

Institutional Tension and Social Policy Adaptation in the Citizenization Process: A “Demand–Resource–Institution” Analytical Framework for Rural-to-Urban Migrants

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Abstract: Amid Asia’s rapid urbanization, integration of large-scale rural and urban migrant has become a core governance challenge. China has applied a protracted process aimed at citizenizing hundreds of millions of migrants; nevertheless, widespread “semi-urbanization” indicates a persistent gap exists between formal *hukou* conversion and real social inclusion. Using a social policy lens, we examine China as a critical case and the roles assigned to—and the institutional failures of—social policy in citizenization and propose a three-dimensional “demand–resource–institution” framework to pinpoint the main barriers to citizenship: structural ruptures in demand identification, resource allocation, and institutional design. Escaping “semi-urbanization” requires shifting from fragmented welfare provision to an integrated social-policy regime built on equal rights and inclusion. This analysis of China yields theoretical insights into state-led citizenization and a comparative policy reference for other developing Asian countries facing large-scale internal migration, rural–urban imbalance, and integration dilemmas.

Keywords: Social Policy, Rural-to-Urban Migrants, Citizenization, Social Integration, Asian Governance

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Introduction

According to the Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on National Economic and Social Development (2024), the permanent resident urbanization rate has reached 67.00 percent, signifying a shift from rapid expansion to quality enhancement. Although China's urbanization is now in its mid-to-late stage, it still lags behind the 81.00 percent average of high-income countries (Mahtta et al., 2022), leaving room for further progress. The outstanding task is to citizenize rural-to-urban migrants who have settled in cities but remain only partially integrated. Their sheer numbers make citizenization a key driver of any future increase in the urbanization rate and a direct determinant of urban growth quality and sustainability. At the central level, citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants and integrated urban-rural development have been elevated into a strategic lever for "high-quality urban development" and institutionalized through authoritative policy documents. The Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Promoting High-Quality Urban Development explicitly call for "coordinated planning and construction of urban-rural infrastructure and public-service systems, the advancement of integrated urban-rural development, and the continuous promotion of the citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants," thereby giving sub-national governments clear targets and an operational framework. This sends a high-level political-priority signal and sets stringent governance requirements.

China's urbanization has produced tangible results: millions of rural residents have purchased urban homes and completed "nominal settlement." However, public governance is judged by equity and accessibility; a physical move—*hukou* conversion plus property acquisition—does not equate to genuine citizenship. At the crux of citizenising rural-to-urban migrants is equal access to public services, institutional recognition of social rights, and substantive embeddedness in urban networks. Survey data show that although many migrants have lived in cities for years, fewer than 20 percent intend to formalize their *hukou* (Qiao et al., 2025). Only after the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China did the country strategically link urban growth to mobility governance and embed "citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants" in top-level designs and dedicated plans as an

institutionalized, phased priority (Huang & Guo, 2016). Compared to Western urbanization, China's process started late, had a thinner historical base, and rested on still-maturing institutions; citizenization policies remain under continuous experimentation. Therefore, China must sustain this effort over a longer horizon and across a broader systemic canvas by relying on institutional refinement and policy innovation.

Since the beginning of the New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, the state has consolidated livelihood-oriented governance logic into "livelihood politics". Within this framework, fragmented welfare transfers no longer meet the compound long-term demands of citizenization; consequently, systematic social policy intervention and durable institutional support are required.

Promoting the citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants is the foremost task of China's new-type urbanization. It is not merely a cross-regional, cross-sectoral process of economic participation but also a process that transcends sociocultural boundaries to achieve class integration and social inclusion. Along the way, institutional barriers produce weak inclusion and value conflicts, raising fundamental issues regarding human modernization, identity reconstruction, and social equity. Migrants who already work and live in cities continue to face institutional and social hurdles in employment, housing, education, and healthcare, making their integration fragile. More strikingly, large-scale "separation between *hukou* registration and actual residence" (Qiao, 2019) persists across intra-city, intra-provincial, and inter-provincial migrants (Li et al., 2024). This structural contradiction heightens the tension between *hukou*-based urbanization and substantive citizenization.

From a real-world demand perspective, the citizenization of rural to urban migrants is both urgent and inevitable. Rural areas face a limited resource-carrying capacity, a single-track industrial structure, and weak endogenous momentum in collective economies, making it difficult to absorb local surplus labor. In the early stages of rural industry revitalization, gains often flow disproportionately to higher-income groups if high-quality development is not achieved, deepening intra-village inequality (Wang & Liu, 2023). At the same time, persistent urban-rural disparities in public services and social welfare continue to attract rural residents, especially young and prime-aged workers, to cities in search of better life opportunities. Yet this mobility pattern creates a

“production in the city, reproduction in the countryside” dilemma: cities absorb the young labor force while the costs of child-rearing and family care are shifted back to the village (Jin, 2010). The resulting tension is temporarily buffered by intergenerational and gender-based divisions within rural households, with costs borne primarily by the elderly, women, and children. Under an urban–rural resource imbalance, the family’s buffering capacity is limited, and social grievances accumulate.

Existing studies confirm that equalized public services are key drivers of citizenization (Wu, 2012). Because migrants continually pursue better public services, even when short-term settlement is uncertain, they adopt strong family-based mobility strategies (e.g., bringing children to urban schools), thereby increasing the salience of social policy. Thus, building a high-quality, inclusive, and citizenship-based social policy system has become the central route for dismantling institutional barriers, promoting equal access to public services, and achieving the substantive citizenization of rural to urban migrants (Pan, 2017; Wang, 2018).

