Migrant Workers' Citizenship Positionality in Contemporary China.[1]

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This chapter discusses the interconnected nature of the institutional, discursive and spatial characteristics of migrant workers' citizenship positioning in relation to the rural–urban divide. Institutionally, the rural–urban divide has been entrenched through the hukou system, which limits access to rights of citizenship of rural migrants in urban China. Discursively, rural migrants have been portrayed to be in need of transformation into desired kind of citizens, that is educated, modern and urban individuals, a narrative stemming from both the indigenous suzhi renkou discourse as well as modern understanding of citizenship adopted from the West. Spatially, migrant workers have been excluded from the city through urban redevelopment projects, which delegate them to the city fringes by keeping property prices prohibitively high or unavailable for purchase to non-local hukou holders, as well as direct evictions of rural-hukou-holders from urban spaces. By highlighting the historical developments and modern adjustments and changes within citizenship institutions, discourse and the spatial position of migrants in urban China, the chapter highlights the internal contradictions in state policies of urbanisation and the entrenchment of rural–urban divide in contemporary formulation of citizenship.

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Introduction

The rural-urban divide is a defining feature of modern citizenship in contemporary China. In most of the literature on citizenship in China, the bifurcated system of citizenship rights between rural and urban citizens embodied in the form of the household registration (*hukou*) system has been the focal point of discussion of the rural-urban divide and its impact on citizenship (see Solinger, 1999; Wang, 2010). In this dominant literature, the *hukou* system has been conveyed of as a discriminatory institution designated to control flow of population in China and enable efficient channelling of resources from the countryside to city workers, and which, in the process, largely disadvantaged rural population, and consequently rural migrants in the cities, the group of so-called 'peasant workers' or 'migrant workers'.[3]

However, there have also been other aspects of citizenship related to rural-urban divide. One such aspect is the derogatory imaginary of rural population, and migrant workers more widely, as 'unfit', 'uncivilised', and 'in need to be transformed' into proper citizens in order to be culturally regarded as equal to urbanites. This discourse is closely linked to both the modernist understanding of citizenship introduced to China in early 20th century from the West, and the indigenous ideas stemming from Confucianism present in the population quality (*renkou suzhi*) discourse. While both *hukou* system and *suzhi* discourse are based fundamentally on the pre-modern indigenous institutions and ideologies, they did adopt some new features and meanings under the modernisation project starting from late 19th century. For instance, the transformation of the ancient *baojia* system into Maoist *hukou* system was inspired largely by the Soviet *propiska* system of internal passports and population control, while the *suzhi* discourse acquired aspects stemming from Western concepts of citizenship which incorporate the derogatory approach to rural as 'non-citizen'. The modernisation project has ingrained these institutional and discursive elements of rural migrants' citizenship positioning in China further by embedding the rural-urban divide within the spatial lay-out of the present-day Chinese cities. These spatial characteristics rely on the delegation of migrant workers to city fringes, or urban villages, from which they are continuously evicted through the policies of demolition and relocation. This spatial exclusion

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[3] While the group of migrant workers comprises of different social classes and also includes some urban-to-urban migrants as well as white-collar workers, the discussion in this chapter mostly refers to the blue-collar workers migrating from rural China.

from the city complemented their institutional exclusion due to the *hukou* system, and discursive exclusion due to the *suzhi* and the wider citizenship discourse.

This chapter discusses the interconnected nature of the institutional, discursive and spatial characteristics of migrant workers' citizenship positioning in relation to rural-urban divide. By highlighting the historical developments and modern adjustments and changes within both citizenship institutions and discourse, and the spatial position of migrants in urban China, the chapter eventually highlights the internal contradictions in state policies of urbanisation and the entrenchment of rural-urban divide in contemporary formulation of citizenship. The first section discusses policies associated with the institutionalisation of rural-urban divide in the form of the *hukou* system, its history, reforms and prospects for continuing to impact migrant workers' citizenship. The second section delves into the discursive aspect associated with rural-urban divide and its impact on citizenship in the form of the *suzhi* discourse. It explains how the *suzhi* discourse has been shaped by wider understanding of citizenship as necessarily urban, and how it has continued to shape migrant workers' citizenship via the state public campaigns in recent years. The final section illustrates how these two aspects, institutional and discursive, have been reinforced by the spatial urban planning policies and the attending material condition of migrant workers in the cities. This section illustrates how all three aspects of migrant workers' citizenship – institutional, discursive and material – played an essential role in the particular economic development model in contemporary China.

