



What Determines Migrant Workers' Life Chances in Contemporary China? Hukou, Social Exclusion, and the Market

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Abstract

It is widely believed that household registration (*hukou*) continues to play a fundamental role in determining migrant workers' life chances in contemporary China. This article contends, on the contrary, that the importance of hukou has declined substantially, and that migrant workers' life chances would not be significantly improved even if China were to abolish the hukou system. Based on an investigation of migrant workers in Beijing and Chifeng City in Inner Mongolia, the author shows that in addition to hukou, two other mechanisms—social exclusion and the market—also limit migrant workers' life chances. Moreover, it is not hukou but social exclusion and market resources that most concern the majority of migrant workers when they strive to find a better job, move up the social ladder, and secure opportunities to settle in the city.

Keywords

migrant workers, hukou, social exclusion, market, life chances

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Both Chinese and Western scholars have long subscribed to the view that the hukou system plays a major role in limiting migrant workers' life chances, and many of them see it as the major source of hardship for migrant workers living in cities (Solinger, 1999; Chan and Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2002; Lu, 2003; Alexander and Chan, 2004; Loong-Yu and Nan, 2007).¹ Recent articles have argued that despite reforms of the hukou system, it remains a critical barrier. For instance, Kam Wing Chan and Will Buckingham argue that these reforms have in fact made very little difference on the ground. By distinguishing two classifications within the hukou system—the classification between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou and that between local and non-local hukou—they argue that recent reforms have only targeted the first of these, namely the division between agricultural and non-agricultural hukou in a particular locality, but have made no effort to eliminate hukou differences between localities. They conclude that the hukou system remains both “potent and intact,” and that it seriously affects “the livelihood of hundreds of millions of ordinary people,” particularly the millions of rural migrant workers, and “continues to be a major wall in preventing China’s rural population from settling in the city” (Chan and Buckingham, 2008: 583, 604–5).

This article will challenge this popular view by posing, and then answering, a different question: Would migrant workers' life chances be significantly improved if China were to abolish the hukou system? While Chan and Buckingham argue that China has not made substantive reforms to the hukou system, I suggest that the hukou system is now playing a relatively limited role in determining migrant workers' life chances. In other words, migrant workers' life chances would not be significantly improved even if China abolishes the hukou system.

If indeed it is true that hukou is playing a role of limited importance, how do we explain that migrant workers are still one of the most disadvantaged groups in China? What other sources generate disadvantages for this population, over and above the hukou system? How do migrant workers themselves view these different sources of disadvantage, and what do they themselves do to improve their own life chances? These questions will also be examined in this article.

A Puzzle: Why Don't Migrant Workers Want an Urban Hukou?

If hukou contributes to such a great extent to migrants' suffering, as many scholars believe, we might expect that a large number of migrant workers would have rushed to change their hukou status when this became possible

in small cities in 1997 and 2001, and to register themselves in one of the large cities that have relaxed hukou rules and removed some of the hukou hurdles in recent years. However, this did not occur.

A good example is the nonchalant reaction of migrant workers to the hukou reform in Shijiazhuang, the capital of Hebei province. The city, with a population of about two million, took the initiative to reform its hukou system in August 2001, allowing migrant workers to register as urban residents as long as they possessed stable employment, received a steady income, or dwelled in a regular place. However, relatively few of the more than 300,000 migrant workers in the city applied to change their hukou status. According to media reports and scholarly research, 69,834 people registered for the local urban hukou in the first year; in the second year the number was about 15,000; and in the third year fewer than a thousand (*Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 2004; Wang Wenlu, 2003; Wang Fei-ling, 2005: 192–93). Considering that many people who registered were not actually migrant workers but in fact relatively wealthy merchants, the number of migrant workers who registered is likely smaller than the numbers given above. If hukou is so relevant to people's life chances, why did the majority of migrant workers in the city not take advantage of this opportunity?

What occurred in Shijiazhuang is not atypical. The 1997 experimental hukou reform, which was implemented nationwide in 2001 and allowed rural residents to register in small cities, also failed to convince more rural migrants to change their hukou status. Official statistics show that the rate of growth in urban hukou registration remained stable before and after the 2001 reform (Figure 1).² In other words, relaxing requirements did not cause an increase in the number of people changing their hukou status. As urbanization has become a major goal for local governments in China, there is no reason to think that these numbers were underreported. Registering for urban hukou after the reforms still requires people to meet one of the following three conditions: possession of stable employment, maintenance of a stable income, or residence in a regular dwelling place. However, these conditions are in no way insurmountable obstacles for most migrant workers, particularly those in small and medium-sized cities. Many places encourage peasants and migrant workers to change hukou status by offering more benefits: for instance, a number of provinces allow peasants to retain the right to a share of the farmland in their home village even after they register as urban residents. Luoyang, a medium-sized city in Henan province, recently encouraged peasants and migrant workers to register as urban residents by offering a bonus of up to 10,000 yuan (*Huashang bao*, 2009). Nonetheless, most migrant workers have not rushed to change their hukou status.

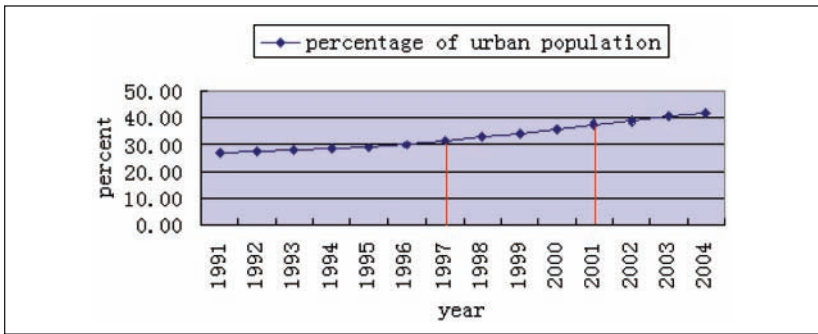


Figure 1. Registered urban population in China, 1991–2004

Note: The years of the experimental reform and the nationwide reform respectively are marked with lines.

Data source: National Bureau of Statistics (2006: table 4-1).

These media reports and official statistics are corroborated by my ethnographic observations in a number of provinces between 2003 and 2006. Other Chinese researchers have also reported migrant workers' nonchalant response to the hukou reforms (Wen, 2002; Zhu, 2007).

Why are so many migrant workers uninterested in changing their hukou status? Scholars have generally paid scant attention to explaining this puzzling phenomenon. This puzzle raises broader questions: What role does hukou play in determining migrant workers' life chances? Would their life chances be significantly improved if China were to completely abolish the hukou system? If not, what other factors hold migrant workers back from advancement? In this article I address these questions using a Weberian multidimensional framework of social differentiation to analyze data I collected in Beijing and in Chifeng prefecture, Inner Mongolia.

Mechanisms of Differentiation: The Market and Exclusion

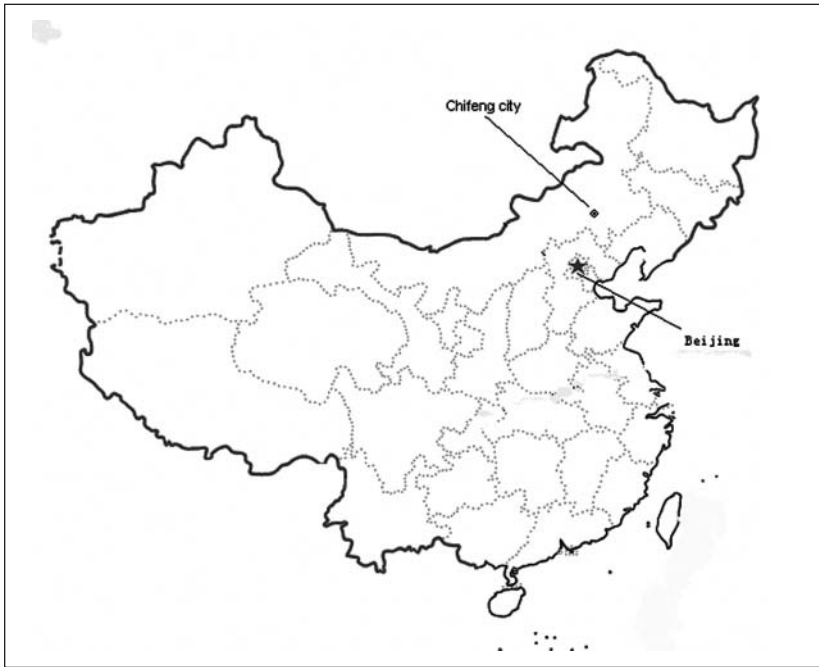
Max Weber highlighted two key mechanisms of social differentiation: market exchange and exclusion. Many scholars conceive of the market as an institution that facilitates equal and just exchanges, but Weber (1958: 182) emphasized that market exchanges often lead to the differentiation of people's life chances. Those who own more resources can command a larger share from market exchanges than those who own fewer, and as a result, previous

inequality is preserved and strengthened. For instance, he maintained that the propertied class often wins price wars with the propertyless in the labor market and uses market exchanges to its advantage, because the propertied class owns more resources and has the leeway to withdraw from market exchanges while the propertyless class has to sell its labor power in the market for subsistence (181–82).

Exclusion operates on principles contrary to those of free market exchange. It is a mechanism by which social groups monopolize goods and opportunities and withhold them from market exchange so that outsiders are excluded from access (Weber, 1958: 190–93).³ Social groups exclude outsiders by maintaining boundaries between themselves and others. Weber identified two types of boundaries: one is legal and the other social. Both boundaries are delineated according to group attributes such as race, language, religion, party membership, and geographical location. Legal boundaries are enforced by state regulations (191). National citizenship, the former apartheid system in South Africa, and the hukou system in China are examples of exclusion based on legal boundaries enforced by the state.

