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Social Mobility of Migrant Peasant Workers in China

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ABSTRACT

Using data from four cities in China (Shenzhen, Suzhou, Beijing, and Chengdu), this article examines the occupational and social mobility among migrant peasant workers in urban areas. Through qualitative interviews with 109 peasant workers in 2005, we found that institutionalized social structures, such as the household-registration system, constrain the occupational and social mobility of rural peasant workers who migrate to and reside in urban areas. Obtaining more education and skills appear to be viable mechanisms for at least some migrant peasant workers to achieve higher occupational or social status in the city. Nonetheless, after several years of working in the urban areas, many rural workers plan to return to their rural hometowns, largely due to the social exclusion they experienced in the cities.

KEYWORDS

Migration, Occupation Mobility, Peasant Workers, Social Mobility, Status Attainment

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