

# Deserving Hukou: An Exploration of How Chinese People Evaluate Migrants' Welfare Deservingness

ANDREAS MICHAEL ØSTERBY-JØRGENSEN 

*Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Kroghstræde 7, 9220 Aalborg Ø, Denmark*

*Sino-Danish College (SDC), University of Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, China*

Corresponding author, email: [amoej@socsci.aau.dk](mailto:amoej@socsci.aau.dk)

## Abstract

Within the welfare deservingness literature, the question of how people conceive of deservingness criteria is still underexplored. Theoretical insights indicate that identity and reciprocity criteria are more fluidly conceived by people than much deservingness literature describes. Through a qualitative analysis, I explore how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of a group of Chinese nationals (identity) who contribute (reciprocity) but are excluded from welfare: intranational Chinese migrants. I find that Chinese people have multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria. Some conceive of identity through larger communities, such as the nation, while others conceive of it through local communities, such as the family. Reciprocity can be conceived of in a less conditional way, which means that contributions generally make one deserving, and in a more conditional way, where one's deservingness depends on one's ability to make more specific kinds of contributions. Welfare recipients' deservingness becomes very dependent on respondents' conceptions of these deservingness criteria.

**Keywords:** Deservingness; identity; belonging; reciprocity; hukou; China

## 1. Introduction

Welfare deservingness research is concerned with how the public views who should be entitled to welfare and why. Two important deservingness criteria are identity (the more one belongs to “our community,” the more deserving one is) and reciprocity (the more one has contributed, the more deserving one is). However, theoretical insights indicate that these deservingness criteria, and how people conceive of them, must be thought of more fluidly than much deservingness literature does. In this article, I focus on how multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria can be identified in Chinese people's evaluations of intranational Chinese migrants' deservingness.

Van Oorschot (2000) argues that the public evaluates the welfare deservingness of people according to five criteria: control, attitude, reciprocity, identity,

and need (CARIN). The CARIN criteria have provided the framework for much of the research on welfare deservingness (Jæger, 2007; Laenen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot, 2006; van Oorschot and Roosma, 2015). However, we still know very little about how people have varying conceptions of deservingness criteria. In this article, I delve into this question. My focus is on identity and reciprocity criteria. Whereas much deservingness literature focuses on identity in terms of national belonging (Carmel and Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Osipovič, 2015; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Reeskens and van der Meer, 2019; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013), I argue that identity and belonging must be understood in a more nuanced way. Because people can identify with more than one community and with different levels of communities (e.g. national, local, etc.) (Yuval-Davis, 2011), identity as a deservingness criterion must be considered in a more fluid way, where different kinds of belonging can be emphasized in the evaluation of deservingness. Furthermore, I argue that we need to pay attention to how the different forms of reciprocity that respondents can emphasize influence recipients' welfare deservingness. Even though reciprocation can be understood in many ways (van Oorschot, 2000), respondents often point to more specific kinds of reciprocation that vary between respondents in kind (Nielsen et al., 2020) and degree of conditionality (Mau, 2004a, 2004b). Accordingly, welfare recipients' deservingness also varies depending on what kinds of reciprocation respondents emphasize.

In this article, I show how multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity can affect potential recipients' welfare deservingness. I do this by exploring how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. These migrants are Chinese nationals, and they contribute to the local economy at their destination through their labor. It could thus be argued that they belong to the same national community as the local residents in their destination (identity), and that they make contributions to the local community (reciprocity). However, they are excluded from welfare. Because of the Chinese household registration (*hukou*) system, which ties all Chinese citizens to a certain location (Song, 2014), migrants are not entitled to welfare at their destinations. The case of migrants' non-entitlement to welfare is thus challenging these conceptions of identity and reciprocity. In making sense out of migrants' non-entitlement, Chinese people deploy multiple notions of identity and reciprocity criteria, and this can offer us insights into how these differing notions affect deservingness.

In a qualitative analysis of 66 interviews with Chinese people working in Beijing, I explore how differing notions of identity and reciprocity affect migrants' deservingness. The interviewees primarily applied these two criteria to evaluate migrants' deservingness. The remaining three CARIN criteria

(control, attitude, and need) are nearly completely absent. I find that interviewees emphasize different notions of identity and reciprocity, and that migrants' deservingness depends on which notions are highlighted. This suggests that deservingness research should pay greater attention to how respondents conceive of identity and reciprocity, because the deservingness of a group of potential recipients varies significantly depending on respondents' emphasized notions of identity and reciprocity. Thus, this article not only offers new empirical insights into deservingness in China but also advances our general understanding of welfare deservingness. This can deepen our understanding of popular welfare attitudes, and given that policymakers, to some extent, design policies in response to public attitudes (Chen et al., 2016; Laenen, 2020), how respondents conceive of deservingness criteria also has an impact on social policy making.

In the next section, I present the CARIN deservingness criteria and explain how the identity and reciprocity criteria must be considered in more fluid ways. Then, I describe the hukou system and highlight the important differences in social rights between residents and migrants. Section 4 provides an account of the method applied in the analysis. Section 5 presents the findings, and the paper ends with a conclusion.