Exclusion, however, does not necessarily require legally defined boundaries or state enforcement. It can also be practiced informally by social groups. This form of exclusion maintains boundaries through the function of “closed social relationships.” According to Weber, a relationship is closed insofar as the “participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions.” Closed relationships are often used to “guarantee the monopolized advantages” (Weber, 1978: 43–44). In other words, people can draw a boundary between themselves and others, limiting the nature of social and economic relationships across boundaries and excluding outsiders from access to resources and opportunities within their social networks.

In short, three mechanisms lead to social differentiation and inequality: the market, legal exclusion, and social exclusion. In analyzing the unequal position of rural migrant workers in China, many scholars have focused exclusively on hukou, a form of legal exclusion, and have not paid enough attention to the roles of the market and social exclusion. Additionally, they have tended to focus on migrant workers in large cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and provincial capitals, while neglecting those in small and medium-sized cities. However, the majority of migrant workers have actually moved not to large cities but to small and medium-sized ones. A national survey conducted in 2000 shows that only 20.2 percent of migrant workers migrated to provincial capitals, while the rest moved to prefecture-level cities (22.2 percent), county cities (20.7 percent), and towns (36.9 percent) (Laodong yu shehui baozhangbu, 2001).



Map 1.

In this article I examine how each of the three mechanisms—hukou, social exclusion, and the market—affects migrant workers' life chances in Beijing, a very large city, and Chifeng City in Inner Mongolia, a medium-sized city (Map 1; Table 1). I argue that the importance of hukou has declined substantially due to hukou reforms and other socioeconomic changes, and that the market and social exclusion have become the most important factors in limiting migrant workers' life chances. In fact, hukou now plays such a small role that abolishing the remnants of the system will not improve the life chances of migrant workers significantly.

The term "life chances" refers to the chances available to migrant workers for procuring better employment, for moving up the urban social ladder, and for settling down in cities. Upward mobility is usually associated with better employment and permanent urban settlement; however, there are other phenomena that contribute to upward mobility, including learning a marketable skill, obtaining a college credential, and establishing a good marriage. It must also be clarified that settlement in cities does not always mean obtaining a

Table 1. Population Composition of Beijing and Chifeng City, 2004

	Total	Residents With Urban Hukou	Migrants	Proportion of Migrants
Beijing	11.9 million	8.5 million	3.4 million	29%
Chifeng City	650,000	500,000	150,000	23%

Sources: *Beijing tongji nianjian* (2005: chap. 3-1). Data for Chifeng City are estimated based on *Chifeng tongji nianjian* (2005) and my interviews with local officials in 2004.

local urban hukou. Rather, it means that migrant workers have brought their families (spouses and children) into the cities and intend to reside there permanently. In this sense, obtaining a local urban hukou is a means rather than an end to migrant workers' process of urban settlement. It is necessary to uncouple migrant workers' hukou status from settlement because a significant number of this population has in effect settled in an urban area without obtaining local urban hukou, both in large cities like Beijing and in medium-sized cities like Chifeng.

Research Design and Data Collection

Beijing and Chifeng City represent two distinct types of cities in China. In terms of population size, Beijing is a very large city while Chifeng City is medium sized;⁴ in terms of administrative structure, Beijing is an independent municipality equivalent to a provincial capital while Chifeng City is a prefectural city.⁵ As Cindy C. Fan (2008: 68) points out, the higher the level of administration of a city and the larger its population, the more difficult it is for a migrant to obtain hukou. Beijing and Chifeng City cannot represent all types of cities in China, but a comparison of them will shed light on how hukou, social exclusion, and the market operate in cities of very different types.

My research focuses on migrant workers who move from rural areas in Chifeng prefecture to Beijing and those who move to Chifeng City. The former group has changed provincial residence while the latter has not. As previously noted, Chan and Buckingham argue that the persisting division between local and non-local hukou at the provincial level still prevents migrant workers from settling in cities, as well as limiting their livelihood. Thus, an examination of the two groups will shed light on how the geographical division between origins and destinations of migration affects migrant workers' life chances in the city. In addition, common place of origin results in the two groups

sharing a variety of attributes, including language (local dialect), culture, life style, and identification with place of origin, dimensions often instrumental in social exclusion. Comparing the experiences of these two groups, therefore, helps us distinguish between the impacts of legal and social exclusion.

My research was limited to female migrant workers. The experience of female migrant workers is different from that of males in many respects. However, in terms of employment and social status, the female migrant workers looked at in this study resemble the majority of migrant workers in China: they are employed in low-wage sectors and are close to the bottom rung of the urban social hierarchy (Li, 2005). In addition, there is no evidence to suggest that cities discriminate against female migrant workers in regard to hukou registration. The intention and decision of female migrant workers to settle in a given city are also reliable indicators as to whether a migrant worker will be able to settle more permanently in the city in question because once women do settle in that city, generally so will their husbands and children. Therefore, by examining the experience of female migrant workers we can analyze how hukou, social exclusion, and lack of market resources affect migrant workers' life chances in general.

The bulk of data in this article was collected during fieldwork conducted in Chifeng City and Beijing between March 2004 and May 2006. In both cities, I conducted in-depth interviews with female migrant workers, local officials, and private employers, and collected relevant written sources, such as press articles and policy documents. Additionally, I conducted a questionnaire survey in each city in 2004: 154 questionnaires were collected in Beijing and 201 in Chifeng City.

In Chifeng City, I randomly selected approximately twenty respondents (female migrant workers) on each of ten randomly selected streets for a survey in December 2004.⁶ It proved, however, difficult to follow the same procedure in Beijing because migrant workers from rural Chifeng were scattered widely across the city. Thus a snowball method was adopted instead: I first contacted several dozen Chifeng female migrant workers in Beijing through the Chifeng Women's Federation,⁷ and then asked them to recommend their acquaintances, friends, relatives, and fellow villagers to participate in my research; finally I conducted a survey among these migrant workers between July and November 2004.⁸ The survey respondents from Chifeng City and Beijing show similarities in education and wages but differences in age, marital status, and length of residence (Table 2). In addition, a larger proportion of the respondents in Beijing worked as domestic workers, whereas the respondents' occupations in Chifeng City were more diverse. These differences result partly from the

Table 2. Basic Characteristics of Surveyed Female Migrant Workers

	Beijing	Chifeng City
Total	154	201
Mean age (years)	22.4	28.9
Marital status (percent)		
Unmarried	81.17	34.17
Married	14.29	62.81
Divorced/widowed	4.55	3.02
Education (percent)		
Below elementary school	0.00	0.53
Elementary school	10.39	7.98
Middle school	76.62	68.09
High school and above	12.99	23.40
Median monthly wage (yuan)	450	400
Mean years of residence in the city	2.67	3.70

methods of selection, but also from the fact that the two groups of female migrant workers were themselves different, as I shall discuss below.

The in-depth interviews were conducted between 2004 and 2006. I made four field trips to Chifeng City and interviewed twenty female migrant workers. In Beijing, I interviewed forty-two female migrant workers and kept in touch with four key informants,⁹ whom I contacted every month with a view to staying informed about events as they took place in the lives of the hundreds of female migrant workers from rural areas of Chifeng prefecture. In both Beijing and Chifeng City, the interviewees were a diverse group in terms of age, education, marriage, and occupation. For instance, the migrant workers interviewed in Beijing not only included domestic workers but also waitresses, saleswomen, hairdressers, office secretaries, and so forth.

In the following three sections, I examine how hukou, social exclusion, and lack of market resources impact the life chances of rural migrants in Beijing and Chifeng City.

Declining Importance of Hukou

Established in 1958, the hukou system classifies all residents in China as either rural or urban. The two groups differ in their entitlements to public

goods. The state used to provide urban residents with “urban benefits” such as employment security, housing, pensions, children’s education, and medical care, and rural residents with “rural benefits,” including access to farmland and a changing set of welfare guarantees (Han, 1999). In general, the value in real terms of urban benefits used to be, and in most cases continues to be, greater than that of rural benefits.¹⁰ In addition, people’s entitlements to public goods also depend on where they register their residence to be. Some places might offer more hukou benefits than others.

Prior to 1984, a key function of the hukou system was the control of rural–urban migration. Without an urban hukou, a rural migrant could not so much as purchase food or find lodging in a given city. Since 1984, however, China has made a series of substantive reforms to the system. These reforms, together with other market reforms, have remarkably reduced the importance of the hukou system in limiting migrant workers’ life chances in cities. The declining importance of hukou can be seen in four respects: first, the reforms have made it much easier for migrant workers to acquire hukou within cities, and this is particularly the case for small and medium-sized cities; second, the reforms remarkably scaled back hukou-related urban benefits, particularly through the 1990s; third, the reforms established the market as an alternative method for rural migrants to obtain urban goods and services; finally, the state has, in the past decade, issued a series of policies aimed at protecting migrant workers and providing them with some urban-based benefits, particularly since 2003.

The first set of changes has been extensively discussed by scholars. In 1984 China relaxed the hukou system so that peasants were allowed to move to cities in search of employment and commercial opportunities. This policy change led to the influx of millions of rural laborers into cities, which in turn placed enormous pressure on the authorities to further reform the hukou system. In 1997 the central government experimented with hukou reforms in 382 small cities, and extended these reforms to all small cities (usually towns and county cities) in 2001. Since then, it has become much easier for rural residents to apply for hukou in these cities. As previously noted, any rural resident who meets one of the three conditions—holding a stable job, maintaining a stable income source, or residing in a regular dwelling place—is eligible to apply for an urban hukou. My fieldwork shows that rural residents and migrant workers require a labor contract of only three months in length to obtain an urban hukou in certain county towns in Chifeng prefecture.¹¹ Many prefectural cities have since followed suit and relaxed the restrictions on hukou registration. Chifeng City, for example, encouraged migrants to apply for hukou in the city in order to meet its goal of increasing its population to one million by 2010

(Chifeng shi zhengfu, 2005). Several provinces have recently made the bold move of abolishing the classification between rural and urban hukou and have relaxed hukou restrictions in large cities, including some provincial capitals (Wang Fei-ling, 2004; Huang and Zhan, 2005). Although it is still difficult for rural residents to obtain an urban hukou in many of China's largest cities, this is no longer the case for small or medium-sized cities, and even for some large cities. So, why do most migrant workers not want an urban hukou? To answer this question, we must turn our attention to the three other aspects of the change in the hukou system.

