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Review

Hukou System Influencing the Structural, Institutional Inequalities in China: The Multifaceted Disadvantages Rural *Hukou* Holders Face

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Abstract: In this paper, the author investigates rural Chinese citizens' encounters of structural and institutional inequalities and social (im)mobility. The author addresses social (im)mobility from a holistic perspective (i.e., in institutional, occupational, social, educational, cultural and political dimensions). In this regard, the author explores if a range of parental disadvantages serve as significant hindrances to the acquisition of social mobilising opportunities among the next generations in rural Chinese contexts. Here a holistic presentation helps understand the nuanced relationship between institutional barriers (i.e., rural *hukou* status) and alternative obstacles to social mobility; and explore, in part, how parental inheritance of rural *hukou* status would bar individuals' from socially mobilising and result in some forms of unsustainability. Previous research on China restrictively measures social (im)mobility from limited perspectives, failing to fully and accurately reflect the extent of social (im)mobility Chinese populations face. This paper is a comprehensive literature review where relevant Chinese literature, exclusively found in the e-library system of the University of Cambridge, is included and thoroughly discussed. Articles that include the keywords of "*hukou*", "China", "social mobility" and (a) "economic", (b) "social", (c) "cultural", (d) "linguistic" or (e) "political" are extensively studied, in a hope to understand the existing scholarship on multifaceted social (im)mobility in Chinese contexts. The author argues that, despite the 2014 *hukou* reform, further loosening the requirements for rural-to-urban *hukou* conversion should be prioritised by the Central Government of China in order to ensure the rural-urban divide and structural and institutional inequalities rural *hukou* holders face can curtain.

Keywords: social inequality; social stratification; social mobility; social reproduction; economic capital; social capital; cultural capital; political capital; China; migration; labour migration

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1. Essay Aims

As a by-product of the industralisation and emphasis on urban economic growth from the mid-20 century, China has been undergoing profound rural-urban divide economically, socially, culturally, institutionally and otherwise. In this paper, the author investigates how parental factors impact nrural Chinese citizens' encounters of structural and institutional inequalities and social immobility. The author addresses social immobility from a holistic perspective (i.e., in institutional, occupational, social, educational, cultural and political dimensions). In this regard, the author explores if a range of parental disadvantages serve as significant hindrances to the acquisition of social mobilisation opportunities among the next generations in rural Chinese contexts. Here, a holistic presentation helps the understanding of the nuanced relationship between institutional barriers (i.e., rural *hukou* status) and alternative obstacles to social mobility; and can explore, in part, how parental inheritance of the rural *hukou* status would bar individuals' from social mobilisation and result in some forms of unsustainability. Previous research on China restrictively measures social immobility from limited perspectives, failing to fully and accurately reflect the extent of social immobility Chinese populations may face. This paper is a comprehensive

literature review where relevant Chinese literature, exclusively found in the e-library system of the University of Cambridge, is included and thoroughly discussed. Articles that include the keywords of "hukou", "China", "social mobility" and (a) "economic", (b) "social", (c) "cultural", (d) "linguistic" or (e) "political" are extensively studied, in a hope to understand the existing scholarship on multifaceted social (im)mobility in Chinese contexts. The reason why "China" rather than "rural China" is adopted as a keyword when searching for existing literature is because the author, to some degree, needs to understand the parental influence on both urban and rural Chinese populations' social mobilising opportunities in order to understand the relative disadvantages the rural Chinese citizens in particular are facing.

2. *Hukou* System in China

2.1. Introduction of Hukou

The Central Government initiated the *hukou* system in cities in 1951 and expanded its coverage to villages in 1958 (Lu and Wan 2014). From 1958, the system was redesigned by the Central Government to restrict the geographical mobility of Chinese citizens (Fan 2008). Every Chinese individual is assigned an urban or rural *hukou*. The designs of the *hukou* system and its meaning of social and geographical control are meant to stimulate the country's then planned economy by facilitating city-based citizens to support heavy industrial development and by using peasants to maintain the surplus of agricultural goods (Donzuso 2015). The *hukou* system is a national policy where the Central Government has delegated the rights to city-level and village-level governments to design their own version of *hukou* policies. This means, for example, non-local *hukou* citizens entering different cities or villages to reside would need to comply with local governments' policies to obtain basic welfare or to understand what the requirements are for *hukou* conversion, if requested and allowed.

Hukou status is predominantly an output of inheritance from parents at birth. Chinese populations inherited their *hukou* from mothers before 1998. From 1998 onwards, they have been able to choose to inherit from their mother's or father's *hukou* type (i.e., urban/non-agricultural or rural/agricultural) and *hukou* location (Congressional Executive Commission on China (CECC) 2005; Song and Smith 2019). City-born groups whose both parents have rural *hukou* inherit rural *hukou* (Montgomery 2012). Each citizen is required to legally register with the *hukou* police authority from birth onwards. Such registration is known as personal identification.

The *hukou* record encompasses citizens' *hukou* type, legal address, unit affiliation (i.e., employment location) and other personal and family details (Raimondo 2019; Wang 2005). The system legalises households' access to social welfares—working rights, healthcare, education and among others—in their place of registration (Bengoa and Rick 2020). This means individuals owning a rural *hukou* are, in most circumstances, only able to gain access to most, if not all, state benefits and welfares designated for rural Chinese populations (Young 2013). In rural areas, one of the state benefits is that lands are allocated to peasants. The edge of working as peasants is that the nature of farming encompasses high autonomy. According to the Household Responsibility System (HRS), rural households are required to pay for agricultural tax and fulfil the farm production quota for the Central Government. Any additional output of farm work can be used freely by rural households themselves for self-consumption, which involves sales in the food market to earn revenue or otherwise (Xu 2013).

Hukou status is, to a significant degree, an evidently strong indicator of rights and privileges affecting individuals' socioeconomic wellbeing. Generally speaking, having a local *hukou* status is necessary to qualify for unemployment and retirement benefits, medical care, local school enrollment, public housing, higher-skilled jobs and others (Zhang and Treiman 2013). Since the industrial reform in 1978, Chinese cities has required an influx of labour force to satisfy the need of large-scale urban construction and the growth of industrial development. Therefore, from 1984, the Central Government has gradually allowed the

flow of rural Chinese labourers into the cities to seek better-conditioned job opportunities by lifting its geographical social mobility restrictions (Zhang and Hoekstra 2020). Here, the Central Government allowed the entitlement of basic welfares and rights to non-local citizens. However, the non-local and rural *hukou* status has remained an entrenched barrier to upward social mobility for non-local citizens. When rural citizens relocate to cities to find better-paid jobs, they are excluded from enjoying the majority of social, economic, cultural and other welfares that are designated for urban natives, compounding their socioeconomic vulnerability.

