



Development Induced Migration and Institutionalised Discrimination: Differential Citizenship and Internal Migrants' Self-Identity in China

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Abstract

This article examines the process that delineates how members of a specific category of Chinese forced internal migrants understand their own identities. The forced internal migrants that constitute the focus of this article have typically had their residential registration status altered from rural- to urban-dwellers; they are indeed forced to relocate as they have had their property appropriated by the central government. Focusing on a factory and its surrounding communities in suburban Shanghai, this study applies qualitative methodologies to reveal that such internal migrants typically continue to self-identify as rural residents despite the change in their official status. Furthermore, they place considerable emphasis on their distinct cultural origins and ways of life, rejecting any potential assimilation into the existing traditions of their new urban environment. Paradoxically, however, these rural migrants also adopt a hierarchical attitude towards more recent migrants, demonstrating discriminatory tendencies towards these more recent migrants by emphasising and elevating their own social interests. This article explores the ambivalence of rural migrants towards their identity and status, which, it is posited, is the combined effect of local Shanghai residents' 'urban protectionist' attitudes and the government's institutionalisation of exclusionary policies towards internal migrants. It is argued that the lack of fluent adjustment in migrants' sense of self-identity, and their limited access to urban public goods, are both perpetuated by structural and hierarchical barriers to improving status under China's current institutional arrangements and compounded by social exclusion and a lack of social welfare provision.

Keywords

China, internal relocation, identity (trans)formation, urbanisation, residency status

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Development Induced Migration and Institutionalised Discrimination: Differential Citizenship and Internal Migrant's Self-Identity in China

Xinyu (Promio) Wang

Introduction

In the post-1949 era, the *hukou* system, which was launched in the early 1950s, provided for the segregation of rural and urban populations. It instituted a legal foundation for the government to regulate the scale and direction of population flows between rural and urban areas (Jakimów, 2012: 661). In effect, migration was largely prohibited. In line with the market-oriented reforms that began in 1979 and the inexorable progress of globalisation, the *hukou* system was amended to promote rapid urbanisation that created concurrent rural-to-urban migration (Chan & Zhang, 1999). From the early 1990s, endorsement of a 'socialist market economy' and the rise of industrial production (Shin, 2015) marked a period of aggravating land expropriation and the concomitant re-allocation of more than 270 million rural dwellers into newly constructed or expanded urban areas (Minale, 2018). The proliferation of internal migration is especially evident in Shanghai, one of China's most modern and more developed urban centres. The Shanghai Statistical Yearbook released by the Shanghai Municipal Auditing Bureau (SMAB) in 2013 includes data indicating that between 2000 and 2012, the number of rural *hukou* holders in Shanghai decreased from 3.4 million to 1.5 million households (SMAB, 2013). However, in China, this urbanisation-induced forced internal migrant group is neither institutionally nor officially defined as internally displaced. Rather, they are often classified as 'development-oriented migrants' or 'migrant workers' (Zhao, 1993) – expedient 'sugarcoat terms' that seek to emphasise forced internal migration as an opportunity to overcome poverty and 'backwardness' in rural areas, and thereby strategically overlook the negatives of involuntary and unwilling rural-urban movement. A significant projected inflow of internal migrants and consequent increases in urban populations unquestionably represents a major source of potential difficulty to the relevant authorities. Possible governance challenges include providing employment opportunities and adequate infrastructure, as well as appropriately calibrating the allocation and distribution of social welfare.

The focus of this article is on the process by which Chinese forced internal migrants construct and understand their self-identities. Previous studies on the process by which individual sense of self-identity can be transformed in a Chinese context have highlighted various obstacles to formulating a coherent new rural migrant identity that is based on changed circumstances (Feng (2004); Gan (2001); Zhou (2002)). Although not focused specifically on forced internal migrants, these studies are typically concerned with providing an analysis of urban economies, rural migrants' labour markets and institutional failings. Factors identified as negatively influencing the development of rural migrant's self-identity include problematic features of welfare and social security systems, restricted property rights, and governmental interference in the economics of labour markets. It should be noted, however, that the majority of these studies downplay the impact of individual psychology on the reformulation of self-identity, and largely ignore the impact of migrants' previous living arrangements and their pre-existing social networks. One key feature of social networks is their capacity to act as boundaries between different social groupings, with these boundaries often being consistent with the nature of individuals' perceptions of their identities. Identity itself can be understood and defined in relational terms. An individual may use notions of similarity and difference with others to articulate their own identity (Hayes & Stratton, 2013). In addition, previous studies on this subject have principally employed a state analysis method, which involves a 'before and after' comparative study of self-identity, comparing, for example, individuals' living environments before and after adjustments in self-identity. The current situation in China, and especially in Shanghai, however, is at odds with this approach. As traditional agricultural activity began to diminish in the 1990s, the majority of rural dwellers

engaged in non-agricultural activities were living in urban or suburban areas. Nonetheless, they typically retained an identity originating in their rural households. In this instance, it is clear that the process of change in such migrants' self-identities was not synchronous with changes in their living environments. As such, a state analysis method does not offer an appropriate approach to understanding this issue (Sun, 2010: 4).

The overarching aim of this article is to broaden the analytical lens applied to the shifting identities of forced internal migrants and to examine the relative significance of individual psychology in this process. By employing a process analysis approach, this article takes steps towards identifying ways to conceptualise processes of identity transformation that are unabridged and that therefore accurately capture the experience of Chinese forced internal migrants. Obstacles to the process of change in forced internal migrants' identities will be elucidated by employing Manuel Castells' expression of the path to identity (2011), combined with field research and detailed interviews, and complemented by incorporation of a focus on individual psychology. The obstacles that will be identified are principally internal, meaning that external factors, such as unemployment and labour market failure, have less of a bearing on self-identity formation.

This article now turns, in Section Two, to introduce and consider the relevant literature on identity and its (trans)formation. This is followed, in Section Three, by an explanation of the methodological and conceptual approach taken to the chosen fieldwork location and research participants. The first part of Section Four then analyses individual understandings of how identity changes, how such individuals label themselves, and the structure and grading to which self-identity is subjected, with this analysis being contextualised within China's overall institutional landscape. The second part of Section Four goes on to illustrate how forced internal migrants have positioned themselves within society, with particular reference to barriers imposed by ingrained notions of hierarchy. The discussion in Section Five seeks to compare and contrast this article's findings with the traditional understanding of how self-identity undergoes transformations within an overarching process of 'civilising' forced internal migrant populations. Section Six then concludes by arguing that a more explicit analysis of the obstacles to transforming the self-identity of forced internal migrants would promote social enhancements and sustainable development in urban settings.