The *hukou* system

In China, the *hukou* system is often pictured as having evolved from the Imperial system of registration called *baojia*. However, this is a contentious claim (Dutton, 1992: 204), and there are actually more differences than similarities between the two systems. The principle function of the *baojia* system was to ensure that the family order was based on Confucian morality: it was therefore the lowest administrative level of moral discipline and control of the state over the population of the empire. As such, *baojia* also acquired wider administrative functions of tax collection, self-defence and the gathering of statistical data (Dutton, 1992: 24-25), somehow akin to the function of the *hukou* system. However, in most respects, the post-1950s *hukou* system is more reminiscent of the Soviet *propiska* system than its ancient Chinese counterpart. Indeed, the rural/urban dichotomy underpinning the

present-day *hukou* system is unprecedented in Chinese history, and did not define the *baojia* system (Solinger, 1999: 27), but it has defined the *hukou* system from its inception.

Despite Maoist promises to empower the rural population (see for example Mao, 1940), the citizenship regime that accompanied the Maoist experiment, with its centrepiece in the *hukou* system, eventually led to ever greater rural-urban disparity and to the creation of the privileged urban class. Starting from the 1950s the authorities sought, through the *hukou* system, to create a stable welfare provision system and control over the population by immobilising access to welfare to the person's birthplace only. As such, the policy emulated the *propiska* (internal passport) system of the Soviet Union. It deepened the rural-urban divide, because it granted urbanities employment, education and food ratios via the extraction of resources from the countryside. This process, which Dorothy Solinger (1999: 27) labelled 'internal colonisation', turned Chinese peasants into an underprivileged workforce financing the modernisation dream of the urban working class (and, in the post-reform period, those among the urbanities who came to form a growing middle class). However, while Oakes and Schein believe that *hukou* reorganised space and time (Oakes and Schein 2006, 5), as I argue elsewhere, it rather reinforced the tendencies already present in the modern discourses of urbanisation and citizenship since the encounter with Western powers in the 19th century (Jakimów, 2012; Jakimów and Barabatseva, 2016). These discourses, as will be discussed later in the chapter, defined the present-day modern imaginary of citizenship as hierarchically placed within the linear space-time trajectory, with the rural placed 'behind' and 'under' the urban, and in need of (cultural) transformation.

The Maoist *hukou* system, which institutionalised such discursive rural-urban divide, started to be progressively reformed since the 1980s. It is important to trace those changes in order to understand the institutional characteristics underlying migrant workers' citizenship status. Cai Fang (2011) divides the reforms into three stages: the period until mid-1990s; until 2003; and since 2003. Currently, the fourth phase of reforms, initiated in 2014, can be added to these three. In the first phase, up until the Deng's southern trip in 1993, the market-orientated reforms initiated in 1978 brought about the first wave of rural-to-urban migration, as the economic reforms relied on access to cheap labour. This period is characterised by many obstacles to migration still present, and the introduction of ID cards (*shenfenzheng*), which while making the movement more traceable and manageable (Dutton,

1992: 333-334), also allowed for closer monitoring of migrant population. The growth in migration accelerated from the early 1990s as a result of the rapid industrialisation in and around the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that was propelled by increased foreign investments after the Deng's southern trip in 1993. This movement propelled the second phase of *hukou* reforms, characterised by the end of food rationing system in urban China. First labour laws were also introduced in this phase, which were a necessary attempt to regulate labour market, and by extension, respond to the precarious working conditions in rapidly industrialising Eastern coast.

A more decisive third stage of reforms was undertaken by the government since 2001-2003. The first step was the relaxation of migration restrictions, fewer hurdles to employment of non-urban-*hukou*-holders in private enterprises, and sometimes the extension of urban *hukou* on the basis of stable employment and accommodation (Zhan, 2011: 245). This part of the reform was labelled '*hukou* in exchange for talent and investments', which mainly meant the ability to purchase a property in the city. Another issue that this 'deep reform' was to address were changes in the repatriation policy and the *hukou* enforcement system. Prior to 2003, migrant workers were subjected to frequent police checks and, if proven not to have a 'temporary resident permit' to stay in the city, they would be detained (and sometimes beaten and tortured) and then deported to their place of origin. Through the Measures on Aid and Management for Urban Vagrants and Beggars regulation in 2003 the government restricted checks on personal identification cards and limited the automatic detention and deportation of migrant workers (Wang, 2010: 91). However, these reforms remained largely superficial, as they did not mean the abolition of rural-urban distinction. They were also geographically uneven, as some localities relaxed their policies more than others. As to the latter, for instance, the 2003 reforms proved to be short-lived in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, where the rise in the homeless and begging population prompted authorities to revise the policy and resulted in renewed repatriations and checks (Wang, 2010: 92). The labour, welfare, pension and insurance laws introduced since early 2000s are important parts of reforming the *hukou* regime, but these were criticised as ineffective and scarcely implemented (Cai, 2008: 68).