In order to minimise sociospatial inequalities, the Central Government has been conducting a major *hukou* reform since 2014, aiming at loosening the requirement for rural citizens to convert their *hukou* to urban status. Each city-level and village-level government can formulate their own policies for *hukou* conversion, including modifying the years of local residency required to be naturalised as a local citizen at the geographical unit (either a city, town or village); they apply for *hukou* conversion (Chan and Buckingham 2008). Yet, to date, profound socioeconomic and sociospatial inequalities remain observable and city-level governments' inclusion of migrant labourers still entails continual endeavours of policy reforms and development to a large extent (Zhang and Treiman 2013). Thus, there is a significant scholarly value to discuss rural Chinese hukou holders' encounters of structural and institutional inequalities and social (im)mobility, alongside how their hukou status serves as a barrier to their next generations' acquisition of upward social mobilising opportunities, despite the recent wave of hukou reform.

2.2. (Less-Educated) Rural Hukou Holders, Are Structurally Disadvantaged

In this sub-section, the author highlights how rural hukou holders face structural inequalities. Here the author discusses that those holding rural hukou are discriminated when claiming occupational and social benefits. The author also introduces how they experience disadvantages in the labour market, in the housing market and education-wise.

Cities, migrant labourers' destinations, are viewed as places filled with economic opportunities, propelling rural populations from the villages. However, when commencing urban lives, rural-to-urban migrants—meaning those who were of rural *hukou* origins but move to cities for at least six months consecutively—begin to perceive their host cities and towns as spaces entailing values and meanings, and they are encouraged to settle down in cities and potentially change their *hukou* status from rural to urban in the long-term (Hao and Tang 2018).

To date, to a large extent, when rural individuals migrate to urban spaces, they are excluded from the entitlement to healthcare, unemployment insurance, pensions, subsidised education, housing and alternative social welfare that are restrictively allocated to urban Chinese communities (Lin and Rodgers 2018; Tani 2015). This is, in part, because rural *hukou* holders residing in cities are denied to work in the public sectors nor can they enjoy the associated benefits, including unemployment subsidies and old-age pensions. These migrant groups, thus, have to work in non-public sectors, implying more working hours, lower wages and worse working conditions (Akgüç et al. 2014).

Zhan (2011) argues that labour and social exclusions in the market and social space, respectively, rather than *hukou* status are major barriers to rural migrant workers' acquisition of life chances. However, Zhan overlooks that labour and social exclusion and *hukou* status are strongly tied in Chinese contexts. According to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and Elias's established outsider model, those known as outsiders are excluded by locals from achieving upward social mobility. While rural *hukou* holders converting to urban *hukou* can still be excluded in the labour market and social space due to their non-urban origins, the conversion to urban *hukou* minimises the symbolic and institutional differences between those of rural origins and urban elites, prompting the former's integration into urban spaces. Moreover, those converting to urban *hukou* can inherit urban *hukou* status for their offspring, facilitating the enjoyment of integration and inclusion and, thus, more life chances that are passed onto succeeding generations.

Wei et al. (2020) analysed the dataset of 2015 China Household Finance Survey (CHFS). Probability proportional to size sampling design was employed to ensure the collection of nationally representative household-level data. As many as 1439 communities in mainland China, only excluding major ethnic minority-concentrated regions, namely Tibet and Xinjiang, were covered by the survey. A total of 133,183 urban household samples were surveyed. Findings revealed that non-local *hukou* holding urban dwellers experienced housing discrimination, as they were impeded from the access to subsidised housing. They were also banned from purchasing commercial housing in host cities. Alternatively, urban dwellers with higher educational attainment were given favourable housing conditions (Wei et al. 2020). The findings supported the claim that urban residents without local *hukou* were prone to enjoy fewer state-subsidised benefits. Moreover, findings revealed that the higher the education level individuals earned, the more state-subsidised benefits were provided, at least in terms of housing. Therefore, it is crucial to take education attainment into account when examining individuals' life chances and social positions. However, the survey did not contain any rural dwelling samples. Therefore, Wei et al. could not obtain a comparison of housing benefits owned between urban and rural residents. Otherwise, it would be possible to understand how residence and *hukou* types influence the entitlement to state-subsidised benefits in greater detail.

Additionally, Chinese citizens are all given subsidised public education only in the regions of their legal permanent residency. Non-local *hukou* holders are denied to enroll their children in local schools, unless they are able to pay for significantly high "guest student" fees. Non-local *hukou* holders who cannot afford the expensive "guest student" fees usually send their children to slum migrant schools built and run by migrant workers. These schools are subject to substantially lower teaching quality (Afridi et al. 2014). As a result, the migrant populations face more barriers to education, hinting their relatively slim chances to secure any state-subsidised benefits. These populations are trapped in the vicious cycle of educational and welfare disadvantages.

2.3. Push and Pull Factors: Why Rural-to-Urban Migrants Continue to Relocate to Cities, Despite the Structural Discrimination They Face

So far in this paper, the author demonstrates that not only is the *hukou* system an instrument used to limit the Chinese population's mobility, but it is also a vehicle for social control and excluding rural groups from accessing state-provided entitlements (Chan 2010; Li 2012). The discriminatory institutional settings have resulted in entrenched social inequalities by *hukou* status, leading to a circumstance coined as "one country, two societies" (Zhou 2019). Despite the institutional restrictions, many push and pull factors are propelling rural-to-urban migration. Push factors encompass lower income levels in villages and a surplus of labour force in the rural agricultural industry. Rural–urban income gaps are supported by evidence: The average monthly earnings of the employed rural population fell from 89% of those of their employed urban counterparts, in 1996, to 64%, in 2008 (Treiman 2012). Pull factors include the availability of a broader range of job opportunities, higher urban living standards and more fulfilling long-term life prospects in cities (Hung 2020). Those who are of younger ages, more educated and possessing fewer lands in villages are more likely to migrate from their rural origins to cities (Meng 2016).

