


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Dualist Land Regime, the *Hukou* System and the Welfare of Migrant Workers in Chinese Cities

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Abstract

Why is China’s household registration system so resilient, and why are migrant workers consistently excluded from equal urban welfare? By disaggregating the *hukou* and land components of the rural–urban dualist regime, this article argues that dualist land ownership, formalized in China’s 1982 Constitution, perpetuates the *hukou* system and unequal welfare rights. On the one hand, dualist land ownership results in an abundance of low-cost, informal housing in urban villages. This reduces the cost of short-term labour reproduction and diminishes migrants’ demands for state-defined urban rights. On the other hand, dualist land ownership enables local governments to amass significant revenues from land sales. The prominence of land-based revenues prompts local governments to link urban welfare rights with formal property ownership and residency, obstructing substantive reforms to the *hukou* system. For comparison, this article highlights Vietnam, a communist country with a unitary land ownership system, which has made greater strides in reforming its household registration system.