The easier access to urban hukou for migrant workers was actually associated with a remarkable reduction in hukou-related urban benefits. When small cities opened hukou registration to migrant workers in 1997 and 2001, hukou-related benefits in these cities had been substantially curtailed due to a series of reform measures in urban areas starting in the early 1980s. The urban reforms in the 1980s and the state-owned enterprise (SOE) reform in the 1990s shattered state-guaranteed employment security (known as the "iron rice bowl," *tiefanwan*). Meanwhile, food subsidies for urban residents were gradually reduced and eventually abolished in the 1990s (Meisner, 1996: 260–67). Moreover, with the marketization of health care and education, more and more urban residents have had to purchase these services on the open market. In other words, possession of urban hukou no longer provides nearly as many benefits as before.

The other side of this story is that migrant workers can now access urban goods and services even though they do not possess urban hukou status. An official document issued in 1984 first allowed peasants to enter cities in search of employment on the condition that they take responsibility for providing their own food. At that time, it was the state's responsibility to supply food for urban residents. However, the ordinance quickly lost its relevance because the marketization of grains and other foodstuff in cities subsequently gave migrant workers and urban residents equal access to the food market. The elimination of the previously existing food coupon (*liangpiao*) system in 1992 was a natural result of the process of marketization. By then, the system had become so irrelevant to people's livelihoods that the elimination did not cause any public outcry. Moreover, the market made accessible to migrant workers not only foodstuffs but also a variety of other necessities such as medicine, housing, and later on children's education. Since the year 2000, China has issued a number of policies intended to protect migrant workers. At least on paper, public schools in cities are required to accept migrant workers' children with no extra charge, employers have to purchase work-injury insurance for migrant workers, and local governments must provide migrant workers with

employment services such as job hunting and vocational skills training (Huang and Zhan, 2005).

Migrant workers are still excluded from a number of hukou-related urban benefit schemes to varying degrees, but these forms of exclusion are no longer a very important source of disadvantage. In both Beijing and Chifeng City, I found that these forms of exclusion in fact exert a very limited impact on migrant workers' life chances.

In Table 3, I identify ten important urban benefits in both Beijing and Chifeng City in 2004–2006, when I conducted my study, and classify them into four categories according to the degree to which migrant workers were excluded.

The degree of exclusion from both unemployment compensation and the urban minimum living support (*dibao*) benefit in Category 1 is high. Both unemployment compensation and *dibao* are offered to urban residents when they become unemployed or their family income falls below a certain standard. The absolute standards of *dibao* and unemployment compensation in Beijing are higher than in Chifeng City, partly because living costs are higher in the former. In 2004, for example, the *dibao* standard was 290 yuan per month in Beijing, while only 130 yuan in Chifeng City (Interviewee No. 59, Dec. 11, 2004; Zhongxinwang, 2004). The amount of unemployment compensation is set in proportion to the minimum wage standard, which was also higher in Beijing (495 yuan per month) than in Chifeng City (420 yuan per month) in 2004 (Beijing shi zhengfu, 1999; Neimenggu zizhiqu zhengfu, 2000).

The exclusion from the *dibao* and unemployment compensation has no substantial effect on migrant workers since the two benefit allotments are very small in real terms. The compensation for unemployment that urban workers may receive depends on how long individuals have been working and how long they have been paying into the unemployment compensation fund. The maximum payout is for a period of two years, during which the unemployed are compensated with 70 to 80 percent of the local minimum wage. Unemployment compensation, if offered to migrant workers, could in theory provide them with subsistence in the event they become jobless. However, with such a small amount of benefit actually granted, it does not in practice aid migrant workers in finding a better job and thus achieving upward mobility, nor does it act as a motivator inspiring them to settle down in cities as such. The same conclusions can also be drawn for *dibao*, the basic standard for which is much lower than most migrant workers' actual wages (Table 2). Moreover, as a substitute for *dibao* and unemployment compensation, farm plots in home villages can provide subsistence support for migrant workers. If we take into account consumption levels and living costs, we find no substantial gap

Table 3. Urban Benefits and Hukou-Based Exclusion of Migrant Workers in Beijing and Chifeng City, 2004–2006

Urban Benefits	Access for		Degree of Exclusion	Variation between the Two Cities	
	Urban Residents	Migrant Workers			
Category					
1	Unemployment compensation	Yes	No	High	Higher standard of compensation in Beijing
	Minimum living support (dibao)	Yes	No	High	Higher standard of support in Beijing
2	Health insurance	Limited	None	Moderate	Broader coverage for urban residents in Beijing
	Retirement insurance	Limited	None	Moderate	Broader coverage for urban residents in Beijing
	Employment services	Yes	Limited	Moderate	More employment services for urban workers in Beijing
3	Neighborhood services	Yes	No	Low	No evident variation
	Housing subsidies	Limited	No	Low	More housing subsidies in absolute terms for urban residents in Beijing
4	Work-injury insurance	Yes	Yes	None	No evident variation
	Children's basic education	Yes	Yes	None	Easier access for the migrant workers in Chifeng
	Food subsidies	No	No	None	No evident variation

between subsistence support in cities and that in rural areas. Therefore, it becomes understandable why many migrant workers are reluctant to change their hukou status, that is, to give up rural subsistence support in exchange for urban subsistence benefits.

Category 2 in Table 3 includes health insurance, retirement insurance, and employment services, the degree of exclusion from which is in each case moderate. This rating is given because possession of an urban hukou does not guarantee either health or retirement benefits, and because recently migrant workers are also provided with some employment services in most cities. In theory all urban residents are supposed to be granted access to health and retirement insurance, but in reality a significant proportion of the urban population remains uncovered. National statistics show that fewer than half of all urban workers were covered by retirement insurance and only 40.9 percent by health insurance by the end of 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2007). The participation rates in the two insurance programs among urban workers are higher in Beijing than in Chifeng City. In 2005, for instance, more than 80 percent of urban workers joined the two programs in Beijing while less than half did in Chifeng City.¹² The Chinese government has attempted to marketize these social programs and has made them very expensive to participants since the 1980s. Migrant workers' low economic status normally prevents them from joining what are for them expensive programs, even if these programs become open to them.¹³ These two insurance programs have attracted much criticism (Croll, 1999; Wang Shaoguang, 2004). Currently China is undertaking a new round of health and pension reforms intended to provide broader coverage to both rural and urban residents. How these reforms will affect migrant workers remains to be seen.

Possession of no health or retirement allowance does not seem to affect migrant workers to any significant degree. The migrant workers in my study readily chose to purchase medicine in drug stores and receive medical treatments in private clinics, the costs of which are often lower than the costs of health insurance programs. They were also inclined to save for their own retirement and exhibited little desire to put their money in the hands of various levels of government.¹⁴

Regarding employment services, the degree of exclusion in Beijing is higher than in Chifeng City because Beijing, being the national capital and thus having more financial resources to work with, has launched more employment programs for local urban residents, particularly for laid-off workers. For instance, it has created tens of thousands of so-called welfare jobs (*gongyixing gangwei*), including security guard positions and traffic control jobs for laid-off workers and unemployed local residents.¹⁵ In this respect, Beijing represents certain large cities which are able to allocate more resources to employment service programs for urban residents. In addition, Beijing reserves certain jobs (taxi driving, for example) for local residents. However, positions from which migrant workers are excluded only amount to a small proportion of

available jobs in Beijing, and most of these are not well paid. Outside these exclusionary sectors, migrant workers can find and have found millions of job opportunities available to them. This situation contrasts sharply with that in the 1990s, when migrant workers in Beijing were legally excluded from hundreds of jobs, including many well-paid positions. In the 1990s, particularly after the SOE reform, Beijing and a few other large cities issued policies to exclude migrant workers from a number of jobs in the name of protecting local urban workers' employment.¹⁶ This practice had virtually ceased by the year 2000, when the state began to emphasize protections for migrant workers. In other words, as far as employment services in Beijing are concerned, a trend can be seen of the legal exclusion of migrant workers decreasing in degree over time, signifying the declining importance of hukou in this respect.

The exclusion from employment services and certain employment positions over the past decade does not seem to exert any significant impact on migrant workers' employment levels in Beijing, though it surely violates the principle of equal treatment on the labor market. By contrast, Chifeng City, like most small and medium-sized cities, provides little employment assistance for local urban residents, thus enabling migrant workers to compete with the latter on a more equal footing in the labor market. However, the labor market in Chifeng City is much smaller than that in Beijing; thus more equitable treatment within the former does not necessarily mean more employment opportunities for migrant workers.

It is important to note that a proportion of employment services have, since the 1990s, become marketized, and migrant workers gain access to these services through the market. For example, job-seeking assistance, one of the most important employment services, was marketized in the 1990s. In Chifeng City, government-sponsored labor markets (*laodongli shichang*), which are affiliated with the Bureau of Employment (*Jiuyeju*), compete with private agencies for job seekers, including migrant workers. In Beijing, where there is a large labor market, numerous private agencies compete with one another to provide employment services for migrant workers and other job seekers for profit. Many domestic workers I interviewed in Beijing found their jobs through private agencies called domestic services companies (*jiazheng fuwu gongsi*). In addition to purchasing services from these employment agencies, many of my interviewees and questionnaire respondents in Beijing and Chifeng City found jobs through their social networks.