Nevertheless, current social policies face implementation challenges. Limited coherence in institutional design and constrained policy efficacy weaken the real-world impacts. The present policy architecture retains the features of the dual urban–rural structure, constraining migrants’ full urban integration. Piecemeal welfare provisions cannot cover the multidimensional and long-term needs of citizenization; therefore, systematic social policy intervention and institutional support are imperative.

Citizenization is not an isolated issue; it constitutes one side of the urban–rural relationship, with rural development forming the other. Rapid urbanization in East Asia since the late twentieth century has generated citizenization pressure in cities and hollowed out rural functions through continuous resource extraction. Therefore, an effective governance system must address both urban and rural developments. East Asian countries have launched rural development, regeneration, and revitalization programs to bridge the urban–rural divide (Tian, 2021). In China, successful rural revitalization depends heavily on high-quality social policy support, an imperative driven by economic considerations, social equity, and governance modernization.

Social policy is thus the key lever for simultaneously advancing “citizenization” and “rural revitalization” and rural revitalization and for

achieving integrated urban–rural development. Despite its acknowledged importance, the literature lacks an in-depth examination of the systemic functions and impact of social policy on citizenization. Grounded in China’s distinctive context, this study clarifies the theoretical foundations of social policy intervention in citizenization, analyzes the dilemmas encountered in practice, and explores future optimization pathways. Given that developing countries face similar citizenization challenges, these findings offer locally grounded insights into policy formulation across East Asia.

Conceptual Clarification of Social-Policy-Driven Citizenization of Rural-to-Urban Migrants

Before examining how social policy can propel the citizenization of rural migrants to urban migrants, we clarify several fundamental concepts. Because terms such as “rural-to-urban migrants,” “citizenization,” and “high-quality social policy” are interpreted differently across academic and policy arenas, delineating their content grounds the subsequent analysis.

Rural-to-Urban Migrants

Academic and policy circles have long diverged in defining “rural-to-urban migrants.” In scholarly literature, the term usually denotes persons who, during the rural–urban dual-structure transformation, exit agricultural *hukou* status and enter non-farm sectors and urban spaces. The defining feature is the simultaneous shift in both modes of production and way of life, closely linked to the citizenization trajectory; the archetypal example is migrant workers (Hong et al., 2021). Although the categories overlap, research on rural-to-urban migrants centers on stable urban employment, residence, and identity transformation, whereas studies on migrant workers emphasize labor attributes and employment characteristics (Ling & Li, 2025).

Government departments also employ inconsistent definitions: public security agencies restrict the term to agricultural-*hukou* persons who have already transferred their registration, while other departments

stress mobility and treat the group as a fluid migratory population. These divergent scopes blur public service eligibility boundaries and risks, excluding many de facto migrants who have not formalized their *hukou*. Therefore, an inclusive definition is required to ensure that policies meet the actual needs of all permanent residents.

Based on the mobility pattern and degree of citizenization, I classify rural-to-urban migrants into three types: (1) settled —those who have purchased urban housing and completed both *hukou* and occupational transfer; (2) migratory —constrained by the urban–rural dual entitlement structure, they move seasonally between the workplace city and their rural *hukou* locality and are often excluded from formal employment systems (Sun & Zeng, 2024); (3) new economy —engaged primarily in platform-based work, they reside long-term in cities but enjoy only precarious social protection coverage. The latter two embody the “separation between *hukou* registration and actual residence.” This typology reveals internal heterogeneity and provides a clear analytical framework for targeted policy design.

Much of the literature treats the preservation of the rural “three rights” (land contract, homestead, and collective shares) as a de facto social protection substitute and the core solution to migrants’ predicaments. This study shifts the analytical lens to the institutional supply of social policy, arguing that for the new generation, urban attraction lies in stable employment, social security, and accessible public services rather than in the possible loss of rural rights. Even when the “three rights” are formally retained, settlement intentions depend on structural conditions such as portable social insurance, equalized public services, and employment prospects. Therefore, social policy is the key variable driving citizenization and directly shapes migrants’ life satisfaction, sense of belonging, and social integration.

Citizenization

Citizenization is a systemic transformation in which rural to urban migrants move from territorial mobility to identity reconstruction. Its core aim is to shift the urban–rural dual structure toward integrated coexistence through institutional innovation, resource allocation, and rights protection involving occupational, spatial, and role transitions

(Sun et al., 2022). For China's rural-to-urban migrants, the critical steps are stabilizing land property rights via land titling (Du & Li, 2024), facilitating simultaneous occupational and identity changes within county territories, and promoting free factor mobility and policy coordination between urban and rural areas, culminating in integrated development and population modernization.

The institutional foundation of citizenization is the reshaping of public service entitlements. The key is to break the binary governance frame that distinguishes "basic" from "non-basic" services. In practice, the institutional axis should be "statutory entitlement – portable rights – sustainable livelihood": legislation must unify access to and responsibility for public services such as education and health care; social-insurance portability must be perfected to weaken identity barriers; and vocational training plus fiscal support (such as publicization of land-revenue proceeds) must secure livelihood sustainability. Citizenization is, therefore, a dynamic process driven by institutions and resource allocation rather than a static welfare outcome; its success hinges on the accessibility of rights, availability of services, and sustainability of identity change.