The final nation-wide efforts at reforming the *hukou* system were initiated in 2014 with the National New-type Urbanisation Plan which promised to introduce people-

orientated urbanisation, with abolition of the *hukou* system and even the removal of the rural-urban distinction (PRC Government, 2014). The plan included some ambitious targets, such as reducing the proportion of population without urban *hukou* from 18% to 15% (so accelerating the rate of urbanisations as in urban-*hukou* extension), and it promised that 99% of migrant children would have access to free education by 2020 (Chan, 2014: 4–5; PRC Government, 2014). However, the effects of this and the previous reforms on the citizenship positionality of migrant workers in urban China have been uneven and largely geographical differentiated. The main cause of migrants' inferior status in urban China in terms of citizenship institutions has long been the lack of access to rights of citizenship in urban China, particularly political rights to vote and social rights to free education, social housing, healthcare and jobs, creating the condition of so-called 'differentiated citizenship' (Guo and Tuo, 2017). The *hukou* reforms have addressed the issue of such differentiated citizenship only to a limited degree so far. While the 2014 reforms were more tangibly rolled out in municipalities below one million inhabitants, where full access to citizenship rights was to be given to rural migrants (Branigan, 2014), the cities with over five million inhabitants, which are the main destinations for migrant workers, were not only exempted from the national policies as discussed above, but they actually introduced ever stricter obstacles to migration and access to substantial citizenship (Chan, 2019). Moreover, some studies point to the rising housing costs as one of the main effects of the reforms, which limits migrant workers' ability to stay in the cities further (Chen *et al.*, 2018; 2019).

Yet, is the *hukou* system really the only mechanism preventing equal participation in urban citizenship for rural-to-urban migrants? While many scholars, particularly in early research on the *hukou* system saw it as the main source of citizenship inequality and exclusion (ex. Solinger, 1999; Wang, 2010), others have argued that while this might have been the case, the situation of many migrants would not change for the better even if the *hukou* system was abolished, as it is the economic subsistence, ability to afford property and social relationships that determine the individual's chances, and not the administrative regime of *hukou* (Zhan, 2011; Wang, 2009; Jacka *et al.,* 2013). Scholars note that although some cities opened the doors to the acquisition of urban *hukou* based solely on the conditions of stable employment and accommodation, few migrants decided to change their *hukou* (Zhan, 2011:245). This is because the impact of the *hukou* system has been diluted by the removal of urban benefits

through the 1990s and the introduction of the market-based access to welfare benefits paired with greater access to urban *hukou* in small- and medium- sized cities. Under such circumstances rural land and rural subsistence are of greater value to migrant workers than urban subsistence (*dibao*) would be if they changed their *hukou* to an urban one (Zhan, 2011: 252-253; Lee, 2007: 23-24). Moreover, as some ardent critics of the *hukou* system have even pointed out themselves, the mere acquisition of urban *hukou* does not dissolve the barriers between migrants and the established urban communities (Solinger, 1999: 9). Social exclusion and the lack of connections which enable access to jobs guaranteeing social mobility, paired with inability to afford a property, are more detrimental to migrant workers' inclusion into the notion of urban citizenship than the *hukou* system (Zhan, 2011: 247). The social discrimination around the urban/rural, insider/outsider or permanent/temporary divide persists even when urban *hukou* is attained by an individual. Therefore, there are other aspects underlying citizenship discrimination on the basis of rural-urban distinction, than just the institutions of the *hukou* system, and these need to be further explored. These aspects relate mainly to cultural perceptions, public discourses and social attitudes on the one hand, and economic aspects of migration, which since 1978 have been increasingly determined by wider market mechanisms and urban redevelopment policies, on the other.

