


Acquiring a Beijing *hukou*: Who Is Eligible and Who Is Successful?

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Abstract

Using a localized perspective, this paper explores the gap between the eligibility criteria for a Beijing *hukou* (household registration) and the reality of successfully acquiring one. By comparing those who are eligible to apply with those who actually succeed in gaining a *hukou*, it reveals that *hukou* practices are operated locally to serve the city's development needs. It also reveals huge gaps between migrants, eligible applicants and *hukou* winners. Most migrants in Beijing are not eligible to apply for a local *hukou*. However, among those limited applicants who can apply, those with a post-graduate education and who serve the capital's political functions are more likely than others to win a *hukou*, an advantage not pointed out in government documents. These “hidden” rules are most likely set intentionally by the city so that it can maintain absolute control over *hukou* transfers; however, at the same time, they frustrate migrants who meet the stated requirements but who are in reality still unlikely to ever acquire a Beijing *hukou*. These findings open up a novel perspective for exploring the people–city nexus in China during the migration process and highlight the gaps between policy and reality for those who can apply for a Beijing *hukou* and those who actually win one.

Keywords: localization; *hukou* transfer; application requirements; evaluation criteria; Beijing

Over the past half century, migrants without a local household registration (*hukou* 户口) in China have received much attention from researchers and policy-makers alike.¹ Without a *hukou*, migrants are unable to access the social and welfare benefits available to urban residents.² Numerous articles have investigated the adverse effects of this deprivation on the daily lives of migrants and have led to many calls for the relaxation of controls on *hukou* transfers.³ The Chinese state has responded, setting a goal in its 2014 New Urbanization Plan

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1 Chan 1996; Chan and Zhang 1999; Solinger 2006.

2 Chan 2009; Goldstein and Guo 1992; Woodman 2016.

3 Chan 1999; Chen, Shaowei, and Liu 2016; Fan 2002;

to transfer the *hukou* of 100 million “floaters” by 2020. Today, less than two years from the target date, this goal is far from being met.⁴ When confronted with this reality, it is critical to reflect on the differences between those who are eligible to apply for a *hukou* transfer and those who actually secure one.

Hukou transfer has already received some scholarly attention, and the factors contributing to a successful transfer are being increasingly studied. However, these studies are almost all conducted at the national level.⁵ Today, *hukou* management is largely operated by city governments, who set entry barriers according to their vested interests.⁶ As these interests and thus barriers vary across cities, so should the types of people who are successful in having their *hukou* transferred. The city, rather than the commonly used aggregated mass, should therefore be the focus of *hukou* research. Moreover, those who have successfully transferred *hukou* should have also met the application requirements; however, this is not the case in reverse. Many applicants who are encouraged by policies that state they are eligible for *hukou* transfer later find that they are not on the list of *hukou* winners. Their aspirations then turn to frustration. What in the *hukou* transfer process distinguishes those who are successful from those who are eligible to apply? This paper aims to investigate that gap.

The objective of this paper is twofold. First, it attempts to reveal the localized application requirements and evaluation criteria of the *hukou* transfer in Beijing. Second, it looks to uncover the consistencies and discrepancies between the stated requirements and real criteria. In so doing, we add a concrete example to the literature on the localization of *hukou* practices. More importantly, by revealing the gap between who can apply for *hukou* transfer and who is eventually granted *hukou*, this paper can help many “floaters” to form better decisions. It can also offer an alternative way forward for *hukou* reform and advance new potential research on this topic.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. First, it introduces the data and definitions. It then explores and compares who can apply for, and who obtains, Beijing *hukou*. The final section offers conclusions and discussions.

