

Abstract

The *hukou* system is the most important institution to determine the urban citizenship of Chinese people. It has well adapted itself with times and remained potent after several waves of reform. The paper tracks the change in the registered population of selected cities in the past 30 years to analyse how large the gate of the *hukou* system has been opened and under what circumstances urban citizenship is conferred to the migrants in Chinese metropolis, with special reference to Shanghai. Facing the flooding migration, the Shanghai Municipal Government has introduced a residence card system without challenging the existing *hukou* system. Blended new wine in an old bottle, a hierarchical structure of population registration and management has been set up leading to a complex system of citizenship stratification.

Keywords: *hukou*; residence card system; urban citizenship, China