## 2. Deservingness & Outsiders

In this section, I introduce the deservingness framework. Van Oorschot (2000) argues that five criteria underlie people's preferences for granting welfare to specific groups. People consciously or unconsciously evaluate potential welfare recipients' deservingness based on the extent to which recipients fulfill five deservingness criteria. If welfare recipients mostly satisfy the deservingness criteria, respondents tend to think that these welfare recipients are worthy of welfare. Other welfare recipients might satisfy the deservingness criteria to a lesser extent, and then respondents tend to think of them as less deserving. The five criteria are as follows:

- Control: If you cannot be blamed for your needs, you are more deserving.
- Attitude: If you are more compliant, you are more deserving.
- Reciprocity: If you have contributed to this society or are likely to, you are more deserving.
- Identity: If you belong to "our community," you are more deserving.
- Need: If your need is great, you are more deserving.

Following the logic of deservingness criteria, immigrants are generally perceived as less deserving. They do not belong to "our community" because they come from another country (identity), and they have not contributed to this

society because they have just arrived here (reciprocity) (Kremer, 2016; Laenen et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2020; Osipovič, 2015; van Oorschot, 2000; van Oorschot, 2006). In contrast, intranational Chinese migrants are Chinese nationals (identity) and they contribute labor at their destination (reciprocity). Despite this, they are not entitled to welfare.

In my analysis, all five criteria were operationalized. However, the interviewees primarily evaluated the deservingness of migrants based on identity and reciprocity criteria. In the following two subsections, I describe how these two deservingness criteria might have to be understood more fluidly, especially in China.

## 2.1 Identity

The identity criterion concerns the extent to which a potential recipient is perceived as belonging to “our community.” The more respondents believe that a recipient is a part of “our community,” the more deserving the recipient is. However, this raises the question: What are the communities that people belong to? Yuval-Davis (2011) argues that people can belong to different kinds of communities (e.g. local, national, religious, and global). Belonging is multilayered, which means that individuals belong to multiple communities and that people may prioritize these communities differently. This makes the deservingness question more complex because a recipient’s deservingness depends on the kinds of belongingness emphasized by the respondent.

The multilayeredness of identities should thus be considered in order to understand conceptions of deservingness. In this regard, it seems particularly relevant to pay attention to the multilayeredness of identity in China. Whereas Marshall (1950) describes how, during the last three centuries, citizenship with equal rights for citizens developed around national communities (see also De Swaan, 1995), Chinese sociologist Fei (1947) argues that the notion of national citizenship is absent among Chinese people. What is more important for Chinese people are the specific relationships of individuals. People primarily belong to a network of specific personal relationships, the most important being that of the family. This ties individuals to their families and to the geographical locations where their families are: home (see also Freedman, 1966).

Fei (1992) described Chinese society in the 1930s and 1940s. Since then, the multilayeredness of Chinese identity has become even more considerable. Nation building has been an ongoing project in China since the end of the 19th century and has intensified in the last four decades (Hayton, 2020). Consequently, the Chinese people have learned about national citizenship with equal rights for citizens (Lee, 2007). Additionally, provincial governments have promoted provincial identities in recent decades (Feng and Zhan, 2006; Goodman, 2002, 2006; Oakes, 2000). Furthermore, Aihwa Ong (1999) describes how, in the era of globalization, a narrative of the transnational Chinese ethnic

community has emerged, which includes ethnically Chinese people outside of mainland China. These different layers of belonging illustrate the multilayeredness of Chinese identities. Oakes and Schein (2006) argue that in reform-era China, identities and belonging are becoming increasingly translocal. Identities can therefore be tied to the local, provincial, and national (Feng and Zhan, 2006; Goodman, 2006; Hoffman, 2006).

This multilayered nature of Chinese identities means that deservingness becomes a complex question, because belongingness becomes much less evident than simply belonging to the nation. Belonging can thus be conceived of both in terms of local communities, such as family, and in terms of larger communities, such as nations. Hence, whether a recipient is part of “our community” becomes a complicated question.

## 2.2 Reciprocity

The reciprocity criterion concerns whether potential welfare recipients have contributed or are expected to contribute. If they have contributed or are expected to contribute in the future, they are more deserving of welfare. However, this reciprocation can take different forms (van Oorschot, 2000).

Mau (2004a, 2004b) provides a typology for how we can think about different kinds of reciprocity. One of the dimensions in his typology is the degree of conditionality attached to the granting of welfare. He distinguishes between weak and strong conditionality. Whereas strong conditionality implies that there are quite specific expectations of welfare recipients' reciprocations, weak conditionality means that the granting of welfare is not so tightly tied to specific forms of reciprocation. Nielsen et al. (2020) further nuance the reciprocity deservingness criterion by pointing out that respondents' expectations of reciprocation can take three different forms. Monetary reciprocation occurs when the recipient contributes by, for instance, paying taxes. Functional reciprocation is when the recipient contributes by performing a task that needs to be done for society to function. Finally, behavioral reciprocation occurs when recipients contribute by showing good behavior and the right attitude. These distinctions between different kinds of reciprocation highlight how deservingness becomes a complicated question. Respondents can emphasize different kinds of reciprocation with different degrees of conditionality, and this will affect recipients' deservingness.