Data and Definition

This study uses the 0.1 per cent microdata sample of the Beijing 2010 Census. This sample includes 18,617 records with over 50 variables covering a wide range of topics. Admittedly, as repeat, onward and return migration patterns are very common in China, neither the census nor any other survey has direct information on migration and *hukou* history. However, indirect information, such as the place of birth, place of usual residence five years ago and current *hukou* registration place, is provided by the census. Today, as limitations on

4 Chen, Chuanbo, and Fan 2016; Kim 2015.

5 Chan, Liu and Yang 1999; Liu, Ye, and Xu 2017; Liu, Zhiqiang 2005; Deng and Gustafsson 2014; Sun and Fan 2011.

6 Chan and Buckingham 2008; Chen, Chuanbo, and Fan 2016; Zhang and Tao 2012; Zhu 2007.

data persist, these data are widely used to infer who is a migrant and who has transferred *hukou*, a method that is followed by this paper.⁷

A migrant in Beijing is defined as a person who, on the date of the census enumeration (1 November 2010), was living in Beijing, had lived in Beijing or had left his or her *hukou* place for at least six months, and had not been born in Beijing. If the migrant had Beijing *hukou*, then he or she is classified as a *hukou* migrant; otherwise the migrant is classified as a non-*hukou* migrant. Here, three points need special attention. First, Beijing municipality is chosen as the geographical region by which the populations are defined. This is not only in line with previous research on migrants in Beijing but also because *hukou* and its related benefits are still provided and allocated by the municipal government.⁸ Second, our resident count is based on a six-month stay, which is different from previous research which uses a one-year length of stay. This difference is because in 1995 the reference period for a permanent resident was officially changed from one year to six months. The new time period has placed more migrants in their current place of residence; previously, migrant residents were undercounted.⁹

The third noteworthy point is that our definition of migrants does not follow previous research, which uses place of regular residence five years ago. We use place of birth instead. Our definition largely avoids the selection bias inherent in previous studies, which exclude those migrants who have spent more than five years in their new place of residence and thus have a higher chance of *hukou* transfer. We note that by dividing migrants into *hukou* and non-*hukou* categories, both definitions rely on the questionable assumption that no migrant has a local *hukou* at first. But this assumption is much less questionable when defining migrants by birth place. Today, there are many return migrants who have kept their *hukou* in their hometown but who were living elsewhere five years ago. However, most babies are born in the place where their parents' *hukou* is registered and so inherit their *hukou* from them. This means that for most people, place of birth is usually where their original *hukou* is registered. This *hukou* can then be transferred through migration.

We dropped three types of migrants from our sample. First, we excluded those below the legal working age (16 years of age). These migrants are unable to obtain a Beijing *hukou* by themselves; they would have to apply through a family-based transfer. For them, the *hukou* status of their parents is decisive and thus should be considered. This information, however, was unavailable, as the household identifier was removed from the census data, perhaps owing to confidentiality. This problem also affected those aged 60 or above, who are similarly subject to the family-based transfer criteria. Moreover, the local *hukou* of elderly migrants may have come from the state rather than the local authorities. This is because *hukou* management was centralized in the pre-reform era, a time when

7 Chan 1999; Liu, Ye, and Xu 2017; Sun and Fan 2011.

8 Goldstein and Guo 1992.

9 Wu and He 2017.

these migrants were in their 20s, the most common age for migration.¹⁰ Third, we excluded those studying in university. University students have access only to a collective *hukou* (*jitihu* 集体户). This is a temporary status and is revoked once the student graduates. Removing these categories leaves 6,560 migrants in the sample: 1,226 *hukou* and 5,334 non-*hukou* migrants.

Who Can Apply for A Beijing *hukou*?

A cursory glance through government documents reveals that there are two pathways to a Beijing *hukou*: a family-based one and a work-based one. The latter is the focus of the current study. As mentioned above, information on family traits, which is necessary for studying the family-based transfer, is unavailable and so migrants eligible to follow this route are excluded from the sample. More importantly, *hukou* policies regarding family-based transfer are designed to meet national requirements rather than the city's own interests. Including these policies in the current research may deviate our attention away from the localized *hukou* practices in Beijing.