Studies show that treating citizenization as a social mobility process is central to understanding the phenomenon and that it should become a strategic fulcrum for achieving common prosperity (Xu, 2022). Current research focuses on the reconstruction of migrants' identity, role, and status, and its impact on behavioral patterns and cultural orientations, addressing core sociological issues such as social mobility, class structure, and cultural identification. Social policy, as a key institutional variable, operates through entitlement determination, service accessibility, and portable rights to promote social integration and identity reshaping, and at the macro level, to optimize opportunity structures and enhance vertical mobility and equity. Scientific policy design must therefore consider the multidimensional effects of social identity and adopt comprehensive governance measures to ensure that migrants gain equal opportunities and rights in the urbanization process (Xiong & Zhang, 2022). In short, citizenization should target not only *hukou* conversion, but also the citizenization of the entire permanent migrant population (Zou, 2021).

High-quality Social Policy

High-quality social policy is the key institutional underpinning of the citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants. In this paper, the term does not denote general welfare provision but emphasizes simultaneous advancement in three dimensions—targeting, systemic coherence, and professional delivery—focusing on migrants’ particular needs during citizenization (Jin & Zhang, 2025). Under the national governance framework and the centralized, unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, social policy is to be embedded and linked across three levels through cross-regional, cross-sectoral and cross-tier coordinated governance: (1) At the social level, it establishes transmission mechanisms between macro institutions and daily life, enhancing policy accessibility and perceived gains by promoting social integration and value consensus; (2) At the governmental level, it uses functional restructuring and optimized policy-tool mixes to balance equity and efficiency dynamically, strengthening public-service capacity and rights-protection effectiveness; (3) At the state level, it stabilizes the governance architecture through unified institutional supply, improved rule systems and enhanced procedural legitimacy, ensuring sustained operation of coordination mechanisms and consistent policy implementation.

Recent Party and state policies aim, through institutional design, to strengthen the equity attributes of social policy and make public resource allocation more inclusive. However, as a higher-stage institutional form, inclusive social policy usually requires mature economic conditions and fiscal capacity. Where comprehensive inclusiveness is not yet feasible, a more pragmatic path is to raise the efficiency and coordination intensity of existing resources under national coordination, calibrate policy targeting precisely, and prioritize groups that are genuinely disadvantaged and urgently needed. Thus, the value of high-quality social policy lies not merely in scale expansion but also in achieving social justice through coordinated institutional arrangements and differentiated delivery mechanisms, thereby affecting migrants’ occupational, spatial, and role transitions toward stable urban status and durable social integration.

Classically defined by Marshall (1950) and Titmuss, social policy is “the mechanism through which the state reduces risk and uncertainty and promotes equality among social members, especially in health, employment, and old-age protection, thereby enhancing intra-group

equality.” It seeks to improve livelihoods, provide welfare, balance economic and non-economic goals, and pursue social equity and progress through resource redistribution (Titmuss, 2011) with three core functions: income redistribution, social investment, and social control. In the context of rural-to-urban migrant citizenization, a high-quality social policy should focus on three objectives: (1) basic protection—housing, education, healthcare, and old-age support; (2) rights empowerment—equal rights in employment, social security, and public participation; and (3) social investment—treating social policy as a key instrument for upgrading human capital.

Operationally, citizenization-oriented social policies remain constrained by fiscal guarantees and institutional connectivity, whereas performance indicators tilt toward scale and speed. Cross-sector coordination is weak, links between education for migrant children and housing support are loose, off-site medical reimbursement is neither universal nor user-friendly, and overall policy synergy is lacking. Housing, the foundational step of integration, is particularly problematic; inelastic supply, spatial mismatch between residence and employment, and numerous entry requirements persist. At the implementation level, informational and procedural frictions abound; complex rules, inconsistent standards, high transaction and information costs, and inadequate public communication and targeted outreach create a gap between statutory eligibility and actual access, undermining both policy effectiveness and public perception.

Theoretically, research on social policy drivers of citizenship remains scarce. Chinese-language studies tend to adopt macro perspectives, examining how administrative boundary adjustments or urban–rural transition models affect livelihoods (Chen et al., 2024; Kan & Chen, 2022), or analyzing the complex effects of local development models on migration policy (Wu & Zhang, 2022)—yet rarely treat social policy as the core independent variable. In the wider East-Asian literature, the focus is on governance responses to rural shrinkage in China, Japan, and South Korea, centering on rural revitalization and the rebalancing of urban–rural relations (Li et al., 2023; 민수민, 2020) rather than on how in-migrants achieve social integration in cities.

In short, the literature stresses macro-governance structures or emphasizes rural-end development, leaving a key question under-

theorized: How can we construct a city-integration-oriented, social-policy-centered analytical framework? Scholarly agreement on both the function and the trajectory of social policy within citizenization remains absent. This study seeks to fill that gap by building an integrated social-policy framework that systematically explains and advances the substantive social integration of rural-to-urban migrants.

Analytical Framework: An Integrated Demand–Resource–Institution Model

The citizenization of rural to urban migrants is a pivotal hinge in China's new urbanization strategy. It bears on the macro-objectives of urban–rural integration and common prosperity, but also activates deeper mechanisms of social equity, domestic demand expansion, and governance modernization. Its practical significance can be summarized in three dimensions. First, by unlocking human capital potential and optimizing the spatial allocation of resources, citizenization injects sustained momentum into integrated urban–rural development (Xiang & Lu, 2022). Second, identity transition generates consumption upgrades and a higher marginal propensity to consume, helping build a domestic demand-led growth mechanism. Third, by dismantling *hukou* barriers and promoting institutional fusion, citizenization advances the integration of social structure. Although the importance of citizenization is widely acknowledged, its advancement remains constrained by insufficient momentum, resource scarcity, and institutional fragmentation. Existing studies usually focus on a single dimension—*hukou* reform or public resource allocation—yet lack a systemic framework that simultaneously incorporates differentiated demand, resource supply, and institutional change. The result is a structural mismatch between policy supply and group demand and an inability to explain the marked inter-local variation in the quality and speed of citizenization. Therefore, a more comprehensive theoretical lens is required to uncover the underlying mechanisms and the multilevel interactive logic.