These nuanced perspectives on the nature of the reciprocity criterion might be particularly relevant to keep in mind when understanding deservingness in China. Fei (1947) points out that the notion of equality is weak in China. Rather than equality among people, relations are hierarchical. This hierarchy manifests itself in two important ways. First, people occupy different positions in society because they have different abilities and qualifications: those with appropriate abilities and qualifications are in higher positions (Xie, 2016). Second, this social

hierarchy is projected into a geographical space. This means that different levels of society are tied to certain locations. The top of this spatial hierarchy is Beijing, due to its role as a political and economic center (Cartier, 2006; Oakes and Schein, 2006; Schein, 2006). To belong in Beijing and in that part of society, one needs the appropriate abilities to contribute. In this case, the conditionality attached to the granting of welfare in Beijing has become very strong. Reciprocation is, then, not only a matter of what you do but also of who you are and what you are able to do. The functions that recipients can and cannot take on determine whether they belong to a given part of society and in a given location, and thus also determine their deservingness of welfare in that location. When this strong functional conditionality is attached to welfare entitlements in a place like Beijing, it means that for some groups of people, it will be very difficult to become deserving of welfare there.

### 3. Hukou & Migrants

This section introduces the case study: intranational migrants in China are limited in their access to public social welfare by the household registration (hukou) system. One inherits the hukou status of one's parents, which means that one's hukou will be in the same location as that of one's parents (Song, 2014). People might be able to change their hukou status but not simply by moving to another location. The person needs to go through formal procedures to obtain a new hukou status. Every place has its own rules concerning hukou conversion, and the difficulty of converting one's hukou also varies. Big cities, such as Beijing, have very strict requirements for hukou conversion (Liu and Shi, 2020; Song, 2014). The exact eligibility requirements for obtaining a Beijing urban hukou are not formulated very clearly; however, Liu and Shi (2020) found that people with a postgraduate degree and those who work in the civil service have a higher chance of obtaining a Beijing urban hukou. These requirements make it nearly impossible for many migrants to obtain a Beijing hukou (Song, 2014).

Public welfare is provided by local governments in China. You are entitled to welfare only in your hukou location, and the types of benefits differ. Hukou holders in China's big cities are entitled to quite comprehensive public welfare, but migrants in China's big cities are excluded from this welfare. Migrants are often excluded from, for instance, public schools, social assistance programs, and housing subsidies' programs (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014).

However, some migrants might be included in the social insurance program. This is an employment-based insurance program in which both employers and employees make contributions. It includes the following welfare benefits: pension, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, work injury insurance, and maternity allowances. Participation in the social insurance program is

required by law but is not strictly enforced. This means that because many migrants work in low-income, informal sectors, where employers are unwilling to pay contributions for them, they are not entitled to social insurance benefits (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014).

The hukou system entails significant differences in public welfare entitlements, and it also entails rigidity in the individual's hukou status, which makes it close to impossible to change one's hukou. Therefore, it is difficult for migrants to become entitled to welfare in their destinations. Examples of how local welfare entitlements are limited to local taxpaying residents can also be identified in Europe (Theiss, 2021). However, because it is very difficult to change one's hukou status, it is not just a matter of living in the destination and paying taxes. Rather, one's hukou status is a permanent feature fixed to the individual. Even though recent hukou reforms mean that criteria for converting hukou are less strict in smaller cities (Zhang et al., 2019), criteria remain strict in China's big cities, which also attract most migrants because of better job opportunities there (Song, 2014). This large part of the population in a city like Beijing has only secondary citizenship without entitlements to local welfare, even though migrants are Chinese citizens who contribute to the local economy. This makes them an interesting case in terms of deservingness, because it can show how the multiple conceptions of identity and reciprocity, which people deploy to make sense out of migrants' non-entitlement, affect welfare deservingness.

#### 4. Methods

The analysis of this article is based on 66 qualitative interviews conducted with Chinese people working in Beijing. Following the examples of Lamont (2000) and Frederiksen (2018), this number of interviews ensures that the sample includes a broad range of Chinese people with different background characteristics. Furthermore, this number makes it possible to identify similarities in the themes that people talk about. A few interviews were conducted by me, while the remaining interviews were conducted by Chinese research assistants. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and then transcribed and translated into English because the interviews were part of the empirical material for a broader cross-national research project. We conducted interviews between October 2019 and May 2021. The first 16 interviews were conducted in person, while the remaining interviews were conducted online because of the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure interviewees' anonymity and confidentiality, interview data were encrypted when sent digitally and stored only on password-secured hard drives. Additionally, the interview excerpts in the findings section are presented in an anonymized form.

TABLE 1. Background characteristics of interviewees

Age	Below 30	31–40	41–50	Above 51
<b>Gender</b>	17	22	16	11
	<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>	
	29		37	
<b>Class</b>	<b>Working class</b>		<b>Middle class</b>	
	30		36	
<b>Household registration status</b>	<b>Registered in Beijing</b>		<b>Not registered in Beijing</b>	
	29		37	

**Note:** Number of interviewees. Class: Working class includes unskilled workers, skilled workers, and routine non-manual employees. Middle class includes service class II (lower-level controllers and administrators), service class I (higher-level controllers and administrators), and self-employed (Svallfors, 2004).