In 2005, both cities formally stated that they would offer employment services such as free job information and free training programs to migrant workers. My fieldwork found that many street-level administrations in Beijing have begun to provide free job information for migrant workers, and also that

certain employment centers at higher levels, which used to exclusively serve local urban residents, have also started to serve migrant workers. Chifeng City has gone further in seeking to actively help migrant workers find jobs, probably because, as part of the so-called Western Development (*xibu da kaifa*) project, it is eligible to receive employment funds, such as the Sunshine Project (*Yangguang gongcheng*) and the Spring Breeze Action (*Chunfeng xingdong*), from the central government for doing so (Huang and Zhan, 2005). In reality, however, the effects of these policies may be limited since migrant workers rely primarily on their social networks and private agencies when seeking employment and skill training. Nevertheless, these changes suggest that the legal exclusion of migrant workers from employment services has indeed been further reduced.

All in all, the exclusion from employment services has declined substantially and now exerts only a limited impact on migrant workers in both Beijing and Chifeng City.

With regard to Category 3, the degree of exclusion is low because both neighborhood services and housing in cities have been marketized. After the work-unit system broke down in the 1990s, most urban residents no longer received subsidized services for daycare, kindergarten, recreational facilities, etc., from their employers. The central government thus urged cities to establish neighborhood organizations to supply these services instead. However, neighborhood organizations such as the community residents' committees (*shequ jumin weiyuanhui*) are unable to organize residents and provide them with services to the degree that work units did in the past. This is true even in Beijing, the national capital, and is certainly even more the case in Chifeng City, a medium-sized city with limited resources. Rather than relying on neighborhood organizations, then, most urban residents purchase these services on the open market.

With regard to housing, reforms in the late 1990s marketized almost all city housing, and now most urban residents have no choice but to purchase their apartments on the market, where in practice they are in more or less the same position as are migrant workers. The municipal administrations of some large cities have, however, begun to provide housing subsidies for poor urban residents, low-rent housing (*lian-zu-fang*) being an obvious example. Beijing is one of these, yet this policy has benefited only a very small proportion of poor urban households (*Beijing qingnian bao*, 2005). Chifeng City does not offer any form of housing subsidy for urban residents. Therefore, it is the market that allocates neighborhood services and housing for both urban residents and migrant workers, and any hukou-based legal exclusion

from these is of a low degree and has little impact on migrant workers' settlement in cities.

With regard to Category 4, which encompasses work-injury insurance, children's basic education, and food subsidies, migrant workers face no legal exclusion.¹⁷ Market reforms resulted in withdrawal of subsidies for foodstuffs and other basic goods from urban residents, who have since had to purchase them on the open market, just as migrant workers have been doing since as early as the 1980s. In January 2003, the State Council of China issued a guideline document on issues pertaining to migrant workers, mandating that public schools in cities accept migrant workers' children with no extra charge. In addition, this document calls for the improvement of employment security and health conditions for migrant workers. Following this guideline document, the Beijing government issued a policy in September 2004 resulting in the opening of public schools to the children of migrant workers (*Xinjing bao*, 2004). However, according to my fieldwork, migrant workers in Chifeng City could send their children to public schools even before the State Council document was issued. Extra fees for attending public schools in the city had been cancelled in 2003. Moreover, even before 2003, public schools in Chifeng City only charged a small extra fee for migrant workers' children. One of the migrant workers I interviewed stated that she had in any case only paid an extra 140 yuan per semester for her child in the past (Interviewee No. 64, Dec. 12, 2004). In 2004, the central government issued two documents requiring employers to purchase work-injury insurance for migrant workers. In reality, many schools and employers attempt to bypass these policies. However, these discriminatory practices are derived not from hukou-based legal exclusion but from a specific form of social exclusion, as I shall discuss below.

In short, the importance of hukou to migrant workers has been declining in line with the hukou reforms and the general transition of China to a market economy. As a consequence of these changes, migrant workers now have access to food, medicine, housing, and other goods or services that are vital to their subsistence in cities. In the meantime, they seek employment through private and public institutions and compete with urban workers in most sectors of the urban labor market. In recent years, they can send their children to urban public schools and bargain with employers for work-injury insurance. It is true that hukou-related benefits in Beijing are greater than those in Chifeng City; however, as I have shown, the two groups of migrant workers covered in this study, one in Chifeng City and the other in Beijing, one with local hukou and one without, are in a very similar situation in terms of hukou-based legal exclusion. Moreover, none of these forms of exclusion, either in

Beijing or in Chifeng City, has played a significant role in limiting migrant workers' life chances.

What benefits can migrant workers receive if they change their hukou status? Let us assume that a given Chifeng migrant worker within my research group switches hukou status from rural to urban or from non-local to local in Chifeng City or Beijing. If she registers residence in Chifeng City, she runs the risk of not receiving any benefits whatsoever: she is eligible neither for unemployment compensation nor dibao because she is currently working and her wages exceed the threshold; she is unlikely to participate in retirement and health insurance programs like other urban low-income household members because they are too expensive; there would be no significant differences in employment services, neighborhood services, and housing subsidies that she could receive; there would also be no changes in terms of children's education, work-injury insurance, or food subsidies. If she registers her residence in Beijing, there would also be no significant differences for her in obtaining unemployment compensation, dibao, retirement insurance, health insurance, neighborhood services, housing and food subsidies, but she would receive more employment services and obtain a better bargaining position with public schools and employers in terms of children's education and work-injury insurance, as I shall discuss below. These benefits, however, do not significantly improve life chances.

Therefore, the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this article is negative: migrant workers' life chances would not be significantly improved even if China were to abolish the hukou system. If hukou-based legal exclusion does not determine migrant workers' life chances, then what holds the majority of migrant workers back from finding better jobs, moving up the social ladder, and becoming permanent settlers in one of China's cities? Or, to put it another way, what barriers must migrant workers overcome to improve their life chances in cities? To answer these questions, we must focus on the other two mechanisms of social differentiation not yet addressed here: social exclusion and the market.

Social Exclusion in Beijing and Chifeng City

While migration introduces many facets of urban life to peasants, this physical encounter does not significantly transform social boundaries between people of rural origin and urbanites. A survey of migrant workers in four large cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Wuhan) conducted in 1996 shows that 63 percent of respondents experienced discrimination at the hands of urban residents, and about two thirds showed a disinclination to make friends with

urban inhabitants (Ling, 1997). My fieldwork uncovered two mechanisms that maintain social boundaries between migrant workers and local urban residents: identity-based exclusion and the separation of social networks. In practice, the two mechanisms often take effect simultaneously and reinforce each other.

Identity-Based Exclusion

Migrant workers can be differentiated and excluded based on two types of identity: as a non-local resident (*waidiren*) and as a peasant (*nongmin*) or a rural person (*xiangxiaren*). The two identities resemble the non-local/local and rural/urban classifications within the hukou system. Thus it is common in the literature not to distinguish between identity-based social exclusion and hukou-based legal exclusion, and instead blame hukou for social exclusion effects. However, as Weber had shown, these are actually distinct mechanisms of social differentiation. While hukou-based legal exclusion requires state intervention and endorsement, identity-based exclusion can operate in the absence of state regulations and even when the state outlaws such practices. A good example is the racial discrimination against African Americans in the United States that exists to this day even though the law has prohibited it since as early as the 1960s (Massey and Denton, 1993).

In the case of China, geographical origin, that is, where one comes from, often influences people's identity formation—for instance, the migrant workers I studied in Beijing often identify themselves as “people of Inner Mongolia” (*Neimeng ren*)—and matters a great deal in people's social life. Those who share the same geographical origin (they call each other *laoxiang*) often feel close to one another and can more easily develop social relations. Moreover, having the same geographical origin means the sharing of dialect, customs, and life style, things which often accompany people their whole lives. On the other hand, people are also excluded on the basis of their geographical origin; this is particularly so for migrants since their geographical origins are different from those of natives. A well-studied case of exclusion of migrants in the context of modern Chinese history is that of Shanghai. Emily Honig has documented in detail how, since the nineteenth century, the Subei people (basically people from northern Jiangsu province) have been discriminated against in Shanghai for their local geographical origin. She also suggests that various forms of exclusion of Subei people continue to exist in contemporary Shanghai (Honig, 1990, 1992).

While it is difficult for migrant workers to conceal their geographical identity, that is, their identity as non-local residents, it is relatively easier for them to conceal their peasant identity to avoid social exclusion, particularly after

they have been in an urban area for a long time and have adapted to city life. My fieldwork did find a few cases where migrant workers were socially excluded because they were peasants or came from rural areas, but this form of exclusion is much less prevalent or effective than that based on geographical identity. The following section focuses exclusively on exclusion of migrant workers on the basis of their being non-local residents.

My fieldwork shows that identity-based exclusion leads to three kinds of exclusionary practices. First, employers and service providers often treat migrant workers differently even when state regulations exist supposedly prohibiting them from doing so. Second, local government officials are inclined to provide more services for local urban residents. Finally, local urban residents often show discriminatory behavior in everyday life toward migrant workers.

Although state regulations mandate that employers must purchase work-injury insurance for migrant workers, some employers attempt to avoid this extra expenditure. In 2005, the Chifeng Women's Federation surveyed 286 domestic workers in Beijing who came from rural Chifeng, and found that fewer than 40 percent of respondents were covered by work-injury insurance. My fieldwork found that some domestic service companies forced migrant workers to sign a contract agreeing to give up the demand for work-injury insurance. State regulations also prohibit public schools in cities from requiring extra charges before accepting migrant workers' children. However, I found that in Beijing many public schools still charge migrant workers extra fees for accepting their children. Most migrant workers I interviewed in Beijing were unmarried and thus did not experience this form of exclusion. However, another survey (of 604 respondents) I conducted in Chaoyang District, Beijing in March 2006 found that 70 percent of migrant workers who sent their children to public schools were charged extra fees. Public schools also force migrant workers to certify that these charges are charitable donations to schools.¹⁸

The migrant workers in Chifeng City cannot be differentiated based on their geographical identity to as great a degree as those in Beijing because the former come from the counties within Chifeng prefecture; therefore they encounter a much lower degree of exclusion than their counterparts in Beijing. For instance, the migrant workers in Chifeng City stopped paying extra fees for their children in public schools as early as 2003. Even before state regulations required that public schools accept migrant worker's children, public schools in Chifeng City had already embarked on a policy of doing so (Interviewee No. 64, Dec. 12, 2004; Interviewee No. 69, Dec. 14, 2004). Also, I found no public schools in Chifeng City demanding "charitable donations" from migrant workers.