The *suzhi* discourse

Alongside the *hukou* system's institutional ramifications of migrant workers' access to citizenship rights in urban China, the population quality (*suzhi*) discourse is often regarded as having played a significant role in affecting the social attitudes towards migrant workers as second-class citizens (Ban, 2018: 3988). The *suzhi* discourse can be viewed as creating a form of 'cultural citizenship', which defines the right to belong to the community as based on cultural characteristic, rather than rights (Fong and Murphy, 2006). It does so, by defining an 'ideal citizen' as someone who acquired an appropriate level of education, acts in a 'cultured' and 'civilised' manner, and even develops certain physical qualities, such as being neat in appearance (Murphy, 2004; Lin, 2017). Clearly, much of this rhetoric is underpinned by what is seen as intrinsically 'urban' qualities and what has long been only attainable in urban setting, such as education and proper dress (Ban, 2018: 3988). Indeed, the policies concerned with improving the 'quality' (*suzhi*), have been particularly targeted at rural population the 1990s and 2000s aiming to turn them into productive 'neoliberal citizens-subjects', (Oakes and

Schein, 2006: 9). Therefore, while the *suzhi* discourse is not directed solely towards migrant workers (it may also be targeted at migrating urban-*hukou*-holders, see Woodman, 2017), it tends to affect migrant workers more due to underlying perceptions of them as in particular need of 'civilising' and 'educating', stemming from the rural-urban divide present in the wider citizenship discourse.

The *suzhi* discourse is underpinned by both Confucian and Western ideological influences such as Social Darwinism (Murphy, 2004: 2) as well as Western conceptualisation of citizenship. In terms of the 'indigenous' tradition of Confucianism, the *suzhi* discourse adopts the Confucian idea of 'self-perfection' as the defining feature of cultural citizenship: this self-perfection can be helped by those with 'higher *suzhi*', including the government officials. It therefore prescribes a kind of continuous citizenship transformation, but one that falls within the clear cultural and state-approved boundaries, rather than questions existing laws and practices (Lin, 2017). In terms of Western conceptualisation of citizenship, it builds on some of its ideas, such as the perception of citizenship as linked to education and, by default, urbanism and urban culture (see Jakimów, 2012). This influence stems from the understanding of citizenship encapsulated in particular in the notion of *shimin* (urban citizen), and *shiminhua* (being turned into urban citizen). *Shimin* is a translation for 'citizen' that was originally adopted in Republican China, and, at that time, it incorporated its Western ideological meaning of an independent burgers class (or middle-class) in the cities, who forged autonomous policies from the state (Harris, 2002: 188). It lost this meaning, however, in the Maoist period, when it came to simply depict an urban-*hukou* holder (Chen, 2005: 120). This new meaning of the word carried with it the differentiated citizenship status between urban citizens and migrant workers in terms of substantial rights in urban China in the post-Maoist era. However, it also continued to entrench the idea of citizen as someone who is necessarily urban, excluding the rural and migrant category as 'non-citizens'. This meaning is further entrenched in the idea of *shiminhua* ('turning into citizen'), which has been widely used to refer to the process of turning migrants into urban citizens by 'civilising' them into the urban culture. Despite the calls for *shiminhua* to include the extension of rights of citizenship and the recognition of migrants' contribution among Chinese academics for instance (Fan and Mao, 2008; Cai, 2008: 69; Chen, 2005: 121), *shiminhua* is largely focused on acculturation, rather than the process of material or legal integration into the city (see Jakimów, 2021: 209-

222). Therefore, the very vocabulary used to depict citizens and citizenship in Chinese can have the dichotomous, hierarchical, rural-urban distinction built into it, which reinforces and informs the *suzhi* discourse.

Notwithstanding these discursive forms of entrenchment of rural-urban disparity in the urban context, the recent years have witnessed a growing recognition of the plight of migrant workers and their unequal status among the urban population as well as in the state's rhetoric (although to a limited degree in the case of the latter). For instance, the 2017 fire in one of the urban villages in Daxing district of Beijing, which costed lives of nineteen migrant workers, and the ensuing eviction of nearly 100 000 migrant workers into the bitter Beijing winter when the villages were being demolished by the city authorities, was met with widespread public outcry among urban middle-classes and intellectuals (see Denyer and Lin, 2017). Similarly, the state's rhetoric has progressively changed throughout 2010s to provide some recognition for the contribution and hardship of migrant workers' lives. For instance, state-sponsored museums of migrant workers' history have sprung across China, in particular in Guangdong, as I myself witnessed on several visits to Guangzhou and Shenzhen. However, these museums entrench rather than question the overlying citizenship discourse, including *suzhi* discourse, as they promote the idea of citizens as neoliberal subjects (Qian and Guo, 2019), and ignore the jarring inequality underpinning migrants' condition and its institutional and economic origin (Jakimów, 2021: 53-55).

