Research Report for India China Institute

Urban Migrant Workers' Social Integration
– A Comparative Study of Three Cities in China
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This project investigates the differences in urban migrant workers' life experiences and the process of social integration in three cities of China – Beijing, Shenzhen, and Xiamen. It aims to show how public policies at local levels can make a difference in the complex adaptation and integration process in which migrant workers' identities are established, evaluated, challenged, denied, and re-established. The main research question is "how does the social integration status of urban migrant workers in the three cities vary?" Specifically, it explores the following three questions: (1) What are the differences and similarities in public and social policies across the three cities regarding the social integration of migrant workers? (2) How do urban migrant workers' characteristics, such as their hukou status and educational level, affect their social integration status? (3) What are the inequalities and struggles migrant workers have experienced when it comes to the key issues of political rights, employment opportunities, access to public services, and urban adaptation?

China witnessed a large influx of rural laborers into cities over the past 30 years due to rapid economic development and urbanization. In 2020, 286 million migrant workers (approximately 36% of the total workforce) existed in China. Migrant workers have become an indispensable labor force of urban economic development there. Yet, under the constraints of the household registration (hukou) system, migrant workers and their children are often excluded from access to health, education and other basic social benefits and suffer from unfair treatment and discrimination. [1]

Migrant workers face tremendous challenges in social integration and identity confusion. On the one hand, they work and live in an urban environment but are not treated the same as their urban peers due to their rural hukou status. On the other hand, they do not have a strong sense of belonging to their hometowns because they only visit a few days out of the year. In the face of the increasing population, some host cities adopt policies and strategies to make it more difficult for migrant workers to seek jobs and stay, while other cities formulate relevant policies to promote the social integration of the migrant population.

This project focuses on urban migrant workers in three cities in China – Beijing, Shenzhen, and Xiamen for two reasons. First, Beijing and Shenzhen adopt a point-based hukou settlement policy to grant urban citizenship to migrant workers. Xiamen, on the other hand, takes a relatively easy approach, and migrant workers just need to provide some documents, such as for

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[1] Formally established in 1958, the hukou system divides citizens into two strata based on each citizen's original birthplace: urban hukou holders (non-agricultural hukou holders) and rural holders (agricultural hukou holders). Hukou status is inherited; descendants of agricultural hukou holders also hold a rural hukou. Although hukou status can be changed with government approval either through work or education, this process can be very complicated due to strict government policies and quotas.

residence permits, and they can obtain local hukou. Second, Beijing has the lowest migrant population proportion among the four megacities (Chongqing, Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen) in China, while Shenzhen has the highest. Xiamen had the highest score on a social integration index of the urban migrant population in 2017 based on a national social integration assessment report. A comparative study in these three cities can show the difference in public policies regarding the hukou reform and the range of social integration status of migrant workers in contemporary China.

This project employs a mixed methodology to answer the research questions. The quantitative analysis draws data from China Migrants Dynamic Survey (CMDS) in 2011 and 2017. The CMDS survey mainly targets migrants and provides nationally representative data of migrants and migrant households. In the 2011 CMDS survey, there were 4,000 migrant workers from Beijing, 3,760 from Shenzhen, and 1,000 from Xiamen. In the 2017 CMDS survey, 6,999 migrant workers were from Beijing, 1,999 from Shenzhen, and 1,999 from Xiamen.

The qualitative research was supposed to conduct through in-depth and in-person interviews with local government officials, migrant workers, and their children. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, unfortunately, I was unable to travel to China and conduct my fieldwork during the fellowship period. I have changed my original plan to complete the interviews via WeChat, the most popular Chinese messaging app. I have secured a group of target interviewees in each city through my networks. This work is still ongoing. For this reason, this report only presents the quantitative analysis results.

The status of social integration in this project is measured by migrant workers' answers to five statements in CMDS surveys. Figure 1 presents the five statements related to social integration. For each statement, migrant workers are asked whether they "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree" with it.