Identity and its (Trans)formation

The theoretical foundations of existing studies on identity and identity transformation suggest a close link between two terms and concepts of categorisation, first, personal character, and second, gender. This linkage is based on these terms' shared focus on interactions between the individual and society. At the individual level, Hayes and Stratton (2013: 130) suggest that identity is the sense 'an individual has of the kind of person that they are'. In terms of social significance, cultural recognition and social status also determine how individuals position themselves and their identities. As described by Giddens (1986: 83-84), 'a social position involves the specification of a definite "identity" within a network of social relations, that identity, however, being a "category" to which a particular range of normative sanctions is relevant'. This social position can also be regarded as 'a social identity that carries with it a certain range of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity may activate or carry out: these prerogatives and obligations constitute the role-prescriptions associated with that position'.

The Origins of Identity Studies: A commitment to, and acknowledgement of, the value and significance placed on the individual

Studies on the subject of identity belong to a broader area of philosophical inquiry that can be described as 'the relation each thing bears just to itself' (Noonan & Curtis, 2004). Charles Taylor (1992) describes the term 'identity' by asking, 'Who am I?', and asserting, 'To know

who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable ... in other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand' (Noonan & Curtis, 2004: 29). Based on Taylor's illustration, individuals confirm their identity by attaching meaning to a social group and their membership of that group. In this sense, the so-called 'identity crisis' in modern society might be interpreted as a form of loss or as a self-identity disorder; this arguably entails a diminishing value being placed on individual competitiveness and 'loss of the sense of the worth and dignity of the human being' (May, 2006: 30-35).

Compared to psychological interpretations, sociology places greater emphasis on the social restrictions that self-identity places on each individual. In his *Symbolic Interactionism*, George Mead (2009) points out that a well-developed and integrated identity means people can contain and create a society through their daily interactions with others. Mead believes that when individuals interact with others in the same social group, identity is created and the wholeness of self-identity is developed. This is because social actors seek to influence others by observing their attitudes and taking them as stimuli that are then incorporated into the subsequent behaviour of the relevant actor; such behaviour contributes to the constitution of the relevant actor's identity.

Castells, in his book, *The Power of Identity* (2011), relates the definition of identity to social culture. He understands that constructing an identity proceeds 'on a basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning' (2011: 6). He also observes that since different people project different characters to society, identity provides actors with the tools to attribute meaning to, and to understand, their actions.

After decades of scholarly development, identity has evolved from being seen as a primarily philosophical concept into a term that represents the functional relations between people and society. The sociological meaning of self-identity considers identity to be a means of examining the legitimacy of individuals through the lens of their interactions with the rest of society. Therefore, as stated by Castells (2011:6), 'identity is people's source of meaning and experience'.

Identity: A theoretical grounding

Identity-building is a process that is influenced and restricted by a specific set of living conditions and, more broadly, the social structures and historical culture in which those conditions exist (Cerulo, 1997). One of the central issues that is dealt with in this article is the identity-building process that is experienced by those who belong to a special community.¹ Different understandings have emerged to interpret the identity-construction process; these have coalesced into the two approaches of social identity theory and self-categorisation theory.

First proposed by Tajfel and Turner in the 1950s, social identity theory is concerned with the study of how racism, along with other forms of prejudice and discrimination, are apprehended from a social perspective.² Tajfel summarises this approach (Hogg, 2006) as being focused on defining each individual identity through an acknowledgement that they 'belong to certain social groups [membership of which is charged] ... with some emotional and value significance' (Tajfel, 1972: 292). Building upon the work of Tajfel and Turner, Hogg went on to claim that the construction of each individual's identity is based on how they are evaluated and categorised among different social groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). The whole of society may be divided into in-groups and out-groups. The actions of each individual remain consistent with other in-groups, thereby emphasising differences between their identities and

¹ Referring, in this respect, to a forced internal migrant's social group.

² For further discussion, see, for example, Tajfel and Turner (2004), Hogg and Terry (2000), and Taylor and Moghaddam (1994).

those of out-group members (Turner, 1975).

The social identity approach focuses on the role of the group in the composition of the individual (Hogg & Abrams, 2001: 3, 7). The following assumption is typically proposed by adherents to this approach. In any given social group, each individual will tend to preserve or pursue the accumulation of self-esteem and enhance their positive opinions of themselves as understood in terms of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979: 40). It is also apparent that social stratification is created during the comparison process, thereby exacerbating the scope for intergroup conflict. As argued by Oberschall, social stratification is ‘based upon an unequal division of scarce resources between social groups’, the implication of which is a ‘social situation [that] should be characterised by pervasive ethnocentrism and out-group antagonism between the over- and un-privileged groups’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1979: 36).

In the light of these theoretical insights, it can be said that, on the basis of an intergroup comparison, rural migrants in China have always understood themselves as occupying a low social status, even following changes to their status under the *hukou* system. In this respect, Tajfel has argued that the typically ‘less privileged’ group ‘often seems to internalise a wider social evaluation of themselves as the inferior or second class, and this consensual inferiority is reproduced as relative self-derogation’. On this reading, China’s forced internal migrant population will, for example, socially self-evaluate based on a comparison with what they consider to be, relatively speaking, an out-group, namely that comprised of local urban residents.

Existing Studies on Transformations in the Self-Identity of Internal Migrants in China

Internal Chinese migrants now form a significant population. This is mainly due to the nature of existing social mechanisms, as endorsed and promoted by the central government, used to facilitate and control a rapid-paced process of urbanisation.³ Increasingly, research is being conducted into the adaptive process undergone by such migrants, and the extent to which identity transformations occur in this context.⁴

Although literature addressing China’s forced internal migrants has been limited, in respect to rural-urban migrants more generally, academics have defined them in a number of different ways, this being based on their emphasis of particular aspects of the migratory experience. Zhang and Tong (2006) have classified rural-urban migrants in terms of whether they initiated their migrations themselves or whether they were undertaken in a passive manner. Their assumption is that ‘initiative migrants’ follow a smoother process of identity transformation because they are more prepared and optimistic about life in an urban environment. Conversely, Li (2007) categorises rural-urban migrants into two groups based on their dependence on cultivating agricultural land. One group represents migrants whose income and social activities were previously highly dependent on agricultural cultivation, while the other group represents migrants with incomes largely based on non-agricultural activities (this being despite them still holding a rural household registration status). In Li’s view (2007: 17-20), for the former group, the loss of agricultural land is not only about losing a stable source of income but also relates to a sensation of being excommunicated from the certainties of their former lives.