Local government officials at the neighborhood level also differentiate migrant workers from local urban residents, and are more likely to provide services for the latter. For example, an official of a Beijing community residents' committee told me why she would do so.

I am more likely to help urban residents such as laid-off workers. Why? Well, for example, there is one couple who is living on the first floor of my apartment building. They are both laid off and don't have much money. I know them very well and trust them. One day a work unit phoned me wanting to hire someone. I immediately thought of the couple. The job requires working only four hours a day and there are two days off a month. The wage is 800 yuan a month. It's a very good job. They were very happy I helped them. Later on I also found the husband a job taking care of other people's cars. I dare not give these job opportunities to people from other places (*waidiren*). What if it ends up with a big problem? I can't take responsibility for them. (Interviewee No. 53, June 14, 2006)

Her remarks indicate that she feels able to take responsibility for the couple because they are local people, but not for migrant workers, whom she calls *waidiren*. None of the migrant workers I interviewed in Beijing ever received personal assistance from local officials. By contrast, migrant workers in Chifeng City are not necessarily excluded from urban officials' assistance. Of the twenty migrant workers I interviewed in December 2004, two mentioned that they had received assistance from officials of residents' committees. One was Zhang Yinhua (the names of all interviewees are pseudonyms), who came to Chifeng City to join her husband in 2000. Like other migrant workers, she had changed jobs many times after she arrived in the city: she had worked collecting trash, as a street vendor, loading and unloading trucks, as a clerk in a grocery store, etc. At the time I interviewed her, she had organized four fellow migrant workers into a cottage industry weaving straw baskets, for which she believed there was a lucrative market. She told me she did not feel discriminated against when on the job market; and more importantly, she knew local officials in the neighborhood where she lived very well, and they often helped her in seeking employment and encouraged her to attend skill-training programs. Zhang sent her child to a local elementary school, and her younger sister was also working in Chifeng City (Interviewee No. 64, Dec. 12, 2004). The other was Pan Yuanli, who was working as a kindergarten teacher in an urban neighborhood at the time of the interview. Pan was 18 years old and unmarried. Unlike Zhang, Pan was attempting a radical change in her life. She

planned to go to Beijing and enroll in an art school. If she succeeded in passing the entrance examinations for the art school, she would settle down in Beijing; if she failed, she would learn some skills and return to Chifeng City to open a small handicraft store. Pan told me she felt no differences between herself and local residents; in addition, neighborhood officials were very nice to her and often helped her and other migrants with security and job information (Interviewee No. 70, Dec. 14, 2004).

However, many local urban residents discriminate against migrant workers. Most of the migrant workers I interviewed in Beijing mentioned that they had experienced discrimination from urban residents. According to my key migrant-worker informants, it is a common feeling among the migrant workers that Beijing natives look down upon *waidiren*. Partly as a result of this discrimination, many migrant workers I interviewed did not want to make friends with native Beijing residents and thought of them as “rude” or “impolite.” The majority of migrant workers I interviewed and surveyed in Beijing were domestic workers. In some ways, domestic service is a special case because most domestic workers work and live under the same roof as their employers. Some domestic workers may even have to share a room with seniors or children. Therefore, compared with migrant workers in other industries, domestic workers interact more frequently and live in closer contact with urban residents, and they are thus more likely to encounter discrimination. But the feeling of being discriminated against was also shared by migrant workers who worked as waitresses or supermarket sales clerks. Li Min came to Beijing in 2003, but she returned home after a one-month stint working in a supermarket; she returned to Beijing again in 2004, and then worked at many and varied jobs, including domestic service, supermarket sales, and hospital nursing. When I interviewed her in June 2005, she was working as a waitress. She had a highly negative attitude toward Beijing natives.

I really hate Beijing natives. I feel really uncomfortable when I'm talking to them. They feel so distant. People from Beijing think they're the real locals, so no matter what, they're superior to you. They never think about what class they belong to; they only have one way of seeing things: I'm a Beijing local and I'm better than you. I only mix with people who've come to Beijing from other places. (Interviewee No. 30, June 18, 2005)

Not only low-wage migrant workers but also those with a relatively high income suffer from discrimination. Ma Jingying came to Beijing after she divorced her husband in 2002. At first she sold cosmetics in a mall and then

worked for a company as a receptionist. Compared with other female migrant workers, Ma earned a relatively high income, more than 1,500 yuan a month. I interviewed her in January 2005 when she was 33 years old, and she told me that it was hard to make friends with Beijing natives because she perceived them as overly arrogant. Ma felt isolated in Beijing and planned to leave. One of my informants told me that Ma actually left Beijing soon after our interview, but did not know whether she had returned home or moved to another city (Interviewee No. 18, Jan. 9, 2005).

Compared with the migrant workers in Beijing, those in Chifeng City felt much less discriminated against because they share the same geographical identity as urban natives and thus cannot be excluded as “non-local residents.” Results of the Chifeng City survey show that only 25 percent of respondents reported discrimination from local urban residents. In addition, of 201 respondents in the Chifeng City survey, only five stated that local residents were “unfriendly” or “very unfriendly” and those who answered “friendly” or “very friendly” account for 43.28 percent of the total.

Unlike hukou-based legal exclusion, identity-based social exclusion of migrant workers occurs without the involvement of the state. In some cases, it is even practiced against state regulations. For instance, it has previously been noted that certain employers and public schools in Beijing illegally charged migrant workers unofficial fees and attempted to escape the sanctions of the law while doing so. It is possible that the hukou system makes it easier to identify migrant workers as non-local residents or peasants, but migrant workers can be singled out and excluded in the absence of a hukou system also. The literature on the relations between migrants and native residents in other countries shows that natives can identify, differentiate, and exclude naturalized migrants in various ways (language, appearance, religion, skin color, residence, background checks, etc.) (Weiner, 1978; Rydgren, 2004; Gradstein and Schiff, 2006).

Separated Social Networks

The other important mechanism of social exclusion is the separation of social networks between urban residents and migrant workers. In both Beijing and Chifeng City, migrant workers reported that they found it difficult to establish social networks with local urban resident involvement. However, this appears much more difficult in Beijing than in Chifeng City because the migrant workers in Chifeng City are more likely to establish social connections with local urban residents through their relatives, fellow villagers, and friends. Moreover, they share with urban residents a common dialect, customs, and

life style, and thus it is relatively easy to develop new social relations with people native to the city.

Most migrant workers in Beijing lack social connections with local urban residents. According to my survey conducted in Beijing, 80.12 percent of Chifeng migrants do not have personal contacts with local natives of Beijing. In Chifeng City, however, only 5 percent of respondents (10 out of 201) do not have any personal contact with the local urban populace, and only 15 respondents have no frequent personal contact (defined here as at least once a month) with the local urban populace.¹⁹

The manner in which migrant workers in Beijing and Chifeng City spend their leisure time also helps to illuminate the separation of social networks between migrant workers and local urban residents. A significant proportion of the migrant workers in both cities (23.03 percent in Beijing and 23.73 percent in Chifeng City) spend their leisure time with people whom they knew before they came to the city (see Table 4). Most of these people are actually of Chifeng origin and also work as migrant workers. In addition, more than half of the migrant workers in both cities spend their leisure time with people who were acquaintances: 53.93 percent (the sum of 37.64 percent and 16.29 percent) in Beijing and 51.70 percent (the sum of 12.29 percent and 39.41 percent) in Chifeng City. However, in Beijing, these newly established social connections are mostly restricted to people who also come from Chifeng prefecture (37.64 percent out of 53.93 percent), whereas in Chifeng City, these new connections are not restricted to people who come from the same county (only 12.29 percent out of 51.70 percent).²⁰ Nevertheless, the migrant workers in this category do not as a rule spend their leisure time with local urban residents. In Beijing, 16.29 percent of the migrant population spends leisure time with people who come from places outside Chifeng prefecture. However, most of the people whom they spend time with are also migrant workers coming from other provinces and few are local urban residents. By contrast, 39.41 percent of respondents spend leisure time with people who do not come from the same county in Chifeng prefecture. It is unclear how many of these people are urban residents, but it is very likely that local urban residents represent a significant proportion because 85 percent of the respondents reported they maintained frequent personal contact (at least once a month) with urban residents.

Social exclusion not only maintains boundaries between migrant workers and urban residents, but also keeps migrant workers from access to goods and opportunities that are shared among urban residents through their social networks or are based on their identities (Tilly, 1998, 2005). Without these goods or opportunities, it is more difficult for migrant workers to find improved

Table 4. Migrant Workers' Social Acquaintances in Beijing and Chifeng

Question: *Whom do you often spend your leisure time with, excluding family members?* (percent)

Beijing		Chifeng City (CC)	
No one	18.54	No one	20.76
People whom I knew before I came to Beijing	23.03	People whom I knew before I came to Chifeng City	23.73
People whom I got to know in Beijing that are also from Chifeng	37.64	People whom I got to know in CC that are from my home county	12.29
People whom I got to know in Beijing that are not from Chifeng	16.29	People whom I got to know in CC that are not from my home county	39.41
Others	4.49	Others	3.81

employment, move upward socially, or obtain the necessary means to become permanent settlers of the city.