Figure 1. Social Integration Measurement Framework

Overall, Xiamen achieved the highest social integration of migrant workers among the three cities, followed by Beijing and Shenzhen. By hukou status and educational level, migrant workers with urban hukou and/or higher educational levels had better social integration than migrant workers with urban hukou and/or higher educational levels. Table 1 to Table 5 in Appendix present the results. Specifically, when asked about their opinions about the statement "I love the city where I am at," in 2011, 56.8% of surveyed migrant workers from Xiamen strongly agreed with this statement. The ratios for Beijing and Shenzhen were 47% and 28.7%, respectively. In terms of the statement "I pay attention to the city's changes," both Beijing and Xiamen had almost half of the surveyed migrant workers who strongly agreed with this statement, while Shenzhen only had 31.78%. Viewed by hukou status, migrant workers with urban hukou were obviously more likely to pay attention to local change than rural migrant workers. For example, 60.03% of urban migrant workers from Beijing paid more attention to local changes, while only 50.42% of rural migrant workers did so.

Regarding the statement "I want to be a member of the local community," 52.8% of migrant workers from Beijing strongly agree with this statement, with Xiamen having the second-highest ratio (47.3%) and Shenzhen having the lowest ratio (32.07%). Likewise, a larger share of urban migrant workers in all three cities wanted to be local community members than rural migrant workers. The fourth and fifth statements measure the sense of belonging of migrant workers. The results show that migrant workers in Xiamen felt more welcome by local residents and were less likely to be looked down on than those in Beijing and Shenzhen. The differences between urban and rural migrant workers were prominent, with urban migrant workers feeling much more welcome than rural peers in all three cities. These patterns persist from 2011 to 2017, with a slight improvement in the social integration status of migrant workers in Shenzhen.

Like the results viewed by hukou status, migrant workers' educational levels also impacted their social integration status. In general, migrant workers with at least a high school degree had higher social integration status than those without a high school degree. This conclusion is drawn from the results based on the surveyed migrant workers' answers to the five statements. Detailed comparison results are presented in Figures 2 to 6 in Appendix.

These results mainly answer the second proposed research question. The first and third research questions will be answered once the online interviews and qualitative analysis are complete. This project contributes to ICI's research theme relating to prosperity and inequality in China. It contributes to the literature in three aspects:

1. It presents how public policies implemented by local governments shape migrant workers' lived experiences and social integration differently during the rapid urbanization process.
2. It expands the application of social integration theory, the theory of the right to the city, and the theory of urban citizenship in understanding the challenges and dilemmas faced by migrant workers under current institutional settings.

3. It prompts policy recommendations to reduce the discrimination, isolation, and stigmatization that migrant workers suffer from and build a more inclusive and equal society.

With ICI's financial and intellectual support, I hired a research assistant from China who helped me collect relevant policy documents, data, and book purchases. The generous funding also enabled me to provide monetary incentives to recruit enough interviewees to participate in this project. Based on this project, I aim to publish two academic journal papers with my mentor, Mark Frazier. I will keep ICI updated on the progress of the writing and producing these two academic papers.

Appendix

Table 1. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I love the city where I am at."

2011	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	0.8	0.97	1.99	0.6
Disagree	2.44	2.35	4.49	1
Agree	51.82	49.68	64.81	41.6
Strongly agree	44.94	47	28.7	56.8
2017	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	0.88	0.81	0.7	0.45
Disagree	1.78	1.93	1.85	0.4
Agree	54.35	46.02	59.48	40.17
Strongly agree	42.99	51.24	37.97	58.98

2011	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	1.35	0.56	1.96	1.65	0	0.54
Disagree	3.59	2.22	5.1	3.86	0	0.72
Agree	46.41	46.62	64.31	65.24	36.11	39.86
Strongly agree	48.65	50.6	28.63	29.25	63.89	58.89
2017	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	0.96	0.69	0.31	0.82	0.95	0.34
Disagree	1.69	1.96	0.92	1.97	0	0.45
Agree	40.78	49.03	49.69	62.69	46.67	39.9
Strongly agree	56.58	48.32	49.08	34.52	52.38	59.31

Table 2. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I pay attention to the city's changes."

2011	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	0.71	0.7	1.54	0.4
Disagree	3.61	4.03	4.34	2.4
Agree	52.1	45.9	62.34	48.1
Strongly agree	43.58	49.38	31.78	49.1
2017	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	0.99	0.76	0.65	0.75
Disagree	3.69	2.29	4.1	2.8
Agree	54.11	45.85	58.58	42.12
Strongly agree	41.22	51.11	36.67	54.33

2011	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	0.3	0.51	1.96	1.14	0	0.72
Disagree	2.69	4.03	3.79	4.32	1.39	0.9
Agree	36.98	45.05	56.86	64.56	34.72	48.47
Strongly agree	60.03	50.42	37.39	29.97	63.89	49.91
2017	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	0.73	0.8	0.61	0.63	0.95	0.79
Disagree	1.51	2.65	1.23	4.76	0	2.98
Agree	38.63	49.77	52.15	60.91	43.81	42.32
Strongly agree	59.13	46.79	46.01	33.69	55.24	53.91

Table 3. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I want to be a member of local community."