**Source:** Author's overview of interviewees.

We interviewed both urban residents with a Beijing hukou and migrants without a Beijing hukou. I included both groups in the analysis because the hukou system is a national system, so the question of migrants' deservingness is relevant in all parts of the country. The limitations in welfare entitlements for non-Beijingers in Beijing are similar in other parts of China for non-local residents. Migrants' deservingness is something that all Chinese people can reflect on, so I included both groups in my analysis. I also found that both groups talk about migrants' deservingness in similar ways.

The sampling strategy was to obtain a broad sample of interviewees who differed in age, gender, class (occupation-based, along the lines of Svallfors [2004]), and hukou status (see Table 1 for an overview). The recruitment strategy was based on a network approach: I looked for people who fit the criteria in the research assistants' networks and my own. To ensure diversity in the sample, I approached different parts of our networks. Despite encountering some challenges in approaching potential interviewees due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that the recruiting process was significantly prolonged, I still managed to recruit a diverse group of interviewees. This ensures that the conclusions drawn based on these interviews cannot be attributed to just one segment of society, but to a wider range of people from different parts of society. However, the sample is not representative of the whole population of China, because we interviewed only people who work in Beijing. Conclusions drawn based on these interviews will be relevant for Chinese people working in environments that are comparable to Beijing, primarily other large, resourceful cities. Whether the findings of this article are more broadly relevant to Chinese society needs to be further investigated.



TABLE 2. Quantification of coding: Deservingness criteria applied to evaluate migrants' deservingness

Deservingness criteria	Number of interviewees
Control	0
Attitude	0
Reciprocity	32
Identity	41
Need	4
<i>Not coded</i>	5

**Note:** 66 interviewees in total.

**Source:** Author's coding of interviews.

The interviews lasted, on average, around one hour and concerned people's attitudes toward welfare. I focused my analysis on the interviewees' statements about whether migrants should be entitled to welfare at their destinations. For this analysis, I have thus not included statements about the deservingness of other groups of potential welfare recipients.

I completed a deductive, theory-based coding of the statements about migrants' welfare status using the CARIN deservingness criteria:

- **Control:** Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their control over their situation.
- **Attitude:** Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their general compliance.
- **Reciprocity:** Statements in which migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their contributions.
- **Identity:** Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their belongingness.
- **Need:** Statements where migrants' deservingness is evaluated based on their need for welfare.

Some statements have elements of several deservingness criteria and are coded with more than one code. Statements in which the interviewee did not recognize the difference in welfare entitlements between local residents and migrants were not coded. Table 2 shows how many interviewees applied each deservingness criterion in their evaluation of migrants' deservingness. I operationalized all five deservingness criteria during the coding. However, the interviewees primarily applied the identity and reciprocity criteria.

## 5. Findings

The identity and reciprocity criteria are important to the interviewees' evaluations of migrants' deservingness. However, multiple conceptions of these two

criteria mean that migrants' deservingness can be evaluated very differently. In the next two subsections, I present my findings concerning the different conceptions of the identity and reciprocity criteria.

### 5.1 Identity: The National and the Local

The questions of identity and belonging were very present in the interviews. However, because of the multiple conceptions of identity, the interviewees had different views on the belongingness of migrants. Even though they were talking about the same group of potential welfare recipients, the interviewees' varying emphases on different communities meant that some interviewees thought of migrants as part of their community, while other interviewees thought of them as outsiders.

On one hand, some interviewees emphasized that migrants belong to the same national community as Beijing hukou holders and are as deserving of Beijing's welfare as the residents:

*I think [migrants] should [enjoy the same social benefits as Beijingers]. [...] Because I think first of all that we are all Chinese. [...] Therefore, no matter where this person is, as long as he is within the territory of your country, he can be guaranteed that his most basic rights are equal.*

(male, 41, local)

This interviewee emphasized that they *are all Chinese*, so it should not matter from which part of the country people come. Thus, they invoked their national identity, which Lee (2007) also describes. Other interviewees emphasized an even larger community: humanity. By highlighting that all people are equal, these interviewees think that migrants should be entitled to welfare in Beijing:

*Regarding the welfare of this person who came to Beijing from a different place, I think it should be enjoyed. After all, everyone is equal.*

(male, 32, migrant)

By emphasizing these large communities, these interviewees said that migrants are deserving of welfare in Beijing because migrants also belong to these communities. With these notions of identity, it does not make sense to divide between Beijingers and migrants in terms of welfare deservingness. Migrants are as deserving of welfare in Beijing as are Beijingers.

On the other hand, some interviewees highlighted more local identities:

*[T]his place is not home. We Chinese have a tradition; that is, to have a house [...] only with a fixed place we can have a home. This is our Chinese tradition. If you come here from other places to work, [...] you do not have a private house in Beijing, you do not have your own fixed house, you always feel that you are still floating. Maybe many people who come to Beijing have this idea. Also, when a family is together, that is home. This is also a traditional idea of us Chinese people.*

(female, 53, migrant)

The view that this interviewee expressed is in line with the ideas expressed by Fei (1947). People are tied to a family and to a specific place where the family is located (*home, a fixed place*). Migrants are thus undeserving because their identities tie them to these communities and places outside Beijing. Similarly, local Beijingers emphasize that their homes are in Beijing, which ties their identities to Beijing.

