

Status of Small-town Youth Research

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Abstract

With the advancement of new urbanization and the rapid development of third- and fourth-tier cities, the group size of Small-town youth has expanded rapidly and become a group of great concern. Numerous studies have explored the connotation of Small-town youth, focusing on the consumption situation, homecoming situation, social support and social identity status of Small-town youth. Reflecting on previous good studies on Small-town youth, we believe that there is a lack of research objects, focus and methods, and it is necessary to strengthen the empirical research on Small-town youth, combining quantitative and qualitative research, in order to better understand and help Small-town youth groups from the practical level. This is of great practical significance for the healthy development of society.

Keywords

Small-town Youth; Consumption; Return to Home; Social Support.

1. Introduction

With the advent of the era of urban-rural integration, the development of "Small-towns" is also gaining more and more urbanization dividends, with prefecture-level cities and some of the more developed county-level cities as the representative of small and medium-sized cities, becoming the connection point of urban-rural relations. Young people in Small-towns are in the middle of urban and rural areas, enjoying not only the leisurely Small-town life, but also the longing and expectation for the outside world. As the country continues to promote urban development and rural revitalization, the consumption power of young people in Small-towns has also increased, and the trend of consumption upgrade has become more prominent, so young people in Small-towns should be widely concerned as an emerging group.

2. The Connotation of Small-town Youth

There are many studies on the connotation of Small-town youth, and the composition of Small-town youth shows diversified characteristics, mainly including five types: one is young people born and raised in third or fourth tier cities, counties and towns, two is born and raised in rural areas and then moved to the countryside, three is born and raised in third or fourth tier cities, counties and towns and then went to live and work in big cities and then returned to their hometowns, five is born and raised in first or second tier cities and chose to go to third or fourth tier cities, counties and towns. Fifth, those born and raised in first- or second-tier cities choose to work in third- or fourth-tier cities, counties, and townships (Lin, 2020). There is a concept that Small-town youth is a group born in the 1980s and 1990s in tier 3-6 cities (Zhang, Long, Li, Wei, and Wang, Yun, 2020). The definition of "Small-town youth" is becoming clearer and clearer in academic circles, in a broad sense, Small-town youth are young people aged 16-40 born or living in third or fourth tier cities and below. In a narrower sense, "Small-town youth" refers to those who are born and raised in these cities, aged 16-40.

3. Research on Small-town Youth

Through the collation of existing literature, we found that the research on Small-town youth involves many aspects, we mainly focus on the consumption of Small-town youth, the situation of Small-town youth returning to their hometown, and the social identity and social support of Small-town youth to explore the characteristics of Small-town youth

3.1. Consumption of Small-town Youth

The rapid arrival of the consumer society has not only promoted the mass consumption of social members, but also accelerated the self-construction of social members' identities. The consumption trend of Small-town youth shows that they are more concerned about "novelty", more demanding on health and more dependent on emotion. Small-town youths are influenced by their circles, because the demonstration effect of consumption and competition effect of Small-town youths are stronger. Through fashion consumption, Small-town youth try to erase the identity difference between themselves and urbanites, so as to pursue a kind of equality and respect in identity and social status, and to realize the identity of "self-transformation" (Zukin, Sharon, 2004; Pan, Yi, 2007; Yang, Fa-Xiang, Zhou, Xian-Run, 2015). Consumption provides an important way for those who are insecure about their relative position in the new social order to integrate into urban culture and acquire a modern identity (Xiao, Sowe, 2018). Through field research and in-depth interviews with eight Small-town young fashionable women, their families and friends, Zhao Duling found that Small-town young fashionable women mainly acquire fashion consumption perceptions through three ways: fashion consumption worship established by urban schooling, embodied urban female models brought by heterogeneous kinship relationships, and the increasingly popular online media effect. The seemingly dignified lifestyle created through fashion consumption is rapidly spreading to rural societies, allowing middle and upper class young women in rural societies to be the first to achieve self-identity construction through this strategy of embodiment practices, and to display it in the social rituals of rural societies, producing a differentiating and dominating effect. (Zhao, Duling, 2021) Small-town youth have better economic expectations for the future and are more daring to overspend, and there are also cases of overspending and climbing consumption in the consumer market (Lin, Dongdong, 2020). Zhang Long et al. conducted questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with typical Small-town youth and their father's generation in Huzhou and Lishui, Zhejiang Province, and the results of the study showed that more and more Small-town youth began to accept more modern consumption concepts, and the proportion of them in immediate consumption and over-consumption was almost twice that of their father's generation (Zhang Long, Li Wei, Wang Yun, 2020). Small-town youths' income continues to rise and become the main force of consumption upgrade in China, the weakening of housing and work pressure gives them more space for consumption, the improvement of education level makes Small-town youths form their own values and consumption views, the rise of consumption channels relying on the internet and hardware innovation, and all the internal and external factors work together to promote the rise of Small-town youth consumption (Lin, Dongdong, 2020).