The differences in social exclusion of migrant workers in Beijing and Chifeng City are derived not from their hukou status but from their geographical identity and social networks. In Beijing, they are more socially excluded because they can be easily differentiated as *waidiren* and their social networks are largely separated from those of the locals. In Chifeng City, however, these individuals cannot be differentiated as *waidiren* to as great an extent as those in Beijing; in addition, it is easier for them to establish contacts with locals through their relatives and friends, that is, through previously existing contact networks. However, this is not to say that migrant workers are not socially excluded in Chifeng City or that crossing social boundaries is not important to their life chances. As newcomers to the city, they too face social exclusion and have to make efforts to cultivate useful social relations to improve their life chances, as I will discuss more in the last section. One interviewee's remarks reveal the existence of social exclusion and the difficulty of cultivating social relations in the city. Tian Li, who works with Zhang Yinhua in the straw-basket weaving operation, told me her feelings in regard to socializing with local urban residents.

City dwellers seem to be a different type of people and they discriminate against people like us. They hold a stereotypical view that you must be worse off than them if you come from the countryside. When

you go talk to them, they become cautious and suspect that you want to ask for help. They're wary even when you talk to them in a normal, friendly way, and immediately get scared you might want to borrow money. They'll keep telling you that they are short of this and short of that. Because of this kind of discrimination, I don't go and see them or contact them very much. (Interviewee No. 65, Dec. 12, 2004)

Lack of Marketable Resources

The re-establishment of markets in the 1980s has enabled peasants to hire out their own labor power, as well as purchase the goods and services requisite for daily life, in cities. In this sense, the market plays a positive role for peasants by helping them gain improved means of making a living, compared with the pre-reform period, during which peasants were required to stay in the rural areas and relied exclusively on farming and rural enterprises. On the other hand, the market also places them in a disadvantaged position because most of them have limited marketable resources, as compared with urban residents.

Migrant workers lack two important types of resources: human capital, including education and marketable skills, and economic capital, including income and property. On average, migrant workers possess a level of education higher than other rural residents, but lower than urban workers. In both Beijing and Chifeng City nearly 90 percent of the migrant workers surveyed had completed at least middle school (9 years) (see Table 2). One study shows that the average educational attainment of migrant workers was 8.88 years in 2000 (Cai, 2005). For the same year, the average educational attainment of rural workers (migrant workers included) was 7.33 years, while the figure was 10.2 years for urban workers (Su, Liu, and Lin, 2007). Therefore, although migrant workers have achieved higher educational levels than other rural workers, they are still in a disadvantaged position on the urban labor market. Migrant workers in Beijing are in a more disadvantageous position than those living in Chifeng City because in Beijing local urban workers' educational attainment is higher than the national average. Research suggests that the educational attainment of local workers in Beijing was more than 11 years on average in 2006 (*Zhongguo jiaoyu bao*, 2007). As a consequence of these educational attainment levels, the migrant workers in my study had to take low-wage jobs, such as in domestic service, the restaurant industry, and sales. Migrant workers also lack marketable skills that might otherwise permit them to obtain better types of work. My survey shows that most migrant workers would like, given the opportunity, to participate in training programs to improve

their skills: 80 percent of the respondents in Beijing and 72.14 percent in Chifeng City have considered attending training programs. However, as we shall see below, many migrant workers are unable to realize this goal for a number of reasons.

Lack of economic resources is another major disadvantage that migrant workers face in urban markets. Their wages are low and most of them do not own property in the cities. My fieldwork also shows that lack of economic resources has led to spatial segregation in cities between migrant workers and urban residents, reinforcing the social separation. Due to low income levels, most migrant workers find themselves forced to congregate in the peripheral areas of cities where housing rent levels are relatively low. Chinese scholars call these places “villages within the city” (*chengzhongcun*) or “zones between the rural and the urban” (*chengxiang jiehebu*) (Li, 2003). These places are often geographically distant from city districts (*chengqu*) where urban residents live. The spatial segregation reduces the possibility of physical encounters between migrant workers and urban residents. Without physically encountering urbanites, it is difficult for migrant workers to obtain access to urban social networks. Thus, disadvantages within the market and social exclusion are mutually reinforcing.

Spatial segregation exists in both Beijing and Chifeng City, but it is more serious in Beijing. According to official statistics, only 10 percent of migrants in Beijing were living in city districts while 90 percent inhabited suburban districts or rural counties in 2003 (Beijing tongjiju, 2004). Of those who do live in city districts, many live in the basements of high-rise apartment buildings. Almost all the migrant workers I surveyed or interviewed in Beijing who did not work as live-in domestic workers dwelt in these basement apartments. A street official I interviewed in April 2006 called these basements “underground spaces” (*dixia kongjian*). These underground spaces are also segregated from above-ground spaces where urban residents live, and the inhabitants of underground spaces interact with no one but fellow migrant workers.

In Chifeng City the situation is both similar to and different from Beijing. A number of migrant workers also reside in peripheral areas. However, since Chifeng City is a medium-sized city the peripheral areas are close to the city center. In other words, although migrant workers and urban residents are spatially segregated, they are not far away from each other. In addition, most migrant workers can afford to rent houses in urban neighborhoods. Tian Li, the straw-basket weaver referred to above, told me that she and her husband spent 100 yuan a month on a small room in a neighborhood near the city center. Their long-term plan was to purchase a house in a suburban area where housing is less expensive and settle down in the city permanently.

Table 5. Average Monthly Wages (in Yuan) of Urban and Migrant Workers in Beijing and Chifeng City, 2004

	Beijing	Chifeng City
Urban workers	2,362.33	906.33
Migrant workers	501.96	433.89
Ratio	4.71	2.09

Note: The data on average wages of urban workers are from *Beijing tongji nianjian* (2005: chap. 4-1) and *Neimenggu tongji nianjian* (2005: chap. 3-3).

The difference in spatial segregation between Beijing and Chifeng City results in large part from the income gap between migrant workers and urban residents in the two cities. The average monthly wage of urban workers in 2004 was 2,362.33 yuan in Beijing while it was 906.33 yuan in Chifeng City (see Table 5). However, according to my surveys, migrant workers' average wages in Beijing were only slightly higher than those in Chifeng City. Therefore, the ratio of the average wage of urban workers to that of migrant workers was much higher in Beijing (4.71) than in Chifeng City (2.09). It is not surprising, then, that compared with their counterparts in Chifeng City, migrant workers in Beijing live farther away from urban residents and are more segregated from them.

Migrant workers' lack of economic resources leads not only to residential segregation but also to the segregation of socioeconomic activities. Zhang Xinhui, one of my informants in Beijing, told me that a typical way she and other female migrant workers spent their leisure time was browsing in supermarkets. They never went to eat at fancy restaurants; sometimes they would buy buns at a supermarket or they might order a bowl of noodles from a street vendor (Interviewee No. 4, Dec. 25, 2004).

Although the migrant workers in Beijing occupy a more disadvantaged position on the market than those in Chifeng City, they are presented with more employment opportunities, since the labor market is itself simply much larger. Nonetheless, migrant workers in both cities are disadvantaged in market terms as compared with urban workers, and all must increase their store of market resources if they wish to see their life chances improved.

Migrant Workers' Agency and Its Limitations

How do migrant workers themselves view the three mechanisms of social differentiation? What will they do to resist the negative outcomes that arise from

the processes of exclusion and the market? Their attitudes and behavior provide us with a good indicator for evaluating which mechanisms—hukou-based legal exclusion, social exclusion, or market exchange—are more important in determining the life chances of these individuals.²¹

My fieldwork revealed that migrant workers attempt to resist negative results that derive from all three mechanisms of social differentiation. Crossing legal boundaries, that is, changing hukou status, however, is not a priority for most of the migrant workers I studied. Rather, they prioritize crossing social boundaries and improving their situation in terms of the market. Neither of these objectives is easy to achieve, however. This is particularly true in Beijing, where migrant workers encounter strong social exclusion and hold a more disadvantaged market position.

Crossing Social Boundaries

It is hard for migrant workers in Beijing to develop personal contacts with urban residents, and it is even harder to make friends with them. Among the hundreds of female migrant workers I interviewed or surveyed in Beijing, only two had succeeded in doing so. One of them was Shi Liyuan, who came to Beijing in 2001 and worked as a domestic servant for a couple, both of whom were middle school teachers. After half a year, Shi and the teachers had developed a good personal relationship. They encouraged Shi to take adult college entrance exams (*chengren gaokao*). To ensure that Shi passed these exams, they not only allowed enough time for her to study, but also helped her purchase textbooks and find exam information, and even went so far as to personally tutor her. Shi finally enrolled in a college program in 2003, which greatly improved her position in the labor market. In 2005, Shi worked for a cell phone company as a receptionist, earning 2,000 yuan a month. Shi decided to settle in Beijing despite having no local hukou (Interviewee No. 44, Mar. 6, 2004). The Chifeng government granted Shi official recognition as a role model for her intense work ethic. However, the government neglected to acknowledge that Shi's success was due not only to hard work but more importantly to her success in crossing social boundaries. Nevertheless, her story inspired at least ten of the female migrant workers in my study to follow her lead. However, without this ability to traverse urbanite-migrant social boundaries, none had been able to achieve success by the time I left Beijing in August 2006.

