

**How Does Migration Shape Self-perception? The Impact of Migrational Factors on the
Self-perceived Class Identity of Internal Migrants: A Case Study of Shanghai.**

AP Research

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of migrational factors on the self-perceived class identity of internal migrants in Shanghai, a major hub of rapid urbanization and socio-economic transformation in China. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the research analyzes data from 394 valid survey responses collected via an online platform and qualitative insights from interviews with eight migrants. The study examines how migration characteristics—specifically length of residence, purpose of migration, and household registration (hukou) status—shape subjective class identity amidst structural barriers and social stratification. Key findings reveal a dual effect of length of residence, which positively correlates with past upward mobility but negatively impacts future mobility expectations due to heightened awareness of systemic constraints. Economically driven migrants exhibit stronger upward mobility compared to those migrating for family or marital reasons, while hukou status emerges as a critical determinant, with local registration significantly enhancing access to resources and social integration. The research highlights the complex interplay between individual agency and institutional barriers, contributing to a nuanced understanding of class identity formation in the context of China's internal migration. These insights underscore the need for policy reforms to address structural inequalities and promote inclusive urban development.

Keywords: internal migration, class identity, Shanghai, hukou system, social mobility

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1 Introduction

1.1 China's Socio-Economic Transformation and the Emergence of Class Awareness

China's social economy has undergone a rapid transformation in a short period of time. This change has profoundly reshaped China's social structure, gradually transforming the originally concentrated and homogeneous social framework into a society with stratified characteristics. These changes have enhanced people's understanding of social status because surveys show that nowadays individuals increasingly feel that they are in a complex social hierarchy (Deng, 2013; Xie, 2010). There is an intricate connection between this consciousness and an individual's specific circumstances as well as the broader social dynamics. Among them, domestic immigration and class mobility play a crucial role in this process (Chen et al., 2019; Liu, 2014).

1.2 Internal Migration as a Defining Feature of China's Socio-Economic Landscape

After the reform and opening up era, domestic population mobility has become a very prominent feature in China's social and economic pattern. Those policies promoting market liberalization have brought about a large-scale population migration and mobility situation that has never been seen before. At first, the population moved from rural areas to cities, and later this mobility pattern transformed into mobility between cities. The phenomenon of population mobility based on families is becoming increasingly common. By 2020, more than 300 million people had been classified into the category of "floating population", which reflects the phenomenon of large-scale population migration within the country (Liu, 2014; Xie, 2010). Although these immigrants provide particularly crucial human capital to cities, most of the time they encounter structural obstacles such as the household registration system, which limit their access to resources and also hinder social mobility (Chen et al., 2019; Deng, 2013).

1.3 The Interplay of Economic Growth and Subjective Class Identity

Literature on subjective class identity reveals the subtle mutual influence relationship between individual factors and macroeconomic factors. Although the economy is constantly growing and people's educational attainment has improved to a certain extent, the subjective understanding of the Chinese people's own social status is mostly lagging behind these advancements. Even though social and economic conditions have improved,(Chen et al., 2019; Evans & Kelley, 2004)there are still many people who consider themselves to belong to the lower class(Chen et al., 2019; Evans & Kelley, 2004). This phenomenon can be explained as being caused by income inequality, which has a negative impact on class identity. Studies have shown that narrowing the income gap and increasing mobility opportunities are very crucial for cultivating a stronger sense of upward mobility (Chen et al., 2019; Curtis, 2016).

1.4 Global Perspectives on Class Identity and Social Stratification

On a global scale, people's views on class identity are influenced by objective realities and subjective reference points. A study conducted in 33 societies shows that income inequality makes social stratification more obvious, thus weakening the sense of identity of the middle class(Curtis, 2016). Apart from the situations mentioned earlier, individuals are generally more willing to associate their own self-perception with the social circle they are directly in rather than with the objectively existing class structure. This trend can be observed both in developed countries and in developing countries(Curtis, 2016; Evans & Kelley, 2004). This indicates that in a society like China, which is in a stage of rapid transformation, class identity is influenced by two aspects. On the one hand, it is the impact brought about by structural inequality; on the other hand, it is the impact resulting from local social interaction.