2011	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	1.11	1.12	1.84	0.7
Disagree	6.33	5	8.3	4.3
Agree	48.39	41.8	57.79	47.7
Strongly agree	44.17	52.8	32.07	47.3
2017	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	1.01	0.74	1.15	0.65
Disagree	5.85	3.36	8.05	4.4
Agree	51.95	42.32	56.73	43.42
Strongly agree	41.19	53.58	34.07	53.58

2011	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural

Strongly disagree	1.2	0.83	1.57	1.74	0	0.9
Disagree	2.84	5.46	4.31	9.07	2.78	2.87
Agree	34.73	39.63	56.08	58.2	33.33	45.96
Strongly agree	61.23	54.07	38.04	30.99	63.89	50.27
2017	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	0.82	0.69	0.61	1.27	0.95	0.56
Disagree	1.46	4.31	3.99	8.95	6.67	4.45
Agree	35.11	46.23	47.85	59.45	39.05	44.23
Strongly agree	62.6	48.77	47.55	30.33	53.33	50.76

Table 4. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I feel local residents are willing to accept me as a member of the local community."

2011	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	1.09	1.52	2.79	0.5
Disagree	7.48	11.82	13.09	5.3
Agree	55.39	51.55	64.63	56.9
Strongly agree	36.05	35.1	19.49	37.3
2017	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	1.06	0.87	1.6	0.4
Disagree	6.05	6.46	12.86	5.9
Agree	56.87	53.21	62.63	55.18
Strongly agree	36.02	39.46	22.91	38.52

2011	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	2.1	1.44	1.57	3.01	0	0.72
Disagree	5.99	12.82	10.07	13.69	2.78	5.57
Agree	48.05	49.68	66.01	64.77	45.83	57.27
Strongly agree	43.86	36.06	22.35	18.52	51.39	36.45
2017	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	0.46	1.11	0.61	1.84	0	0.34
Disagree	3.79	7.83	8.28	14.15	3.81	6.19
Agree	47.67	56.17	56.75	64.72	54.29	55.77
Strongly agree	48.08	34.89	34.36	19.29	41.9	37.7

Table 5. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I feel local residents always look down on me."

2011	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	27.77	18.25	16.62	26.4
Disagree	47.93	39.15	47.9	58.7
Agree	19.42	33.62	27.71	12.3
Strongly agree	4.88	8.97	7.77	2.6
2017	Total	Beijing	Shenzhen	Xiamen
Strongly disagree	28.5	24.42	22.31	33.02
Disagree	54.54	56.47	58.33	55.53
Agree	14.22	15.99	17.01	10.01
Strongly agree	2.74	3.13	2.35	1.45

2011	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	19.16	18.8	19.08	15.68	37.5	26.21
Disagree	42.81	36.76	50.46	47.44	52.78	59.78
Agree	29.64	35	24.44	28.15	8.33	10.95
Strongly agree	8.38	9.44	6.01	8.73	1.39	3.05
2017	Beijing		Shenzhen		Xiamen	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Strongly disagree	30.78	20.86	28.83	20.3	33.33	32.19
Disagree	53.65	58.04	54.6	59.26	59.19	56.05
Agree	13.33	17.52	15.64	17.7	9.52	10.24
Strongly agree	2.24	3.58	0.92	2.73	0.95	1.52