This study proposes a three-dimensional demand-resource-institution integrated framework to explain how social policy drives the citizenization of rural-to-urban migrants. The framework aims not only

to reveal the motivational structure, binding conditions, and institutional logic of citizenization, but also to answer one core question: How can policy supply be efficiently matched against the complex demands of citizenization? This study makes a threefold contribution to the literature. First, by moving beyond single-institution or single-group lenses, citizenization is conceptualized as a systemic and interactive process. Second, by pinpointing the structural contradictions generated by demand heterogeneity, resource scarcity, and institutional rigidity, this study provides a theoretical anchor for policy optimization. Third, it crafts a meso-level explanatory framework that bridges macro-level institutional design and micro-level behavioral responses. Building on this foundation, the analysis deploys “institutional tension” as a conceptual lens to expose deep-seated contradictions and dynamic logic embedded within the demand–resource–institution framework (Greenwood et al., 2021).

In the course of citizenizing rural to urban migrants, institutional tensions manifest in three analytically distinct variants. During citizenship, such tension surfaces exist in three analytically distinct forms. In the first instance, there is a mismatch between heterogeneous demand and homogeneous supply: migrant groups present highly differentiated needs, whereas policy categories remain uniform and rigid, leaving substantial gaps in coverage. In the second instance, there is a conflict between resource constraints and the norm of equitable sharing: fiscal pressure compels local governments to prioritize *hukou* residents for resource allocation, institutionally excluding agricultural transfer migrants. In the third instance, a contradiction between institutional stability and institutional change: the *hukou* regime and allied legacy structures exhibit strong inertia that safeguards existing governance routines, yet this inertia directly impedes the equal-rights imperative of citizenization and retards further reform.

Existing studies show that China’s social-policy and governance change is not linear; instead, it absorbs and resolves institutional tension through multi-level bargaining, experimentation, and recalibration between “central–local” and “efficiency–equity” objectives, producing a dynamic of “tension–adjustment–institutionalization” (Guan, 2024; Mertha, 2009; Zhou, 2017). Institutional tension can, therefore, be treated as the background logic of the demand–resource–institution framework: demand heterogeneity continuously generates tension, forcing the

dynamic adjustment of resource allocation and institutional integration, while resource constraints and institutional inertia feed tension back, producing differentiated policy effects across regions and periods. Thus, citizenship is not a unidirectional implementation process, but a continuous game and adaptation driven by institutional tension.

The “internal mechanism” of citizenization refers to the stable causal relations and evolutionary logic among migrants’ behavioral choices, policy responses, and institutional settings. The Demand–resource–institution framework seeks to capture the core mechanisms that explain this complex process. Specifically, the internal mechanism operates through three mutually reinforced channels.

First, the demand-identification mechanism is a logical starting point for validating policy responses. Citizenization demands are heterogeneous and hierarchical, spanning basic needs (housing, social insurance, and employment services) and developmental needs (educational equity, social integration, and identity recognition). If policy design fails to recognize differences among subgroups (such as voluntary versus involuntary movers) in demand structure, priority order, and realization constraints, targeting failure and an insufficient response will follow.

Regional heterogeneity is also salient. In eastern regions, the income gain from citizenization is small, so willingness is low and over-intervention may backfire; in central and western regions, citizenization is positively correlated with income growth, so stronger policy guidance is warranted (Yang, 2022). Identification is the starting point of the policy process, and its accuracy determines the direction of the design and rationality of resource allocation. The state always uses “categorization” to delimit the target group and to determine eligibility and resource flows. This seemingly technical administrative legal classification has profound social consequences: it not only directly shapes the specific flow and pattern of fiscal expenditures but also plays a dual role at the institutional level—it may either exacerbate or reproduce social inequality (Menjívar, 2024).

Second, the core of the resource adaptation mechanism lies in the effective allocation of public resources and the breakthrough of existing constraints while also emphasizing the precise identification and fulfillment of demands. Once the demand is identified, resources must be matched to the needs. Citizenization faces fiscal sustainability, service-

carrying capacity, and spatial equity constraints. Local governments are trapped between the internalization of short-term costs and the externalization of long-term benefits. Imbalances—premium public services concentrated on *hukou* residents and indemnificatory housing located at the urban fringe—intensify “semi-urbanization (Jin & Sa, 2024).” Therefore, the mechanism must secure a dynamic balance between social policy supply and available public resources to maximize policy effectiveness (Guan, 2024).

Ultimately, the institutional integration mechanism is dedicated to systematically breaking the institutional ties between household registration and welfare. The traditional *hukou* system acts as an “institutional filter” that ties core urban entitlements (education, health, pensions) to *hukou* status. Social policy must use residence-permit schemes, point-based *hukou* conversion, and tradable rural rights exit instruments to shift the allocative principle from *hukou* identity to residential contributions, thereby removing the structural barriers to integration.

The three mechanisms are nested and adaptive: demand identification guides resource deployment and institutional design, resource constraints feed back into institutional innovation and layered demand management, and institutional transformation, in turn, secures sustainable resource optimization and demand realization. The overall efficacy depends on inter-mechanism synergy and policy coupling, which directly determine the quality and speed of citizenship.