Under the current general background, the question arises: How do migration characteristics, such as length of residence, purpose of migration, and hukou status, shape the self-perceived class identity of internal migrants in Shanghai in the context of structural barriers and socio-economic stratification? This study examines these dynamics with the help of Shanghai, which is a symbol of rapid urbanization. It is also a major destination for domestic immigrants. This study aims to combine personal experiences with macroeconomic trends, and then conduct a broader discussion on the class identity, social mobility and socio-economic integration of contemporary Chinese immigrants.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Class Identity

Class identity is an individual's subjective understanding of their social status. This subjective understanding is generally different from the individual's actual socio-economic status, that is, there is a deviation between the two. The classic theory proposed by Jackman and Jackman (1973) emphasized a cognitive and emotional process, whose role is to build a bridge of communication between objective social status and subjective social status. The results of the recent empirical research conducted in China show that among the factors influencing class identity, income inequality has become the main determining factor, while educational situation or professional status is not the main determining factor (Chen et al., 2019) China's transformation from a planned economy to a market economy has a significant impact on social stratification against this historical background. Previously, it was a rigid two-tier structure, but now it has transformed into a more flexible but unequal hierarchical structure. This transformation is related

to the historical background at that time. When China began to transform from a planned economy to a market economy, such changes led to alterations in social stratification as well. It has changed from the original rather rigid two-level structure to the current hierarchical structure, which is more flexible but has unequal situations (Li, 2019).

The research conducted by Li Peilin et al.(2005)mainly pointed out the complexity of class identity in the psychological aspect, particularly emphasizing people's subjective cognitive situation, which is not only affected by material conditions, but also by aspects such as social expectations and social norms. At this time, Evans and Kelley (2004) pointed out a global trend in 2004 that individuals would regard themselves as "middle class" and would not consider those objective indicators. However, most of the time, these studies would ignore how immigration would complicate these situations because immigration would introduce new reference points. It will also bring about cultural imbalance. This issue is particularly crucial in the urban environment of China. In Chinese cities, immigrants will encounter some systemic obstacles when fully integrating into society.

2.2 Internal Migration

Internal migration in China has played a transformative role in the redistribution of the labor force and the reshaper of the urban population structure. However, the household registration system is still a relatively major obstacle at present. This system restricts rural migrants from accessing urban resources and exacerbates inequality (Zhang C., 2020). Despite these challenges, migration is often associated with economic and social mobility. In the research published by Peng et al.(2020), it was clearly pointed out that the immigrant group has achieved the learning model of "learning by doing" in the actual process of life and work, and they have also fully utilized all

the economies of scale advantages of the city. Through such a way, the socio-economic status of the immigrants themselves has been improved. However, as shown in the research on urban inclusion policies conducted by Tan and Wang(2019), most of the time these benefits are offset by cultural and institutional exclusions.

The research conducted by Zhang (2020) specifically explored the wage discrimination faced by rural household registration holders. This research emphasized how systemic inequality has led to the persistent feeling of marginalization among migrant workers in the labor market. The research conducted by Chen et al.(2019) focused on the interaction between economic inequality and the concept of subjective mobility. Through this research, it was revealed how these factors disproportionately affect immigration. However, these studies are generally conducted using macro-level methods, mainly focusing on structural factors, while ignoring the personal narratives and adaptation strategies of immigrants. Shanghai has a unique social and cultural landscape. Under such circumstances, the limitations of this kind of research become particularly crucial.

2.3 Internal Migration and Class Identity

The intersection between domestic immigration and class identity is a situation presented after the complex interaction between structural constraints and individual initiative. Rao(2014) put forward such a view. He believed that immigration has a promoting effect on economic and social mobility. However, immigrants often need to make relatively significant adjustments in terms of culture and psychology. The same situation is that the research conducted by Chen and Fan(2016) indicates that although the phenomenon of immigration has improved the material conditions of many people, due to the differences in accessing public resources, this may make the sense of social exclusion more severe. These findings are consistent with the analysis Zhang(2011)

made on urban integration, in which Zhang particularly emphasized the crucial role that household registration plays in influencing immigrants' access to urban welfare.