3.2. Small-town Youth Return to Their Hometown

By examining the "involutionalization" of Small-town youth social identity, Liao Mengya and Zhang Long et al. showed that due to the country's vigorous development of rural economy, the convenience of urban life and increased development opportunities, coupled with the difficulty of integrating into urban society and the pressure of survival, "returning Small-town youth The number of "returning Small-town youth" is increasing year by year, and the number of "indigenous Small-town youth" who are unwilling or unable to leave is also increasing. (Liao, Mengya, Zhang, Long, 2021) Guo Wei et al. explored the issue of the settlement intentions (to

return to their hometown, or to stay or remain in other cities and towns, etc.) of mobile Small-town youth using data from the China Mobility Monitoring 2016, and the study sample included rural youth and urban youth as reference subjects to obtain a valid sample of 10,051 Small-town youth, 86,203 rural youth samples. The sample of the study includes both rural youth and urban youth as reference subjects. The results of the study show that Small-town youth have a higher willingness to stay in their hometown than rural youth, and women are more inclined than men not to return to their hometown; their willingness to return to their hometown is higher as their age increases; the longer the mobility time, the lower the willingness to return to their hometown. (Guo Wei, Lu Jiaying, 2020) The reason for this may be that Small-town youth are not completely alienated from the city, and social capital including housing and education will influence this group's choice of other hometown and hometown.

3.3. Small-town Youth Social Identity and Social Support

Liu Tingting et al.'s analysis of a survey on the housing choices of the migrant population accompanying families in Shanghai shows that the migrant population does not easily integrate into the community and is psychologically separated from the locals (Liu Tingting, 2014). This psychological separation increases the cost of community integration for Small-town youth, making them turn to virtual communities to "live in groups," but it is difficult for Small-town youth to achieve social fission in virtual communities. Sun Li et al. used purposive sampling and content analysis to study the urban-rural themed short videos posted by Small-town youth in "Rastrap", and found that Small-town youth flowed into the city in an upward-looking way and might be close to urban youth for a short period of time, however, "excessive urbanization and Chinese characteristics of household registration. However, "the 'metropolitan trap' formed by excessive urbanization and Chinese characteristics of household registration and social exclusion prevent them from truly integrating into the city" (An Chao, 2015); when Small-town youth return to Small-towns from big cities, the vernacular reality conflicts with the vernacular ideal, and they cannot find their exact position. Under the social practice of double marginalization, the continuous sense of alienation, drifting and isolation causes a crisis of self-identity and generates ontological anxiety (Sun, L., Ma, C.-H., 2019). Through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with typical Small-town youth and their father's generation in Huzhou and Lishui, Zhejiang, Zhang Long et al. explored the characteristics of the current survival situation of Small-town youth and the differences between them and their father's generation, and their findings showed that while social development provided Small-town youth with more career development paths, it blurred their career planning, high career anxiety and low satisfaction (Zhang Long, Li Wei, Wang Yun 2020). In this environment, mobile media somehow provide us with a sense of security and place at home in this 'mobile' and 'de-territorialized' global culture." (Yu Hongmei, 2013) The audience identification that Small-town youth reap from their "near-village" identity performance through online media gives them ontological security in virtual space.

4. Reflection and Prospect

4.1. From the Perspective of the Research Object

In previous studies, when exploring the youth group in Small-towns, most of the research subjects were selected from online media such as Raptor and Jitterbug, or mobile population monitoring data were used for analysis, which failed to cover college students or graduate students in universities, and could not cover the youth group in Small-towns in a broader sense.

4.2. From the Perspective of Research Focus

Most of the existing researchers focus on the consumption characteristics of Small-town youth, the situation of Small-town youth returning to their hometowns, social identity and social support, and the research perspective of Small-town youth has yet to be expanded.

4.3. From the Perspective of Research Methods

At present, there are more introductory reports and reviews on Small-town youth, while the number of scientific and rigorous empirical studies is still limited. Some of the existing studies mostly stay on case studies and empirical observations, and quantitative studies are scarce. There is a need to strengthen the empirical research investigation and psychological mechanism analysis of Small-town youth, and to combine quantitative and qualitative research in order to better understand the Small-town youth group.

4.4. From the Application Level

The community should pay more attention to the Small-town youth, and form a civilized, harmonious, honest and friendly living atmosphere within the community, so that the Small-town youth group drifting outside can feel warm and supported. At the same time, the community can join hands with psychological majors in colleges and universities to bring psychological knowledge into the community through thematic lectures and group support, so as to improve the level of social support and life satisfaction of Small-town youth and diminish the sense of loneliness and wandering of Small-town youth.

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