



# How social structure changes in Chinese global cities: Synthesizing globalization, migration and institutional factors in Beijing



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## ABSTRACT

Recent studies on the social structural change in global cities have recognized globalization, migration, and institutional factors as three main forces underlying this process. However, effects of these factors have rarely been synthetically examined and the social structure of emerging Chinese global cities under typical influence of all these factors has yet not been systematically scrutinized in previous literature. To fill these gaps, we firstly established an encompassing framework to incorporate the effects of these logically interconnected factors and then applied it to Beijing, the capital and an emerging global city of China. Using the economic and population census data, we investigated the social structural changes of migrants and local residents separately over the past decade. The results demonstrated a clear trend of professionalization with a considerable growth of 'the upper class' coupled with relative shrinkages of 'the middle and lower classes' in Beijing. In this case, economic globalization and the large immigration did not result in social polarization as conventional wisdom suggested because the localized welfare system successfully prevented local residents from engaging in 'the lower class' on the one hand and the developmental state intentionally upgraded the occupational structure with a selective openness regulation on the other. Beneath this overall professionalization trend, the social gap between migrants and the locals was not reduced but widened despite their common professionalization trend. This is mainly due to the internal differentiation of migrants in upward mobility. Compared with local residents, qualified migrants are able to equally get upgrading chances with very limited institutional obstacles while those in 'the lower class' cannot. These results all suggest the particular importance of institutional factors in reshaping the social structure of global cities. The integration of the interactive effects of multiple factors and the separate examinations of migrants and local residents are demonstrated to be conducive to understanding social structural changes, developing targeted social policies, and expanding the theoretical horizon of global city research.

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## 1. Introduction

Global cities as significant urban centres have emerged along with the dynamic and widespread economic, political, and cultural changes accompanying globalization (Baum, 1997). In the field of global city research, social structural change has been one of the most complex and controversial issues over the past decades (Pinch, 1993). Three influential factors, among the many affecting the social structure of global cities, are recognized as playing central roles. First, economic globalization beginning in the 1980s has renewed the importance of major cities as global control and command centres, where the rapid growth of financial industry and advanced services and the sharp shrinkage of manufacturing industry occur concurrently. Associated with these

industrial transformations, urban social order in these cities witnesses an expanding polarization of the occupational structure where both the top and bottom ends of the distribution are growing at the expense of the mid-level occupations, which is known as the social polarization theory (Sassen-Koob, 1984; Sassen-Koob, 1986; Sassen, 1991; Sassen, 2001; Sassen, 2011). This theory, however, is challenged by Hamnett who conceives the polarizing process is the product of specific large waves of immigration, the second factor contributing to social structural change (Hamnett, 1994a). Hamnett argues that, rather than economic globalization, it is the large-scale migration that generates social polarization, without which, professionalization would be the dominant process (Hamnett, 1994a; Hamnett, 1994b). As the third influencing factor, institutional factors are also regarded to be critical in the social restructuring process. These factors, including but not limited to, welfare state regimes and the developmental state, may mediate the impact of economic globalization and large-scale migration to produce divergent social outcomes (Burgers & Musterd, 2002; Esping-Andersen,

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1990; Hamnett, 1996a; Hill & Kim, 2000; Musterd & Ostendorf, 1998). Furthermore, during the social restructuring process, migration should be conceptualized not merely as one of its causes, but also as an integral component (Castles, 2010), whose social structure, compared with local residents, may be changed to different degrees by the abovementioned factors. Thus the distribution of migrants on the social ladder is likely to be different from that of local residents in global cities (Musterd & Deurloo, 2002).

These seemingly contradictory and competing social outcomes in global cities are actually the heterogeneous results of their different exposures to economic globalization and large-scale migration on the one hand and their divergent institutional arrangements on the other, which have been extensively scrutinized on hyper global cities in the 'Global North'. However, limited attention has been given to unpacking the social outcomes in global cities of the 'Global South' in general and China in particular (Harloe, Fainstein, & Gordon, 1992; Kwon, 2005; Lo & Yeung, 1996). China has been experiencing a rising engagement in globalization, a flood of regional migration, a localized welfare system, and a developmental state (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013; Lin, 2004; Wu & Yusuf, 2004; Pei, 2006). What did the mix of these brings to the social structure in its global cities, more specifically Beijing? Since the deepening of the market-oriented reform and open-door policy in the 1990s, global cities pushed by the broad economic restructuring driven by the interrelated processes of urbanization and globalization have emerged in China (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013; Tang & Parish, 2000; Wei, 2007; Wei, 2012). Beijing is claimed as a 'global city' that experiences social stratification with deindustrialization against the economic globalization backdrop (Hu & Kaplan, 2001). Further, the relaxation and reforms in the household registration (*hukou*) system have allowed population mobility, especially related to labour, thereby making massive inter-regional migration possible (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Shen, 2013). In the past decades, the 'floating population' (i.e., temporary migrants) in China has increased from 6.1 million to 21.6 million in the period 1982–1990 and astonishingly expanded to 79.0 million and 170.6 million in 2000 and 2010 respectively (Liang, Li, & Ma, 2014; Liu, Qi, Cao, & Liu, 2015). This continuous expansion of temporary migrants that occupy the lower rung of the social ladder is believed to further promote significant social stratification within cities and between migrants and local residents, especially in global cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Fan, 2002; Fan, 2004; Shen, 2013). In these instances, social structural change in such global cities as Beijing would seem more compatible with Sassen's social polarization theory where migrants are degraded and 'locked' into the low social status, while wealth is accumulated by a section of the population as well, thus creating a polarized society.