Analysis of migrants’ identity-construction processes: In recent scholarship, the focus on migrants’ identity-construction processes has mainly been limited to the following two features: identity disruption and social isolation. With respect to the former, some Chinese academics point out that for most internal migrants, despite their household registration status changing from ‘rural’ to ‘urban’, they are nonetheless more psychologically inclined to categorise themselves as rural residents. Even if they have partially accepted an urban identity

³ See, for example, Feng (2004), Gan (2001), Zhou (2002), and Zhu (2002).

⁴ For further discussion, see, in particular, Sun (2010).

on account of their changed *hukou* status, they still regard themselves as having a rural social identity (Sun, 2010). This is due to differences in their living conditions and behavioural habits compared to indigenous urban residents. The resulting incoherence and inconsistency in their respective views of their identities may be described as ‘identity disruption’. Jiang (2002) identifies that this can cause migrants to suffer from conditions including identity anxiety, identity confusion, and a sense of relative deprivation and structural strain that may result in pressure to commit a criminal offence. In terms of social isolation, the existence of differential citizenship in mainland China renders the cognitive hierarchy theory applicable.⁵ From this perspective, Wang and Gao (2004) point out that internal migrants’ subjective perceptions of their position in society may result in a sense of social discrimination at the hands of other types of city-dwellers. They argue that family support is one of the most influential factors in the process of migrants’ identity-transformation. Developing upon this argument, Wei (2006) goes on to note other important factors that also influence internal migrants’ social integration, including a nostalgic sense of belonging to their hometown, a sense of exclusion from the urban environment, and a perception of psychological distance between themselves and indigenous urban residents.

The origins of identity-transformations and resources: Castells (2011) has articulated the following principles of identity-building. These incorporate elements of both the origins of the process and the form taken by the consequent identity. These principles, as articulated below, will be used as analytical tools within the current article:

- Legitimising identity: this comprises a set of rules formulated and introduced by ruling groups to extend and rationalise their dominance over other groups in society.
- Resistance identity: the creation of social groups within systems of logic and value originated by the ruling tiers, which ascribes a different or controversial logic to identity construction.
- Project identity: social actors create a new identity based on how they wish to re-position themselves in society and on a desire for change in existing social structures.

Methodological and Conceptual Considerations

Alongside the scholarly literature introduced above, this research also adopts an empirical, qualitative element, specifically face-to-face interviews. The analysis and arguments in this article are informed by data collected during an eight-week fieldwork expedition to the Shanghai-based scientific equipment manufacturer, X (hereinafter referred to as “SEM”). SEM is located in a suburban community named Chonggu (pseudonym). It was chosen as a site because its management team is composed entirely of indigenous residents of Shanghai (hereinafter “Shanghainese”), yet the vast majority of its workforce is made up of internal migrants from surrounding rural areas. This group contrasts with another, smaller group in the workforce that is comprised of migrant workers from other provinces in southwestern China. These three groups manifested significant feelings of differentiation between their respective identities, fuelled by their close, daily interactions with members of other groups at SEM. This workforce composition was relatively representative of other companies operating in the Shanghai suburbs at the time of the research.

Chonggu is a longstanding, ‘built for purpose’ industrial centre. Internal migrants working in this area have therefore experienced a relatively long-term process of identity transformation, meaning that they can be considered more reliable and more stable sources of data and information. In Chonggu, the Shanghai dialect is used for most day-to-day

⁵ For an example, see Huang et al. (2007).

communication. This necessitated use of a local interpreter for interviews and other information gathering activities.

The majority of prior research on migrants has been carried out in the context of domestic communities. In contrast, this research was conducted in the workplace. This article therefore provides insights into, and draws conclusions regarding, migrant identities that apply specifically to migrants with stable incomes. Moreover, this excludes any resistance to identity transformation that may arise purely from deterioration in living standards experienced post-migration.

Research Participants

Three groups of people were targeted as potential interviewees, namely:

1. internal migrants working at SEMX;
2. other workers at SEMX (including the management team and migrant workers from other provinces); and
3. officials and staff from government departments responsible for administering the Chonggu area.

The organisation studied is a major, privately held business, which employs a large number of internal migrants pursuant to an informal agreement with the Chonggu municipal authorities. This agreement permits SEMX to rent land at a reduced rate, on the understanding that SEMX provides continuous employment opportunities to internal migrants.

Table 1 (below) shows that 178 migrants were working at SEMX during the research period, with 130 of these being Shanghai rural migrants from villages surrounding suburban areas of Shanghai.

Table 1: SEMX Staff Composition

	Index	Total	%
Gender	Male	160	86.49
	Female	25	13.51
Marital status	Married	175	94.59
	Single	10	5.41
<i>Hukou</i> status	Local Shanghai urban residents	7	3.78
	Shanghai internal migrants	130	70.27
	Migrant workers from other provinces	48	25.95

From Tables 2 and 3 (below), it can be seen that education levels are relatively low among Shanghai internal migrants when compared to migrant workers from other provinces. In respect to the former, 19.23 percent had received a junior high school education, and 70 percent had received a technical school level education. A review of all internal migrants' résumés showed that the majority had relatively long histories in industrial manufacturing.

Table 2: Education Level – Shanghai Internal Migrants

Education level	Total	%
None	0	0.00
Primary School	0	0.00
Junior High School	25	19.23
Technical School (<i>Zhiye Jishu Xuexiao</i>)	91	70.00

Technical Secondary School (<i>Zhong Zhuan</i>)	10	7.69
Senior High School	4	3.08
Junior College (<i>Da Zhuan</i>)	0	0.00
University	0	0.00
Overall total	130	100

Table 3: Education Level – Migrant Workers from Other Provinces

Education level	Total	%
None	0	0.00
Primary School	0	0.00
Junior High School	6	12.50
Technical School (<i>Zhiye Jishu Xuexiao</i>)	12	25.00
Technical Secondary School (<i>Zhong Zhuan</i>)	20	41.67
Senior High School	2	4.17
Junior College (<i>Da Zhuan</i>)	6	12.50
University	2	4.17
Overall total	48	100

Conversely, over 50% (four out of a total of seven) of the management team possessed a junior college degree, with the remaining three holding university degrees. Accordingly, given their educational, professional, and skills-based advantages, local Shanghai urban residents evidently represent a more privileged social group than the other two groups working at SEMX. In addition, it should be noted that under the Chinese social security and welfare systems, these three groups each qualify for different levels of social welfare benefits, thereby deepening their institutional distinctiveness.