Moreover, the theory proposed by Bourdieu(1987) holds that class identity has both objective and subjective aspects. It is jointly formed by an individual's position in that structured social space and personal perception. This view is supported by research on the migration of rural population to cities in China, which shows that because there have always been institutional obstacles, even if one has lived in the city for a longer time and their income has increased, it does not necessarily lead to an improvement in class identity. The work carried out by Xie(2010) emphasized emphatically how social stratification led to the emergence of "deflationary" class identity among immigrant groups. The concept of "deflationary" class identity mentioned here highlighted the psychological impact brought about by exclusion.

However, most of the existing studies have focused on structural barriers such as household registration and income disparity but have not thoroughly studied the psychological dimension of class identity. Although it has been fully proven that immigration can bring economic benefits, what long-term impact does immigration have on the social status perceived by oneself? This issue has still not been fully explored in an urban environment like Shanghai where social stratification is very prominent.

2 Research Questions

2.1 Theoretical Model

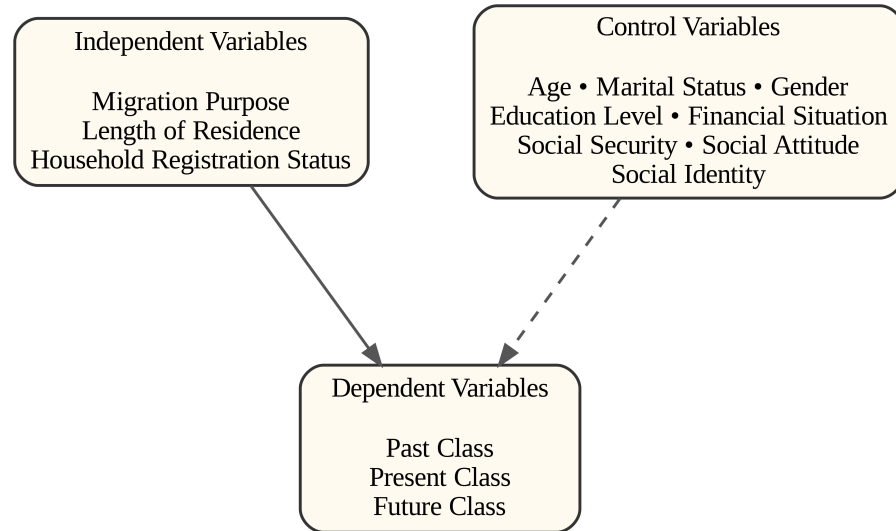


Figure 1 Architecture of Theoretical Model

The theoretical model (**Figure 1**) underpinning this study regards self-perceived class identity as the dynamic outcome resulting from the interaction between migration characteristics and structures, institutions, and individual factors. This theoretical model places domestic migrants in the broader context of urban socio-economic stratification in China and emphasizes the dual roles of integration opportunities and systemic obstacles in the formation of subjective class concepts. The model also emphasizes that immigration characteristics, such as the length of residence, the purpose of immigration, and household registration status, are the main determinants that function within institutional frameworks such as the household registration system, because the household registration system controls the acquisition of resources and also has an impact on the trajectory of social mobility. Additionally, this model regards dimensions such as population, socioeconomics, and attitudes as moderating factors. Recognizing that they have the ability to improve the experiences of immigrants and the ways to internalize class mobility among them.

2.2 Hypothesis

The length of time that the internal floating population resides in the destination has a very prominent impact on their social mobility. At the beginning stage of immigration, internal immigrants mainly rely on their own economic foundation and the social network they possess to strive for a higher social class status in the destination area. However, as their residence time in the destination keeps increasing, their degree of social integration has also deepened, but the obstacles to social mobility are gradually intensifying. Such a dynamic situation will have a negative impact on their expectations of the changes in social classes over time.

