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Research on the Multiple Collaborative Governance Mechanism of Social Security for Flexible Employment Personnel in the Platform Economy: A Comparative Analysis Based on Multiple Cases

Junru Tao*

School of Politics and International Relations, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu, 730000, China

Corresponding author: Junru Tao, 3446268107@qq.com

Abstract: Driven by the dual drive of digital technology empowerment and industrial structure reshaping, the platform economy has become the core carrier for absorbing employment and ensuring people's livelihood in China, and the scale of flexible employment it covers has exceeded the 200 million mark. However, while this group enjoys employment flexibility, they also face a serious lack of social security. The traditional social security system based on industrial standard labor relations shows obvious exclusion effect in the face of fragmented and decentralized labor under the control of algorithms. Based on the perspective of collaborative governance, this paper analyzes the practical dilemmas such as ambiguous identification of labor relations, imbalance in the distribution of responsibilities and ineffective regulatory coordination. By comparing JD.com's "full guarantee", Meituan and Ele.me's "selective guarantee", and Lala's "de-wages" governance model of foreign Uber, the efficiency differences in the allocation of rights and responsibilities of multiple subjects are discussed. The research shows that building a collaborative governance network with the participation of the government, platforms, trade unions and workers is the key to breaking the situation. This paper advocates realizing the multi-party sharing of social security responsibilities by innovating "order/proportional" flexible payment, promoting occupational injury protection pilots, and strengthening digital supervision methods. This study not only has important academic discussion value, but also directly responds to the policy demand of improving the insurance rate of flexible employment personnel in the national "15th Five-Year Plan", and has clear practical relevance.

Keywords: Platform Economy; Flexible Employment; Social Security; Diversified And Collaborative Governance; Case Comparison

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1. Introduction

In the historical intersection of digital transformation and deep adjustment of the global economic structure, the platform economy has completely reconstructed the employment map of modern society with its unique resource allocation efficiency and extremely low entry threshold. According to the estimates of the State Council and relevant functional departments, the scale of flexible employment in China has steadily exceeded 200 million, and this huge group is not only a powerful supplement to the job market, but also an important cornerstone to support China's economic resilience and promote social innovation [1]. However, in this "cloud labor market" intertwined with algorithms, platforms and fragmented tasks, the vulnerability of labor security has become an unavoidable social issue. For a long time, the design logic of China's social security system has been deeply embedded in the framework of "strong labor relations" in industrial society, that is, the enjoyment rights of social security are strictly anchored on the labor contract between employers and workers. In the platform economy environment, the labor process shows significant decentralization and flexibility, and platform enterprises have achieved a high degree of atomization of labor through technical means, which puts a large number of practitioners on the embarrassing edge of "labor has no relationship and employment is not guaranteed" [2].

In response to this social pain point, this project focuses on the multi-collaborative governance mechanism of social security for flexible employment personnel under the platform economy, and tries to jump out of the simple legal identity game and seek breakthroughs from the perspective of governance structure and cost sharing. The urgency of the study lies in the fact that if 200 million practitioners are allowed to wander outside the social security network, it will not only lead to a decline in the overall risk resistance of society, but also inhibit consumption vitality due to the increase in "preventive savings", thereby affecting the long-term driving force of the national economic cycle [3]. At present, China's "15th Five-Year Plan" has clearly proposed to "increase the participation rate of flexible employment personnel", and the annual "Government Work Report" also requires the introduction of special policies to support this group to participate in employee insurance. In this macro context, this study introduces the "collaborative governance theory" and "welfare mixed economy theory" to try to construct a four-dimensional analysis model covering the relationship between governance subjects, the distribution of government and enterprise responsibilities, the regulatory coordination model, and the cost sharing mechanism, so as to solve the fragmentation tendency in the existing research.

The argument logic of this paper is based on the in-depth deconstruction of typical platform guarantee models at home and abroad. Through cross-regional and cross-industry comparative analysis of cases such as JD Express, Meituan Takeaway, Ele.me Delivery, Lala Freight and Uber in the EU, we should not only reveal the effectiveness limitations of the existing governance model, but also explore the operability of new mechanisms such as "order/proportional" payment. From a deeper perspective, improving the platform economy social security system is a key link in maintaining social fairness and justice and promoting common prosperity, with far-reaching social benefits. The project team is composed of the backbone of political science and administration, international politics and other majors of Lanzhou University, with solid theoretical literacy and preliminary research foundation, and is determined to provide valuable decision-making reference and theoretical basis for government departments to improve the pilot of occupational injury protection and formulate relevant social security policies through systematic academic exploration.