Conceptual Framework

It is important for the meaningful development of this article's analysis to add further depth to the definition of the term 'forced internal migrants'. All internal migrants who participated in this research met the following criteria:

1. they previously held a Shanghai rural *hukou* that then became an urban *hukou* due to their forced rural-urban migration;
2. they were fully dependent on income generated from activities in the urban setting, but able to sustain living standards that were at least as comfortable as those enjoyed prior to migration; and
3. they were enrolled in the Shanghai social security and welfare systems following their migration.

China's Hukou System: The creation of differential citizenship and the institutional discrimination faced by rural migrants

In the late 1950s, the Communist revolution caused a significant influx of rural residents into the cities. The result was a severe shortage of public services and social infrastructure (Chan & Zhang, 1999). This represented a turning point for the Chinese Government. From 1955, the Government began to control the flow of internal migration via the *hukou* system. The implementation of this system allowed only 1.5 percent of rural households to change their status to urban households annually (China. State Council, 1977). The *hukou* policy, as portrayed by Sun (2010), almost imperceptibly created the conditions whereby urban household status was considered a rare social resource.

In an aim to further differentiate between the statuses under the *hukou* system, the Chinese Government issued to urban residents residency papers that had a red cover, and issued to rural residents residency papers that had a blue cover. Year after year, this difference in colours became more firmly established as the authoritative proof of identity, as well as announcing differences in social status (Xu, 2000: 158). The reason that such differences contribute to distinctions in social status can, per Frank Parkin (1974), be termed as ‘social closure’. According to social closure theory, in order to maximise collective rewards (such as social welfare and access to public services), social groups already receiving such benefits act to restrict other groups from accessing such resources on a commensurate basis (Parkin, 1974: 14). Since the Chinese Government imbued urban residency with a meaning that included access to scarce resources and privileges, *hukou* status became a label for social class and prestige. Under a social closure arrangement that was based on differential citizenship, the meaning of the term ‘rural household’ was widened beyond a simple reference to location, surroundings or work type, to become a symbol of social identity and an undignified status within the social hierarchy. Therefore, in these circumstances, a change in *hukou* status came to be equated with a change in rights and status, with such determination remaining under the strict control of the central Chinese Government.

Medical and Endowment Insurance for Rural Residents

In 1992, a medical and endowment insurance system for rural residents was launched in Shanghai. This system is separate to that for indigenous urban residents (China State Council). This system encouraged rural residents to voluntarily pay a certain amount of their income into an ‘insurance account’.⁶ The content of this account would become available upon retirement, meaning that post-retirement income was based entirely on an individual’s prior income levels.⁷ The national welfare policy on social insurance for urban residents, however, both mandates such payments and provides for pensions to be distributed on a uniform basis by the Government. It may, therefore, be deduced that people who have a rural *hukou* status must rely solely on their own financial resources after retirement. In essence, it appears that the central Chinese Government has designed an institutionally discriminative redistributive policy for social welfare provision that excludes rural residents.

The Social Mobility of Rural Residents

Under the restrictive migration controls, there are two principal ways by which rural residents can migrate into the cities (Sun, 2010). Migration may occur as a consequence of military conscription, which takes place once per year. By enrolling in the military system, rural residents get the opportunity to acquire an urban *hukou* status following demobilisation or a military severance order. A change in *hukou* status by this means would also benefit the soldier’s immediate family since their registration would also be transferred to the urban *hukou* status. Opportunities for a change in status by this means are, however, highly restricted because only rural residents who have previously worked in industrial factories before military conscription can have their registration status adjusted. The second means of changing registration status is migration into the cities on the basis of meeting minimum educational requirements. As described by an official from the Chonggu Administration Office, if a rural resident attends a higher education institution (university level or above), they will have the opportunity to change their registered address to that of the city where their university is located. Upon graduation and obtaining a job in the urban area, their *hukou* status can be changed. However, it was nonetheless noted by the same Chonggu Administration Office official that higher education is not a common priority for young people in Chonggu. Indeed,

⁶ In Shanghai, this amount equates to 5 percent of the insured party’s monthly earnings.

⁷ As calculated by the Chinese Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

since 2006, less than ten people per year among the resident Chonggu population entered university, this being due to the cost of higher education and the poor educational infrastructure available locally.

From this review of the social welfare system and the scope for social mobility, it becomes apparent that rural residents have found themselves forced into a passive state. Under current institutional arrangements, rural residents have a lower social class, poorer social security entitlements, and less opportunities for upward mobility; all of which is determined and announced by possession of a rural *hukou* status.

A Constructed Internal Migrant Social Identity

Huntington (2004: 22) once pointed out that social identity is largely constructed: ‘people make their identity, under varying degrees of pressure, inducements and freedom’. Through the continuous infusion of ideology and the rules of the *hukou* system, external pressures have replaced any scope for most internal migrants to independently choose their status in the social hierarchy. This has resulted in the self-identities of internal migrants becoming closely linked to institutional arrangements. Government-proposed social management policies have further reinforced and legitimised the resulting self-identities, through publicity and educational measures designed to consolidate the separation between rural and urban *hukou*. Ultimately, it may be argued that this discriminatory institutional arrangement has led to the establishment of resistance identity among internal migrants, as although they may be surrounded by the urban environment post-migration, they are still institutionally separated from the urban social infrastructure.

Turning attention now to how internal migrants identified themselves pre-migration. During the interview process, three ways of describing self-identity were observed, and were generally ascribed the following monikers by participants:

- ‘Peasant’ (*Nongmin*): most internal migrants at SEMX identified themselves as being ‘peasants’ pre-migration. Although most were involved in non-agricultural activities at that time, they still recognised themselves as part of this group based on how they were defined in their *hukou* booklets.
- ‘Hick’ (*Xiangxiaren*): those internal migrants who were engaged in agricultural work pre-migration frequently described themselves as ‘hicks’ during interviews. They often used this term in a passive manner that expressed a view of themselves as rustic and uneducated.
- ‘Native’ (*Bendiren*): this term was frequently used when internal migrants were talking about the difference between their manners and customs compared to indigenous Shanghai residents or migrant workers who had come from other Chinese provinces.

From the findings above, it is apparent that there is a relative passivity about internal migrants’ attitudes towards their pre-migration self-identities. This is consistent with the institutional discrimination embodied by the *hukou* policy.

The clear social boundaries expressed by internal migrants at SEMX were also associated with the nature of social hierarchy in China. By surveying different perceptions of identities expressed by interviewees from all three groups at SEMX, it can be seen that most participants ascribed by far the lowest status in the social hierarchy to peasants. Indeed, more than 93 percent of interviewees regarded peasant status as being the lowest tier of society, both in the past and in the present day. During the late 1990s, some academics undertook research⁸ on how Shanghai residents from urban and rural households ranked 50 different occupational types

⁸ See, for example, Chou (1996) and Lu et al. (1997).

based on each type's social rights, economic income and reputation. The research demonstrated that among those occupational types, officials from the Chinese Communist Party and government departments were viewed as being on the highest rungs of the social ladder, whereas peasants were viewed as having the lowest status.