*I do not think [people who move to Beijing from other parts of China should enjoy the same social benefits as local people in Beijing]. Because I am from Beijing. [...] When Beijingers go to outside places, Beijingers are outsiders. When Beijingers return home, the capital has turned into the capital of outsiders. It belongs to everyone. Beijingers have no home.*

(male, 49, local)

Beijingers are tied to Beijing because their *homes* are in Beijing. This ties Beijingers to Beijing and makes them *outsiders* outside Beijing. Migrants are undeserving because their homes are not in Beijing. Because Beijingers have their homes in Beijing, they belong to Beijing. They are thus deserving of Beijing's welfare, while migrants are not.

The emphasis on belonging to local communities means that, for instance, belonging to the national community is much less important.

Interviewer: [...] *Do you think people who move to Beijing from other provinces in China should enjoy the same social welfare as local people in Beijing? [...]*

Interviewee: *I still say, put this question in a bigger [perspective]. Can you [Chinese nationals] go to New York now and let people in New York treat you like New Yorkers?*

(female, 50, acquired local)

This interviewee justifies that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing by saying that Chinese nationals are not entitled to welfare in New York. This quote shows how the national community is less important for these interviewees in this context. A Chinese person from another part of China is as much of an outsider as a Chinese national in the United States. Migrants within China are therefore as undeserving of welfare as Chinese nationals are abroad.

Many of the interviewees spoke about identity more indirectly. Some expressed concern about the possible influx of migrants to Beijing if equal social benefits were implemented.

*[Migrants] surely cannot enjoy [the same social benefits as the local people]. If they can enjoy it, [people in other parts of China] all come, 20 million or 50 million. Beijing cannot do it.*

(male, 44, migrant)

This interviewee considers the consequences of equal welfare benefits for migrants and applies a logic like the welfare magnet thesis (Borjas, 1999): if Beijing's welfare

benefits were the same for migrants as for Beijingers, it would attract more migrants to the city. This deservingness logic is similar to the rejectionist logic that Nielsen et al. (2020) found in their European focus group interviews. By pointing to Beijing's limited welfare capacity, people reason that migrants cannot be deserving of welfare in Beijing. Hence, they draw a line between Beijingers and migrants, where Beijing's welfare can only be for those who belong in Beijing.

A few of the interviewees also applied alternative rejectionist logic. They highlighted certain features of the hukou system to justify that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. For example, some highlighted how Beijingers are not entitled to welfare if they go to other places in China.

[...] [I]t is reasonable that [outsiders should not enjoy the same social benefits as Beijingers when in Beijing] because when Beijingers go to other places, they do not enjoy any local [welfare] policies. [...]

(male, 27, migrant)

By describing this feature of the hukou system, this interviewee justifies that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. Because Beijingers and migrants mutually exclude each other from welfare in their counterpart's place of origin, there is a kind of equality in the relationship. Another alternative rejectionist logic stresses how migrants are entitled to welfare in their places of origin:

*You are enjoying the welfare of the outside place when you come from the outside. If you say a farmer, he is enjoying the farmer's local social security insurance. Then if you come to Beijing to work, you are still enjoying the local social security policy [in your place of origin]. If you say blue-collar workers, blue-collar workers are still enjoying this kind of social security insurance policy in the outside place.*

(male, 32, acquired local)

Migrants are already entitled to welfare in their place of origin, so they neither need nor should be entitled to welfare in Beijing. By showing how both Beijingers and migrants are entitled to welfare in their respective places, these interviewees emphasize systemic equality. It is therefore fair that migrants are not entitled to welfare in Beijing. Like the resource-scarcity rejectionist logic, these institutional logics become ways to draw a line between Beijingers and migrants: only those people who belong to Beijing should be entitled to welfare in Beijing.

To sum up, the identity criterion is not simply a question of how much a recipient belongs to the "community." The multilayeredness of belonging means that there are multiple levels of communities in which individuals belong (Yuval-Davis, 2011). When evaluating deservingness, the respondents emphasize different levels of community. This means that a recipient's deservingness can vary depending on the kind of belonging emphasized by the respondent. In this subsection, I have illustrated how this is the case with the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. Some interviewees emphasized belonging to

larger communities, such as the nation. This meant that migrants would be seen as belonging to “our community” and hence as deserving of welfare in Beijing. Other interviewees highlighted belonging to more local communities, such as the family and home. Beijingers thus belong to Beijing, while migrants belong to outside places. Migrants were therefore seen as undeserving by those interviewees. The multilayeredness of belonging thus makes the question of belongingness much more complicated, and who is deserving and undeserving becomes much less clear.

## 5.2 Reciprocity: Contributing What?

The theme of reciprocity was also present in the interviews. However, the interviewees did not point to migrants' contributions to the nation when evaluating their deservingness of welfare in Beijing. Rather, the interviewees emphasized the ways in which migrants have or have not contributed to Beijing. Just as Mau (2004a, 2004b) describes certain types of reciprocity as entailing reciprocity only between members of the same social insurance scheme (balanced reciprocity), the reciprocity emphasized by the interviewees is only between members of the Beijing community. In this case, migrants cannot be deserving just on the basis of them having contributed to, for instance, the national community. Rather, their deservingness is dependent on their contributions to the Beijing community. This thus strengthens the conditionality attached to welfare entitlements in Beijing, and it makes many migrants less deserving because they might have contributed more to the larger national community and less to this specific local community. Deservingness based on reciprocity also depends on the kind of community emphasized by the respondents.