2. The Governance Dilemma of Social Security for Flexible Employment Personnel under the Platform Economy

2.1 Institutional Exclusion Caused by Ambiguous Determination of Labor Relations

In the current legal framework and social security administrative practice, the determination of labor relations is the "only key" to open the door to social insurance. However, the emergence of the platform economy has dissolved the traditional sense of "labor affiliation" from the underlying logic. Under the sophisticated organization of algorithms, platform enterprises and practitioners often appear as a weakly connected civil cooperation or service matching relationship. This legal representation of "de-employment" masks the substantive economic dependence and technical control, resulting in a large number of food delivery riders and online car-hailing drivers often being turned away from seeking legal remedies or applying for work-related injury recognition and pension insurance because they cannot provide written labor contracts. This institutional "identity pre-position" requirement has evolved into a de facto access barrier in the context of high liquidity in the platform economy, making the coverage of the guarantee system seriously imbalanced with the growth rate of new formats.

2.2 The Imbalance of Responsibility Distribution among Stakeholders and the Dilemma of the Game

From the perspective of the welfare mixed economy, social security should be an organic combination of the tripartite responsibilities of the state, enterprises and individuals. However, in the real platform governance network, the balance of power is obviously tilted towards platform enterprises with the right to speak technology. As the ultimate beneficiary of labor surplus value, platform enterprises have successfully transferred the statutory social security payment responsibility to third-party labor service companies or individual workers by using diversified employment methods such as outsourcing and crowdsourcing. For grassroots flexible workers, in the absence of enterprise allocation support, they often exceed their financial ability to bear the full amount of employee insurance costs by their personal strength. This extreme asymmetry in the distribution of responsibilities has directly led to a long-term downturn in the insurance rate. At the same time, the government finance is also facing heavy pressure to fill in the face of hundreds of millions of security gaps, which not only damages the basic rights and interests of workers, but also erodes the fairness of the social security system [4].

2.3 Institutional Blind Spots Caused by the Fragmentation of Cross-Departmental Supervision and Coordination

The cross-regional and cross-industry attributes of the platform economy pose great challenges to the traditional territorial management and block segmentation supervision model. At present, the functional departments involved in the social security governance of the platform cover multiple systems such as human resources and social security, market supervision, transportation, and trade unions, but in actual operation, there is often a serious lag in information sharing and action coordination between departments. Due to the lack of a unified digital supervision platform, it is difficult for regulatory authorities to obtain the real employment data and labor trajectory of platform enterprises in real time, resulting in the phenomenon of “suspension” in policy implementation at the grassroots level. In particular, for some flexible workers with cross-platform practice and multiple identities, there are still serious administrative barriers to the transfer and continuation of insurance relationships and the accumulation of benefits. This fragmented state of supervision not only gives some enterprises the opportunity to take advantage of loopholes in the rules to evade responsibility, but also increases the administrative cost of workers’ rights protection, making it difficult to effectively exert the institutional advantages of pluralistic and collaborative governance.

3. Comparison of Cases of Typical Platform Social Security Security Models

3.1 The “Full Guarantee” Model Driven by the Internalization of Labor Relations: Taking JD.Com as an Example

As a representative of “heavy assets” in platform enterprises, JD.com insists on establishing stable labor relations with front-line couriers and paying “five insurances and one housing fund”, which has significant benchmarking significance in the industry. The core logic of this model is to exchange a high level of security for a high level of cohesion and professional stickiness within the organization. From the perspective of economic benefits, although the JD.com model has increased short-term labor costs, from a long-term perspective, the perfect social security system has greatly reduced the turnover rate, which in turn has reduced the hidden expenses brought about by high-frequency recruitment and new employee training. This benign interaction model of “guarantee-stability-efficiency” proves that in the digital employment environment, enterprises taking the initiative to assume social security responsibilities is not only a manifestation of social morality, but also a strategic choice to build long-term competitive advantages [5]. However, this model also shows strong exclusivity, and its extremely high requirements for capital strength make it difficult for many crowdsourcing platforms in the start-up stage or fierce competition to directly follow suit.

3.2 The “Selective Guarantee” Model of Third-Party Crowdsourcing and Flexible Intervention: Take Meituan and Ele.Me as Examples

Instant delivery platforms such as Meituan and Ele.me show another highly flexible governance logic, that is, mainly relying on third-party labor outsourcing and pure crowdsourcing models. Under this governance structure, the platform hedges the most urgent work-related injury risks by purchasing mandatory individual commercial accident insurance or participating in state-initiated occupational injury protection pilots. This model has greatly released the expansion momentum of the digital economy and lowered the industry threshold, but it has also led to serious “fragmentation” of workers’ rights protection. In actual operation, this governance structure is often manifested as “management on the platform, responsibility on the three parties, and risk on the individual”, forming an unstable triangular relationship. Although occupational injury protection has played a role in alleviating extreme individual disputes, this selective intervention has not yet touched the core pain points of the lack of long-term risk resistance of flexible employment groups in terms of fundamental welfare protection such as pension and medical care.