Apart from the situations mentioned earlier, the starting point of social class in the destination region varies due to different immigrants. Domestic immigrants who have moved to other places for economic reasons generally have a stronger self-driven social mobility in the destination region. They will be more proactive in improving their position in the social class. Compared with them, those who have moved due to family matters or the original migration of marriage rely more on the factors of social mobility and belonging. For instance, they might rely on their family's local relationships and connections to change their social status. However, such factors of belonging provide relatively weak support for continuous mobility. This gap in support often becomes larger as they live in the destination area for a longer time. The longer the time, the more obvious this gap becomes. As a result, it hinders the social mobility of immigrants who migrate due to non-economic reasons, making it very difficult for them to rise in social class.

The household registration (hukou) system in China is closely linked to public services such as retirement benefits, education and employment opportunities. Immigrants with non-local household registration are mostly excluded from the scope of these public services, thus making them a socially vulnerable group in the destination area. This situation has caused a relatively large

identity difference between local and non-local groups. However, some internal floating population will rely on transferring their household registration to the destination area to overcome the obstacles brought by household registration. Doing so provides them with more social support and security, laying the foundation for their upward social mobility. It can be said that compared with those without household registration, migrant workers with household registration are more capable of experiencing the situation of social mobility.

Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Internal migrants who are economically driven are more likely to achieve social mobility compared to those who migrate for family or marital reasons.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The length of residence negatively affects the expected social class change of internal migrants in a given 5-year period.
- **Hypothesis 3:** The length of residence has a positive effect on the current social class change relative to the past social class of internal migrants.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Holding Shanghai household registration has a significant positive effect on the social class change of internal migrants.

3 Data and Description

The data for this study was collected through an online survey hosted on the platform Wenjuanxing (WJX). Survey questions are partially inspired by CSS (China Social Survey)(Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, n.d.). A total of 394 valid responses were gathered, all originating from IP addresses located in Shanghai. Consent from all participants is gathered before filling the questionnaire. The respondents are internal migrants who have been living in Shanghai for at least six months, ensuring that the sample is representative of the study's target population. The use of Wenjuanxing allowed for efficient data collection while

maintaining geographic and demographic specificity to the research scope. English translation of the questionnaire used is shown in **5.1 Survey Questions (English Translation)**.

3.1 Variables

3.1.1 Dependent Variable

The survey includes the following question to assess current social class identity: "How would you classify your current socio-economic status in this locality?" The possible responses are: "Upper, Upper-middle, Middle, Lower-middle, Lower."

The social class change of the migrant population over the past five years is derived from the question, "How would you classify your socio-economic status in this locality 5 years ago?" The change is calculated by subtracting the response to the question "How would you classify your current socio-economic status in this locality?" from the earlier response, resulting in three categories: upward (coded 2), unchanged (coded 1), and downward (coded 0).

The expected social class change in the future is derived from the question, "How do you expect your socio-economic status in this locality to be in the next 5 years?" The change is calculated by subtracting the response to the question "How would you classify your current socio-economic status in Shanghai?" from the future expectation, resulting in three categories: upward (coded 2), unchanged (coded 1), and downward (coded 0).

3.1.2 Independent Variables

- **Migration Purpose:** This is derived from the survey question, "What is the main reason for you coming to live in Shanghai?" Possible responses include: work or employment, study or training, relocation or moving, marriage, accompanying family members, visiting relatives or friends, caring for grandchildren, children's education, retirement/health care,

and others. Based on the similarity of responses, work or employment, study or training, and relocation or moving are combined into economic factors (coded as 2), marriage is categorized as a marital factor (coded as 1), and accompanying family members, visiting relatives or friends, caring for grandchildren, children's education, and retirement/health care are categorized as family factors (coded as 0).

- **Household Registration Status:** This is derived from the survey questions, "Have you been living here for more than six months?" and "Where is your current household registration?" Possible responses include: the town (or street) where the sample is located, another town (or street) in the same county (or district), another county (or district) in the same province, and other provinces. Based on geographic location, the sample's town (or street) and another town (or street) in the same county (or district) are considered local household registration (coded as 1), while those from another county (or district) within the province and outside the province are considered non-local household registration (coded as 0).
- **Length of Residence:** This is derived from the survey questions, "Have you been living in Shanghai for more than six months?" and "Which year did you come to live here?" For those who have lived in the surveyed area for more than six months, the length of residence is calculated by subtracting the year of the survey from the year of arrival. The length of residence is then re-coded as follows: 0-3 years = 1, 4-7 years = 2, 8-11 years = 3, 11+ years = 4.

