

Digital Squeeze and Subject Liberation: Social Work Participation in Social Integration of Low-Quality Labor Force

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Abstract

With the rapid development of the high-tech society, China has entered an era dominated by digital technology, which has put forward higher requirements for the quality of labor. The low-skilled labor force, due to the limitations of their own cultural capital and social capital, lacks opportunities to access and learn about digital resources. In the process of upward mobility, they face social integration dilemmas, including economic, cultural, behavioral, and identity integration difficulties. To stimulate the subjectivity of low-skilled labor, social work, with the principle of helping others, can intervene in the low-skilled labor group from the national, community, and family levels, fully utilizing the convenience of digital technology to assist them in better integrating into society.

Keywords

Digital technology; Low-quality labor force; Social integration; Social work.

1. The Question Raised

China has entered a new era in which digital technology dominates production and life, the rapid flow of information and the interconnection of all things have become the social norm, and the employment field has shown a trend of further strengthening the mainstream and core of high-tech talents. In the digital age, human dependence on technology has far exceeded the imagination of the "post-industrial society". Regarding the relationship between technology and society, Manuel Castells pointed out that the network has constructed a new social form, and information technology fundamentally constitutes the material basis of society. In terms of the impact of the transformation of work and employment on the social structure, the emergence of the information technology paradigm will cause the trend of social polarization that the top and bottom of the occupational hierarchy will expand simultaneously and equally, but the growth rate and scale of lower-level service employees with lower technical requirements are much lower than that of higher-level occupations [1]. Therefore, the problem of employment inequality is not only the reduction of employment opportunities for lower-level workers, but also the exclusion and discrimination related to labor force.

Low-level employees can be called "low-quality labor force", characterized by low professional skills, low knowledge level and low labor remuneration, which are called "three lows" [2]. The high quality labor force has rich scientific knowledge, technical level and high comprehensive ability, and can quickly match or adjust knowledge and ability with work [3]. According to the above viewpoints, this paper defines low-quality labor force as a kind of mobile labor force group with low knowledge level, low professional skills, low income, weak comprehensive adaptability and high substitution [4]. Under the current social background, the technical requirements of the labor force are gradually increasing, but the overall cultural quality of the bottom labor force in our country is not high, and its social status is mainly engaged in low-technical requirements for migrant workers in cities. In 2018, the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the total number of migrant workers in China was 28.836 million [5], and the proportion of the population engaged in the tertiary industry increased

from 42.6% in 2013 to 51.5% in 2020 [6], indicating that more than half of the secondary and tertiary industries in China are migrant workers.

In the digital age, compared with industrial social labor, the process of digital labor has undergone fundamental changes, and the purpose of production of digital labor is completely different from the process of commodity conversion of labor force in industrial society, but the process of objectification of digital technological structure [7]. However, due to the limitation of knowledge level, it is difficult for low-quality labor groups to reach high-level digital technology, and there is a natural "access gap" between them. Compared with other groups, the development opportunities brought by digital technology are not really reflected in the low-quality labor force.

In addition, the current social security system in our country is still not perfect [8], and the social security system is the backing of the upward mobility of low-quality labor groups, and the imperfect system brings challenges to their further social integration. Due to structural and institutional factors, as well as accidental factors in the establishment of labor relations, it is difficult for low-quality labor groups to solve various problems encountered in upward mobility by themselves, and it is necessary for the state and society to solve various structural, institutional and even moral obstacles. Based on the function and effectiveness of social work, this paper will consider how social work in the digital era involves low-end labor to integrate into society and "take root" in the city.

2. Basic Characteristics of Low-Quality Labor Force

2.1. Low level of knowledge

Knowledge workers are the backbone of the promotion of social productivity, while the low-quality labor force is limited by its education level, the general knowledge level is low, especially the "digital gap" between the high-quality labor force and the application of technology. Migrant workers are the main labor force in labor-intensive industries, but they face the dual disadvantages of education and age. In times of economic challenges, they need to upgrade their skills and qualities, but most are still low - and medium-skilled, with limited room for career advancement. In the digital age, the importance of knowledge has reached an unprecedented level. From "atom endowed" to "bit propagation", knowledge has become "networked", "visualized" and "embodied", and no longer exists only in paper books. Course forms have also begun to be "networked", and people's learning methods have become diversified [9]. However, for low-quality labor groups with low knowledge level, they lack the opportunity to receive information education, and it is difficult to follow the pace of the digital age and adapt to the development of the digital age.