The framework thus defines “internal mechanism” as the interactive logic and evolutionary process among the three channels, offering a systematic theoretical tool for diagnosing practical dilemmas and exploring governance solutions. Historical experience shows that any policy must satisfy the economic feasibility requirements. Jiaxing’s “Separation-for-Swap” reform, for example, failed to internalize the full cost of land-resettlement quotas, plunging the local government into heavy debt, while farmers’ cost-benefit calculus led them to regard exit from homestead land as “not worthwhile,” producing tepid policy uptake.

Practical Challenges: Multidimensional Dilemmas of Social-policy-driven Citizenization

The predicaments confronting social policy in advancing the citizenization of rural to urban migrants are not isolated malfunctions; they permeate the entire policy chain of design, resource allocation, and implementation. Their roots lie in three mutually reinforcing factors: long-standing institutional inertia, fragmented implementation, and a systematic disjuncture between policy objectives and migrants' needs. More importantly, these three factors do not simply add up but rather interweave and reinforce one another, jointly forming a complex and stable structural obstacle. In other words, the implementation of citizenization often manifests as the dysfunction of the "demand identification - resource adaptation - institutional integration" triple mechanism in practice: when policies fail to accurately capture the heterogeneous demands of rural-to-urban Migrants, the targeted and fair allocation of resources cannot be achieved, and the fragmentation at the institutional level will further amplify the aforementioned failure effects.

The subsequent analysis proceeded in three steps. First, it examines how demand identification misaligns with migrants' heterogeneous needs, and how such misalignment becomes entrenched. Second, it scrutinizes the resource allocation processes to show how fiscal and administrative constraints curtail the effective supply of public services. Finally, it investigates the deep institutional obstacles that restrict the realization of migrants' rights. By tracing the interlocking character of these obstacles, this section explains why current policies underperform and offers a diagnostic framework for alternative paths.

Structural Misalignment between Demand Identification and Policy Response

Migrants' citizenization needs are highly heterogeneous and dynamic, yet the policy system continues to categorize them through the static label of "floating population," overlooking sub-groups such as long-term settlers, family migrants, flexibly employed workers, and villagers undergoing in-situ citizenization. This "categorization distortion," rooted in path-dependent institutional design, creates a temporal and structural

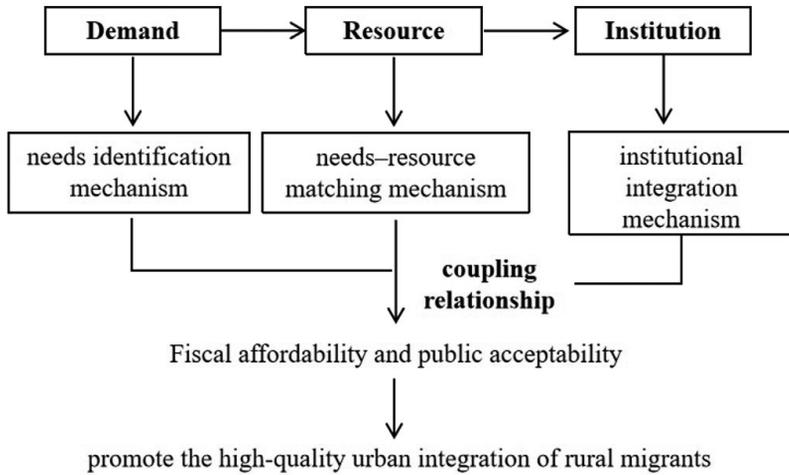


Figure 1. A “demand–resource–institution” analytical framework for rural-to-urban migrants.

lag between policy and reality. New-economy workers—delivery riders, ride-hailing drivers, and live-stream vendors—exemplify the gray zone: their employment relationships are fluid, boundaries between self-employment and wage-work are blurred, and social-security coverage is precarious. As existing classifications fail to capture their specific risks (unstable income, occupational injury, housing insecurity), these workers remain invisible in social policy targeting (Wang, 2021). The policy failed to timely identify the specific demands, such as employment security, stable housing, and occupational injury protection, brought about by this transformation, resulting in its placement in a “grey area” within the social policy framework.

The feedback loop was equally unbalanced. Policies are still promulgated chiefly through top-down mobilization, whereas routinized bottom-up claim-making channels are weak. Existing consultation fora poorly absorb the grievances of flexibly employed or non-*hukou* residents, breaking the “demand-discovery—policy-revision” circuit and turning implementation into a black box. As Bourdieu (1989) notes, the effectiveness of institutions hinges on their capacity to “name” social groups and thus render them visible for resource allocation (Riley, 2017).

Current citizenization lacks this naming capacity, leaving emerging groups structurally unseen.

Moreover, when dissected at the level of specific regulatory arrangements, core public services—point-based school admission, social insurance, and housing assistance—uniformly set entry thresholds that are both high and opaque, widening the policy supply versus population demand gap. Points-based school admission, nominally designed to secure “equitable access,” functions in practice as a selective gate-keeping device; its stringent point requirements convert the policy into a mechanism of exclusion that erodes the very fairness principle it proclaims. The scoring matrix folds years of local residence, social-security contributions, tax payments, and volunteer service into a multidimensional quantified index that off-loads institutional burdens onto individuals, producing “latent exclusion” of new urban residents above all of the agricultural-transfer population. This exclusion is less of an isolated eligibility screen than the conjoint product of institutionalized resource scarcity and socio-spatial stratification. Extending the lens to public security, residential enclaves of agricultural-transfer migrants are concentrated on the urban periphery where protection is configured as a “subordinate tier.” Relative to core districts inhabited by middle- and high-income groups, these communities exhibit significantly lower police deployment, emergency response capacity, and crime prevention coverage, a pattern repeatedly documented in Western cities (LaBerge et al., 2022). The spatial layout of grassroots police stations is largely ad hoc, spawning overlapping, fragmented, or even vacant service jurisdictions that dilute the overall enforcement efficiency (Sun et al., 2019). Resource surpluses cluster near the urban core, while peri-urban zones and migrant settlements endure systematic service vacuums.

