

## Media Dilemmas and Countermeasures During the Citizenization of Land-Lost Farmers

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### Abstract

Urbanization is a must-taken road for China's modernization. To help realize the citizenization of land-lost farmers who cannot return to the countryside is an important part of urbanization. As an important tool for individuals to enter society, mass media play an important role in the integration of land-lost farmers into the urban area. However, the citizenization process of land-lost farmers is faced with media dilemmas, including inadequate media literacy, lack of media right of speech, stigmatization of media image and so on. This paper solves the above problems from three perspectives, namely the government, media and lost-land farmers, and puts forward adjustment and improvement suggestions from the above three perspectives at an attempt to genuinely help realize citizenization of land-lost farmers.

**Key words:** Land-lost farmers; Citizenization; Mass media

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### INTRODUCTION

The Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee pointed out that citizenization of rural population is a major task for China's new-type

urbanization, an important choice for the sustainable and sound development of China's economy and society, and an important issue during China's modernization process calling for immediate solution. The National New-Type Urbanization Plan (2014-2020) issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council clearly in March this year further states that, "As a must-taken road for China's modernization, the people-oriented urbanization can gradually promote the citizenization of rural population in the urban area<sup>1</sup>. However, with the acceleration of urban sprawl and urban construction, many places in China are faced with the problem that "land urbanization" significantly exceeds "population urbanization." Under the situation, more and more farmers have lost the land that they rely on to make a living, obtained the identity of urban residents and become the emerging "citizens." According to statistics of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the number of current land-lost farmers has exceeded 50 million, and has become an important part of farmers-turned citizens (Pan, 2013). Whether the rural population who has entered the urban area can smoothly transfer their identity to citizens can directly influence the development of China's socialist modernization.

Under the long-existing urban and rural binary pattern, the word, "farmer," has dual connotations, both as a profession and a social identity. "Citizenization" refers to how "citizens" transferred from "farmers" with the above two functions develop corresponding abilities, adapt themselves to cities and endow themselves with basic qualities of being a citizen (Zheng, 2005). It can be seen that citizenization of land-lost farmers involves in two aspects: a) the transformation of the external identity and profession; b) the adaptability to the urban

<sup>1</sup> The CPC Central Committee and the State Council. (2014). *The national new-type urbanization plan (2014-2020)*. Retrieved March 17 from <http://politics.rmlt.com.cn/2014/0317/244361.shtml>.

life and the identification with the urban life in terms of cultural connotations, values and thinking styles through the acceptance of cities and their own integration. Its essence is a continuous socialization and modernization process of land-lost farmers in the new urban community environment.

## 1. CITIZENIZATION OF LAND-LOST FARMERS: A SOCIAL ISSUE CALLING FOR IMPERATIVE STUDY

During the modernization process of Western countries, farmers were forced to give up or gave up land on their own. They entered the urban area and became an important driving force for the fast rotation of capitalism wheels. During the process, citizenization of lost-land farmers underwent a long and painful transformation. The foreign studies of citizenization of land-lost farmers have been mainly conducted from the following perspectives. First, from the perspective of adaptability to the urban area, Thomas and Florian Witold Znaniecki (2000) studied the process how Poland farmers leave their own country and immigrated to America, gradually turning themselves into modern citizens and industrial workers under the local social and cultural influence. Second, from the perspective of industrialization and urban development, Arthur Lewis (1989), a development economist and the winner of the Nobel Economic Prize, put forward the “dual-economic structure and model” targeted at the traditional non-agricultural population, village agricultural population and urban non-agricultural population; Northam (1975), an American urban geographer, put forward S-shaped theory of urban development process by analyzing the worldwide urbanization process. Third, from the perspective of globalization and modernity, Giddens (2000) studied the choice of diversified lifestyles among groups freed from traditions; Alex Inkelesand, Vorgan, et al. (1975) analyzed the transformation of humans during the modernization process. Fourth, from the perspective of citizenization, the transformation of land-lost farmers in Western countries is decided by the social and historical factors in the various countries. The transformation model varies in different countries, such as the compulsive non-agriculturalization model represented by British “Enclosure Movement,” the non-agriculturalization transfer model featuring free migration represented by the American market, the non-agriculturalization model featuring the combination of the “leap-frog transformation” and the “villages’ non-agriculturalization transformation” represented by Japan, etc..