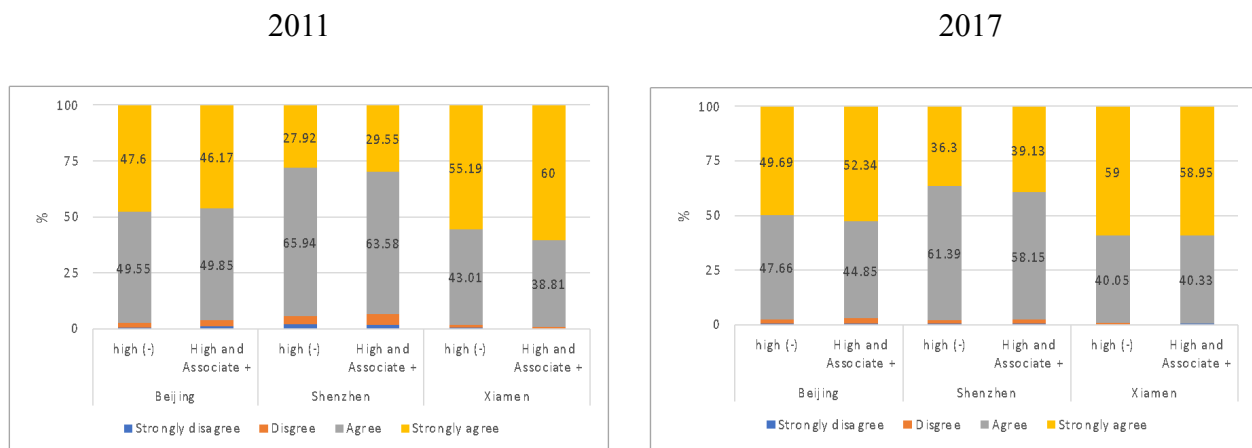

Figure 2. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I love the city where I am at.

2011   2017

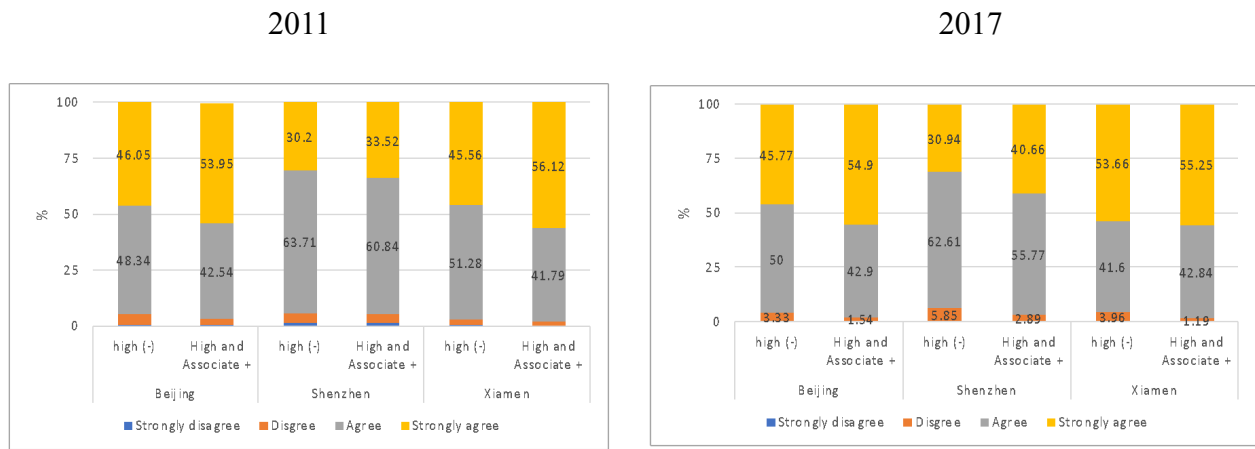

Figure 3. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I pay attention to the city's changes."