Thus, the interviewees evaluated migrants' deservingness based on their contributions to Beijing. However, they emphasized different kinds of contributions to Beijing. Some talked about contributions more broadly.

[ . . . ] I think he works and lives in Beijing. He probably is contributing to Beijing. I think he should be treated equally with Beijingers.

(female, 51, local)

It depends on whether they are working like other people, giving back, and making contributions to this society; then they can enjoy some benefits accordingly.

(female, 32, migrant)

These two interviewees did not have very specific conditions for the granting of welfare. That is, they attached a relatively weak conditionality to welfare entitlements. They talked about *working* and *giving back*, which are broader kinds of contributions that most people can make. This is also the case for most migrants, who often come to Beijing to work. Therefore, many of the interviewees who did

not have very specific conditions for granting welfare also saw migrants as more deserving because migrants make some kind of contribution to Beijing.

Other interviewees highlighted more specific conditions for the granting of welfare. They emphasized monetary reciprocation:

*[...] Are these [social] benefits not created by our government? This comes from tax. I pay tax here. I should have this right, but our country has the hukou limit. I quite agree that where you pay tax is where you enjoy welfare.*

(male, 28, migrant)

*[...] I think the current policy is very good. It depends on the social insurance contributions you pay. If you have paid enough, if you have contributed enough, you can enjoy the same [social benefits].*

(female, 29, local)

These two interviewees mentioned two kinds of monetary contributions: *tax* and *social insurance contributions*. By making these payments, migrants become deserving of welfare in Beijing. However, many migrants work in low-salary, informal sectors. In these sectors, employers do not pay social insurance contributions. Furthermore, their salaries are so low that they do not pay taxes (Leung and Xu, 2015; Song, 2014). Therefore, these migrants are not making these monetary contributions. With an emphasis on monetary reciprocation, it thus becomes harder for migrants to deserve welfare in Beijing. This makes the conditionality for granting welfare stronger, and it is then not enough just to do some kind of reciprocation.

A few interviewees applied the reciprocity criterion in an even more conditional way:

*Beijing has its future as an international metropolis. It will transfer some functional things that do not belong to this city; that is, it is based on development needs. Because the cities are now divided into first tier, second tier, and third tier. I think it depends on this [migrant's] ability. If they match [the migrant's ability and the city's development], that is good. The two aspects are good. If they do not match, then you may have to make a choice.*

(female, 35, migrant)

This quote illustrates strong functional conditionality. Migrants' deservingness of welfare in Beijing depends on the kinds of contributions they can make to Beijing. It is not just any contribution that makes migrants deserving of welfare in Beijing. Beijing has special status in China (*an international metropolis*) with special needs when it comes to the personnel it requires. As a first-tier city, it will need talented people with abilities that will help it develop. Migrants' deservingness is therefore conditional on their ability to perform certain functions that contribute to Beijing's development. However, many migrants do not have these kinds of

abilities. Many of them come from rural areas where the education level is generally lower (Im, 2014). When respondents attach this strong functional conditionality to welfare entitlements, it becomes very difficult to become deserving.

In sum, migrants can become deserving of welfare in Beijing through their contributions to Beijing. Whether migrants have contributed to the nation is inconsequential. However, migrants' deservingness depends not only on the contributions they can make to Beijing, but also on the kind of reciprocity emphasized by the respondents. Some interviewees attached relatively weaker conditionality to migrants' entitlement to welfare, which means that migrants' contributions to Beijing in the form of their work and efforts to the local economy make them deserving. In contrast, other interviewees attached stronger conditionality to welfare entitlements. Some interviewees emphasized how migrants should make certain monetary contributions before they can become deserving of welfare in Beijing. A few interviewees attached a strong functional conditionality to migrants' entitlement to welfare in Beijing. This means that migrants' deservingness depends on the extent to which they can perform certain required functions. Because Beijing has a top position in the spatial hierarchy (Cartier, 2006; Oakes and Schein, 2006; Schein, 2006), migrants' abilities to contribute have to match this position in the hierarchy before they can become deserving. With stronger conditionality attached to migrants' welfare entitlements, many migrants are deemed undeserving of welfare in Beijing. Thus, even though the reciprocity criterion can make migrants deserving of welfare in Beijing, their deservingness depends on the respondent's conception of reciprocity.

## 6. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored how differing notions of identity and reciprocity emphasized by Chinese people influence the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants. Even though migrants are Chinese citizens who contribute labor, they are not entitled to welfare at their destination. This makes migrants a challenging case in terms of deservingness. The interviewees had both positive and negative evaluations of migrants' deservingness. Differing conceptions of identity and reciprocity criteria mean that migrants are seen as deserving by some and undeserving by others.

Yuval-Davis (2011) describes how identity and belonging are multilayered, which means that individuals can belong to multiple levels of communities simultaneously. Thus, they can feel that they belong to, for instance, both the national community and local communities. This multilayeredness of identities and belonging means that the question of deservingness becomes complicated. Belonging to the nation, which is often the kind of identity that is emphasized in deservingness literature (Carmel and Sojka, 2021; Kootstra, 2016; Kremer, 2016; Osipović, 2015; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012; Reeskens and van der Meer,

2019; van der Waal et al., 2010; van Oorschot and Uunk, 2007; Wright and Reeskens, 2013), is only one of the ways in which people can feel belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). People can feel belonging to multiple communities, and researchers can therefore not assume which kinds of belongingness respondents emphasize when they evaluate recipients' deservingness. Whereas some respondents emphasize larger communities, where more potential recipients are seen as belonging, other respondents highlight smaller communities, where fewer recipients are perceived as belonging.