The application requirements for the work-based transfer route have never been clear cut but, after studying dozens of government documents, several guidelines can be inferred. The first one is regarding education. Before 2009, many documents issued by the Beijing Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau stated that a bachelor's degree was required to apply for a Beijing *hukou*.¹¹ This requirement was then raised to a master's degree in 2009.¹² But for our data, which were collected just one year later, the effect of this change should not be obvious. Therefore, we use the pre-2009 requirement to draw the hypothesis that migrants with a university education are more likely than others to be granted a Beijing *hukou* (H1).

Second, it is advantageous to work in a sector that contributes towards the development of Beijing's economy. According to many documents, contributing to Beijing's core priorities seems to be a prerequisite for the city's *hukou* application.¹³ Although it has varied slightly over time, Beijing's urban master

10 Chan and Zhang 1999.

11 See, e.g., BMHRSSB 1999; 2001. Documents on BMHRSSB annual plans for receiving fresh non-native graduates between 2000 and 2008 are available at <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/so/s?qt=%E6%8E%A5%E6%94%B6%E9%9D%9E%E5%8C%97%E4%BA%AC%E7%94%9F%E6%BA%90%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F&siteCode=1100000088&tab=all&toolsStatus=0>. Accessed 11 November 2019.

12 See, e.g., various documents on BMHRSSB annual plans for receiving fresh non-native graduates since 2009 at <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/so/s?qt=%E6%8E%A5%E6%94%B6%E9%9D%9E%E5%8C%97%E4%BA%AC%E7%94%9F%E6%BA%90%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F&siteCode=1100000088&tab=all&toolsStatus=0>. Accessed 11 November 2019. Also see People's Government of Beijing Municipality 2009.

13 See, e.g., BMHRSSB annual plans for receiving fresh non-native graduates at <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/so/s?qt=%E6%8E%A5%E6%94%B6%E9%9D%9E%E5%8C%97%E4%BA%AC%E7%94%9F%E6%BA%90%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F&siteCode=1100000088&tab=all&toolsStatus=0>. Accessed 11 November 2019. Also see BMHRSSB 1999; 2001; 2018a; People's Government of Beijing Municipality 2007; 2009.

plan has generally emphasized the importance of maintaining the city's roles as national political centre; the capital city of a socialist country; national science and technology centre; and economic centre of northern China.¹⁴ As such, migrants working in designated key sectors such as the civil service, public services, technology and research, and advanced business services should have a higher chance of being granted a Beijing *hukou* than others (H2a).¹⁵ In addition, it is not only the sector that is important; it appears that level of skill and experience is also a decisive factor. Managers and professionals are said to be preferred in *hukou* applications.¹⁶ Office workers, especially civil servants working for the central government, are also favoured. It is therefore expected that applicants working in these types of jobs and sectors are more likely to be granted a Beijing *hukou* than others (H2b).

The third guideline centres on residence. To guarantee that local *hukou* go to settlers rather than movers, a certain period of residence is always mandatory. The exact period of time required for Beijing was unclear at the time of data collection. However, as the period for large cities was set at five years in the New Urbanization Plan, we are convinced that this will be the minimum period required for such a megacity as Beijing. Therefore, those who have lived in Beijing for more than five years are expected to have a greater chance of obtaining a local *hukou* (H3a). Moreover, there are additional *hukou* transfer channels in the towns and villages within the Beijing municipality. In 1997, the Beijing government announced that migrants living and working in towns could apply for a Beijing *hukou*. This channel was then closed in 2005.¹⁷ However, in the same year, a new *hukou* channel was opened in Beijing's villages. Since then, graduates employed as village cadres have been, and continue to be, granted Beijing *hukou*.¹⁸ Thus, Beijing *hukou* applications in the municipality's villages and towns are more likely to be successful than applications for *hukou* in the city (H3b).