2011   2017
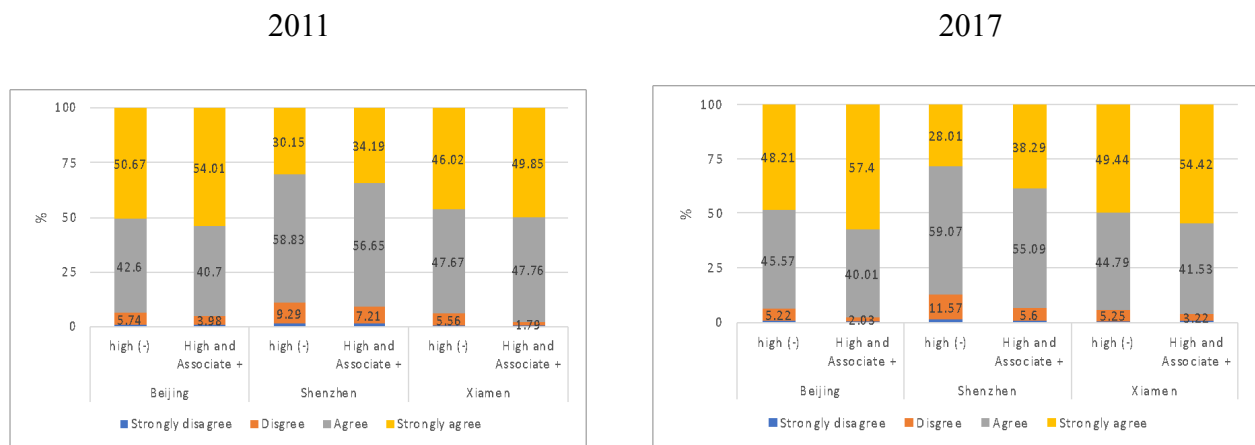

Figure 4. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I want to be a member of the local community."
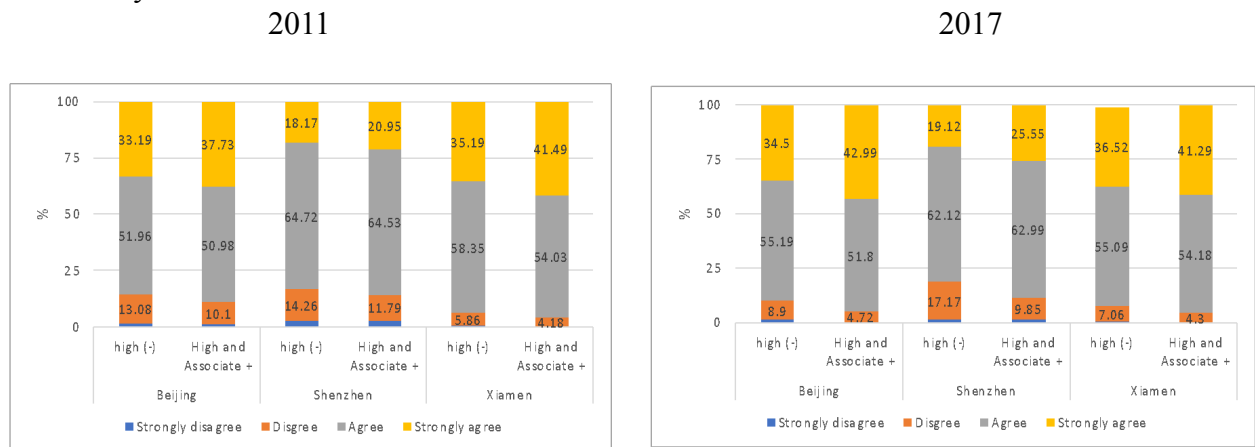
2011   2017

Figure 5. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I feel local residents are willing to accept me as a member of the local community."

2011

2017

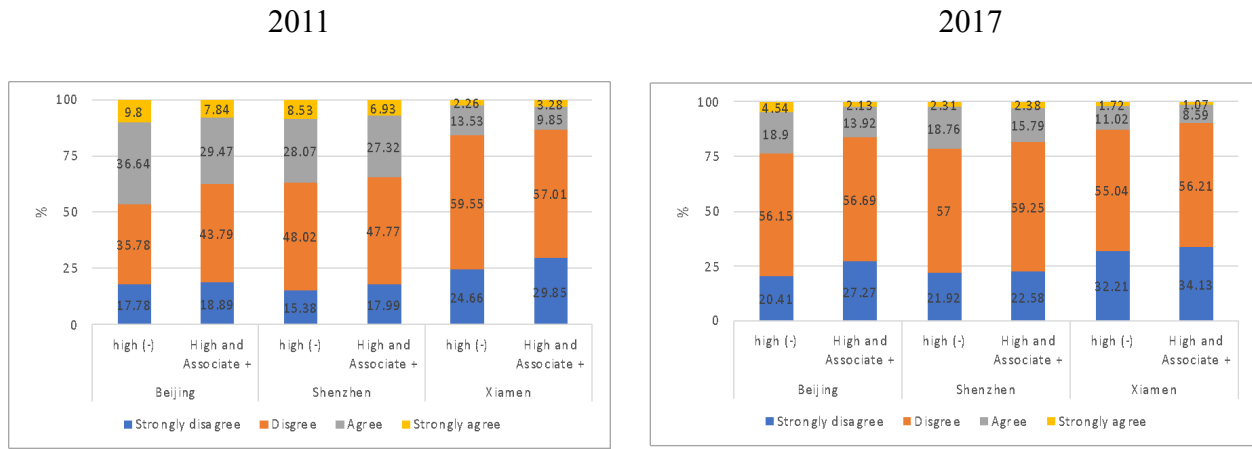Figure 6. Surveyed migrant workers' answers to "I feel local residents always look down on me.