China is a late-starter in terms of research into citizenization of land-lost farmers. In recent years, scholars from different fields, including Sociology, Politics and Management, have studied the hotly-

debated issue. For example, Chen (2005) analyzed the psychology and behaviors of land-lost farmers from the social psychological perspective, and the leading role of the government during the resocialization of land-lost farmers; Chen (2007), Qin (2002), Yao (2008), Lu (2003) and so on analyzed the issue from the perspective of land system and settlement of land-lost farmers; Lu (2007), Zhao (2007), Li (2005) and so on studied from the perspective of the social security system for land-lost farmers; Zhang et al. (2006). discussed the identity of land-lost farmers; Wang (2010), Zhang et al. (2006). discussed the integration and adaptability of land-lost farmers to the urban area based on the core concepts of “social exclusive,” “social conflicts” and “marginalization theories.”

However, statistics showed that the citizenization of land-lost farmers is less discussed from the perspective Journalism and Communication. In the above two fields, the issue is mainly conducted from the following aspects: a) about the analysis of land-lost farmers’ media cognition, such as the exploration of land-lost farmers’ media cognition by Ding Linghua (2012) based on the investigation of the Pearl River Delta; b) about the media literacy of land-lost farmers during the urbanization process: such as the discussion of land-lost farmers’ media literacy by Wang Jing, Liu Weichun et al. (2012); c) about the analysis of media reports about land-lost farmers, such as the theoretical analysis of news reports about land-lost farmers from the perspective of media by Feng (2009). However, generally speaking, the research findings of the issue are seriously out of line with the role of mass media in social life.

## 2. IMPORTANT ROLE OF MEDIA IN CITIZENIZATION PROCESS OF LAND-LOST FARMERS

Leone thought that mass media cannot only stimulate people’s empathy, but also serve as a “magic magnifier,” greatly enriching the modern factors. Alex Inkeles also gave a typical exposition on the influence of mass media’s popularity and development on humans’ modernity. At present, TV, radio stations, newspapers, network and other media have covered people’s social life in an all-weather, all-dimensional and multi-layer way. In the new living space, the land-lost farmers must suffer a heavy blow. During the urbanization process, the penetration and influence of mass media have an unshirkable responsibility for the citizenization of land-lost farmers.

### 2.1 Improvement of Land-Lost Farmers’ Sense of Identity

Mass media serve as an environmental monitoring radar and cultural transmitter, which can provide all-around information services for land-lost farmers; expose them

to a systematic, timely and comprehensive understanding of national systems and policies, cultural trends and connotations; acquire new knowledge and information to boost personal development, and improve their social adaptability and obtain more personal rights. More importantly, mass media can enhance their sense of identity and belonging, and social identification during the citizenization process.

## **2.2 Guarantee of Land-Lost Farmers' Appeal to Interests**

Mass media can not only provide rich information for land-lost farmers' citizenization, but act as a feedback mechanism, which can help land-lost farmers express their desires and wishes. Through information feedback investigation, BBS, phone calls and emails, mass media provide an effective feedback channel for audiences. By reporting the genuine information to media, land-lost farmers can get their problems effectively solved, thus better integrating themselves into the urban social life.

## **2.3 Promotion of Land-Lost Farmers' Resocialization**

During the urbanization process, the individual socialization channels for target population are integrated into the mass media's communication space to finish social indoctrination and individual internalization. After entering the urban area, land-lost farmers transfer their communication channel from the traditional interpersonal communication to mass media. The information provided by mass media has constituted an important part of people's life, influencing social value orientation and social code of conduct, and imposing a profound and extensive influence on land-lost farmers' resocialization.

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# **3. MEDIA DILEMMAS FACING LAND-LOST FARMERS DURING THE CITIZENIZATION PROCESS**

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It is not hard to find that there are still many problems existing in China's mass media, which play a positive role in promoting citizenization of land-lost farmers. In nature, media should act as a "lubricant" and "communication bridge." However, during the citizenization process of China's land-lost farmers, China's mass media fail to play their part in the following aspects.