The last guideline is intended to help the less-developed suburbs attract more talented workers and balance development across the capital. Before 2009, when the education requirement for *hukou* transfer was at the undergraduate level, any fresh graduate working in Beijing's suburbs was eligible to apply for a Beijing *hukou*. However, for those working in the downtown districts, this only applied if the graduate was working in one of the key sectors. Since the

14 Beijing's urban master plans (Beijing chengshi zongti guihua) for 1958, 1973, 1983, 1993, 2004 and 2016 are available at <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/so/s?database=bj&tab=all&siteCode=1100000088&qt=%E5%8C%97%E4%BA%AC%E5%9F%8E%E5%B8%82%E6%80%BB%E4%BD%93%E8%A7%84%E5%88%92>. Accessed 11 November 2019.

15 These sectors include public administration and social organization, education, healthcare, social insurance and welfare, culture, sports and entertainment, information transfer, computer services and software, scientific research, polytechnic services and geological prospecting, finance, and leasing and commercial services.

16 See, e.g., BMHRSSB 1999; 2018a.

17 See, e.g., People's Government of Beijing Municipality 1997; 2005.

18 See, e.g., Office for the People's Government of Beijing Municipality and Beijing Municipal Committee of the CCP 2005.

education requirement was raised to a masters' degree, those with a first degree are only allowed to apply for a *hukou* if they work in the suburbs.¹⁹ Further scrutiny of how strictly this guideline is applied requires information on workplace, which unfortunately the census does not provide. In order to fully explore the effects of the *hukou* application requirements, more detailed data are needed, which calls for future improvement in data collection.

Who Is Granted Beijing *Hukou*?

Migrants, eligible applicants and winners

Applying the guidelines to the microdata, it is evident that there is a huge gap between those coming to Beijing and those who are eligible to apply for a *hukou*. In Beijing in 2010, only 21 per cent of migrants had a university education; 24 per cent worked in the key sectors; 33 per cent worked in management/professional/clerical positions; and 13 per cent met both the education and job requirements. Further, only 17 per cent of migrants lived in towns or villages, even though the chance of being granted a *hukou* was greater there. There is, then, a gap also between where migrants want to live and where the Beijing government wants them to live. Yet, with regard to duration of residence, over half of all migrants had stayed for at least five years, which meets the *hukou* application guidelines. Long-term migrants make a huge contribution to Beijing and aspire to settle there; however, the fact is the vast majority are actually not eligible to apply for a *hukou* (Table 1).

Hukou winners differ significantly from the rest of the migrants in terms of their education, jobs and residency, which points to the overall effectiveness of the application guidelines. In 2010, over half of those who were granted a Beijing *hukou* had a university education; 60 per cent worked in the designated key sectors; 75 per cent were in key jobs; and 92 per cent had lived in Beijing for at least five years. Compare this with the same figures for non-*hukou* migrants: only 13 per cent had a university education; 17 per cent worked in key sectors; 24 per cent were in key jobs; and 41 per cent had lived in Beijing for at least five years. However, contrary to the application guideline on where to live, *hukou* migrants were less represented in towns and villages than non-*hukou* ones. This contradiction may be the result of the failure of this specific guideline or a tendency of potential *hukou* winners to choose to live in the city. We use a model-based approach later to determine which explanation is right.

19 See, e.g., BMHRSSB annual plans for receiving fresh non-native graduates at <http://www.beijing.gov.cn/so/s?qt=%E6%8E%A5%E6%94%B6%E9%9D%9E%E5%8C%97%E4%BA%AC%E7%94%9F%E6%BA%90%E9%AB%98%E6%A0%A1%E6%AF%95%E4%B8%9A%E7%94%9F&siteCode=110000088&tab=all&toolsStatus=0>. Accessed 11 November 2019.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Migrants, Eligible Applicants and *hukou* Winners