2.2. Technological capacity cannot meet the needs of society

Global competition is increasingly fierce, our country needs to play the important role of scientific and technological innovation in driving economic and social development. In the future, enterprises choose "machine replacement" to achieve industrial structure and technological transformation and upgrading or will become a normal. Replacing repetitive labor by machines will undoubtedly have a great impact on low-quality labor who have been engaged in alternative labor for a long time [10]. If the technical ability of low-quality labor cannot be improved, they will face difficulties such as job substitution, unstable labor relations, squeezed family income, and enhanced technological control [11]. Digital society requires to improve the technical level of labor force, but the technical level of China's labor force is generally not high, lack of middle and senior skilled workers, it is difficult to synchronize with the development of digital society. The low-quality labor force needs the popularization of

digital technology and stable optimization of employment, but it lacks the opportunity of digital training and is difficult to adapt to the digital working environment.

2.3. The level of employment is lower

Due to the lack of higher education background and professional skills training, the educational and knowledge level of the low-quality labor force is relatively low. This makes it difficult for them to compete for jobs in modern industries and high-tech fields. As to whether digital transformation can bring about an increase in the salary of low-quality labor, in addition to the view that digital technology is easy to replace them and exacerbate their weak position, some studies also believe that the development of digital technology promotes the rapid popularization of visual and easy-to-understand operating systems, thus lowering the threshold of employment. Moreover, the improvement of job digitization can bring salary premium [12]. But digital jobs will raise average wages and widen the wage gap between low- and high-skilled workers, limiting the career development of low-skilled workers. The technical capabilities of a low-skilled workforce limit advancement and career development, impeding personal growth. In the period of economic depression, industry changes and even digital dividend contraction, low-quality labor is more likely to fall into employment difficulties or unemployment.

2.4. Lack of openness and expansion of ideas

Modern society advocates open ideas and encourages the values of diversity, inclusiveness and equality. People are more respectful of different viewpoints, cultural backgrounds and lifestyles, pursue social diversity and inclusiveness, pay attention to personal growth, career development and quality of life, and pursue personal values and opportunities for self-realization. However, the low-quality labor force has a limited understanding of the development trend of modern society, scientific and technological innovation and social change, resulting in their relatively closed ideas, unwilling to accept and try new ways of thinking and working methods, more inclined to stick to traditional ways of working and thinking, and lack a positive attitude towards change and innovation. With the rapid development of the digital era, various technical means emerge in an endless stream, but low-quality labor groups have not fully enjoyed the convenience of digital technology, and there is a "gap" between them, which also reduces the enthusiasm of low-quality labor forces to integrate with digital.

3. Social Integration Difficulties Faced By Low-Quality Labor Force

Social integration refers to the integration of floating population into the local mainstream social system in terms of economy, behavior, culture and concept. It is a comprehensive and systematic concept, including four dimensions of economic integration, cultural integration, lifestyle and social mode, and psychological identity, which are progressively interdependent [13]. The low-quality labor force will encounter a series of difficulties in the process of social integration due to its own limitations.

3.1. Economic integration difficulties

The need for technology in the digital age is becoming more and more prominent. This is reflected in employment, mainly reflected in the change of employment structure and the economic income brought by it is also affected to a certain extent. It is difficult to integrate the low-quality labor force into the economy, and the low-quality labor force is difficult to guarantee the quality of life because of the backward technical level, low wages and high expenses. The economic factor is the main obstacle to its social integration, and the imbalance of labor input and income is the main problem of its job market. Relevant data show that the wage cost of manufacturing workers in China is one-tenth or one-twentieth of that in developed

countries [14]. It can be seen that the pay and remuneration of low-quality labor are not equal, and this group does not enjoy the equal economic rights advocated by the government. The digital transformation of all walks of life has improved the overall economic production efficiency, but it has also created new demand for skills, either resulting in the decrease of employment and income of low-skilled labor represented by migrant workers, or the increase of labor income and welfare level of migrant workers year by year due to technological progress [15]. However, due to the skills-biased characteristics of digital technology itself, the income of higher-level labor with higher comprehensive endowment will increase more, and the social gap between different levels of labor will be larger, and the corresponding social exclusion of low-quality labor will likely increase.