## **3.1 Aggravation of Land-Lost Farmers' Media Self-Marginalization**

Most of the new urban residents from the rural area passively change their identity, so they still maintain most of the original lifestyle and lack the initiative to integrate themselves into the urban life. Besides, restricted by the education background and cultural level, they do not have so many channels to obtain information. Traditional information channels are their major choices.

As a result, they have no access to new media and new information, let alone participate in media interaction. Some young people having received some education have mixed feelings about media. They are suspicious of the information provided by mass media, but have no other accesses to information. Consequently, network becomes a place for their emotional relief and entertainment. It is hard for them to express their ideas through media. Consequently, the traditional citizen stratum will hardly recognize the identity of these new citizens. Under the impact of the information dissemination revolutionary tide, the knowledge gap and the communication gap are widening among land-lost farmers. During the citizenization process, land-lost farmers' media self-marginalization is aggravating. The media qualities of land-lost farmers are obviously lagging behind the improvement of their material compensation and the transformation of the identity and position.

## **3.2 Lack of Land-Lost Farmers' Media Right of Speech**

Right of speech is an important right of citizens and the basic guarantee for the other rights. It influences not only social ideology, but also political and economic interests of communication subjects. One's share of the right of speech decides one's social status. With the acceleration of media convergence and the rapid development of the media industry, mass media have become more and more subdivided, refined and professionalized, giving rise to travel channels, auto channels, fashion programs, computer magazines and journals, etc. However, there are few channels or special journals for land-lost farmers. Though some local governments have launched some websites targeted at land-lost farmers, these websites hold less attraction to land-lost farmers. The lack of the channels for land-lost farmers to express their interests reflects their vulnerable communication position, and the lack of their right of speech in the current social structure. The essence reflects the imbalanced game mechanism of social rights and interests.

## **3.3 Stigmatization of Land-Lost Farmers' Media Image**

The major target audiences of mass media are urban citizens. In order to cater to these major audiences, media become a stereotyped builder. The agenda setting function of media is reflected as its selective and tendentious information transmitted to audiences. During the information transmission process, land-lost farmers' media image is often stigmatized. On the one hand, some media are deviated from the social factors and shape land-lost farmers into the image of the vulnerable and victims, who suffer forced demolition, displacement and lack of guarantee. Reports of the kind often lack in-depth investigation and authenticity. Their sensational nature can easily impose a negative influence on the psychology of land-lost farmers and the vulnerable group, intensify the

social conflicts and widen the psychological gap of land-lost farmers during the citizenization process. On the other hand, some radical media even shape land-lost farmers into an image of negative actions, including violent cases, collective siege of the government and smashing and other sabotage behaviors; lacking social skills, adaptability to social development and an enriched spiritual life. Reports of the kind show the media's discrimination and prejudices against land-lost farmers. They might easily create a negative and dull image of land-lost farmers among the public, and further aggravate the estrangement between urban residents and land-lost farmers.

## **4. MEDIA COUNTERMEASURES DURING THE CITIZENIZATION PROCESS OF LAND-LOST FARMERS**

### **4.1 To Give Full Play to the Positive Role of Governments of Various Levels**

During the citizenization process of land-lost farmers, governments of all levels have unshirkable responsibilities. First, they can deepen the market institutional reform, promote the media restructuring, enhance the institutional and policy regulation and control while encouraging market-oriented development; break through the vague relationship between media property right and rights and liabilities ownership, solve the conflicts between government regulation and market driving and the internal conflicts in terms of political ideology and ensure the media right of speech among the vulnerable group. Second, governments at all levels should provide the legal guarantee and policy platform for land-lost farmers to express their interests and exercise their right of speech. In this way, land-lost farmers will have the wish to pour out their feelings, channels to express their ideas and legal tools to safeguard their right of speech. Besides, the government portal websites, such as "administration publicity" and "interaction and exchange," can be launched. Internet and the other new media transmission channels should be utilized to provide land-lost farmers with the information related party's and government's policies, guidelines, etc. Governments of all levels should encourage land-lost farmers to exercise their right of speech, to be informed and to participate through policy support; actively listen to public opinions, adopt public's valid suggestions and realize orderly political participation in real sense and establish the mutual communication trust between them and land-lost governments. At last, governments should establish the training mechanism to improve land-lost farmers' media qualities; enhance the media exposure, cognition and comprehension of media through various channels and dimensions; vigorously narrow the knowledge and information gap between land-lost owners and urban citizens; enhance land-lost farmers'