	Composition of migrants (%)			Percentage who win <i>hukou</i>
	All migrants	<i>Hukou</i>	Non- <i>hukou</i>	
Guideline 1: Education Level***				
Not eligible: no university	78.92	45.19	86.67	10.70
Eligible	21.08	54.81	13.33	48.59
University (undergraduate)	15.34	30.59	11.83	37.28
University (postgraduate)	5.75	24.23	1.50	78.78
Guideline 2a: Sector***				
Non-eligible: other sectors	75.69	40.23	83.00	9.08
Eligible	24.31	59.77	17.00	42.01
Civil service	2.52	11.63	0.64	78.99
Public services	6.73	16.86	4.64	42.82
Technology and research	8.30	19.00	6.09	39.12
Advanced business services	6.77	12.27	5.63	31.00
Guideline 2b: Occupation***				
Non-eligible: other occupations	67.10	25.51	83.00	6.49
Eligible	32.90	74.49	24.32	38.69
Managers and administrators	2.79	4.27	2.49	26.14
Professionals and technical workers	17.30	43.22	11.96	42.68
Office workers	12.80	27.00	9.87	36.04
Guideline 3a: Length of residence***				
Non-preferred: < 5 years	49.62	7.83	59.22	2.95
Preferred: ≥ 5 years	50.38	92.17	40.78	34.19
Guideline 3b: Place of residence***				
Non-preferred: city	83.51	89.97	82.02	20.14
Preferred	16.49	10.03	17.98	11.37
Village	10.23	6.85	11.00	12.52
Town	6.27	3.18	6.97	9.49

Source:

0.1 per cent microdata sample of the Beijing 2010 Census.

Notes:

* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (significance level is from Chi-2 test).

The majority of the Beijing *hukou* winners fulfil all application requirements, but the converse is not true. Less than half of all migrants with a university education and working in one of the prioritized sectors have managed to acquire a *hukou*. This share drops to about one-third for migrants in key occupations and living in Beijing for at least five years. More importantly, *hukou* transfers are not distributed equally among the eligible migrants. For those with a post-graduate education, 79 per cent were granted a Beijing *hukou*, which is more

than double the share of those with a first degree. Similarly, the share of *hukou* winners in the civil service is double that of winners working in advanced business services. These differences suggest a discrepancy between application guidelines and the true evaluation criteria.

Consistencies, gaps and discrepancies

In the first model in [Table 2](#), we can determine that the eligibility requirements are generally consistent with the real evaluation criteria. This model predicts the probability of acquiring a Beijing *hukou* for all migrants. It shows that migrants are more likely to be granted a Beijing *hukou* if they have a university education; work in the required sectors; have professional, technical, management or clerical positions; have stayed in Beijing for at least five years; and reside in villages. These outcomes confirm most of our previous hypotheses. They also show that the underrepresentation of *hukou* migrants in villages does not point to the ineffectiveness of the guidelines on residence. A migrant self-selection process, in which many eligible applicants choose not to live in villages, may be responsible instead.²⁰ Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that fulfilling the *hukou* application requirements is generally a necessary prerequisite for obtaining a Beijing *hukou*. These findings highlight the localized nature of current *hukou* practices.

Although there is a general consistency between application requirements and evaluation criteria, gaps are evident in education level and job sector. Up until a year before the collection of the data, a first degree, rather than a postgraduate degree, was sufficient to apply for a Beijing *hukou*. But the coefficient for a first degree is about only half that for a postgraduate degree. Likewise, archival research finds no preference in the requirements for specific sectors among those that serve the city's core functions. However, when it comes to actually obtaining a *hukou*, there is a bias towards the civil service.²¹ This means that for Beijing, political administration is considered to be a more important sector than other key areas. Given these gaps, research on *hukou* transfer eligibility and award should not only be conducted in a place-based context but also be juxtaposed and compared. Moreover, *hukou* reforms should not only consider the application requirements but also take into account the gaps found here. After all, a *hukou* hopeful will find it more frustrating and deflating to be rejected after going through an application process.

Two minor discrepancies were found between the application requirements and evaluation criteria. First, the effect of managerial and administrative post on a migrant's *hukou* prospects is not positive, as expected, but insignificant. This

20 In 2010, only 1% of migrants in villages met both the education and job requirements.

21 These gaps have existed for a long time. Using the 2000 Census microdata in Beijing, we find that the coefficient for undergraduate education is about 60% of that for postgraduate education. With regard to the employment sector, the positive effect is only significant for the civil service in 2000.