The case of intranational Chinese migrants illustrates how this multilayeredness of identities complicates the question of deservingness. Accordingly, some interviewees emphasized the nation and evaluated migrants as deserving because they saw them as belonging to the same national community. Other interviewees emphasized belonging to more local communities, such as family and home. This meant that migrants were seen as not belonging and, therefore, undeserving. The multilayeredness of identities and belonging therefore necessitates that the identity-deservingness criterion be understood in a more nuanced way, where fluidity in how respondents emphasize belonging is considered.

I have also illustrated how the reciprocity criterion must be thought about in a nuanced way. Reciprocation can take many forms (van Oorschot, 2000), but respondents often emphasize and expect specific kinds of reciprocation that vary in conditionality (Mau, 2004a, 2004b) and kind (Nielsen et al., 2020). Because recipients might be able to reciprocate in some ways, but not others, recipients' deservingness depends on which kinds of reciprocation respondents expect. The case of migrants' deservingness has also illustrated this point. Whereas migrants were perceived as deserving if interviewees emphasized how migrants work and contribute to the local economy, migrants were seen as less deserving if interviewees highlighted more specific conditions for the granting of welfare; for instance, monetary contributions like tax. Some interviewees attached a strong functional conditionality to migrants' deservingness of welfare in Beijing. They reasoned that because Beijing is a political and economic center, it is only people with certain abilities who can perform certain functions needed in Beijing who can be deserving of welfare in Beijing. Consequently, these interviewees see many migrants as not deserving of welfare in Beijing. Respondents might likely attach this kind of strong functional conditionality only to welfare entitlements in cities perceived as high in the spatial hierarchy of China. Respondents therefore do probably not attach the same degree of conditionality to welfare entitlements in smaller cities. They might thus perceive migrants as more deserving of welfare there because migrants more easily will be perceived by respondents as contributing sufficiently. In any case, the different kinds of reciprocation emphasized by the interviewees show that recipients' deservingness is very much dependent on which kind of reciprocation the respondents emphasize.



The case of intranational migrants' deservingness shows how we need to pay attention to how respondents conceive of identity and reciprocity before we can understand how they evaluate deservingness. This article has focused on the fluidity of identity and reciprocity criteria, and this fluidity was identified in the interviewees' evaluations of migrants' deservingness. However, this analysis is based only on the interviewees' evaluations of intranational Chinese migrants' deservingness. If the analysis had focused on the deservingness of other groups or deservingness in relation to specific policy areas, it is likely that other deservingness criteria would have been applied by the interviewees, or that interviewees would have conceived of the identity and reciprocity criteria in different ways.

My findings, therefore, do not indicate how people apply deservingness criteria in general. Rather, they suggest that people have differing notions of identity and reciprocity, and that potential recipients' deservingness will vary depending on the notions that respondents emphasize. This is something that deservingness research must pay attention to. Deservingness is not only a question of recipients' characteristics, but also of how respondents highlight different notions of identity and reciprocity. Deservingness research should therefore be careful with assuming certain conceptions of identity and reciprocity. Even though I have illustrated the importance of this by exploring how Chinese people evaluate the deservingness of intranational Chinese migrants, the findings are likely also relevant in other contexts and in other countries because people outside China also have differing notions of identity (Yuval-Davis, 2011) and reciprocity (Nielsen et al., 2020). Recognizing these differing notions is therefore likely to be important for understanding deservingness in other parts of the world.

### Competing interests

The author declares none.