2.4. Additional Parental Influences on Individuals' Social (Im)Mobility

In this sub-section, the author presents how the young generations from rural hukou households experience substantial, complex inequalities in education. This shows that the educational system in China is discriminatory, where students inheriting rural hukou from parents face additional challenges when seeking academic and extra-curricular successes. As an outcome, the lack of educational opportunities rural Chinese students are entitled to could translate into barriers to their professional entry in the longterm, prompting those holding rural hukou to be subject to social immobility.

In addition to the inherited *hukou* status, parental investments in or influences on children's academic and, therefore, career success are another parental factor of social immobility. In China, all children are given the right to free six-year primary education and three-year junior secondary education. Despite the government's funded education opportunities, urban and more affluent rural families are financially supporting children to learn ample after-school tutorial and extra-curricular activities. From 2007 to 2011, after-school education expenditure grew from 44% of the total educational cost to 60%, respectively. Moreover, after finishing nine-year compulsory, funded education, urban and better-off households are financially capable and willing to pay for children's extra years of education. However, worse-off rural children are often financially barred from accessing these learning opportunities (Song and Zhou 2019). The more parental investments there are in children's education, the more likely children can attain better scores in the national college entrance examination (Song and Zhou 2019). As the author mentioned before, entering higher education is one of the requirements enabling *hukou* conversion from rural to urban status. Therefore, the parental, financial barriers to education discourage less financially secure rural children from undertaking *hukou* conversion, forming a vicious cycle of social immobility. It is crucial to examine how education-related parental influence, alongside parental inheritance of *hukou* status, plays a part in the determination of children's social immobility in order to unveil any social reproduction of inequalities in Chinese contexts. Such an exploration is conducive to the formation of interventions to tackle intergenerational disadvantages or poverty. However, Li (2012) analysed the 2005 student placement database of two separate Chinese colleges (in Shanghai and Sichuan, respectively); both colleges were ranked above the top 30% of all schools at the national level. Li used a total of 1372 observations from the Shanghai sample and 2166 observations from the Sichuan sample. The findings indicated that parental CCP affiliation does not necessarily increase graduates' occupational and academic outcomes. Such findings, therefore, ostensibly counter-argued that parental influence on children's success might not essentially be found, at least from the political perspective. However, most parentally CCP-affiliated samples were of urban origins. The findings overlooked whether parental CCP affiliation impacts rural populations' employment and educational outcomes (Li 2012). Alternatively, Li found that inherited urban *hukou* is associated with foreign, professional firm entry and continual education. It is necessary to understand specifically why the inheritance of urban *hukou* gives an edge to individual accomplishments, or whether the inheritance of rural *hukou* is subject to barriers to success. If so, in this paper, the author will discuss what parental barriers rural *hukou* holders encounter.

In Kuang and Liu's (2012) study, 54 (46 males and 8 females) undergraduates in Beijing voluntarily took part in an experiment. They were all registered with urban *hukou* at the time they engaged in the study. A total of 35 participants (64% of all participants) were registered with urban *hukou* at birth, while the rest were originally holding rural *hukou*. Kuang and Liu found that, despite the membership of urban *hukou* during the experiment, those inherited with rural *hukou* at birth declared that they faced discriminatory encounters more often relative to those inherited with urban *hukou*. Their findings echoed Li's (2012) arguments that parental inheritance of rural *hukou* implies more difficulties in everyday life, even if individuals of rural origins already convert their *hukou* to urban status. However, Kuang and Liu's study only focused on undergraduate students in one of the most advanced cities in China—Beijing. Moreover, the study lacked female participants. The sampling outcomes might result in a limited understanding of the relationship between inherited *hukou* status and challenges in life among a broader population of Chinese citizens. Therefore, it is essential to develop more nationally representative studies that help address such a relationship in detail.

In the following sections, the author presents occupational, social, educational, cultural, linguistic and political barriers to social mobility that rural *hukou* holders encounter. The contents of these sections would help frame the understanding of structural and insti-

tutional inequalities in association with rural *hukou* status and alternative parental drivers in detail.

3. Occupational Inequalities Faced by Rural *Hukou* Holders

In this section, the author will address major occupational disadvantages faced by rural *hukou* holders as a premise to examine how individuals inherited with rural *hukou* are hampered from upward social mobility. In host cities, rural-to-urban migrants staying for over a month and seeking local employment must apply for a temporary residential permit (Huang et al. 2014; Yang and Guo 2018). Those who are unwilling to apply for the permit, in order to save the application fee and avoid the preparation of required documents, have to move back and forth between host cities and home villages; this causes inconvenience and the need to spend on transportation expenses (Kuang and Liu 2012). The continual needs to travel between villages and cities also minimise rural *hukou* holding groups' opportunities to develop urban social capital. In this context, social capital comprises resources based on social networks and associations with certain bodies, families and names which can help generate life chances and facilitate upward social trajectory (Atkinson 2015; Savage 2015; Savage et al. 2013; Shapovalova 2013).

At work, rural-to-urban migrants often occupy "3-D" jobs (i.e., dirty, dangerous and demeaning) or are self-employed, especially in the retail industry (Akgüç et al. 2014; Chan 2010). The possession of an urban *hukou* is, alternatively, seen as an instrument to facilitate the securement of stable, non-physical and better-paid jobs, including receptionist and office clerk positions (Chen and Hoy 2011). Basically, the urban labour market practises two rules for labour recruitment: It is either "local citizens exclusively" or "migrants permitted to apply for jobs but local populations are prioritised" (Chen and Hoy 2011). According to Article 5 *of* The Temporary Regulation on the Administration of Cross-Provincial Employment of Migrant workers, issued by the Ministry of Labour in 1994, urban job opportunities for the migrant groups are restricted, a policy which is, in part, to ensure employment security for local city dwellers (Li 2006).

Urban employers often hold prejudice against those of rural origins, characterising them as low-educated and delinquent groups, even though migrant labourers are perceived as having some preferable traits—cheap, diligent and compliant at work (Chen and Hoy 2011; Guo et al. 2017). The prejudice against rural-to-urban migrants propelled local urban residents' reluctance to maintain any form of contact with migrant groups, leading to the entrenched social distance between both groups (Kuang and Liu 2012). The lack of social contact engenders socioоccupational segregation between the two groups, where rural-to-urban migrants are marginalised in social space and at work to some extent. Such a circumstance implies that the inherited rural *hukou* hinders rural-to-urban migrant groups from claiming a fairer share of socioоccupational rights in cities, despite their contribution to physically demanding jobs.