From the interviews conducted with internal migrants at SEMX, it was also found that, before migrating, although the interviewees indicated that they had had almost no social interactions with Shanghainese people pre-migration, they still, due to the *hukou* policy, viewed that group as well-educated, with higher income levels and a better social reputation.

Identities Constructed under the Influence of Institutional Arrangements

The process by which internal migrants construct their self-identities has been determined largely by discriminatory, but inviolable, institutional arrangements. The attendant legal and civil rights and obligations form the ways in which they have identified themselves. In the following sections, three bases for identity-building are discussed in order to identify the process by which rural residents construct their identities within institutional arrangements fostered by the Chinese Government.

In the early 1950s, autonomous bodies beyond the reach of central Government controlled rural areas, this being on account of the insufficiency of the latter's authority to rule. Since the mid-1950s, however, through the societal economic ownership reform movement, the institution known as the 'people's commune' was created out of the existing structure used for the governance of villages.⁹ The central Government had direct control over these institutions and, under its rigorous management, prevented members of the communes from making independent choices, even concerning their personal interests. All communes were indeed under the jurisdiction of the central Government and were directed by the collective community that had immediate control over life in the commune (Yang, 1999).

As a result, the political authority of the central Government permeated every aspect of daily life (Sun, 2010: 75). In these collective communities, actions that could be interpreted as being motivated by an individual's desire to assert their own personal interests or rights could place them under enormous political risk. Sun (2010) has claimed that this institutional arrangement repudiated the legitimacy of any differentiation between the private and public spheres. Interpersonal relationships also diminished; people began to view themselves as connected to others by a common authority rather than singular interactions with other group members. Within these communities, the behaviour of other people was, beyond expression of loyalty to the Party, difficult to predict (Huang, 2002: 54). In order to survive in these difficult circumstances, people based their identities on the 'recommendations' of the ruling regime, using only cultural and material resources provided by the regime to construct their identities.

After the central Government had instituted comprehensive control over rural residents via the commune, it was necessary to attach substantive elements to identity in the form of rights and obligations. Based on records of Chonggu's internal migrant community, the meaning attached by the central Government to the internal migrant identity included a political meaning attached to each social class; this was represented by a system of normative values for commune members to practice and enforce.¹⁰ Those who disobeyed were punished publicly, and as a result, in order to avoid such punishment and retain their existing status, internal migrants chose to obey the prescribed rules.¹¹

As such, the process of de-individualisation initiated by the commune system culminated in internal migrants defining the boundaries of their identities in a manner that cohered with the

⁹ See Yang (1999), p. 243.

¹⁰ This assertion is based on evidence from the Country Annals published by the Shanghai Municipal Government General Office.

¹¹ *ibid.*

central Government's 'identity model'. The provision of normative standards became an effective way of controlling the flow of information into and within rural society. The informational asymmetry that resulted from executive pre-filtering of all information received by internal migrants meant restricted development of political consciousness and participatory dispositions among internal migrants (Hogg and Abrams, 2001). Instead, a psychological state of blind obedience to authority, what could be termed 'authority worship', became the norm for internal migrants, exacerbating the sense of hierarchy. In addition, the selective supply of information effectively constrained any scope for comparative activities, which arguably constitute a central aspect of the identity-building process. This lack of any ability to make positive comparisons between in-groups and out-groups has severely restricted internal migrants' self-awareness (Hogg and Abrams, 2001).

Differential citizenship means that the proportion of social resources allocated to rural and urban areas is different. For this reason, both urban and rural residents in China tend to accept that poverty and a lack of infrastructure in rural areas are social norms. During interviews at SEMX, when referring to their impoverished pre-migration living conditions, internal migrants used phrases such as 'already good enough for countrymen' and 'this is how peasants are supposed to live'. This reflects a view that it is normal for rural residents, as well as internal migrants, to suffer poorer living conditions than their counterparts in urban areas. Most of SEMX's management team echoed this view, expressing the belief that peasants' lives were supposed to feature a lack of material possessions. It was therefore not unusual for indignation to be expressed at the fact that most internal migrants were allocated spacious apartments by the Government when they were forcibly relocated. This attitude resulted in their unwillingness to treat internal migrants in a respectful manner and/or their refusal to acknowledge them as Shanghai urban residents. Internal migrants' exposure to discriminatory resource allocations before migration, and the refusal of indigenous Shanghainese to accept them as urban citizens, has resulted in the establishment of a resistance identity that both separates them from urban social circles and entrenches their belief that they are still rural residents.

Securing Civil Rights after Identity Transformation

After changes in identity, the rights enjoyed by internal migrants are concentrated within the social welfare system. The current social welfare system available to internal migrants in Shanghai is rooted in a basic social welfare provision that is offered under the Social Insurance Interim Measures of Shanghai Small Cities and Towns (hereinafter "Measures") (China Shanghai Municipal Government, 2003a). The Measures apply to people holding an urban *hukou* who live in suburban Shanghai. All internal migrants working at SEMX qualified for this provision at the time this research was conducted. Unlike the social welfare system for rural residents, the Measures require the enrolment of all internal migrants and the monthly payment of monies that will ultimately be distributed by the Government on a uniform basis.

The Measures (2003a) provide that post-retirement, internal migrants can receive an annuity, amounting to 20 percent of average city-wide monthly wages. In 2013, this annuity was set at RMB 1,007 per month. Interviews conducted at SEMX suggest that most internal migrants believe the endowment insurance represents a far more secure welfare guarantee. Nonetheless, they also complained that the small size of the annuity and the high cost of living in Shanghai meant that they would have to live on basic food rations during their retirement. These complaints were somewhat tempered, however, by a widespread view that their previous identity as peasants would have meant them having to survive on the very minimum of resources.

The Measures also permit internal migrants to obtain discounts of up to 60 percent when using outpatient, emergency or hospital services to treat critical illnesses. In contrast to the health care system provided to Shanghainese, however, no fees are covered for minor illnesses,

such as influenza or fevers. Yet, it was also evident that rural migrants in SEMX were less concerned with the health care system than they were with endowment insurance, since most are in the relatively healthy stages of mature adult life.