Indeed, the most recent policies and public campaigns entrench the *suzhi* and *shiminhua* discourses. The 'socialist core values' campaign under Xi's administration has provided explicitly Confucianism-inspired approach to citizenship. Closely tied to 'moral education' exerted through Confucian classrooms and Party Schools, 'socialist core values' closely mirror the Confucian ideal of citizen encapsulated in the *suzhi* discourse: self-disciplined, patriotic, dutiful, and obedient to authority. These kinds of values can be found in the poster-based and media propaganda intensively deployed across China, which, unlike more elitist Confucian classrooms, is targeted at a mass recipient. Among the 12 socialist core values listed on the posters, the four which are to constitute the desired citizenship are 'patriotism', 'integrity', 'dedication' and 'friendship'. Among the remaining ones, there is a mixture of those which proclaim China to have values of 'democracy' and 'social equality', while also encouraging 'harmonious' and 'civilised' conduct of the citizenry. Although, like most CCP slogans, these

can be interpreted in multiple ways, they clearly allude to the Confucian ideals, and promote the idea of 'becoming a citizen', rather than being born as one (Gow, 2017: 105). In that way, the campaign conforms to the *suzhi* discourse's transformative idea of citizenship, as unattainable goal and a process which needs state's assistance and education (Lin, 2017). Similarly, the introduction of the 'Social Credit System' in 2014 made many of these prescribed citizen behaviours essential to attaining a 'good credit score', which, in turn, defines citizens' ability to rent a property, travel, or find a job (Creemers, 2018). The system relies on big data and face recognition technologies to ensure not only public security, but also desirable citizen behaviours which conform to Xi China's 'moral values'. Those behaviours which are defined as 'uncivilised', such as playing loud music in public or eating on public transport, have also been stigmatised in previous public campaigns, and are often associated with rural migrants. Meant to build 'a culture of sincerity and traditional values' and 'a harmonious socialist society' (State Council, 2014), the system clearly alludes to the *suzhi* discourse in the types of values and behaviours it promotes and punishes (Kostka and Antoine, 2020).

Despite the changes in social attitudes across China towards migrant workers, and a growing inter-group sympathy for their plight, the dominant public campaigns and state policies have been reinforcing rather than dismantling the hierarchical and derogatory attitudes towards migrant workers in urban China. The rural-urban divide entrenched in the citizenship discourse also continues to underlie the public and state attitudes towards rural population and migrant workers through the seemingly unrelated *suzhi* discourse. Perceived as 'lower quality', 'uneducated' and 'uncivilised', migrant workers are particularly targeted by the recent state campaigns promoting Confucian ideals of citizenship. These discursive tools, while might seem solely rhetorical, are easily extended to the actual policy and hard measures taken against migrant workers: as the next section highlights, this is particularly visible in policies and economic measures taken to spatially exclude migrant workers from the cities on the basis of their economic status.

The urban redevelopment policies

While the *hukou* system largely defines the institutional aspect of migrant workers' citizenship positionality, and the *suzhi* discourse the discursive and social aspects, the economic policies accompanying China's modernisation project since Deng Xiaoping's reforms create a

particular material positionality of migrant workers in urban China. This material positionality manifests itself in the spatial exclusion of migrant workers from the cities, particularly, the first and second tier Chinese cities, with population over ten million inhabitants. In those cities blue collar migrant workers tend to rent accommodation in urban villages (*chengzhongcun*), or in the outskirts of the cities, due to their inability to afford rental, and even less so, purchase, of a property in other parts of the city, and due to various municipal policies which seek to limit their presence in the city proper. Such spatial exclusion from the city, while largely the result of migrants' economic status is also partially linked to both the *hukou* system and the *suzhi* debate, and it forms an important manifestation of their citizenship positionality stemming from the rural-urban disparity.