3.3 The "Quota Governance" Model of Deworship and International Regulation: Taking Lala and EU Uber as Examples

Freight platforms such as Lalala show a more thorough "non-employment" characteristic, and the platform is more like an intermediary for information matching, and the driver bears almost all the business risks as a self-employed person. From an international perspective, the EU provides a valuable reference group for the governance evolution of Uber drivers. Some EU member states have established a "third category status" between workers and independent contractors through judicial rulings and legislative interventions, mandating platforms to provide paid leave and minimum social insurance allocations for employees. The core of this governance idea is to explore a "de-wages" payment mechanism, that is, social security payments are no longer tied to the total monthly salary, but are levied according to labor activity or a fixed amount. This comparison of cross-border governance reveals that the key to solving the problem of platform social security lies in the underlying innovation of institutional logic, that is, how to link the acquisition of social security rights and interests with specific labor contribution rather than identity labels.

4. The Construction Path of Multiple Collaborative Governance Mechanisms

4.1 Build a Governance Network of "Government-Enterprise-Work-Labor" Equal Rights and Responsibilities

The essence of pluralistic and collaborative governance is to realize the reorganization of social security power and the optimal allocation of resources. In this network, the government should transform from a direct order issuer in the past to a builder of governance rules and a referee of fair games, and clarify the platform's allocation obligations at different employment levels through legal means. Platform enterprises should transform social security responsibilities into necessary links in the algorithm logic, establish a transparent security fund withdrawal and payment system, and realize the "re-contractualization" of labor at the level of digital technology. At the same time, we should vigorously support the development of new trade unions, so that they truly have the ability to negotiate collectively with the capital side, and strive for the right to speak on behalf of practitioners in terms of cost sharing and premium ratio. By establishing this multi-center, equal governance matrix, it can effectively hedge the technical advantages of platform enterprises and ensure that flexible employment groups receive fair guarantee quotas in the distribution of digital dividends.

4.2 Innovate the "Order/Proportional" Flexible Payment and Multi-Party Sharing Mechanism

In view of the characteristics of irregular working hours and diversified income sources of flexible employment, it is necessary to break the stereotyped logic of traditional social security payment on a monthly and unit basis. This paper advocates exploring a "fragmented hedging" payment scheme, that is, implementing a new mechanism of "billing per order, instant withdrawal, and proportional sharing". At the technical level, a very low proportion of the amount can be automatically withdrawn from each completed order through the platform as a guarantee fund, which will be shared by the platform, individuals and government finances in a certain proportion. This model decentralizes and invisibly decentralizes the heavy payment pressure, greatly lowers the threshold for workers to participate in insurance, and also solves the problem of premium accumulation when practicing on different platforms. In this process, the government can guide platform enterprises to transform cost avoidance into compliance motivation through tax rebates or special subsidies, and finally achieve a logical leap from "identity protection" to "labor contribution protection".

4.3 Strengthen the Deep Cultivation of Digital Precision Supervision and Occupational Injury Protection System

The effectiveness of collaborative governance must be anchored by advanced technical means. The government should take the lead in establishing a dynamic database of flexible employment personnel covering the entire industry, and capture the order flow, working hours and insurance payment status of the platform in real time through the interface. This kind of digital supervision can not only prevent platform companies from concealing and evade responsibility by modifying algorithm rules, but also provide data support for subsequent accurate and differentiated policy supply. On this basis, the coverage of the occupational injury protection pilot should be accelerated nationwide and gradually expanded to a full-insurance system covering basic pension and medical care. By organically combining the “compulsory” of occupational injury protection with the “supplementary” nature of commercial insurance, a multi-level and three-dimensional safety barrier can be built for 200 million flexible workers, and the transformation of social security governance from “post-crisis management” to “precise prevention in advance” can be truly realized.

5. Conclusion

Through the systematic study of the social security governance mechanism of flexible employment personnel under the platform economy, this paper finds that the current dilemma of lack of security is not an inevitable product of technological development, but a phased pain of social distribution justice and governance logic lagging behind the transformation of productivity. The traditional “dualistic” labor law system can no longer carry the rights and interests of flexible employment groups in the digital age. Through horizontal and vertical comparison of domestic and foreign cases such as JD.com, Meituan, Lala, and Uber in the European Union, the study reveals the limitations of single-entity governance attempts in the face of complex interest games. Only under the guidance of the theory of collaborative governance can the sustainability of social security be realized by building a responsibility system shared by the government, platforms, trade unions and individuals.

Looking forward to the future, with the in-depth implementation of China’s “15th Five-Year Plan”, improving the flexible employment social security system will become a strategic fulcrum to promote social fairness and maintain stability. The “pay-as-you-go” mechanism and the “four-dimensional analysis framework” proposed in this paper not only provide theoretical support for policy design, but also point out the practical direction of ensuring institutional innovation in the digital environment. Although there is still some room for improvement in the depth of field research and the acquisition of dynamic data, through the exploration of multiple collaborative governance paths, we have reason to believe that with the joint participation of all parties, workers in the digital age will be able to find the best balance between flexibility and security. This is not only a defense of the dignity of 200 million workers, but also the only way to build an inclusive growth society and achieve the grand goal of common prosperity.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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