The resultant structural mismatch between policy supply and resident demand not only blunts the precision and effectiveness of public programs but also cultivates a lived experience of marginalization. For rural to urban migrants, prolonged relegation to the institutional periphery and persistent barriers to equal public services have progressively eroded urban belonging and social identification.

Resource Constraints and Public-service Supply Bottlenecks

Effective citizenization presupposes the alignment of finance, administrative capacity, and interagency coordination. However, current resource mechanisms exhibit endemic constraints.

First, the absence of a central–local fiscal-sharing mechanism is the fundamental driver of chronic resource undersupply. A durable structural tension separates the central government’s “whole-chessboard” macro strategy from the fiscal reality that local governments must “balance their own books.” The consequent misalignment between expenditure responsibilities and revenue authority erodes local willingness and capacity to deliver inclusive social policies, so that “high ambitions” systematically produce “low implementation.” Citizenization imposes sizable public service costs, yet no refined accounting standard or equitable cost-sharing formula exists. The absence of explicit fiscal transfers, requiring local governments to finance these costs alone, is patently unrealistic. At a time of tightening local budgets, the extra burden amplifies fiscal stress and governance strain, thereby undermining the policy’s long-term sustainability.

Second, the sector-based governance model collides with the integrative logic of social policy, reducing resource allocation efficiency. Citizenization is an inherently cross-cutting policy that demands intensive interagency coordination. However, administrative barriers and information silos reproduce the vertical–territorial fragmentation that top-level designs aim to dissolve. Residence-permit services, for example, are conceived as an integrated package; however, they underperform because unified coordination standards are missing, demonstrating that the current governance architecture cannot cope with the issue’s complexity. Polycentric governance theory stresses that effective policy networks must transcend single-department boundaries and forge multi-actor modules (Morrison et al., 2023). Therefore, the prevailing fragmented regime is an institutional source of weak implementation, raising the operating costs of social policy and, through delays and blockages, eroding program credibility and effectiveness.

Third, the supply of social-support facilities displays a “symbolic” bias that misallocates resources. “Love-station” shelters constructed for workers in new economic sectors are routinely undermined by poor site selection and weak management, trapping governments in a “heavy

construction, light utilization” cycle. Field evidence shows that these facilities score low in accessibility and practical utility, revealing a structural disjuncture between policy supply and genuine group needs and indicating that public support has not been embedded in workers’ everyday life contexts.

Finally, land and related collective assets have failed to act as effective props for citizenization and, instead, operate as resource constraints. Sluggish property transfer mechanisms weaken the land’s role as an “economic safety cushion” for farmers entering cities, reducing their willingness to exchange land income for urban social protection. Empirical studies further show that uncertainty over land rights significantly inhibits cross-regional labor mobility (Adamopoulos et al., 2024). Consequently, an asset that should provide economic security is “locked in” by institutional arrangements that impede population mobility and urban integration. Simultaneously, eligibility rules for basic public services still hinge on *hukou* status, raising access and transaction costs for non-*hukou* groups and constituting a practical barrier to the realization of rights.

Institutional Integration Failure and Rights-protection Deficits

As the primary lever for fostering social integration and guaranteeing citizenship rights, the social policy’s capacity to accelerate citizenization of the agricultural transfer population is systematically eroded by internal failures of institutional integration. These failures prevent the policy repertoire from performing its requisite functions and constitute a deep structural brake on citizenization. The resulting dysfunction occurred at three analytically distinct levels.

First, core social policies continue to embed strongly exclusionary eligibility rules that curtail the effective delivery of rights. Education, healthcare, and old age protection remain tightly coupled with *hukou* status. Although instruments such as residence permits have widened the gateway to access, they largely stop at conferring entry-level qualifications and have yet to unlock the substantive allocation mechanisms attached to core welfare benefits. Consequently, even when agricultural transfer migrants achieve spatial entry, their acquisition of beneficiary status within social policies may still be restricted. This

design prevents social policy from supplying equal structural protection and traps the migrant population in a situation of “easy physical entry, difficult rights integration,” leaving the citizenization far behind the urbanization of land (Wu, 2016).

Second, the dual urban–rural structure destabilizes the ascription of rights. Cities and countrysides have long corresponded to relatively separate institutional and fiscal arrangements; the former emphasizes social insurance and public service provision, whereas the latter depends more on collective and family embedded safeguards. After entering the city, migrants’ original rural protections erode; yet—because *hukou* and qualification thresholds have not been fully dismantled—they cannot be embedded in the urban system in a timely or complete manner, producing a phased institutional “interstice.” This uncertainty over rights attribution undermines the continuity and stability of social protection and may weaken migrants’ trust in and attachment to urban public institutions.

Third, the social policy agenda exhibits a degree of closure in terms of issue selection and participation mechanisms, thus diluting the channels through which rights claims can be voiced. Agricultural-transfer migrants face systematically limited opportunities and capacities to participate in neighborhood elections, policy hearings, and other grassroots governance arenas, so their interest claims struggle to enter the public decision-making space and translate into concrete policy adjustments. From a governance perspective, inclusive political participation is a key mechanism shaping the allocation of social policy resources. When the relevant group remains at the agenda margin, both the institutional recognition of their civic identity and the substantive attainment of equal rights are constrained. Insufficient openness and feedback in the policy process objectively reduce the sensitivity and responsiveness of social policy to migrants’ real needs.