Table 2: Logistic Regression Models of the Determinants of Acquiring Beijing *hukou*

	(1) All	(2) City	(3) Town
<i>Guideline 1: Education level (reference: below university)</i>			
University (undergraduate)	1.62***	1.65***	4.61***
University (postgraduate)	3.83***	3.81***	3.33*
<i>Guideline 2a: Job sector (reference: other)</i>			
Civil service	2.56***	2.68***	
Public services	0.76***	0.82***	0.97
Technology and research	0.50***	0.50***	-3.39*
Advanced business services	0.38**	0.43**	-1.01
<i>Guideline 2b: Occupation (reference: other)</i>			
Managers and administrators	-0.13	-0.03	0.00
Professionals and technical workers	0.96***	1.04***	0.45
Office workers	0.89***	0.95***	0.75
<i>Guideline 3a: Length of residence (reference: <5 years)</i>			
>= 5 years	2.41***	2.19***	4.67***
<i>Guideline 3b: Place of residence (reference: city)</i>			
Village	0.80***		
Town	0.25		
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age	0.09***	0.10***	0.10***
Gender (male = 1)	-0.35***	-0.16	-1.22**
Marital status (ever married = 1)	0.29*	0.24	-0.68
Ethnicity (minorities = 1)	0.54**	0.56**	-1.00
<i>Constant</i>	-8.29***	-8.58***	-8.95***
Model -2 log likelihood	-1286.79	-1104.69	-55.11
Model chi-square	2441.53***	2197.52***	83.56***
<i>Pseudo R</i> ²	0.49	0.50	0.43
Observations	5484	4574	342

Source:

0.1 per cent microdata sample of the Beijing 2010 Census.

Notes:

Dependent variable: 0 = non-*hukou* migrants; 1 = *hukou* migrants. *** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$.

may be the result of the nuances in these types of jobs. Among managers and administrators, only those in charge of the state-sector or world-renowned enterprises and organizations are invited to enter the *hukou* application system.²² However, in 2010, only 6.5 per cent of migrants worked in the state sector. Thus, for the key-occupation policy to be fully examined, a further breakdown of managers and administrators by firm type, size and reputation is needed, which unfortunately we cannot derive from our data. This problem actually confirms the complexity of the *hukou* system, which is carefully designed, meticulously tailored and constantly modified for the city's ever-changing needs.

22 See, e.g., People's Government of Beijing Municipality 1997; 2007; 2009.

Another discrepancy lies in the effect of living in towns, which should be positive but turns out to be insignificant. The fact that the relevant policy was only implemented for eight years (between 1997 and 2005) may have undermined the expected effect. There were also fewer migrants during this period than in the following period up to 2010. The inability of towns to attract powerful firms may further erode the effect. This is because most migrants in the private sector acquire a Beijing *hukou* through their firms. The ability of firms to obtain *hukou* for their eligible workers via district authority quotas, which are set by the municipal government, then becomes instrumental.²³ However, large and successful firms tend to concentrate more in the city than in towns. Consequently, the advantage of having access to the extra *hukou* channel in towns may be cancelled out, making the effect of living there insignificant. This interpretation is validated by Models 2 and 3 in Table 2. Here, working in technology and research has a negative effect for migrants in towns and a positive one for those in the city. Therefore, opening extra *hukou* channels in towns may not be enough to resolve the mismatch between where migrants want to live and where the government wants them to live. Changing the allocation rules more fundamentally and cultivating a more attractive environment may also be important.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper takes a widely known but rarely used localized perspective to compare those who are eligible to apply for a transfer of their *hukou* to Beijing with those who successfully manage to do so. To our knowledge, it is the first study to undertake such a comparison by matching an archival analysis of *hukou* policies with an empirical analysis of the 2010 Census microdata. We find that migrants who meet the application guidelines have a higher chance of acquiring a Beijing *hukou*. Decisive factors include having a university education, working in a key occupation, living in Beijing for more than five years and being located in a village. Migrants who best meet the city's needs are also prioritized. In order to maintain its role as China's political centre, the capital of a socialist country, the national centre for science and technology and economic centre for northern China, Beijing has a vested interest in attracting the best talent and to balance development across the municipality. As such, who is eligible for and who should be granted *hukou* are both decided locally in order to best meet the city's core objectives. Eligibility is more often than not essential to being granted a *hukou*.