In addition, employers set lower wage rates for rural-to-urban migrants than their equally productive local urban citizens (Chen and Hoy 2011; Song and Smith 2019). For example, Li (2012) unveiled the wage gaps between rural-to-urban migrant and local urban labourers. He mentioned that migrant labourers worked for 58 h per week on average, relative to 43 h per week for their urban counterparts. The hourly pay for migrant labourers is 45% that of local urban labourers. Worse still, most urban labourers are given higher in-kind payment, such as in the form of employer insurance coverage, than migrant labour groups. When in-kind payment is taken into account, the hourly pay for migrant labourers is merely 37% that of local urban labourers. However, Li failed to distinguish between lower-skilled and better-skilled migrant labourers. Therefore, his figures cannot reflect how important skill levels are for migrant labourers to seek increased income security. Despite such shortcomings, Li's findings indicated that the inherited rural *hukou* is in association with financial and occupational vulnerability, even if the migrant groups are just as, if not more, productive than those inherited urban *hukou* from parents.

In the urban labour market, employment in the public sector plunged from over 90% in the 1980s to 30% in 2002. Private enterprises have mushroomed. These companies

share greater autonomy with respect to labour recruitment and wage practices relative to public counterparts. The relaxation of the urban labour market has allowed rural-to-urban migrants to work in the private sector. However, these migrants continued to be employed in poorer-conditioned, lower waged jobs. Importantly, the labour market in China comprises the public (i.e., state-owned enterprises (SOEs)), private (private enterprises) and agricultural sectors. SOEs offer the highest wage levels for employees, followed by private enterprises and then agricultural businesses (Fields and Song 2013). In agricultural sectors, labourers are largely excluded from any state-owned welfare and benefits (Huang and Guo 2017). Furthermore, lower-skilled rural-to-urban migrant labourers are least likely to secure any jobs in SOEs. However, higher-skilled migrant and local urban labourers have access to the majority of SOEs' job opportunities (Akgüç et al. 2014). Currently, the permission for high-skilled migrant labourers to work in SOEs demonstrates the relaxation of the urban labour market and the improvement of occupational rights earned by skillful migrant labourers. However, low-skilled migrant labourers remain to be victimised under the liberalisation of the urban labour market. This is because the Central Government prioritises the protection of the occupational rights and welfare enjoyed by better-skilled and/or local urban *hukou*-holding labourers. While local urban labourers are unlikely to face occupational competition from low-skilled migrant labourers, they growingly compete with better-skilled labourers of rural origins. Therefore, the inheritance of urban *hukou* from parents no longer guarantees exclusive privileges to dominate most, if not all, better-conditioned job opportunities in the urban labour market.

The persistent occupational discrimination reflects that the migrant groups, especially those with low-skills, have little negotiation power in urban labour market and are often subject to inferiority (Chen and Hoy 2011). Chen and Hoy (2011) surveyed rural-to-urban migrant and local urban labourers in 21 manufacturing companies in Minhang and Putuo Districts—areas where rural-to-urban migrant labourers are concentrated—of Shanghai, qualitatively interviewed personnel managers in those surveyed companies and additionally conducted 20 in-depth interviews with rural-to-urban migrant labourers between 2005 and 2006. Their findings from multinomial logistic regression analysis demonstrated that unskilled labourers primarily engaged in the lowest-paid jobs. In the manufacturing industry, a surplus of unskilled rural-to-urban migrant labourers available to occupy labour-intensive jobs was present. Such a labourer suplus prompted employers to offer poor working conditions, lower wage levels and limited social security to unskilled migrant groups. On the contrary, higher-skilled rural-to-urban migrant labourers were competing with local urban labourers for higher-paid positions. Again, such a circumstance demonstrates that the absence of local *hukou* status might not necessarily hamper labourers from securing better working conditions. It is predominantly the lack of skills needed in the urban labour market that caused rural *hukou* holding migrants to experience occupational inferiority. However, it is noteworthy that the presence of a local *hukou* status, to some extent, strengthens the advantages for individuals to secure more skill-development opportunities through, for example, subsidised education.

Skill and education levels are intertwined. In the following contents, the author will argue how rural parents have lower education levels than their urban parent counterparts and that poor parental educational attainment is another familial factor contributing to barriers to upward social mobility of the next generations. Educational attainment is one of the primary human capital leading to economic success. Human capital is known as any stock of knowledge or the innate/acquired characteristics a person has that contribute(s) to their economic productivity (Becker and Tomes 1994; Tan 2014). With lower parental education level, existing literature (Li and Zhong 2017; Wu and Treiman 2007) argues that rural groups would, in part, receive lesser extents of parental investment and engagement that directly or indirectly facilitate their educational attainment.

Aside from barriers to education and skills development, those in possession of rural *hukou*, regardless of their residence, continue to receive a minimum socioоccupational security at work. Prior to 2002, urban companies only had to cover local urban labourers' social

benefits, including pension, unemployment insurance, medical insurance and housing provident fund. From 2002 onwards, however, rural-to-urban migrants have been entitled to some forms of social benefits in terms of pension and medical insurance. Despite the improvement of socioоccupational security given to rural-to-urban migrant labourers, their levels of social benefit entitlements have been far lower than those offered to local urban counterparts (Chen and Hoy 2011). For example, rural-to-urban migrant labourers are largely excluded from the entitlement to minimum living guarantee and disability benefits (Song and Smith 2019). Such circumstances strengthen the understanding of occupational inferiority and insecurity non-urban *hukou*-holding populations experience. Despite the inclusion of rural *hukou*-holding employees' socioоccupational benefits to some degree, it is noteworthy that, as the author mentioned before, rural-to-urban migrant labourers are prone to engage in self-employed jobs. Those who are subject to self-employment are excluded from benefits designated for employees. Moreover, as of 1 January 2008, the Labour Contract Law has been applied. This law significantly improved rural-to-urban migrant labourers' socioоccupational security in the shorter-term by, for example, requiring all employers to sign labour contracts with employees, protecting long-service employees against dismissal, guaranteeing the provision of basic employment benefits and limiting the use of temporary contracts. However, the percentage of migrant labourers' employment contract signing rates fell to 35.1% from 42.8% in 2016 and 2009, respectively, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)' 2016 data, implying that migrant labourers' encounters of occupational exploitation continued to be the labour market norm (China Labour Bulletin 2021). A significant portion of rural-to-urban migrant labourers has continued to be exploited by their urban employers who have offered no employment contracts to the migrant groups (Raimondo 2019; Wang et al. 2009; Xu 2013). Huang and Guo (2017) studied 73 in-depth interviews in most popular rural-to-urban migrants' destination cities, namely Guangzhou and Shanghai, along with the common migrants' native region, which is Mumakou village in Hubei Province. While the absence of signing labour contracts when hiring labourers and employees is criminalised, Huang and Guo's findings revealed that most interviewed rural-to-urban migrants were not protected by any formal contracts. The absence of such an employment protection places migrant groups' rights to participate in the urban social welfare system in jeopardy, as their employers can easily exploit their rights by rejecting any contribution of necessary social welfare to their labourers and employees. Therefore, in sum, rural *hukou*-holding labourers remain being entitled to fewer socioоccupational protection and benefits, both relative to their local urban counterparts and to what they are supposed to enjoy.