In respect to job-seeking services, there is no difference between policies for internal migrants and Shanghainese. Since 2006, all residents with a Shanghai urban *hukou* status can obtain free careers training in Government-owned career development centres (China Shanghai Municipal Government, 2003b). Internal migrants need to compete in the urban labour market just like other urban residents. In other words, no jobs are assigned to them on the basis that they are internal migrants (although in the mid-1990s, the Shanghai municipal government expropriated land from companies to coerce them into providing jobs to internal migrants who had lost land elsewhere following its forcible acquisition by the authorities).

The Measures enable internal migrants who fail to obtain a job after migration to claim unemployment insurance for every month of unemployment, up to a maximum period of 24 months (2003a). Most internal migrants at SEMX believed that unemployment insurance had increased their confidence with respect to life in urban areas, since most had worries about losing their jobs due to a lack of skills and education.

Based on the above review of the social security system available to internal migrants, it can be asserted that they experience no significant increase in living standards upon relocation to the city. Despite their migration, only a basic standard of living is available to them after retirement. In terms of employment, most internal migrants at SEMX expressed negative feelings, stating that although they currently had a job with a stable income, the difficult economic situation meant that the company's survival was by no means guaranteed. Lack of skills and education meant that they felt less confident in finding a job if they did become unemployed, despite the provision of free careers training sessions and unemployment insurance. It is apparent that the Government tends to leave the issue of (un)employment to the labour markets, thereby absolving itself of responsibility for resolving any employment difficulties faced by internal migrants. Above all, since the internal migrants' living conditions pre- and post-migration had remained essentially the same, less significance was ascribed to any of the benefits that were supposed to accrue to them on the basis of their transformed identities. Instead, most saw the change in their identity as little more than words written on their residency papers.

Self-Identity and its Construction Following Identity Transformation

The nature of changes to self-identity witnessed in China result from institutional arrangements that were created in order to manage problems arising from land acquisitions, which themselves were necessitated by rapid urbanisation. However, based on the above discussion, the civil rights obtained by internal migrants post-migration are not equivalent to those possessed by indigenous Shanghai residents. The social security system available to internal migrants could be more accurately described as a guarantee of a minimum living standard, as opposed to a real welfare system; the latter would serve to improve or maintain decent living conditions and would prevent internal migrants from dropping to a level of mere subsistence living. These institutional arrangements, combined with the three bases of identity mentioned previously, have raised serious obstacles to internal migrants' construction of new identities.

Based on Taylor's (1992) description of the term 'identity', after obtaining a new identity as an urban resident, the first issue that is supposed to concern internal migrants is summed up by the question 'Who am I?'. However, for internal migrants at SEMX, this issue arose only after identity transformation, as their prior lifestyles were preserved. Indeed, as mentioned previously, all internal migrants at SEMX were from an area that had been industrialised for a long period of time. In respect to income resource, Table 4 (below) reveals that the majority of internal migrants consulted were not dependent on agricultural activities either pre- or post-

migration.

Table 4: Internal Migrants' Major Income Resources Pre- and Post-Migration

	Pre-migration	Post-migration
Monthly wages	53 (82.81%)	59 (92.19%)
Agricultural activities	7 (10.94%)	0 (0%)
Other	4 (6.25%)	5 (7.81%)
Overall total	64 (100%) ¹²	

Furthermore, during the interview process, it became apparent that internal migrants considered the most profound change arising from their new identity to be location, since most were living in public rental accommodation. The public housing they occupy is located in Chonggu, only a few kilometres from where they had previously lived. After moving into public housing, internal migrants continued to live together in close proximity because most people living in Shanghai's public housing are also internal migrants. By combining information obtained from the interviews with the above analysis of the social security system, it can be asserted that internal migrants' living standards did not change significantly following migration. Therefore, with the exception of the change in their location, their lifestyle and living standards had remained essentially unchanged.

Denial of Rural Residency Status

During eight weeks of field research, 64 internal migrants at SEMX completed research questionnaires. The results are detailed in Table 5 (below), alongside results for 7 Shanghainese and 48 workers from other provinces.

Table 5: SEMX Workers' Identity Recognition Source

	Internal migrants	Migrant workers from other provinces	Shanghainese
<i>Hukou</i> status	61 (95.31%)	46 (95.83%)	6 (85.71%)
Occupation type	3 (4.69%)	1 (2.08%)	0 (0.00%)
Other	0 (0.00%)	1 (2.08%)	1 (14.29%)
Overall total	64 (100%)	48 (100%)	7 (100%)

It had been assumed that internal migrants might reject recognition as rural residents due to the widespread social consensus that this is a disadvantaged group, with its members possessing only a low economic and social status. However, survey results reveal that almost all internal migrants determined their identity and status based on what was printed on their residency paper, as opposed to other resources, such as civil rights, social welfare or income.

In order to illustrate why internal migrants actively prefer an identity that is both institutionally and socially conceptualised as vulnerable and second-class, in-depth interviews were carried out with ten internal migrants. The interviews revealed a common feeling that they were still rural residents. When inquiring for further clarification, interviewees often stated that they would have preferred to have moved to an urban area in a few years' time. This view may be attributed to the government offering to pay internal migrants a defined amount of compensation for forced land acquisition. Significant increases in Shanghai's housing prices have meant that the amount of compensation has increased every year. As such, it would be appealing to transfer residency status later due to the higher amount of compensation that could

¹² 64 out of 130 Shanghai internal migrants at SEMX participated in this research.

be expected. It is therefore important to note that internal migrants' tendency to ascribe a higher value to rural residency status was not due to any improvement in social status they had personally experienced, but rather the generous compensation they would have anticipated due to acquisition of their land.

A Hazy Denial of Urban Residency Status: Self-deprecation and discrimination

During the interviews, most internal migrants recognised themselves as belonging to a disadvantaged and vulnerable social group with a low social status. They consistently expressed negative subjective feelings about the change to their status. Table 6 (below) reveals that internal migrants at SEMX attributed an even lower social status to themselves than to non-migrant rural residents, despite also indicating strong opposition to being considered Shanghai urban residents. In the interviews, three possible explanations were found for this phenomenon.

Table 6: Internal Migrants' Views on their Social Status

	Peasants' social status is higher	Own social status increased post-migration	Would prefer to be recognised as Shanghainese
Agree	52 (81.25%)	3 (4.69%)	0 (0.00%)
Disagree	2 (3.13%)	4 (6.25%)	9 (14.06%)
Does not matter	10 (6.40%)	57 (89.06%)	55 (85.94%)
Overall total		64 (100%)	

As mentioned above, current rural residents were perceived by interviewees as having a higher social status because, if existing rural residents were to become Shanghai urban residents, they would obtain a higher amount of compensation for the acquisition of their property. Compared to this group, internal migrants at SEMX expressed feelings of relative deprivation. Merton (1968) explains this feeling of relative deprivation by using reference group theory, indicating that between in-groups and their relative out-groups, people consistently take on the standards of others as a reference to monitor their own position and standards. Since only current rural residents could obtain higher rates of compensation, internal migrants at SEMX regarded them as having a higher social status.