The specific detail of variables is show as follows:

Table 1 Variable Description and Coding

Variable Category	Variable Name	Description	Response Categories / Coding
Dependent Variables	Social Class Identity	Current socio-economic status classification.	Upper (0), Upper-middle (1), Middle (2), Lower-middle (3), Lower (4)
	Social Class Change	Change in social class over the past 5 years.	Upward (2), Unchanged (1), Downward (0)
Independent Variables	Expected Social Class Change	Expected change in social class over the next 5 years.	Upward (2), Unchanged (1), Downward (0)
	Migration Purpose	Main reason for migration to Shanghai.	Economic (2), Marital (1), Family (0)
	Household Registration Status	Current household registration location.	Local (1), Non-local (0)
Control Variables	Length of Residence	Duration of residence in Shanghai.	0-3 years (1), 4-7 years (2), 8-11 years (3), 11+ years (4)
	Financial Situation	Financial situation in the previous year (2023).	Surplus (2), Balanced (1), Shortage (0)
	Age	Age of the respondent.	Continuous variable (calculated as the difference between survey year and birth year)
	Marital Status	Marital status of the respondent.	Unmarried (0), Married (1)
	Social Security	Whether the respondent has government-provided health insurance or public medical care.	Yes (1), No (0)
	Social Identity	Whether the respondent considers themselves a local resident or an outsider.	Local (1), Outsider (0)
	Social Attitude	Perceptions of fairness in various aspects of Shanghai society.	Unfair (0), Fair (1), Very Fair (2)

Gender	Gender of the respondent.	Male (1), Female (0)
Education Level	Highest level of education attained.	Middle school or below (0), High school or vocational (1), Associate degree (2), Bachelor's degree (3), Graduate degree (4)

4 Data Analysis and Model Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min-Max
Current Social Class	1.43	1.22	0-4
Past Class Change	1.05	0.83	0-2
Expected Class Change	1.28	0.85	0-2
Migration Purpose	2.23	1.13	0-3
Length of Residence	3.08	1.01	1-4
Household Registration	0.63	0.48	0-1
Age	38.23	8.52	26-58
Marital Status	0.67	0.47	0-1
Gender	0.48	0.49	0-1
Education Level	2.34	1.23	0-4
Financial Situation	1.03	0.85	0-2
Social Security	0.58	0.64	0-1
Social Attitude	0.76	0.43	0-1
Social Identity	0.72	0.45	0-1

4.1.1 Variable Description

Table 3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

Variable/Statistic	Factor Loadings	Uniqueness	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Income Equality	0.9042	0.1824	0.9724
Education Equality	0.9279	0.1389	
Employment Equality	0.9291	0.1367	
Judicial Equality	0.8820	0.2220	

Welfare Equality	0.9451	0.1068
Overall Fairness	0.9450	0.1069
Factor Analysis Method	Principal Factors	
Number of Retained Factors	1	
Total Variance Explained	5.10628	
LR Test (Independence vs. Saturated)	$\chi^2(15) = 3197.19, p < 0.0001$	

Table 3 presents the results of the reliability and validity analysis for the measures used in this study. The reliability of the scale, assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, is 0.9724, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the variables. This suggests that the items collectively measure the underlying construct effectively.

A principal factors method was employed for factor analysis, retaining a single factor with an eigenvalue of 5.10628, which explains the majority of the variance in the data. The factor loadings range from 0.8820 (Judicial Equality) to 0.9451 (Welfare Equality), demonstrating that all variables are strongly correlated with the retained factor. The uniqueness values, which represent the proportion of variance not explained by the factor, are all relatively low, ranging from 0.1068 to 0.2220, further supporting the appropriateness of the single-factor solution.