Taken together, the exclusiveness embedded in institutional design, the discontinuity across policy subsystems, and the closure of agenda-setting jointly erect an institutional barrier to “rights protection” in the citizenization process. This “institutional non-continuity” imposes high hidden costs: on the one hand, fragmented requirements, such as social insurance duration thresholds and point-based hurdles, slow the pace of citizenization; on the other hand, policy barriers erode migrants’ institutional identification and sense of social belonging. Achieving

genuine citizenization, therefore, hinges on shifting social policy from “status restriction” to “universal coverage” and on constructing a nationally unified, seamlessly linked policy system that can systematically lower institutional costs and safeguard the equal rights of new urban citizens.

Optimization Paths and Guiding Principles

High-quality social policy is the linchpin for moving rural-to-urban migrants from “physical entry” to “social inclusion.” Policy design must be systemic, sustainable, and equitable to meet the three challenges of demand identification, resource allocation, and institutional integration.

Demand Identification: Employment-Centred Active Empowerment

Traditional approaches treat social policies as passive safety nets. However, field evidence shows that stable and dignified employment is the decisive factor in migrants’ decisions to remain in the city. Social policy should, therefore, shift from passive protection to employment-centered active empowerment. First, it should be systematically embedded in industrial and educational policies so that targeted, market-driven vocational training increases the employability of the agricultural transfer population. Second, it must place the guarantee of labor rights at its core, ensuring that the earnings generated by workers in new employment forms—flexible employment in particular—are reliably convertible into durable social status and a predictable life trajectory. Employment is not merely an economic variable; it is also a foundational social policy issue that shapes urban identity and social networks.

Resource Allocation: A Multi-Layer, Integration-Oriented Support System

Social policy resource allocation must be structured around the full citizenship trajectory, weaving a multilayered, systematically integrated safety net through coordinated interventions in the four domains. First, in employment support, institutional backing is extended beyond simple

job matching to diverse employment forms by establishing informal labor markets and regulating digital platforms, as exemplified by Zhejiang's community-based intelligent informal labor market pilot. Second, in educational equity, migrant children's enrolment guarantee mechanisms are perfected to secure unimpeded access to fair, high-quality education; schools dedicated to rural and urban migrant children are upgraded to local public school standards; and outstanding migrant pupils are offered places in high-quality schools to generate demonstration effects. Third, in housing provision, rental social-housing stock is expanded while local-SASAC-controlled Urban Construction and Development Groups are incentivized to invest, lowering living costs and furnishing new citizens with a stable "social anchor." Fourth, in social insurance, old age and medical insurance are extended to full coverage with portable benefit records, multichannel financing mechanisms are piloted, and flexible employment groups are brought under the protective umbrella, ensuring the seamless transfer of medical insurance entitlements. Only when these domains act in concert can both subsistence and developmental needs be secured, and a sense of belonging among the agricultural transfer population be consolidated.

Institutional Integration: From "Identity Restrictions" to "Rights fulfillment"

In the ongoing citizenization process, social-policy entitlements confront a "last-mile" delivery barrier, although they only nominally cover all permanent residents, program impose hidden thresholds—household-registration vetting and burdensome documentation—that confine the agricultural-transfer population to rights-based poverty. Entitlements exist on paper yet remain inaccessible in practice. Institutional integration must therefore engineer a seamless transition from "status restriction" to "rights realization." Operationally, capable jurisdictions should establish new standing citizen service agencies, dismantle interdepartmental silos, and consolidate social policy applications into a single-window procedure.

At the design level, public services should be allocated primarily by place of residence, progressively delinking social welfare from household registration and land tenure to reduce settlement hesitancy. Social

assistance can pilot this shift by transferring eligibility from the *hukou* location to the locality of de facto residence. Furthermore, institutional integration must prospectively accommodate new economic forms. Singapore's enactment of The Platform Workers Bill, which legislatively incorporates platform workers into work-injury compensation and provident-fund coverage, demonstrates that only legally codifying the basic rights of new-form labor and expanding systemic inclusivity can a social policy system embrace and respect every worker who contributes to the city.

Overarching Principles

Operationally, high-quality social policy optimization must adhere to three overarching principles.

First, it must strengthen coordination. Citizenization is not a unidirectional urban absorption process but a bidirectional rural–urban loop. Policy design should institutionalize a human-centered rural–urban integrated development mechanism that allows agricultural transfer migrants to circulate between cities and countrysides while retaining their entitlements, capital, and skills. Simultaneously, it must accommodate rural revitalization and return-home entrepreneurship instead of treating citizenization and rural revitalization as separate tracks. Through fiscal transfer payments and land rights registration arrangements, the policy package must reduce in-migrant uncertainties and advance integrated rural–urban governance.

Second, policy optimization must adopt a gradient approach. Citizenization is inherently incremental, progressing from eligibility acquisition to rights enjoyment, and from opportunity access to capability formation. Therefore, implementation must sequence, tier, and regionalize reforms in an orderly manner. On the supply side, a graded public-service mechanism—“core services first, weighted support for accompanying family members”—should be constructed in tandem with stepwise enhancement of residence-permit benefits and portable social-insurance records to narrow the treatment gap between migrants and registered residents. On the demand side, professional social work and community governance systems must deliver individualized case services, group mobilization, and institutional linkages to lower migrants' social

integration costs. Moreover, a gradient strategy must be embedded within the macro framework of national and food security. This requires that, while urban–rural income and opportunity gaps are narrowed to raise cities’ pull, policy simultaneously prevents one-way urban “siphoning” of human capital. Measures such as land trusteeship, agricultural socialized services, moderate-scale farming, and the cultivation of new professional farmers should be employed to stabilize the rural production capacity, thereby forging a dynamic equilibrium in which urban absorption and rural resilience are mutually reinforced.