3.2. Social capital shortage

Due to the lack of digital technology capabilities, low-quality labor may face exclusion and discrimination, may be seen as a useless labor force, and it is difficult to obtain social recognition and respect, which in turn leads to difficulties in integrating their behavior. In the mode of intelligent collaborative work, digital ability has become a factor that cannot be ignored to affect the career success of employees, and the difference between digital "haves" and "have-nots" has become more prominent. At the same time, it is difficult for low-quality labor to integrate into this digital social cohesion. The spread of information technology redistributes social power resources, and digital inequality is reflected in differences in Internet access and use, leading to disparities in consumption, income, reproductive willingness and welfare, as well as gender, age, group and class disparities. Digital technologies affect career success by reducing costs, improving efficiency and access to information, transforming jobs into knowledge-intensive, increasing wage premiums and job output differentials. Employees are increasingly required to actively identify information sources in study, work and social interaction, which leads to the difference between human capital and social capital, and to a certain extent affects career success. However, the low-quality labor force often faces the challenge of adapting to this digital society, having difficulties in the application of digital technologies and being unable to effectively integrate into society.

3.3. Cultural integration difficulties

Cultural capital refers to a person's cultural knowledge, skills and values in the society, which has an important impact on the individual's social communication, career development and social identity. First of all, the application of digital technology puts forward high requirements on individual cultural capital and requires people to have basic computer network skills. Low-quality labor forces often lack basic knowledge and skills in this aspect, resulting in difficulties in the application of digital technology. Secondly, the digital society requires people to constantly learn and adapt, and the low-quality labor force may not be able to keep up with the pace of technological development due to the lack of relevant cultural capital, resulting in their disadvantaged position in the digital society. In addition, the application and utilization of digital technology has also brought new cultural values and social patterns. In the digital society, people pay more attention to the sharing of personal information and the establishment of social networks, which requires individuals to have certain social skills and social capital. The low-quality labor force may not be able to effectively participate in the digital social society and establish a broad social network, so it is difficult to integrate into the cultural life and social circle of the digital society.

3.4. Identity difficulty

Identity refers to the psychological distance, the sense of belonging, and the thinking and cognition of who they are, where they come from and where they will go between the low-quality labor force and the local people and the villagers. The identity of low-quality labor force

is mainly reflected in three aspects: First, the subjective identity of low-quality labor force, low-quality labor force is mostly engaged in low-skill, low-wage work, low social status. The digital age emphasizes high skills and digital abilities, and they are difficult to obtain opportunities in the digital field due to insufficient skills and knowledge, which affects their self-worth and social identity. Second, the employment situation of low-quality labor, the rapid development of digital technology makes many low-skilled jobs face the risk of automation replacement. A lower-qualified workforce may need to transition to adapt to new job skills, which can lead to job insecurity and identity problems. The third is the social situation of low-quality labor force. Many workers only interact with their fellow townspeople or family members every day, and rarely communicate with local people, and there is a clear communication boundary between them. Most of the low-quality workers maintain a traveller mentality, believing that they are only temporary sojourn in a foreign land, that the destination society is "theirs" rather than "ours", that their "roots" are still in their hometown, and there is isolation from the local residents.

4. Social Work Involves the Path of Social Integration of Low-Quality Labor Force

In theory, social work has a high degree of compatibility with the social integration of low-quality labor. In practice, how should the subjectivity of low-quality labor be brought into play and how should social work be involved? From the perspective of social support theory, the key to the social integration of low-quality labor force lies in the construction of social support network, which is explained separately below.