media awareness and improve their ability to correctly employ media. The new media techniques should be popularized among the younger generation; the orderly re-education should be conducted among the middle-aged and the old. Moreover, opportunities should be created for them to air their own interests and media willingness. In this way, land-lost farmers can be effectively integrated into the urban life and achieve citizenization.

### **4.2 To Endow Mass Media With Important Missions**

It is a long way to go to genuinely integrate land-lost farmers, who are accustomed to traditional economy and social norms, into the urban life. Mass media can influence the modernization and socialization process. Only when more attention is paid to land-lost farmers' life and the transformation of their stereotyped communication style and perspective can they effectively be integrated into the urban life. First, an interaction platform should be built to enhance land-lost farmers' right of speech. The primary goal of media is to improve land-lost farmers' lack of media right of speech. In real life, land-lost farmers are extremely sensitive to compensation for land acquisition, housing demolition, employment, settlement and other issues closely related to their immediate interests. A little bit of fairness can arouse their imbalanced psychology and trust crisis. Mass media should grant certain social space for land-lost farmers at opportune time, and set up channels, forums or columns targeted at land-lost farmers to enable them to air their opinions through media, and realize the exchange of opinions among governments, society and land-lost farmers. In this way, a rational social consensus can be formed to promote social stability and harmony. Second, mass media should reshape their positive image and promote land-lost farmers' recognition of their identity. Mass media play an important role in coordinating the relationship among relevant government departments, land-lost farmers and original urban citizens. The image of land-lost farmers shaped by media and concerns of land-lost farmers' concerns reflected by media influences social groups' recognition of land-lost farmers, and how land-lost farmers look at themselves. Therefore, on the one hand, mass media should give full play to their positive role instead of shaping land-lost farmers into the image as a negative object; enhance land-lost farmers' perception of their own role, social recognition and identification; transfer their negative emotions and promote citizenization process. On the other hand, mass media should give a positive publicity of land-lost farmers, emphasizing their diligence, honesty, simplicity, braveness and other traditional virtues and their contributions to urban development. In this way, the traditional media discrimination against land-lost farmers can be eliminated and the stereotyped image of land-lost farmers can be improved, thus promoting the mutual understanding, trust and respect between the original

urban residents and the newly-turned citizens, eliminating the estrangement between them, leading the original urban residents to objectively evaluate the newly-turned citizens, sincerely accept them and promote their integration into the urban life.

### 4.3 To Give Full Play the Subjective Initiative of Land-Lost Farmers

The citizenization process of land-lost farmers cannot just rely on the policy adjustment, management model transformation and introduction of the market mechanism on the part of governments of all levels, or the reform of mass media. The active participation of land-lost farmers is a linchpin to the successful transformation. If they lack the ability to implement and exercise the modern institution, and fail to undergo a transformation to modernity and socialization in terms of psychology, ideas, attitudes and behaviors, it is hard for them to realize citizenization in the real sense. First, in order to smoothly integrate themselves into the city and realize the citizenization, land-lost farmers should be open-minded, improve their own adaptability and strengthen their understanding of the connotation of the urban culture. Second, land-lost farmers should be tolerant to some negative reports, actively change their stereotyped image, break through the fence with the city's original residents and promote their integration into the urban life quicker. At last, under the impact of the new media era, land-lost farmers should enhance their self-training, improve their media cognitive competence and media literacy, actively fight for their media right of speech and expression right of interests and learn to reasonably and accurately express their wishes and appeal to interests.

## CONCLUSION

Mass media with unique advantages play an important role in the citizenization process of land-lost farmers. However, the above analysis shows land-lost farmers' citizenization process is faced with various media dilemmas. Based on the collaboration of governments and mass media, land-lost farmers can get rid of their passive role, eliminate misunderstandings and enhance sense of identity to actively integrate themselves into the new social community.

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