Local urban groups are given some extent of privileges for career development, including more opportunities for promotion (Chen and Hoy 2011). The exploitation of "cheap labourers" by urban companies often discourages low-skilled rural-to-urban migrants from increasing their own demands for promotion, benefits and otherwise (Wang 2005). Their need to work relentlessly, due to prolonged working hours, hints that they rarely have spare time to continue their education on a part-time basis or receive on-job training. Their continual ownership of low-level skillsets is a barrier to obtain job promotion or apply for less physically demanding positions. They are trapped in the continuity of "cheap labourers" exploitation. Such phenomena support the argument of the contemporary existence of a segmented labour market in Chinese cities (Akgüç et al. 2014). The low wage levels (despite higher than what rural-to-urban migrants can earn in their home villages) and prolonged working hours limit the remittance they can send to and time they can interact via telecommunication devices with their families in rural origins, respectively (Lin and Rodgers 2018). However, living costs in villages are much lower than in cities. Therefore, the limited remittance sent by rural-to-urban migrants may suffice in terms of supporting families' everyday living; yet, it may plausibly be insufficient to attain upward social mobility. Qin et al. (2011) analysed a household survey they completed in two selected counties in Sichuan Province, in Southwest China, and in additional two counties in Hubei Province, in Central China. The survey comprised 9097 households and 36,720 respondents, 34.3% of

whom were rural-to-urban migrants. Findings disclosed that 43.8% of migrant labourers remitted over half of their wages to home (Qin et al. 2011). Such findings demonstrated that rural-to-urban migrants have to retain, if any, very limited spare financial resources for personal use, due to high living costs in cities and their obligations to send most wages to their rural origins. They are, therefore, socioeconomically discouraged from practising any more desirable lifestyles in cities and remaining as financially underprivileged groups.

In sum, discrimination encountered in the urban labour market compounds the overall inferior socio-economic status (SES) attached to rural *hukou* holders. Rural *hukou* holding groups share significantly lower SES than their urban *hukou*-holding counterparts. SES is not only reflected by earnings and occupational status but also in the access to social welfare as a form of security (Lin and Rodgers 2018). It is, therefore, important to understand whether rural *hukou* holders are largely deprived of the access to social welfare in order to illustrate their low social positions.

4. The Lack of Access to Social Welfare Faced by Rural *Hukou* Holders

As the author mentioned before, both rural residence and *hukou* type prompt the restriction to access social benefits and services. The inheritance of urban *hukou* symbolises an official recognition of city dwellers' rights and interests. The *hukou* system encodes a system of divided citizenship, where rural *hukou* holders are relegated to second-class citizenship (Hu and Salazar 2008). Although rural *hukou* holders are granted the right to population mobility, they are denied to the access to full community membership when residing in cities (Chan 2010). In this section, the author further outlines how local rural citizens and especially rural-to-urban migrants are socially vulnerable when attempting to claim resources and welfare in local communities.

Local city dwellers often hold social stigmatisation and distrust against those of rural origins, believing the latter to be poorly educated, occupationally incapable and socially liable. Rural *hukou* holders, therefore, experience difficulties in mobilising their social ties with local city dwellers for support, if necessary (Wang 2011). In Shanghai, for example, existing literature argues that rural-to-urban migrants have significantly been subject to lower levels of within-community trust, social trust and public trust; neither education nor income can alter the trust levels of rural-to-urban migrants towards other urban residents. Individuals with low trust levels usually live closely with each other, prompting the application of distrust between them and constantly worsening their trust levels further (Lu and Wan 2014). However, rural-to-urban migrants usually relocate to urban spaces which are already resided by a group of individuals within their rural network. Individuals of the city-living rural communities are able to socially support each other, despite their lack of social ties with local urban citizens (Li and Mao 2018). These rural *hukou* holders would, for example, mutually help each other seek housings and find urban jobs, alongside co-organising social gatherings. In the urban labour market, the lack or absence of local kinship networks and friendship ties may restrain rural-to-urban migrant labourers' employment opportunities (Fan et al. 2009). Such social support is known as migrants' support network, facilitating transactions or exchanges of financial, informational, physical, emotional and other types of support among migrant communities. Migrants' support networks are predominantly built from kin and places of origin (Xu and Palmer 2011).

For future research directions, the author will assess how an inherited *hukou* status is associated with different levels of social trust, and whether rural *hukou* holders predominantly fail to obtain as much social support and help, when necessary, as their local rural, and especially urban counterparts do. Moreover, for local rural dwellers who are less likely to face everyday social stigmatisation and discrimination by local urban residents due to their absence of shared social space and resources, the author will study whether they enjoy a far higher degree of social ties and trust relative to their rural counterparts of urban destinations. By studying these relationships longitudinally, the author hopes to understand whether the growth of institutional liberalisation and population mobility in

urban space and in China, in general, curtails or widens the gaps of social network and trust enjoyed by different parties (i.e., local rural citizens, rural-to-urban migrants and local urban citizens).

Within the country, community and social memberships given to rural *hukou* holders have been ameliorated. In recent decades, the rapid sustainable economic development of China has increased the financial and administrative capacity of local government agencies. As a result, social insurance programmes, including the Basic Healthcare Insurance, have been widely delivered (Huang and Guo 2017). Moreover, in Guangdong Province, for example, rural-to-urban migrants and the local urban citizens received the same insurance benefits so far as both contribute equally to the insurance pool; in Shanghai and Chengdu, both groups are offered separate, yet parallel, insurance schemes (Huang and Guo 2017). The implementation of such social policies aims at minimising the gaps of social protection and benefits owned between rural-to-urban migrants and local urban citizens.