The other successful example of note is Zhang Xinhui. Zhang came to Beijing in 2000 and started working as a domestic servant for a television host in April 2004. She quickly won the trust of the latter and has worked

for her ever since. Zhang was the highest paid among the domestic workers I interviewed; her salary was 1,000 yuan a month in 2004 while most domestic workers only earned around 450 yuan a month. In 2005, the television host helped her sister, whom I discuss below, to find a hairdressing job; and she also helped Zhang's husband with skills training and a search for employment in 2006. I met Zhang again in the summer of 2008, at which time she was still working for the TV host. Zhang told me that she had saved more than 100,000 yuan and did in fact not know what to do with the money. She returned to Chifeng City in early 2008 and decided to purchase an apartment in the city, but reversed this decision when she was about to sign the purchase contract. However, the money she had accrued was far short of that necessary to purchase an apartment in Beijing, and thus she turned instead to the attempt to establish a small business. Her employer offered to loan her funds once she had developed a sound business plan. When I met her, she was struggling to figure out which type of business was worth investing her years of accumulated savings in.

Many migrant workers are well aware of the importance of connections with local urban residents. Domestic service is a job of low social prestige in China and most of the female migrant workers in my study did not want to work in this sector for long. But some told me that they deliberately chose domestic service because it provided them a better chance of getting to know urban residents and securing their assistance. In general, however, these migrant workers' efforts and hopes are frustrated because of distinct social boundaries between themselves and the local residents of Beijing.

Crossing social boundaries is relatively easy in Chifeng City. As I have noted, only 10 out of 201 survey respondents in Chifeng City did not have personal contacts with urban residents, and only 15 of these 201 respondents did not have frequent personal contact with urban natives. Crossing social boundaries can translate into gains in the market because it enables migrant workers to access goods and opportunities controlled by local urban residents. Of 17 female migrant workers in Chifeng City who had stable, high-income occupations (600 yuan a month and above), as accountants, teachers, nurses, or chefs, for example, 13 found their jobs through relatives, friends, or acquaintances in the city. Connections to urban residents are also helpful for migrant workers in starting small businesses, such as apparel stores, barber shops, and restaurants. The three migrant small-business owners I interviewed all had relatives and friends in Chifeng City who were local urban residents. Song Meihua was one of them. When I interviewed her, she was 31 years old and had been living in Chifeng City for nine years. She and her husband were running a business marketing vegetable seeds. Song's grandparents on her mother's

side were local residents of Chifeng City, and she thus had many relatives in the city. With their help, Song and her husband started to sell vegetable seeds in 1999. The success of the business allowed them to develop new social relations with other business people, both migrants and local residents, who could assist them in further development of their business. Song's case demonstrates the importance of initial connections to local residents, which became for Song's business a "virtuous circle": the more social relations Song and her husband were able to establish, the more their business could expand, and vice versa. The couple planned to purchase a house in the city in the near future (Interviewee No. 68, Dec. 14, 2004).

Another difference between Beijing and Chifeng City is that female migrant workers in Chifeng City can cross social boundaries by marrying local residents, but this is almost impossible in Beijing because, as previously noted, few of them have developed personal contacts with urban residents. Nie Yanglin, a 35-year-old female migrant worker living in Chifeng City, told me her story:

I have been here for about 15 years and my child is 12 years old. My husband is a local from here. I used to live in a village in Ningcheng county [a county in Chifeng prefecture] and initially I just came here to find a job. There are many others like me. We came here in search of employment and then got married to local people. Now my brother is here; so is my sister. Like me, my sister dropped out of middle school, came here, and got married to a local resident. (Interviewee No. 69, Dec. 14, 2004)

It should be pointed out that crossing social boundaries in Chifeng City is still a difficult undertaking for most migrant workers, though it can be more easily done than in Beijing. Migrant workers must invest time and money into cultivating useful social relations, but they are often unable to do so due to lack of economic resources or useful prior contacts. As the previously noted case of Tian Li shows, it is not easy for many migrant workers to improve their relations with local urbanites or secure their help.

Accumulating Marketable Resources

It is very difficult for migrant workers to accumulate economic resources because most earn low wages. Therefore, improvement of human capital is often the most realistic means for advancement. There are two ways to increase human capital: one is to raise the level of one's educational attainment by

enrolling in an adult college program (as in the case of Shi Liyuan); the other is to join a training program. Enrolling in an adult college program is often extremely difficult because it requires time-consuming (often more than one year) and intense preparation for the entrance exams. Therefore, most migrant workers opt to join training programs to learn vocational skills.

In both Beijing and Chifeng City most migrant workers I either surveyed or interviewed expressed an interest in participating in skill-training programs. However, this is also a costly affair fraught with risk. It is costly because skill training often requires a lot of money; it is risky because learning a marketable skill does not guarantee finding a better job. Indeed, in many cases, it is difficult to even ascertain which skills might be marketable in the first place.

When I attempted to find out why the migrant workers I surveyed did not participate in training programs either in Beijing or Chifeng City, I suggested several reasons (see Table 6). In Chifeng City, "training fees are too high" and "I have no spare time for training" were the most common answers. In Beijing, more than half of the respondents indicated that they lacked time for training, but a significant proportion of respondents (45.45 percent) selected the response "my educational level is low and so training might be too hard for me." This outcome is most likely a consequence of the gap in educational attainment between migrant workers and the rest of the urban population in Beijing being so wide that migrant workers are intimidated by the "sophistication" of training programs. In both Beijing and Chifeng City, a significant proportion of respondents answered with the statement: "current work is too exhausting, so I do not have energy to participate in training." Few people in either city indicated that their "current job is good and so there is no need for training" or "training is useless" (Table 6).

One case, from the Beijing study, exemplifies how training might not be sufficient to secure a better job. Zhang Xinqin followed her elder sister Zhang Xinhui to Beijing in 2003. The younger sister participated in a hairdressing training program in March 2005 in order to make the switch from employment in domestic service (Interviewee No. 28, Aug. 14, 2004; June 10, 2006). Her friend Cao Zhenying joined her, with the same purpose in mind (Interviewee No. 32, Aug. 21, 2004; June 18, 2005; June 17, 2006). Both of them quit their jobs and each spent 2,000 yuan on the two-month training program. After they completed training, however, Cao could not find a hairdressing position and had to return to domestic work. At first Zhang could not find work either. Her elder sister Zhang Xinhui then asked her employer (the television host referred to above) whether she might be able to recommend her to a hairdressing salon. With her recommendation, Zhang Xinqin finally found a hairdressing position and doubled her monthly income from 500 yuan (the wages of her domestic

Table 6. Reasons for Not Participating in Training Programs (Percent)

Reason	Beijing	Chifeng City
Training fees are too high	36.36	51.24
I have no spare time for training	58.18	50.24
Current work is too exhausting, so I do not have the energy for training	21.82	32.84
My educational level is low and so training might be too hard for me	45.45	16.92
Current job is good and so there is no need for training	5.45	10.45
Training is useless	7.27	14.93

service job) to 1,000 yuan. Although both Cao and Zhang had received the training, Zhang was successful mainly because her sister succeeded in crossing social boundaries.

Changing Hukou Status: Crossing Legal Boundaries

Changing hukou status is also one of the means available to migrant workers for improving their life chances in the city. As we have seen, possession of a local urban hukou means possible access to unemployment compensation, dibao, and other welfare programs. However, with the shrinking of hukou-related benefits and intensification of market competition, changing hukou status has become less and less attractive of an option for migrant workers. This holds true even for the migrant workers I interviewed in Beijing.

Beijing provides hukou-holders with relatively more benefits in terms of dibao, unemployment compensation, and employment services. As a result, lower-strata urban residents in Beijing, such as laid-off workers and dibao recipients, are better off than their counterparts in small and medium-sized cities like Chifeng City. However, most migrant workers are young and full of aspirations; they strive to find better job opportunities and ascend the social ladder rather than languishing on society's bottom rung. In many cases, increasing human capital and crossing social boundaries are more effective ways to achieve these goals than switching hukou status. Among the dozens of migrant workers I interviewed, none brought up the issue of hukou. I often reminded them of the issue of hukou, but they typically responded by saying: "It's too early to think about it," "hukou isn't a problem," or "I've never thought about hukou." Cao, the domestic worker who failed to find a

hairdressing position, told me that her parents wished she could settle in Beijing. However, she thought that impossible, since she had neither a good job nor much education. I then asked her whether hukou was also an obstacle. She gave a negative answer and emphasized again that the problem was due to her insufficient level of "human capital" and her low-wage occupation.

At present, it is still very difficult for a migrant worker to register residence in Beijing, but not having hukou is no longer a significant obstacle to settling in that city. It would undoubtedly cause a certain degree of inconvenience if one were to settle in Beijing without having local hukou. However, this inconvenience can be overcome if one holds satisfactory employment and earns a relatively high income. For instance, it is reported that hundreds of thousands of college graduates have settled in Beijing even though they possess no Beijing-based hukou (*Zhongguo qingnian bao*, 2002, 2005). Migrant workers are very aware of this situation. Cheng Yafeng, for example, came to Beijing in 2002 and has worked as a domestic worker ever since. Inspired by the success of Shi Liyuan, she told me that she had made up her mind to settle in Beijing permanently. Her plan was to pass the college entrance examinations and obtain an associate degree in English. She believed that one could settle in Beijing as long as one had a marketable skill (Interviewee No. 45, Sept. 10, 2005). Cheng's view was shared by several of the other migrant workers included in my study. Of the 154 migrant workers I surveyed in Beijing, 12 indicated that they had decided to settle in Beijing permanently, though it was obvious that they could not acquire a Beijing hukou in the foreseeable future. Some migrant workers sought to secure settlement in Beijing by learning a marketable skill. Liu Guipeng is such an example. She quit high school and came to Beijing in search of employment in 2003. After one year of working in a restaurant, she decided to learn computer skills as an avenue to being able to take up residence in the city. Liu's plan was inspired by the example of her sister, who came to Beijing in 1999 and married a businessman. Neither Liu's sister nor her husband possessed a Beijing hukou but they nevertheless settled in Beijing and had a child. Liu thus believes that she too can settle in Beijing by learning a skill and finding a better job (Interviewee No. 20, Oct. 16, 2004).