However, being a socialist country with a long tradition of government interventions, the Chinese state still plays a critical role in shaping the impacts of economic globalization and large-scale migration on social outcomes (Fan, 2004; Tang & Parish, 2000; Wei & Yu, 2006). In short, Chinese global cities have been driven by the capitalist imperative of economic globalization with a large immigration on the one hand and have been influenced by the unique characteristics of the localized welfare system and the developmental state on the other (Chubarov & Brooker, 2013). In this sense, the social structural change as a whole and of migrants and the locals respectively in Chinese global cities may witness a departure from Sassen's social polarization theory towards Hammett's professionalization theory or even towards more sophisticated outcomes. Yet, these uncertain social results in Chinese global cities cannot be adequately understood with the existing global city theory that is conceptualized on the basis of the social experiences of the global cities in the 'Global North' where economic globalization, large-scale migration, welfare state regimes, and the developmental state have never simultaneously occurred. Therefore, to effectively contour and comprehend the inherent logics and underlying dynamics of social structural change in Chinese global cities where the above factors coexist, it is necessary to rethink the Euro-American legacy of the global

city theory, and at the same time to reframe the conceptualization of social structural change in global cities.

Prior empirical investigation on the social structure of Chinese cities suggests a salient difference between migrants and local residents in the labour market as an inevitable result of their varied access, opportunities, and constraints to desirable jobs imposed by their household register status (Cheng, Guo, Hugo, & Yuan, 2013). This institutional discrimination rendered migrants at the bottom of the socio-economic order with occupations that were not wanted by local residents in the 1990s (Fan, 2002; Gu, 2001; Guo & Iredale, 2004; Yang & Guo, 1996). However, quantitative studies in this field have been conducted exclusively on the basis of small-sample questionnaire data that cannot provide a whole picture of such employment discrimination. Moreover, limited research has inquired how this occupational bifurcation is embedded in economic globalization, large-scale migration, and institutional arrangements in the Chinese context. The question is whether this bifurcation has been weakened in the 2000s when the urban labour market became more open with China's increasing integration into the world economy and the institutional arrangements became more inclusive with the resurgence of the socialist ideology of equality? This question has yet not been answered (Cheng et al., 2013; Guo & Iredale, 2004).

To fill the theoretical and empirical gaps identified above, this paper focuses on the social structural change in general and of migrants and local residents in particular in the Chinese context under the forces of economic globalization, large-scale migration, and institutional factors – the localized welfare system and the developmental state – during the recent decade. To be specific, two questions are addressed through the in-depth analysis of the changing social structure in Beijing. First, what changes do the above three factors bring to the overall social structure – do they polarize or professionalize the occupational structure? Second, beneath the overall social structural change, to what extent and in what way do migrants and local residents perform differently?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The next section develops an analytical framework for understanding social structural change in global cities based on existing theoretical explanations. The Beijing context is then systematically profiled through a three-layered introduction. This is followed by empirical studies on the occupational structural change in general and of migrants and local residents in particular in Beijing during the past decade. The major findings from these empirical studies are summarized in the final section with a further discussion of their implications for policy-making and future studies.

## 2. Theoretical explanations and analytical framework

It is undoubtedly true that the emerging globalization of economic activities has generated 'global cities' with global control functions that are directly reflected in the structure and dynamics of their production sectors and employment (Friedmann & Wolff, 1982; Friedmann, 1986; Knox & Taylor, 1995). According to Sassen's (1984, 1986, 1990, 1991, 2001, 2011) long series of books and articles, these dynamics in global cities, characterised by the shrinkage of manufacturing and the shift to services, often lead to a growing social polarization in occupational structure through two channels. The direct one is the reorganization of labour market revolved around major growth sectors in global cities, thereby expanding the number and proportion of managers, administrators, and professionals in the occupational structure. The indirect ones are the growth of the semi-skilled or unskilled service jobs derived to serve the increasing high-skilled workers and the inherent demand by low-skilled labourers for such jobs along with the shrinkage of manufacturing industry. Nevertheless, this theory has been challenged by Hamnett (1994a, 1994b, 2003b) with the professionalization theory in which he states that the proportion of managerial and professional occupations increases whereas the shares of all other occupational groups decline in global cities. In this theory, Hamnett argues that economic globalization has shifted the economy, especially in global

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