Existing literature argues that, even though there are narrowing gaps in social insurance enjoyed between rural-to-urban migrants and local urban citizens, such disparities remain profound (Bengoa and Rick 2020). Although rural-to-urban migrants have been entitled to an improved level of social insurance coverage, the percentage of such groups with any form of social insurance or pension remains very low. According to the data of the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (CMHRSS), in 2017, some 22% of rural-to-urban migrant workers were protected by basic pension or medical insurance, 27% were given work-related injury insurance and 17% enjoyed unemployment insurance (China Labour Bulletin 2021). Additionally, three public insurance programmes have been primarily offered nationwide. The New Rural Cooperative Medical System (NRCMS), which was enforced in 2002, is designated for rural populations. Rural-to-urban migrants are still covered by the scheme. However, as these migrant groups are unable to use such healthcare benefits in cities, they experience further social disadvantages. Local urban citizens receive basic medical welfare based on the Urban Employees Basic Medical Insurance (UEBMI), which was established in 1998, and the Urban Residents Basic Medical Insurance (URBMI), which was implemented in 2007 (Bengoa and Rick 2020). The contribution to urban health insurance schemes is only made mandatory for employees holding urban *hukou* and those owning long-term employment contracts. As a result, ample rural-to-urban migrant labourers do not receive any health insurance benefits from employment (Bengoa and Rick 2020). Uncertainty remains in these contexts on whether local rural or local urban citizens are more likely to be protected by social insurance and on to what degree are rural-to-urban migrants behind in terms access to social insurance. In additional future research, the author will respond to such uncertainties in detail.

Despite fewer social insurance opportunities, rural-to-urban migrants are still socially insured to some extent. For example, the local government of Jiangsu Province enables rural-to-urban migrants to voluntarily purchase commercial insurance (Huang et al. 2014). Unlike local urban counterparts who are mandatorily bound to social insurance schemes, rural-to-urban migrants can decide if they would like to be socially insured, with the exception of work injury insurance that is paid by the employers (Huang et al. 2014). It is, therefore, plausible to argue that rural-to-urban migrants are less socially insured than their local urban counterparts, due to the voluntary, rather than compulsory, basis of the contribution to the corresponding social insurance scheme. However, nationally representative studies should be examined in order to understand how the existence of social insurance is distributed throughout the country.

Moreover, individuals without urban *hukou* are required to pay for public hospital services when used, since they are often excluded from the local urban medical insurance programmes (Niu and Qi 2015). Hence, rural *hukou* holders are more likely to visit private clinics for medical services than their local urban counterparts. Private clinics are smaller in scale, less developed and poorer equipped than public hospitals (Bengoa and Rick 2020). City-based rural *hukou* holders are additionally not entitled to urban unemployment relief benefits (Chan 2010). It is, therefore, noteworthy that relevant researchers should measure

the social security, as part of social welfare, Chinese citizens enjoy beyond only social and healthcare insurance.

Song and Smith (2019) studied 2015 China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) and 2014 CHARLS life history data. They employed multistage stratified probability proportional to size sampling; the sampling frame contained all county-level units nationwide, with the exception of Tibet. Their findings revealed that local urban *hukou* holders have better healthcare access than local rural *hukou*-holding counterparts. Moreover, local rural *hukou* holders are more likely to own ongoing healthcare insurance than rural-to-urban migrants do. Furthermore, unlike local rural citizens, rural-to-urban migrants cannot maximise their usage of land-use rights—a state-owned social welfare designated for rural *hukou* holders—for generating earnings by participation in agricultural work, due to their presence in cities (Huang et al. 2014). In such a circumstance, the migrant groups are, therefore, further socially disadvantaged compared to their local rural counterparts. However, Song and Smith failed to examine social welfare and benefits beyond healthcare insurance. Social capital can only be fully investigated upon the inclusion of most, if not all, forms of social welfare and insurance which are alternatives to healthcare insurance in data analysis. For example, non-contributory welfare programmes commonly include aging subsidies, elderly services, the Urban Basic Living Standard Guarantee (UBLSG) for low-income families and public housing. In most circumstances, these non-contributory welfare programmes are exclusively provided to local *hukou* holders, although eligibility requirements vary among cities. Therefore, rural-to-urban migrants, owning no local *hukou* in cities, are institutionally excluded from enjoying these welfare programmes (Huang and Guo 2017). Relevant researchers should, again, take a range of social welfare into account when measuring the levels of social capital owned by Chinese citizens.

The possession of insurance has higher levels of benefits for individuals with lower SES and education level (Bengoa and Rick 2020). SES is measured by parental education, parental occupation, family wealth and home educational resources (Byun and Pong 2016). Therefore, insurance that is given to low-skilled rural-to-urban migrants, relative to their better-skilled migrant and local urban counterparts, has a relatively higher positive impact on their own social security. However, such poorer-educated, low-skilled migrant groups are largely excluded from social welfare, including insurance and entitlement. This is because these groups are less likely to secure better-paid and prestigious jobs that are usually associated with higher levels of social benefits (Gao 2010; Huang and Guo 2017). Moreover, despite the growth of social welfare entitlement to rural-to-urban migrants in general, currently, some forms of institutional barriers to their social security exist. For example, in Guangdong Province, rural-to-urban migrants are permitted to withdraw their social insurance contributions; yet, employers are required to mandatorily and continually contribute to the social pooling of insurance. Even though such a system ostensibly ensures that rural-to-urban migrants are protected from social insurance policies within the province, their interests are significantly harmed if they decide to migrate to other regions, as they are denied when withdrawing their shares of the social pooling of insurance (Huang and Guo 2017). This means that social insurance entitled to rural-to-urban migrants regionwide is not portable when they decide to relocate to other provinces. As a result, Guangdong-based rural-to-urban migrants are institutionally exploited, and their geographical and occupational mobility may plausibly be hindered.

Huang et al. (2014) surveyed over 2806 rural-to-urban migrants in Jiangsu Province. They found that higher-skilled and elite rural-to-urban migrants are more active when participating in different welfare programmes. The welfare programmes are usually extended to cover such elite migrant groups, because they have edges in market competition and are more capable to strengthen local economic development. For example, Beijing attracts better-educated and better-skilled rural-to-urban migrants to work in technology, commercial services and management occupations. Some 7% of Beijing *hukou* holders are migrants working in these occupations (Song 2016). However, Huang et al. failed to indicate whether the variety of welfare programmes is transferrable between provinces. If

not, rural-to-urban migrants would encounter some extent of socioоccupational vulnerability, despite their active participation in such programmes. When rural–urban gaps on social welfare entitlements increasingly narrow and the population mobility is growingly welcomed, it is likely that more better-skilled migrant groups will take up white-collar jobs in advanced cities in the future.