Third, the optimization must achieve targeted focus. The optimization path must highlight key groups and critical junctures. Differential support should address the employment instability and inadequate rights protection experienced by new-generation migrant workers and workers in new employment forms. Concurrently, public-service and social-integration policies must respect agricultural-transfer migrants’ cultural identity and collective memory, refraining from labelling their traditional customs “backward” and instead converting them into cultural resources that foster social integration. By prioritizing key cohorts and respecting differences, genuinely integrative citizenization can be realized.

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市民化进程中的制度张力与社会政策调适： 农业转移人口的“需求—资源—制度”分析框架

摘要: 在亚洲快速城市化的浪潮中，大规模内部迁移人口的社会融合已成为一项核心的治理挑战。这一挑战在中国表现为推动数亿农业转移人口实现“市民化”的复杂而长期的治理进程。然而，当前进程中普遍存在的“半城市化”现象揭示了形式上的户籍转换与实质性社会融合之间的鸿沟。本研究以社会政策为分析视角，将中国作为关键案例，旨在剖析其在农业转移人口市民化进程中所扮演的角色与面临的制度失灵。通过构建“需求-资源-制度”的三维整合分析框架，本研究揭示了当前中国社会政策在需求识别、资源配置和制度设计层面存在的结构性断裂，这些断裂共同构成了市民化进程的主要障碍。研究主张，破解“半城市化”困境需要超越碎片化的福利供给，构建一个以权利平等和社会融合为导向的一体化社会政策体系。通过对中国经验的深度分析，本研究不仅为理解国家主导下的市民化进程提供了理论洞见，也为同样面临内部大规模迁移、城乡发展失衡与社会融合难题的亚洲其他发展中国家，提供了具有比较意义的政策框架与实践指导。

关键词: 社会政策、农业转移人口、市民化、社会融合、亚洲治理

시민화 과정의 제도적 긴장과 사회정책의 조정: 농업 전이 인구에 대한 ‘수요-자원-제도’ 분석틀

초록: 아시아의 급속한 도시화 속에서 대규모 내부 이동 인구의 사회통합은 핵심적인 거버넌스 과제로 부상하고 있다. 중국에서는 수억 명에 달하는 농업 전이 인구의 ‘시민화’를 추진하는 복합적이고 장기적인 과정으로 나타난다. 그러나 현재 과정 전반에 광범위하게 존재하는 ‘반(半)도시화’ 현상은 형식적 주민등록(호구) 전환과 실질적 사회통합 사이의 간극을 드러낸다. 본 연구는 사회정책을 분석 시각으로 삼아 중국을 핵심 사례로 설정하고, 농업 전이 인구의 시민화 과정에서 사회정책이 수행해 온 역할과 직면한 제도적 작동 실패를 규명하고자 한다. 이를 위해 ‘수요-자원-제도’로 구성된 차원 통합 분석틀을 구축하여, 현재 중국의 사회정책이 수요 식별, 자원 배분, 제도 설계 층위에서 보이는 구조적 단절을 밝혀낸다. 이러한 단절은 상호 연동되어 시민화의 주요 장애로 작동한다. 연구는 ‘반도시화’의 난제를 해소하기 위해서는 과편화된 복지공급을 넘어, 권리의 평등과 사회통합을 지향하는 통합적 사회정책 체계를 구축해야 함을 주장한다. 중국 경험에 대한 심층 분석은 국가 주도형 시민화 과정을 이해하는 데 이론적 통찰을 제공할 뿐 아니라, 대규모 내부 이동, 도시-농촌 간 불균형, 사회통합의 어려움에 직면한 다른 아시아 개발도상국에도 비교 가능한 정책 틀과 실천적 지침을 제시한다.

주제어: 사회정책, 농업 전이 인구(농촌에서 도시로 이동한 인구), 시민화, 사회통합, 아시아 거버넌스

市民化過程における制度的テンションと社会政策の調整： 農業転移人口に対する「需要—資源—制度」分析枠組み

要旨: アジアにおける急速な都市化の波のなかで、大規模な国内移動人口の社会統合は、統治理論と実務の双方にとって中核的な課題となっている。中国では、この課題は数億人規模の農業転移人口の「市民化」を推進するという、複雑かつ長期の統治プロセスとして表出している。しかし、現在の進行過程に広くみられる「半都市化」現象は、形式的な戸籍上の転換と実質的な社会統合とのあいだに横たわる深いギャップを露呈させる。本研究は社会政策を分析視角とし、中国を鍵となる事例として、農業転移人口の市民化過程において社会政策が果たしてきた役割と直面する制度的機能不全を析出する。具体的には、「需要—資源—制度」から成る三次元の統合的分析枠組みを構築し、需要の把握、資源配分、制度設計という各層で中国の社会政策に内在する構造的断裂を明らかにする。これらの断裂は相互に関連し、市民化を阻む主要な障害として作用している。研究は、「半都市化」の困難を打開するためには、断片化した福祉供給を超克し、権利の平等と社会統合を志向する一体的な社会政策体系の構築が不可欠であると主張する。中国経験に対する精査は、国家主導型の市民化プロセスの理解に理論的示唆を与えるのみならず、同様に大規模な国内移動、都市・農村間の発展不均衡、社会統合の難題に直面する他のアジア新興国に対しても、比較可能な政策枠組みと実践的指針を提示する。

キーワード: 社会政策、農業転移人口(農村から都市への移動人口)、市民化、社会統合、アジア・ガバナンス

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