The LR test for independence versus saturation ($\chi^2(15) = 3197.19, p < 0.0001$) confirms the statistical significance of the factor model. Overall, these results validate the robustness and coherence of the scale for analyzing perceived equality and fairness in the selected domains.

4.1.2 Social Class Patterns

The analysis of internal migrants' social class and mobility, as summarized in Tables 4, 5, and 6, reveals notable trends and differences based on household registration (hukou) status and expectations for mobility.

Table 4 Current Class Status of Migrants

Class	With Hukou	Percentage With Hukou	Without Hukou	Percentage Without Hukou	Total	Total Percentage
Upper	4	50.00%	4	50.00%	8	4.35%
Upper-Middle	15	55.56%	12	44.44%	27	5.67%
Middle	83	59.66%	71	40.34%	154	42.38%
Lower-Middle	55	43.86%	64	56.14%	119	28.23%
Lower	42	47.59%	44	52.41%	86	19.37%
Total	203	50.54%	191	49.46%	394	100.00%

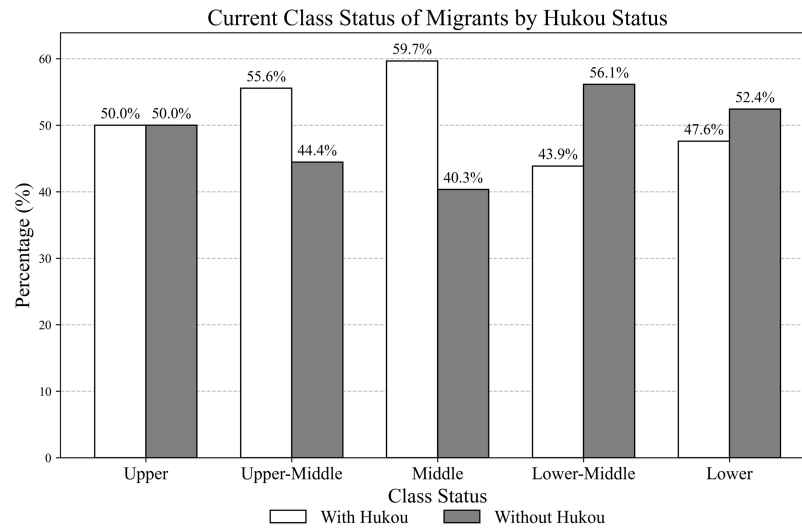


Figure 2 Current Class Status of Migrants by Hukou Status

Table 4 (Figure 2) shows that the current social class distribution among internal migrants skews lower overall, with the majority classified as middle class (42.38%), followed by the lower-middle class (28.23%) and the lower class (19.37%). However, there are slight advantages for migrants who have transferred their hukou. Among upper-class migrants, 50.00% hold local hukou,

while 50.00% do not. Similarly, in the upper-middle class, 55.56% of migrants have transferred their hukou, compared to 44.44% who have not. These patterns suggest that hukou transfer provides internal migrants with better access to resources and opportunities, thereby facilitating upward social mobility and improving their integration into the destination area.

Table 5 Past Social Class Change of Migrants

Class Change	With Hukou	Percentage With Hukou	Without Hukou	Percentage Without Hukou	Total	Total Percentage
Upward	54	58.23%	44	41.77%	98	26.56%
Stable	116	50.29%	109	49.71%	225	54.82%
Downward	34	45.35%	37	54.65%	71	18.62%
Total	203	50.54%	191	49.46%	394	100.00%