The struggles faced by internal migrants in respect to their identities can also account for interviewees' refusals to be considered urban residents. All internal migrants at SEMX lived in public housing, which thereby excluded them from the social circles of indigenous Shanghai residents. On this matter, they received nothing in the way of assistance from the municipal government. Yet, internal migrants often felt discriminated against by local indigenous Shanghai residents; they reported being verbally assaulted by locals and being described as lacking in manners and education. They also reportedly found it distasteful to talk with or build relationships with internal migrants outside of work. It is evident therefore that alongside a refusal to consider themselves as urban residents, internal migrants could not enter Shanghai's urban society due to differences in their culture, lifestyle and social status.

Refusal by internal migrants to be considered urban residents is symptomatic of conscious self-devaluation (Pawson, 2008). According to the SEMX management team, when labour disputes occurred, internal migrant workers often labelled themselves as part of a disadvantaged group in order to extract additional benefits and assert their rights. Members of the management team also stated a belief that internal migrants shared a common view that the central Chinese Government would help disadvantaged groups to protect its own interests; however, this only partially influences verdicts on labour disputes. Therefore, self-deprecation by internal migrants was more likely a morally-rationalised excuse for claiming as much as possible when issuing demands. Interviews with internal migrants also confirmed this opinion,

with internal migrants commonly asserting a belief that being a weaker group made it more reasonable for them to issue their demands.

Denials of urban residency status are not absolute, however, since when talking about migrant workers from other provinces, internal migrants frequently used the term ‘native (*bendiren*)’ to describe themselves. This term helped to emphasise differences in terms of social status, lifestyle and culture between themselves and those they viewed as ‘outsiders’, as well as their kinship with Shanghainese people. The findings detailed in Table 7 (below) show that almost all internal migrants at SEMX positioned themselves above migrant workers from other provinces. In doing so, they cited reasons such as ‘different cultural and living habits’ in other provinces, an ‘inability to understand the rules’ that they saw being exhibited by migrants from these areas, along with the fact that migrants from other provinces ‘receive less social welfare’.

Table 7: Internal Migrants’ Views on Different Identity Holders and their Relative Social Status

	Internal migrants	Workers from other provinces	Shanghainese
Upper class	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	10 (15.63%)
Middle class	7 (10.94%)	0 (0.00%)	51 (79.69%)
Lower/secondary class	52 (81.25%)	58 (90.63%)	0 (0.00%)
Cannot tell	5 (7.81%)	6 (9.38%)	3 (4.69%)
Overall total	64 (100%)	64 (100%)	64 (100%)

Internal migrants also emphasised their sameness with local Shanghai residents in these discussions, expressing a view that ‘compared with those outsiders, at least we [internal migrants] all speak the Shanghai dialect, live in the Shanghai province, and basically share similar cultural customs with Shanghainese’. Therefore, when talking about migrant workers from other provinces, the internal migrant was more willing to accept an identity similar to that of a Shanghai urban resident and, by doing so, they protected their self-esteem, as well as discriminating against perceived outsiders. This follows Tajfel’s (1972) social identity theory, which states that each individual within a social group will, as far as possible, exhibit a tendency to preserve or pursue his or her self-esteem, enhancing their positive view of themselves and distinguishing themselves from out-groups.

Under existing institutional arrangements, internal migrant workers at SEMX have used their own means to draw boundaries, to claim social rights, and to reconfigure their social status vis-à-vis other social groups following changes in their identities. When considering the issue of self-identity, they denied being Shanghai urban residents on account of their perceived social exclusion, discrimination by local urban residents and the current institutional arrangements, rather than any subjective process of determination. Conversely, they also displayed a contradictory willingness to accept themselves as Shanghai urban residents on the basis of discriminatory views towards migrants from other provinces, emphasising kinship with the local Shanghai urban residents in order to protect their own self-esteem. This distorted, or perhaps blurred, view reveals considerable confusion in respect to self-identity and self-positioning. This thereby demonstrates that the identity issues faced are not rooted in rights-based conceptions of equality, but rather are a consequence of hierarchical differences, as well as a willingness to modify asserted notions of self-identity dependent upon one’s interests. Internal migrants denied their urban residency statuses to highlight their desire for priority in terms of compensatory payouts for land acquisition; during their daily lives, however, they were more likely to yearn for the social status enjoyed by local Shanghai urban residents, and thus by indirectly accepting their urban residency status, they were able to discriminate against

people from other provinces, successfully increasing their own levels of self-esteem.

Discussion

The comprehensive process of transformation in internal migrants' self-identities may be understood as arising from a combination of two main processes. Firstly, identity shall adhere to a comprehensive set of civil, economic and social rights, such as the right to inhabit a certain area, the right to education, and the right to protection under a system of social security and welfare. Secondly, citizenship should be socially sourced in the perception and acceptance of rights for both oneself and others. As revealed above, however, Chinese internal migrants have failed to achieve wholeness and continuity in their self-identities after transferring from a rural to an urban household status. Such a failure is both an institutionalised outcome and an active choice made by internal migrants.

Institutionally, according to Marshall's theory, a modern citizen should have access to a combination of rights, that is to protection under the law, to political participation, and to social welfare (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992). From these three perspectives, the civil rights obtained by internal migrants after changing their identities were seen to be profoundly different from the civil rights of local Shanghainese. Despite a lack of substantive difference between these two groups, institutional arrangements engender their differing treatment within the social welfare system. As mentioned above, the Measures (the insurance system applicable to internal migrants) are defined as being 'only applicable to internal migrants who live in the Shanghai suburb area, or other personnel that were permitted to be enrolled by the Shanghai municipal government' (2003a). Regardless therefore of the Measures' specific conditions, their application represents a mode of institutional discrimination against internal migrants that separates and distinguishes between the rights of internal migrants and their urban counterparts. In addition, although public housing is provided to internal migrants, which unquestionably helps migrants to settle in urban areas, it is designed specifically for internal migrants. This means such public housing forms a separate 'ghetto' that exists outside the social circles of local urban residents. It therefore forms a barrier to internal migrants' participation in urban life, blocking them from constructing interpersonal relationships with city-dwellers, relationships that could lead to a more straightforward identity-building trajectory.