In future research projects, the author will longitudinally explore the patterns of socioоccupational conditions of rural *hukou* holders residing in cities, prompting the understanding of whether further liberalising the welfare system is needed in order to ensure that more better-educated and better-skilled migrant labourers are given the benefits they deserve. Moreover, research outputs will hint whether an improvement in quality educational opportunities given to rural *hukou* holders, welcoming lower-skilled rural-to-urban migrant workers to work in SOEs or alternative approaches, will be conducive to equalising the social welfare given to both rural and urban *hukou* holders. Additionally, the author will assess whether an increase in social welfare given to rural *hukou* holders with lower SES, relative to rural *hukou* holders with upper SES and urban *hukou* holders, has a significantly or marginally positive effect, if any, on raising their overall social position. The outcomes can possibly suggest whether Chinese policymakers should relatively focus on delivering more social welfare to vulnerable rather than privileged groups.

As insurance schemes have been increasingly designed to accommodate the rise in rural-to-urban migration, the need for *hukou* conversion for insurance participation diminished (Huang and Guo 2017). However, in terms of social welfare as a whole, individuals are primarily entitled to such social benefits of where their *hukou* is based. The *hukou* system establishes a disconnection between rural-to-urban migrants' residence and their enjoyment of social welfare (Huang et al. 2014). It is the ownership of urban *hukou*, rather than residence, that serves as a gateway to a suite of social resources for rural-to-urban migrants. By converting their *hukou* from rural to urban status, individuals of rural origins can gain access to, for example, more and better-quality healthcare services, affordable housing and children's schooling opportunities. In addition to the facilitation of *hukou* conversion, extending the coverage of non-contributory welfare programmes can also be achieved by relaxing thresholds for access to public services (Huang and Guo 2017). Such a relaxation can enable more rural-to-urban migrants to be protected by state-funded social and public welfare schemes to some extent. China's endeavours to integrate rural *hukou*-holding labourers into urban economies are, in part, in the hope that these rural-to-urban migrant labourers can earn and spend more financial resources in order to further drive China's economic growth (No Urban Life in Sight for Many of China's Migrant Workers 2014). However, the Central Government fails to meet such a goal, as they exclude labourers of rural origins from expanding their socioeconomic capacity, resulting in the fact that many of them can barely meet their ends. It is, therefore, needed to produce research outputs that can hint interventions in order to mitigate the socioeconomic difficulties of labourers of rural origins. By raising the SES of rural *hukou* holders, the Central Government can improve and sustain China's long-term economic development, in addition to minimising the amount of rural *hukou* holders, either based in villages or cities, who live in poverty.

5. Parental Barriers to Upward Social Mobility Apart from Inherited *Hukou* Status

Increasing underprivileged rural groups' education level is a means to strengthen rural *hukou* holders' socioeconomic capacity in the long-term, as human capital can be accumulated to generate individuals' life chances. However, as the author mentioned before, existing literature argues that rural education is always subject to poor teaching facilities and teacher quality, relative to its urban counterparts (Ding and Lehrer 2012; Golley and Kong 2013; Wang 2002; Wang and Gao 2013). Moreover, at work, local citizens in rural agricultural provinces face high unemployment and poor income levels (Ness 2013). In order to improve rural households' financial wellbeing and social position, in 2019, an estimated 291 million rural-to-urban migrant labourers nationwide—comprising more than

one-third (36 percent to be specific) of the entire working population—relocated to cities to seek for better job and educational opportunities (China Labour Bulletin 2021). The children of these migrants have been either left behind in rural areas or moved to cities along with their parents. In this section, the author singles out the relationship between the inheritance of cultural and linguistic resources from parents and their next generation's upward social mobility opportunities; then, the author will discuss this relationship in the following section.

For rural children as a whole, the higher their parents' education levels, the more time and financial resources they would invest in their children's education. In addition, higher-educated parents respect their children's decisions with respect to extra-curricular development more. Moreover, unlike the less-educated counterparts, higher-educated parents usually work for jobs that are less physically demanding and have fewer working hours, so they have can spare time and are in better mood conditions to educate their children after work (C. Zhang 2018; J. Zhang 2018). Chen et al. (2009) studied 2002 Chinese Household Income Project Survey (CHIPS); the survey data cover 12 provinces and municipalities of China, including Beijing, Guangdong and Gansu. Two-stage random sampling method was adopted for data collection of this survey. Chen et al. found that the broader the parental social network and the higher the paternal education level and the presence of paternal political membership, the more likely sample respondents could gain entry in high-income industries. In this context, paternal social and educational resources were particularly conducive to help sample respondents secure better-conditioned urban than rural jobs. Such findings hinted that rural-to-urban migrants may require the possession of paternal resources for upward occupational trajectory more than their local rural counterparts, as such resources are particularly lacking among migrant groups. Moreover, the presence of paternal party membership is equivalent to an addition of 10 years of paternal education in terms of facilitating sample respondents' entry to high-income industries (Chen et al. 2009). The findings implied that fathers' political affiliation is significantly beneficial to Chinese citizens' promising career entry, relative to fathers' additional education level. However, Chen et al. carried out their study almost two decades ago. It is necessary to study the associations between individuals' social positions and paternal or parental education level and political affiliation with the use of more up-to-date secondary datasets.

6. Cultural and Linguistic Disadvantages Faced by Rural *Hukou* Holders

Rural *hukou* holders further encounter cultural and linguistic barriers to education; the extent of such barriers is influenced by the origins and behaviour of their parents. Rural-to-urban migrant groups, for example, often encounter acculturation barriers, namely obstacles to secure cultural capital (Lin et al. 2011). Cultural capital encompasses cultural knowledge in the forms of, for example, music; literature and arts; and linguistic competence (Atkinson 2010; Eijck 1999). Individuals with more initial reserves of cultural capital are associated with further academic and occupational successes (Friedman 2012). Chinese individuals of rural origins may not be native speakers in Mandarin, but China's education curricula mandatorily require the use of Mandarin as the exclusive medium of instruction among all but a few westernised public higher education institutions. Individuals communicating in rural dialects face significant language barriers and prejudices when studying in upper-tier urban schools and higher education institutions (Dello-Iacovo 2009). Byun (2007) argued that speaking legitimate languages, either authentic English or languages that local urban individuals prefer, is seen as a behaviour to preserve some extent of highbrow culture. Therefore, in Chinese contexts, those who are not proficient in English or Mandarin often face some forms of cultural and linguistic disadvantages.