4.1. National level

First of all, the government should break the localized welfare management model, establish residency criteria for low-quality labor, and allocate public resources and services in accordance with the localization. Through digital platforms and information systems, information management and service coordination are provided to ensure that low-quality labor forces have access to public resources. Social work should promote the implementation of policies, give play to professional advantages, and ensure the implementation of policies. Secondly, the state should increase the number of jobs suitable for low-quality labor, establish the labor market information platform, improve the employment matching degree, and reduce the employment risk. Social workers should have an in-depth understanding of the group, assess problems, and advise the government to ensure that policies meet their needs. Third, the government should integrate vocational training for low-quality labor into the national education system, providing funding, training opportunities, digital technology guidance and incentives to promote social work and digital technology applications. Social workers should advocate vocational training, establish digital media platforms, popularize the advantages of training, and enhance the subjective consciousness and digital skills of low-quality labor. Finally, the government needs to extend injury insurance to all low-quality workers and expand old-age insurance coverage to ensure their stability. Social workers should pay attention to their social welfare issues, provide policy advice, popularize welfare policies, and enhance the trust and national identity of the low-quality labor force.

4.2. Community level

Community support is mostly based on geography and is provided by families or other individuals or social organizations in the community, including emotional exchange and social integration, which helps individuals integrate into society by creating a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere in the community. First, social workers should build digital platforms to integrate recruitment, training and social welfare information to enhance the employability of

low-quality labor; Establish community service positions, provide employment and economic support, and enhance their economic adaptability. Second, social workers can cooperate with training institutions through communities to carry out digital training and education programs for low-quality labor forces to help them master basic digital skills and information literacy, and improve their ability to adapt to the digital society. Third, social workers should promote the emotional identity of low-quality labor, encourage their participation in community decision-making through online surveys, voting and discussion platforms, enhance political participation and community support, and increase social ties with local residents. Finally, social workers should promote cooperation between low-quality workers and local residents through neighborhood committees, using social media and online platforms to increase interaction. To provide them with expression space, enhance community participation and sense of identity, stimulate their subjectivity, and promote the social integration of low-quality labor groups.

4.3. Individual and family level

Family support is the emotional and material support given by the family members who live with the individual on the basis of blood relationship. Social workers are involved in the social integration of low-quality labor from the family level. First, social workers conduct field visits to the family environment of low-quality labor, assess social integration issues, understand their demands through communication, establish digital support networks, and promote interaction and learning among family members. Secondly, in the process of communication, social workers should pay attention to the requirements of family members and the goals they want to achieve, help families develop feasible goals, provide families with links and guidance of digital resources, help them make better use of digital service platforms, and improve the digital ability of families with low-quality labor force. At the same time, understand the characteristics and advantages of each family member, give play to the strengths of family members, and then stimulate the subjectivity of members, from the individual identity, actively face the society, and adapt to the new social needs in the digital age. Through the guidance of social workers, the subjectivity of low-quality labor groups should be brought into play, and good family support should be used to enhance the sense of acquisition of low-quality labor forces with the help of the "east wind" of digital technology, so that they can integrate into local society more actively.

5. Conclusion

The low-quality labor force is the main force of China's labor force group, which is characterized by low knowledge level, low skill level and low labor remuneration. With the continuous development of the society led by digital technology, the social risks faced by low-quality labor force have increased, and low-quality labor force is difficult to meet the social needs in many aspects, and is faced with a series of integration problems. As the discoverer and solver of social problems, social work plays a very important role in the upward mobility of low-quality labor groups. It can help low-quality labor forces to adjust risks, improve their own quality, and make them better integrate into society in the upward mobility process. As far as the low-quality labor force itself is concerned, it should establish a rational attitude, actively face the changes in the requirements of social development, adapt to the development and requirements of the digital age, and improve personal digital ability. The intervention of social work will promote the social integration of the low-quality labor force group, but the good state of upward mobility of the low-quality labor force group needs the joint efforts of all parties. Only by creating a good social atmosphere, allowing low-quality labor groups to find their own positioning in the society and exert their subjectivity, can they better integrate into the society led by digital technology.

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