### References

- Borjas, G. J. (1999), 'Immigration and welfare magnets', *Journal of Labor Economics*, 17, 4, 607–37.
- Carmel, E. and Sojka, B. (2021), 'Beyond welfare chauvinism and deservingness. Rationales of belonging as a conceptual framework for the politics and governance of migrants' rights', *Journal of Social Policy*, 50, 3, 645–67.
- Cartier, C. (2006), 'Symbolic city/regions and gendered identity formation in South China', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 138–54.
- Chen, J., Pan, J. and Xu, Y. (2016), 'Sources of authoritarian responsiveness: A field experiment in China', *American Journal of Political Science*, 60, 2, 383–400.
- De Swaan, A. (1995), 'Widening circles of identification: emotional concerns in sociogenetic perspective', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 12, 2, 25–39.
- Fei, X. ([1947] 1992), *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Feng, C. and Zhan, C. (2006), 'Openness, change, and translocality: new migrants' identification with Hainan', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 74–92.
- Frederiksen, M. (2018), 'Varieties of Scandinavian universalism: a comparative study of welfare justifications', *Acta Sociologica*, 61, 1, 3–16.
- Freedman, M. (1966), *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung*, London: The Athlone Press.
- Goodman, D. S. G. (2002), 'Structuring local identity: nation, province and county in Shanxi during the 1990s', *The China Quarterly*, 172, 837–62.
- Goodman, D. S. G. (2006), 'Shanxi as translocal imaginary: reforming the local', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 56–73.
- Hayton, B. (2020), *The Invention of China*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hoffman, L. (2006), 'Urban transformation and professionalization: translocality and rationalities of enterprise in post-Mao China', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 109–37.
- Im, D. (2014), 'The legitimation of inequality: psychosocial dispositions, education, and attitudes toward income inequality in China', *Sociological Perspectives*, 57, 4, 506–25.
- Jæger, M. (2007), 'Are the "deserving needy" really deserving everywhere? Cross-cultural heterogeneity and popular support for the old and the sick in eight Western countries', in B. Veghte and S. Mau (eds.), *Social Justice, legitimacy and the Welfare State*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 74–94.
- Kootstra, A. (2016), 'Deserving and undeserving welfare claimants in Britain and the Netherlands: examining the role of ethnicity and migration status using a vignette experiment', *European Sociological Review*, 32, 3, 325–38.
- Kremer, M. (2016), 'Earned citizenship: labour migrants' views on the welfare state', *Journal of Social Policy*, 45, 3, 395–415.
- Laenen, T. (2020), *Welfare Deservingness and Welfare Policy: Popular Deservingness Opinions and their Interaction with Welfare State Policies*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Laenen, T., Rossetti, F. and van Oorschot, W. (2019), 'Why deservingness theory needs qualitative research: comparing focus group discussions on social welfare in three welfare regimes', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60, 3, 190–216.
- Lamont, M. (2000), *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Lee, C. K. (2007), *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Leung, J. C. and Xu, Y. (2015), *China's Social Welfare: The Third Turning Point*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Liu, T., and Shi, Q. (2020), 'Acquiring a Beijing hukou: who is eligible and who is successful?' *The China Quarterly*, 243, 855–68.
- Marshall, T. H. ([1950] 1992), 'Citizenship and social class', in T. H. Marshall and T. Bottomore (eds.), *Citizenship and Social Class*, London: Pluto Press, 1–52.
- Mau, S. (2004a), *The Moral Economy of Welfare States: Britain and Germany Compared*, New York: Routledge.
- Mau, S. (2004b), 'Welfare regimes and the norms of social exchange', *Current Sociology*, 52, 1, 53–74.
- Nielsen, M. H., Frederiksen, M. and Larsen, C. A. (2020), 'Deservingness put into practice: constructing the (un)deservingness of migrants in four European countries', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 71, 1, 112–26.
- Oakes, T. (2000), 'China's provincial identities: reviving regionalism and reinventing "Chineseness"', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59, 3, 667–92.
- Oakes, T. and Schein, L. (2006), 'Translocal China: an introduction', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 15–49.

- Ong, A. (1999), *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Osipovič, D. (2015), 'Conceptualisations of welfare deservingness by polish migrants in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy*, 44, 4, 729–46.
- Reeskens, T. and van der Meer, T. (2019), 'The inevitable deservingness gap: a study into the insurmountable immigrant penalty in perceived welfare deservingness', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 29, 2, 166–81.
- Reeskens, T. and van Oorschot, W. (2012), 'Disentangling the "new liberal dilemma": on the relation between general welfare redistribution preferences and welfare chauvinism', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 53, 2, 120–39.
- Schein, L. (2006), 'Negotiating scale: Miao women at a distance', in T. Oakes and L. Schein (eds.), *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities, and the Reimagining of Space*, New York: Routledge, 213–37.
- Song, Y. (2014), 'What should economists know about the current Chinese hukou system?' *China Economic Review*, 29, 200–12.
- Svallfors, S. (2004), 'Class, attitudes and the welfare state: Sweden in comparative perspective', *Social Policy & Administration*, 38, 2, 119–38.
- Theiss, M. (2021), 'Local routes to preschool – access policies in Polish municipalities from a social citizenship perspective', *European Journal of Social Work*, 24, 2, 290–301.
- van der Waal, J., Achterberg, P., Houtman, D., de Koster, W. and Manevska, K. (2010), "'Some are more equal than others": economic egalitarianism and welfare chauvinism in the Netherlands', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 20, 4, 350–63.
- van Oorschot, W. (2000), 'Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public', *Policy & Politics*, 28, 1, 33–48.
- van Oorschot, W. (2006), 'Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 16, 1, 23–42.
- van Oorschot, W. and Roosma, F. (2015), *The social legitimacy of differently targeted benefits*, ImPROvE Working Paper No. 15/11, Antwerp: Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy – University of Antwerp.
- van Oorschot, W. and Uunk, W. (2007), 'Welfare spending and the public's concern for immigrants: multilevel evidence for eighteen European countries', *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 40, 1, 63–82.
- Wright, M. and Reeskens, T. (2013), 'Of what cloth are the ties that bind? National identity and support for the welfare state across 29 European countries', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20, 10, 1443–63.
- Xie, Y. (2016), 'Understanding inequality in China', *Chinese Journal of Sociology*, 2, 3, 327–47.
- Yuval-Davis, N. (2011), *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations*, London: Sage.
- Zhang, J., Wang, R., and Lu, C. (2019), 'A quantitative analysis of Hukou reform in Chinese cities: 2000–2016', *Growth and Change*, 50, 1, 201–21.