The rural-urban divide's entrenchment in the spatial make-up of Chinese cities can be traced in various policies underpinning China's urbanisation and the wider model of economic development. In the initial phases of Deng-era urbanisation, particularly in 1990s, these policies used the *hukou* system legislation to exclude migrants from urban benefits and to control their flow. This approach was aimed to facilitate urban economic development by benefitting its residents, the growing middle-class and urban workers, at expense of the blue-collar migrant workers, who were treated as a disposable workforce fuelling urban development, without the right to access its fruits. For that reason, the surveillance and control mechanisms exerted through the *hukou* system over population were systematised through 'improvements' such as introduction of 'national identity cards' (*shenfenzheng*) in 1980s, and later 'temporary resident permit' (*linshi jumin xukezheng*), which controlled migrants' movement. At the same time, these *hukou*-related policies were paired with capitalist model of factory regimes, which relied on limited mobility of factory and construction workers, and ensured that they never had time, and often permission, to leave the compounds where they both worked and lived. In the 1990s this situation was compounded by frequent occurrences of bonded forms of labour (Chan, 2000), whereby migrants' identity cards were retained by their employers and they were not allowed to leave the workplace until they paid back the presumed initial costs that the company had incurred to source them from the countryside and to provide them with accommodation in the company's compounds. While the introduction of labour laws in late 1990s and 2000s, and particularly the Labour Contract Law in 2008 which made labour contracts compulsory,

improved the worst excesses in such labour practices, the gruelling working conditions of overtime, wage arrears and weak health and safety safeguards remained commonplace, and have often been ignored by municipal governments who competed for investments. The progressive relaxation of the *hukou* system changed little in the lives of migrant workers in the manufacturing and construction industry, but at least it allowed for private rental of housing, particularly in urban villages, and for those working in other types of industries, such as services, retail, scavenging for recycling materials or street peddling.

Yet, the rural-urban divide is expressed through the spatial exclusion of migrant workers from the city not only in the above legal and material senses, but also figurative sense, underpinned by the persistence of the *suzhi* narratives on migrant workers among urban policy-makers. This is for example visible in the case of Beijing, where the urban planning policies of recent years have explicitly discursively targeted urban villages as 'dirty, chaotic and backward' 'city cancers' (Siu, 2007: 335) and 'pain belts' (Yuan, 2011: 244-5, quoted in Hayward, forthcoming 2021) due to the supposedly criminal activities of migrant workers inhabiting them. The municipal documents have been applying label of 'low-end population' to blue-collar migrant workers explicitly (BMPC, 2007), contrasting them with 'high quality talent' (*gao suzhi rencai*), which unlike the blue-collar migrant workers should be attracted to the city (see Hayward, forthcoming 2021). This language clearly echoes the 'low *suzhi*' view of migrant population, rendering them as the 'uncivilised' Other harmful to the city's hypermodern and global image. What these policies and discourses behind them indicate is contradictory to the so-called 'integration into the city' narratives, which, while are themselves underpinned by the 'othering' and *suzhi* discourses and largely aimed at 'acculturation' rather than material or legal inclusion, at least attempted to create some space for migrant workers' inclusion in the city (see Jakimów, 2017; Jakimów, 2021: 209-222). However, the rhetoric of 'low-end population' has had some tangible repercussions for migrant population in the recent years, where the intent to dispose of, rather than 'integrate' the blue-collar migrant workers has become all too obvious.

This removal is carried out via the municipal policies of 'redevelopment', which usually boil down to mass demolition of urban villages to make space for commercial properties and high-end accommodation for urban residents. While the municipal governments usually provide some compensation to the owners of properties in urban villages, some even offering

a flat in the newly redeveloped area (as has been noted in the case of Hangzhou for instance, Yang *et al.*, 2008: 75), they fail to deliver substitution housing for migrant workers renting the properties. These migrants are simply evicted in the aftermath of demolition and have to find another place to live in, often in another urban village already scheduled for demolition, which fractures their communities and crashes their children's chances to attend a school in big cities. Indeed, the policy of urban redevelopment has long served a double aim of benefiting from real estate boom, and removing migrant workers from city spaces, despite relying on the migrant labour to build new properties in the first place. Beijing can serve as a prominent example of this trend. The redevelopment of Beijing's city centre prior to the 2008 Olympics relied on the demolition of 171 urban villages located in central Beijing (Shin and Li 2012: 2), and the 'repatriation' of roughly one million migrant workers to their hometowns (Wang, 2010: 92). Concomitantly, the city government introduced policies of removing peddling migrant workers from city spaces, and the city guards (*chengguan*) were tasked with tracking and removing petty migrant traders from the street of central Beijing (Swider, 2015: 707). The most recent plans of the Beijing city planning department aim at capping the population number to 23mln by 2030, to further limit migrants' access to the city, which is likely to be exerted through further policies aimed at removal of blue-collar migrant population (Lau, 2017). An example discussed earlier, that of the demolition of Daxing urban villages in the aftermath of the December 2017 fire, and the subsequent expulsion of 100 000 migrant workers, is an example of how this plan is being exerted in practice. Yet, clearly, this spatial exclusion and expulsion through urban redevelopment policies is built upon the rural-urban divide at the heart of the legal and discursive aspects of citizenship in China and it benefits from it.