On the other hand, due to differential citizenship in China, the identity-building process is highly selective and hierarchical. Internal migrants distinguished themselves from Shanghainese urban residents to reinforce illusory feelings of superiority, this arising from a belief that they enjoyed more protection from the government. Although this helped to obscure any feelings of relative deprivation in the light of the significant advantages possessed by local urban residents, by actively refusing to accept this new identity, internal migrants were indirectly reducing the scope for any advance in their own social resources. By portraying themselves as a vulnerable social group, they also separated themselves from Shanghai urban society. They also ascribed to themselves a lower status when comparing themselves to current rural residents. It should, however, be noted that this can be accounted for by internal migrants' perception of economic advantages to living in rural areas and is not attributable to any abatement in hierarchical discrimination under current institutional arrangements.

When making a comparison between themselves and migrant workers from other provinces, internal migrants indirectly conceded to self-identifying as Shanghai urban residents by referring to themselves using the word 'native'. With this word, they labelled themselves as distinctively Shanghainese, deploying examples such as the Shanghai dialect, lifestyle and manners. These distinctive qualities represented a resource by which they could consolidate self-esteem by contrasting themselves with perceived outsiders. Tacit approval is offered to this discriminatory behaviour by the prevailing hierarchical means of ranking identities.

However, whether as a result of institutional barriers to integrity in respect to civil rights,

or as a consequence of an active choice to live outside the new urban social environment, Chinese internal migrants' notions of their self-identity post-migration mark a reproduction of social class and inequality that is generated from the aggravating rural-urban disparities brought by the *hukou* system. By endowing a different level of civil, social and economic rights to rural and urban dwellers, this system introduces both institutionalised and cultural discrimination. Rural residents are seen as second-class citizens. They are stereotyped as being poorly educated, seen as incompatible with an urban lifestyle, and enjoy inferior access to social welfare. From this perspective, Chinese internal migrants' struggle with their urban identity formation process reflects an impotent form of resistance to perceived social discrimination from Shanghai urban residents. It also serves to highlight the peculiar duality within the identities of the internal migrants concerned, as is expressed in the simultaneous discrimination aimed towards internal migrants by local Shanghai urban residents, and the discrimination migrant workers themselves express towards 'outsiders' from other provinces.

The shaping of rights between internal migrants and local citizens also raises some critical challenges to mainland China. In a context where 'collective membership becomes the precondition for rights entitlement' (Shin, 2015), it is indeed questionable whether, along with the strengthened local to non-local, and rural to urban division, China can still be perceived as a 'socialist state' as it itself proclaims. Internal migration in China is, as mentioned above, a phenomenon induced largely by urbanisation. Urbanisation in China is characterised by forced acquisition, demolition, eviction and the commodification of agricultural land. Such a process not only means that rural dwellers have no other option but to relocate to urban areas, but also that free return to rural areas is likely impossible because income generation opportunities are undermined by the loss of agricultural land. Although land acquisition in China is justified both politically, by popularising the idea that it is a contribution that rural residents can make towards achieving the greater goal of national development, and legally, as once rural land is reclassified as urban land it no longer lies outside of central Government's full control,¹³ this process still brings into question the relationship between state, urban and collective citizenship. In addition, the continuously reproduced dualism with regard to access to civil rights and urban services between the local and the non-local citizen brings with it the issue of rights awareness. Globalisation and the rise in human rights norms are both a Chinese and an international issue. The degree of civil rights a nation envisions for its local and non-local residents reveals its commitment to immigration inclusion (Bloemraad and Provine, 2013). In this respect, this article adds a Chinese perspective to the existing immigration inclusion literature, the focus of which is typically on the European and North American contexts.

Conclusion

This article has revealed a new path towards understanding the self-identity formation process of internal migrants in China. Unlike previous research, which often draws a binary conclusion that migrants either can or cannot accept their new identities, this research disrupts this dichotomy by revealing how, under existing institutional arrangements in China, the boundaries of self-identity are unclear. The obstacles experienced by internal migrants during changes in their self-identities are manifest in discriminatory social policy. This causes feelings of relative deprivation, social isolation (arising from both psychological and physical factors), and low self-esteem vis-à-vis local urban residents. It is these factors that make it difficult for internal migrants to join the urban society.

An understanding of the factors that assist internal migrants in integrating into their new environment is complicated by the fact that internal migrants only indirectly admit to their new

¹³ In the Chinese context, land in the urban area is entirely controlled by the local government, whereas rural agricultural land is tied to each rural dweller. Yet, through the process of administrative boundary adjustment, the authorities can obtain control of agricultural land by re-classifying this as urban land (Hsing, 2012).

social identities when faced with a social group subjectively positioned at a lower rung on the social ladder. They admit this identity, however, they do so in a way that is both hierarchical and discriminatory. This is thereby counter-productive in terms of sustainable social development. In order to help internal migrants better settle into urban areas, both socially and psychologically, it is essential that the central Government eases restrictions on migratory mobility, reduces the implementation of discriminatory policies, and uses public advocacy and educational media to weaken the inherent sense of hierarchy felt between local and non-local rural and urban groups. Local governmental authorities should also use their social and economic resources to guarantee and protect internal migrants' rights and interests, doing so in a way that reinforces their sense of belonging, facilitates their settlement into urban life, and reduces social inequalities.

This article has also discussed some of the major social outcomes from China's urbanisation-induced internal migration. Pre-migration, the *hukou* system institutionally separates and discriminates rural dwellers' social, economic and political life from their urban counterparts, creating a politically justified pyramid social structure in which rural residents are positioned at the bottom. Post-migration, the *hukou* system acts as a tenacious barrier, reinforcing inequalities between internal migrants and local citizens by preventing internal migrants access to urban social services. Without being officially classified as internally displaced, the social class of internal migrants is further reproduced and enhanced throughout lives lived in gated communities, whether this be in a factory that has special protocols in recruiting internal migrants and thus the majority of workers are non-local citizens, or a neighbourhood unit that is built specifically to host internal migrants. Either way, the urban life of internal migrants resembles an isolated island within the city, marked by the polarisation of exacerbating inequalities and dual citizenship. From this perspective, the experiences of Chinese internal migrants in the city resonates with the contemporary debate surrounding international migrant workers' civil rights and social inclusion in destination countries (Kofman, 2009; Pécoud and de Guchteneire, 2006; Spijkerboer, 2013). Similar to Chinese internal migrants, international migrant workers, especially low-skilled workers, are often treated as temporary and/or second-class residents, who live in segregated social spaces. As such, the struggles in identity formation and adjustment processes that have been revealed in this article should not only be perceived as a distinctly Chinese phenomenon, but also as a reference to a particular means of social change that should attract attention from scholars focusing on migration and policymaking at the global level.

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