In addition rural dialects, the clothes, behaviour and speech of rural *hukou* holders can easily be identified by local urban counterparts. These symbolic identities are considered undesirable cultural characteristics by local urban dwellers (Hu and Salazar 2008). The institutional *hukou* system and cultural discrimination and prejudice against rural culture are intertwined. The *hukou* system has heightened the stigmatisation and inferiority of

rural cultures (Hu and Salazar 2008). Such literature corresponds to qualitative studies that investigate rural-to-urban migrants' *suzhi*. *Suzhi* is defined as "the innate and nurtured physical, psychological, intellectual, moral, and ideological qualities of human bodies and their conduct." In Chinese contexts, *suzhi* is understood as the biological and social differences between individuals, communities and populations where the place of origin, class background and educational attainment are all taken into account when measuring such a concept. Those identified as having low *suzhi* are regarded as inferior and marginalised in the social hierarchy. Rural migrant populations in Chinese cities are usually stigmatised as "low *suzhi*," as their non-urban lifestyles and symbols are seen as inferior (e.g., Qian 2018; Jacka 2009). Migrant groups' continual display of traits in association with their rural *hukou* would reinforce their experience of social discrimination, limiting their opportunities to acquire life chances in cities in the long-run.

Additional literature argues that when focusing on the development of students' highbrow culture, teachers and language assistants should concentrate on expanding students' knowledge about Western arts, literature and other similar interests (Laborda et al. 2020). On the contrary, when developing students' lowbrow culture, teachers and language assistants should be primarily focused on classroom settings; teaching staff should educate students' habits, everyday life customs and similar fields (Laborda et al. 2020). In Chinese contexts, based on the policies of higher education admissions, students with talents in legitimatised arts are given bonus admission points. Those of rural origins, however, find these expensive extra-curricular activities less financially accessible, which makes students of rural origins suffer from further disadvantages in terms of entering better higher education institutions or building their higher-brow cultural confidence (Zhao 2014). Their slim opportunities of entering elite higher education further restrict their life chances in maximising cultural potentials and converting *hukou* to urban status.

It is noteworthy that Pierre Bourdieu introduced the term *habitus*, arguing people's "dispositions formed out of practical engagement with the materially shaped environment shared by those close in social space" (Atkinson 2010, p. 11). Bourdieu argued that individuals' cultural preferences are influenced by their judgment, action and perception based on the social conditions in their education systems, household units and adulthood. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) believed that cultural capital is reproductive, because every individual is inclined to reinforce the structure of the allocation of cultural capital according to their classes and symbolic and material interests. They noted that highbrow cultures are often shared by upper classes as cultural tastes that are labelled as the dominant aesthetic. However, lowbrow cultures—cultures that privileged individuals rarely value or prefer, and those whom demonstrate an interest in and the possession of these cultural tastes tend to be discriminated or marginalized—are viewed as inferior cultural interests that are primarily shared by lower classes (Friedman 2014). These arguments suggest that lower SES groups who dominate lowbrow cultural resources are barred from entering the *habitus* shared by their upper SES counterparts in which social positions are plausibly culturally reproduced among generations.

Existing literature argues *habitus*, or cultural boundaries, is weakening, as upwardly mobile populations may be introduced to highbrow cultures and a rising number of individuals belonging to upper classes are accepting lowbrow cultures (Chan and Turner 2017; Daenekindt and Roose 2014). However, it is noteworthy that most individuals still tend to strengthen their own *habitus*. The formation of *habitus* by upper classes—space where members dominate the most resources and opportunities—discourages those of rural origins and those with lower education and skill levels from entering their social circles. Such a circumstance limits low SES groups' upward social mobility opportunities.

7. Conclusions

After the discussion of structural inequalities and institutional barriers to social mobility the rural Chinese population is facing, it is important to briefly outline, in this paper, the arguably most direct approach to tackle such barriers—the further relaxation of the

hukou system. Under the *hukou* relaxation in recent decades, rural *hukou* holders with higher education qualifications and better skills may be able to secure professional and managerial positions. Such a circumstance results in a more sustainable lifestyle in cities. However, unless they officially convert their *hukou* to urban status, their next generations will otherwise continue to encounter parentally inherited structural, institutional disadvantages in occupational, social, cultural, educational, political and other dimensions (Zhao and Li 2019).

In order to gradually root out structural and institutional unfairness, the importance of continual *hukou* reform policies is second to none. Despite Chinese Government's endeavours in unifying *hukou* status and the erasing urban–rural distinction, spatial inequalities remain profound, and the continuation of *hukou* reforms is urgently needed for the purpose of increasing rural-to-urban migrant communities' sustainability when residing in cities. Bengoa and Rick (2020) reported that the major reasons for *hukou* conversion are distributed as follows: education (33.3%), purchases of urban properties (29.7%), land expropriation (20.7%) and employment to work for professional and managerial positions (12.15). Additionally, regional communities may require individuals to meet some locally set "entry conditions" in order to convert their *hukou* from rural to urban status. For example, in Guizhou Province, urban *hukou* is given to migrant groups who satisfy the income level and residence requirements, and in Shanxi Province, urban *hukou* is distributed to migrant communities who are willing to relocate to remote areas to reclaim desert lands via tree planting (Wang 2005).

According to the 2002 Law on Land Contract in Rural Areas, to undertake rural-to-urban *hukou* conversion, rural *hukou* holders need to return their lands to the local governments without any compensation (Meng 2016). For rural *hukou* holders who anticipate the appreciation of their land values as a result of potential local commercial and industrial development, returning their lands might cost them financially in the long-term. However, in return, *hukou*-converted individuals and their next generations can ostensibly enjoy a fairer share of multifaceted "privileges" that are designated for urban *hukou* communities, insofar as they decide to relocate to cities.

For future research focus, the author will analyse what parental factors positively impact individuals' social mobility. Research outputs can hint at relevant Chinese social policymaking by prioritising the delivery of factors that have significant, rather than marginal, positive impacts on underprivileged rural populations, as a response to lessening the problems of intergenerational social immobility and poverty, in addition to the spatial inequalities between rural and urban regions. Such outcomes can facilitate the realisation of social, economic and sustainability issues encountered by rural-to-urban migrant populations.

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