Significant gaps between migrants, eligible applicants and *hukou* winners have been revealed. In 2010, most migrants in Beijing failed to meet the education and job requirements, and they did not live where Beijing wished them to live. Even among the limited number of qualified applicants, the chances of obtaining a

23 One recent document issued by the BMHRSSB stated that district authorities should allocate a quota to firms based on their sector, prospects, tax contribution, employment contribution, how they operate and how they train their employees. See BMHRSSB 2018b.

hukou still varied. Those with a postgraduate education had a much higher chance than those with an undergraduate education, a bias rarely mentioned in official documents. Preference was also given to those who worked in the civil service over workers in other key sectors. This was also a “hidden” rule. Although the Beijing government clearly sets out the eligibility requirements for *hukou*, it is less clear about what is needed to actually obtain one.

The *hukou* system is a complicated one and requires further exploration. This study was unable to scrutinize the *hukou* policies that favour those working in Beijing’s suburbs as the data on both place of work and residence were not available. We were also unable to examine whether managers or administrators were better placed to obtain a *hukou*, as both roles were taken as a whole in our data. Other more subtle factors, such as academic performance, have been left unexplored, as this information was unavailable in the census. All of these omitted variables point to the possibility of a bias in the results. Additionally, we could only infer from the data who was a migrant who had successfully transferred *hukou*, as this information could not be read directly. All these limitations mean that there is much room for further research. This research should look to employ improved techniques and also enhanced datasets. Opportunities to look at *hukou* transfer across cities and over time may then emerge as a topic for research, one that has only been lightly touched upon by the current analysis.

Although the focus of this article is on Beijing, our contributions go beyond the capital. There will also be gaps between migrants, eligible applicants and *hukou* winners in other first-tier cities such as Shanghai. These gaps can be used to the local authority’s advantage when deciding on the most suitable candidates as well as allowing it to have the final say on *hukou* transfer. However, they can also shatter many migrants’ dreams of acquiring resident status in their adopted city and lead to potential social unrest. To avoid such unrest, migrants should be better informed about these gaps, and *hukou* reforms should be formulated to this end. The less attractive cities can also gain some inspiration from our results. Offering the chance of *hukou* status was not enough for the towns in Beijing’s outskirts to attract talent from the city centre. Likewise, less developed cities elsewhere cannot compete against more developed ones in the ever fiercer intercity competition simply by raising the short-term value of *hukou* status. More resources should be mobilized to improve the overall city quality. Moreover, a new potential field in *hukou* research has been revealed. This is a field in which a place-centred perspective should be adopted, archival and empirical analyses combined, and the gap between who can apply and who is granted *hukou* explored and then compared across cities.

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Disclosure statement

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摘要: 本文从地方化的角度比较了北京市的落户政策和现实状况。结果表明, 落户的标准制定和现实操作都是地方化的过程, 都体现了城市的发展导向。满足落户政策是实现落户的前提, 但绝大多数迁移者都难以满足落户标准。此外, 满足落户标准者和实际获得户口者也存在多方面的显著差异: 在满足落户标准的迁移者中, 具有研究生学历和为首都政治中心服务的人群才更有可能获得北京户口, 而各种落户政策文件中并未出现这种明显的偏向性。这些“隐性”规则很可能是城市政府有意设置的, 以长期保持对落户的绝对控制。但这会让表面上达到了政策要求、实际上却很难落户的迁移者丧失希望。这些关于落户政策与现实错位的研究发现为解析迁移过程中人与城市之间的关系开辟了新的视角。

关键词: 地方化; 户口迁移; 落户标准; 评估体系; 北京

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