Such policies and the subsequent forceful controls over migrant population and their removal from urban spaces contradict the previously discussed promises of 'abolishing the *hukou* system', 'integrating migrants into the city' or 'respecting migrant workers' contribution' propagated by the central and municipal governments across the country. It is also questionable that these policies are sustainable in the long-run: if the migrant population is ostracised and ever-further removed from the city centres of large metropolises, who will service the middle class lifestyles of the urbanites promoted in the current discourses on urban citizenship? After all, many scholars have emphasised the essential role of urban

villages, and migrant workers within them, to cities' ability to attract investments and sustain the capitalist forms of urbanism (Wu et al. 2013: 1930; Zhan 2018: 1538). Paired with the middle-class urbanites' growing recognition of the social injustice suffered by migrant workers, the municipal governments might be facing social resistance against such urban policies. These internal contradictions between the exploitative economic growth model and migrant access to equal citizenship in contemporary China might create a long-term challenge to the urbanisation project which was built on the basis of both.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to bring together three major aspects of the citizenship positionality of migrant workers in China: the legislative aspect largely attributed to the *hukou* system, the discursive citizenship aspect underlying the popular *suzhi* discourse, and the spatial-economic aspect of migrant workers' exclusion from urban citizenship. Since the 1990s' predominant academic focus on the primacy of the *hukou* system as determining migrant workers' citizenship status, much has changed not only in the very legislation surrounding the *hukou* system, but also the attending social attitudes and narratives, and the spatial access of migrant workers to urban spaces. This chapter highlights these changes and aims to present the variegated factors beyond legalism which shape migrant workers' citizenship positionality.

The burning question which emerges from the discussion is the impact of such treatment of migrant workers in contemporary China on both the prospects of social cohesion and the very sustainability of the urbanisation project underlying China's economic growth model. By introducing more stringent urban policies, as is the case in Beijing and other largest cities, will Chinese cities be able to sustain the services essential to the functioning of urban China, and particularly, the growing middle class lifestyles promoted by the current citizenship discourse? Will the excluded and marginalised migrant workers be pushed ever further into the urban fringes or eventually expelled from the city, further deepening their exclusion from urban citizenship? Or will the rural-urban divide be gradually 'flattened' in the process of urbanisation of the countryside and the inclusion of rural migrants in smaller cities, creating new citizenship divisions between migrants from less-developed and those living in the more-developed metropolises? The trends since early 2010s point to growing role of intra-provincial migration, which is being further encouraged by the current changes in the *hukou* policies encouraging access to urban citizenship in small cities, but more stringent

policies in large metropolises. This trend might point to a new phenomenon, already illustrated by research on urban-to-urban migration, whereby small-city migrants are treated in a similar way as rural population in large cities, having to overcome similar *suzhi* discourse-based discrimination and institutional obstacles to those suffered by the rural population (see for instance Woodman, 2017). Another trend, that of the inter-class or inter-social group alliances, as witnessed with the defence of migrant workers expelled from Daxing urban villages in 2017, or the middle-class students' support for striking migrant workers in the case 2018 Jasic dispute, can change the citizenship positionality of migrant workers, at least in terms of citizenship discourse and the attending social attitudes. The role of activists from within the migrant worker group, as well as outside of it, should not be ignored: it is their efforts which have caused changes in governments' policies such as the rise of 'recognition for migrant workers' contribution' or abolishment of certain words regarded as derogatory (such as *nongmingong*) in the policy documents (see Jakimów, 2021). The changes in migrants' citizenship, while depending so fundamentally on the state policies, are very much driven by the social contestation from below, which is the most likely way in which the inferior positionality of migrant workers can be transformed.

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