Hukou-related benefits in Chifeng City are less substantial than those in Beijing: dibao support and unemployment insurance are very low and the government does not offer job opportunities specifically for urban residents. It is also much easier for migrant workers to register their residence in Chifeng City than in Beijing. Like migrant workers in other small and medium-sized cities, however, they feel no pressing need to change their hukou status even when it is in fact possible. My fieldwork shows that switching hukou status is

of minor concern for those who have settled in Chifeng City. For example, Song Meihua, the vegetable seed business owner mentioned above, was earning a relatively high income (at least 1,500 yuan a month) and lived with her husband and nine-year-old child when I spoke to her. She told me that she was not treated any differently by urban residents because she was from the countryside, and that their child was accepted at a local elementary school at no extra charge. She had yet to change her hukou status. "There's no rush," she said. "Let's wait and see" (Interviewee No. 68, Dec. 14, 2004).

Changing hukou status from rural to urban or from non-local to local is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for migrant workers' settlement in cities. Getting a college education, learning skills, cultivating useful social relations, and accumulating economic resources are all important alternative ways for migrant workers to find better jobs, move up the social ladder, and eventually settle down as urban residents, and this is true both for Beijing and for Chifeng City. However, none of these are simple matters, particularly in large cities like Beijing.

The greater limitation of migrant workers' agency to improve their life chances in large cities also offers a glimpse into where the majority of migrant workers in China may settle in the future. As migrant workers grow older, a number of issues, such as housing, marriage, and child rearing, will arise, creating pressure to take action. For instance, my fieldwork in rural areas in Chifeng prefecture shows that local people believe their daughters should get married before the age of twenty-two. In fact, however, many of the unmarried migrant workers I encountered in Beijing had already passed this age, but they nevertheless cannot wait too long; nor can they normally marry in Beijing due to social exclusion and lack of marketable resources. By contrast, the average age of the migrant workers in Chifeng City was 28.9 years and two-thirds were married (Table 2). This indicates that settlement in cities like Chifeng City is a more viable option for migrant workers. Many of the migrant workers I interviewed in Beijing were planning to settle down in Chifeng City. Therefore, medium-sized cities like Chifeng City, and smaller cities also, will probably become important sites of settlement for the majority of migrant workers in the future. This also suggests that these cities should receive more attention from scholars of Chinese internal migration and development than they do at present.

Conclusion

Rural migrant workers come to cities with various aims: earning cash income, making a living, seeing the outside world, learning new skills, leaving behind

village life, and so forth. However, not all migrants can accomplish their goals after arriving in the city. Some have to return to the countryside when they become older or suffer work injuries. Some choose to settle down in a small or medium-sized city like Chifeng City. And some become successful and settle permanently in one of China's larger cities. These personal choices and experiences are embedded in China's social structure, which itself can limit migrant workers' life chances.

This article offers two tentative findings. First, hukou is no longer of fundamental importance in limiting migrant workers' life chances, unlike what many scholars believe. The impact of hukou-based legal exclusion has declined substantially due to market reforms and policy changes since the 1980s. As far as settlement in the city is concerned, changing one's hukou status to urban is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition. Despite the declining importance of hukou, however, social exclusion and the market continue to act to severely limit migrant workers' life chances.

Second, social exclusion of migrant workers increases in degree as they migrate farther away from home to another municipality or province, and the intensity of market competition rises along with the size of the cities. In large cities like Beijing, the migrant workers of Chifeng origin encounter a high degree of social exclusion through identity-based exclusion and separation of social networks. In addition, they are in a very disadvantageous position on the market. Therefore, they have either to cross social boundaries or improve their market situation in order to settle permanently in these urban centers. Changing hukou may provide some benefits for migrant workers in these cities, but hukou is no longer a major obstacle to the improvement of their life chances.

In Chifeng City, it is also difficult for the migrant workers of Chifeng origin to ascend the social ladder or secure permanent residency, but not as difficult as in cities like Beijing, thanks to lower levels of social exclusion and less competitive labor markets. Therefore, a larger number of migrant workers, particularly those who are competitive within the market or have useful social connections, are able to settle down in small and medium-sized cities like Chifeng City. The benefits of changing hukou status in these cities are almost negligible; therefore it often comes last on the list of concerns migrant workers may have.

I am not defending the hukou system in China, which is unfair in many ways. Rather, I am arguing that the importance of hukou in determining migrant workers' life chances has declined substantially. Therefore, migrant workers' life chances would not be significantly improved even if China were to

abolish the hukou system and equalize the legal treatment of rural and urban residents. Improving migrant workers' life chances will require policies or interventions that effectively enhance migrant workers' position within the market and reduce their social exclusion.

Appendix

Interviewees

- No. 4: Informant
 - No. 18: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 20: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 28: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 30: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 32: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 44: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 45: Migrant worker in Beijing
 - No. 53: Local official in Beijing
 - No. 59: Local official in Chifeng City
 - No. 64: Migrant worker in Chifeng City
 - No. 65: Migrant worker in Chifeng City
 - No. 68: Migrant worker in Chifeng City
 - No. 69: Migrant worker in Chifeng City
 - No. 70: Migrant worker in Chifeng City
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Notes

1. By “worker” I mean someone who is employed, including unskilled and skilled workers and professionals.
2. From 1991 to 2004, the average annual rate of growth in the proportion of the urban population was 4.23 percent. The rate was 3.8 per cent from 2001 to 2002, slightly less than the average.
3. Weber (1958: 190–93) defined these social groups as status groups that can be differentiated based on non-economic characteristics such as honor, prestige, and other virtues.
4. Chen Xiangming (1991: 344) classifies all Chinese cities into five categories: super cities (2 million people and above), huge cities (1 to 2 million), large cities (500,000 to 1 million), medium-sized cities (200,000 to 500,000) and small cities (200,000 and below). These criteria should be increased since China has been undergoing rapid urbanization since the early 1990s. Thus, I regard Chifeng City as a medium-sized city even though its population exceeds 500,000.
5. Cities in China can be ranked in a hierarchy based on the level of administration from high to low: municipalities directly under the central government (*zhixiashi*), including Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Chongqing; provincial capitals; prefectural cities; county cities; and towns. Generally, a city of higher administrative level has a larger population. In economically developed eastern China, however, a city of low administrative level can have a large population. For example, Shenzhen is a prefectural city but its population had reached 8.6 million in 2007.
6. Street (*jiedao*) is the lowest administrative unit in Chinese cities. A street often governs anything from a few to ten or more residential communities.
7. The Chifeng Women’s Federation established an office in Beijing in 2001 with a view to contacting and providing services for female migrant workers from Chifeng prefecture.
8. The snowball method can lead to results where respondents share more commonalities than differences. To correct this bias, I intentionally diversified interviewees in terms of age, occupation, education, and income.
9. Informants No. 1 and No. 2 worked for the office established by the Chifeng Women’s Federation; Informants No. 3 and No. 4 were migrant workers.

10. In some cases the real value of rural benefits is greater than that of urban benefits. For example, land that neighbors cities is in many cases more valuable than urban benefits, particularly in developed provinces. As a consequence, the forced transfer of peasants in these areas to urban residency in recent years, the aim of which is expropriation of their land, has sparked waves of collective peasant protests. See Lee, 2006: 259.
11. This was certainly not the case in the mid-1990s, when rural residents were required to pay several thousand yuan (a large sum of money at that time) in order to procure an urban hukou. I interviewed an urban resident in one of the county towns of Chifeng prefecture in the summer of 2008 who had paid 5,000 yuan to procure an urban hukou in 1994. She regretted this greatly, however, since the urban hukou has not in fact brought her any significant benefit.
12. The rates are estimated based on *Beijing tongji nianjian* (2006: chaps. 3 and 20) and *Chifeng tongji nianjian* (2006: chaps. 4 and 12).
13. This is one of the reasons why a significant portion of urban residents have not joined the programs either.
14. A number of cities have begun to allow migrant workers to join their retirement insurance programs. For example, the Beijing government issued a policy document regarding retirement insurance in December 2008 that pertains to migrant workers (the serial number of the document is Jing Zhen Fa 2008 No. 49). Recently it was reported that some cities do not allow migrant workers to transfer their insurance accounts when they migrate to another city or return home (see, for example, *Guangzhou ribao*, 2009). These reports provide further proof why most migrant workers do not want to join these programs.
15. It was reported that the Beijing government would spend 660 million yuan annually to create welfare jobs between 2003 and 2005. The spending could create about 70,000 jobs if each position cost 800 yuan a month. See *Beijing wanbao*, 2003.
16. Examples of such policies include *Beijing laodongju tonggao* (Beijing Labor Bureau Public Notification) [1996] No. 2, date of issuance: March 28, 1996; *Beijing laodongju shehui baozhangju tonggao* (Beijing Labor and Social Security Bureau Public Notification) [1999] No. 8, date of issuance: December 1, 1999.
17. Here I only discuss primary- and middle-school education. Opportunities for college education are still related to hukou. Students must take the college entrance exams in provinces where they have hukou. Exam scores for college entrance are lower in some provinces and *zhixiashi* (most notably Beijing and Shanghai) than others. However, it must be pointed out that Beijing and Shanghai are exceptional cases and cannot be seen as representative of all large cities.
18. On the other hand, the practice of charging “voluntary” donations is by no means restricted to the migrant worker population. Many schools in urban areas charge

urban residents for accepting their children, particularly when the parents want to send their children to schools outside their residential district.

19. Here personal contact is defined as contact between acquaintances, friends, or relatives, excluding contact with employers and workmates. Methods of contact include telephone, home-visits, and get-togethers for leisure reasons.
20. This difference indicates that non-local geographical identity exerts more impact on social networks of the migrant workers of Beijing than those of Chifeng City.
21. My research is limited to migrant workers who have low socioeconomic status. Migrants who earn a high income and hold a college degree may view hukou, social exclusion, and lack of market resources differently.

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Biography

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