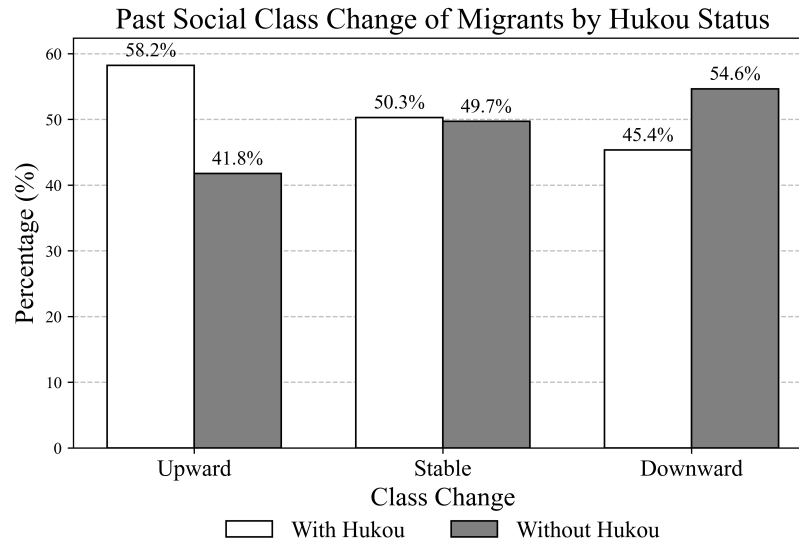


Figure 3 Past Social Class Change of Migrants by Hukou Status

Table 5 (Figure 3) shows perceptions of mobility by comparing migrants' current social class to their past social class. The majority of respondents (54.82%) perceive no significant change in their social class, while 26.56% report upward mobility and 18.62% report downward mobility. Migrants with transferred hukou are more likely to achieve upward mobility: 58.23% of those who experienced upward mobility had transferred their hukou, compared to 41.77% who

had not. In contrast, among those who experienced downward mobility, a larger proportion (54.65%) did not transfer their hukou, while only 45.35% had transferred their hukou. These results highlight the role of hukou transfer in providing greater stability and opportunities for upward mobility, while those without hukou transfer face greater risks of downward mobility.

Table 6 Expected Social Class Change of Migrants

Class Change	With Hukou	Percentage With Hukou	Without Hukou	Percentage Without Hukou	Total	Total Percentage
Upward	94	46.42%	101	53.58%	194	47.83%
Stable	77	57.02%	66	42.98%	143	33.24%
Downward	28	47.25%	28	52.75%	56	18.93%
Total	203	50.54%	191	49.46%	394	100.0%

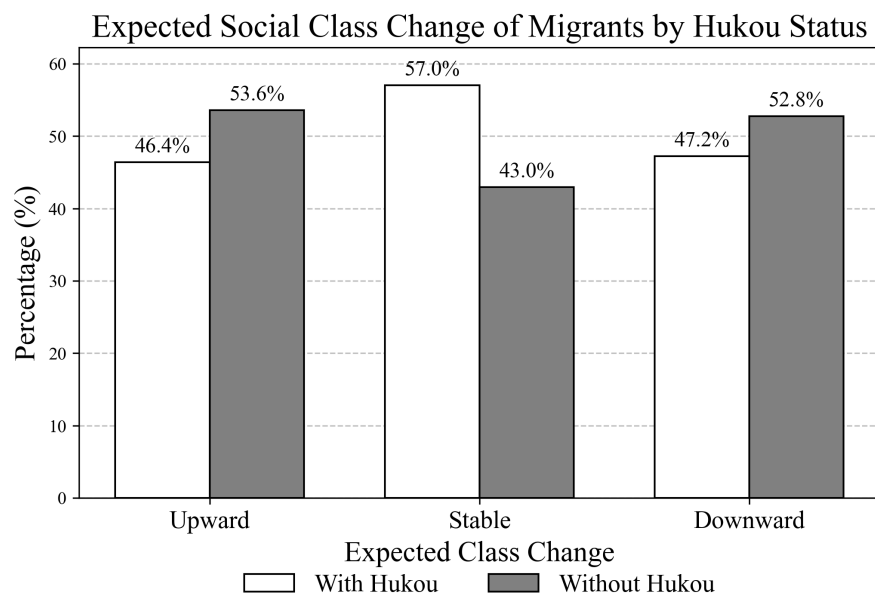


Figure 4 Expected Class Change of Migrants by Hukou Status

Table 6 (Figure 4) examines expectations for future social class mobility. Most migrants express optimism about their future, with 47.83% expecting upward mobility, 33.24% expecting no change, and 18.93% anticipating a decline. However, there are important distinctions based on hukou status. Among migrants without hukou transfer, 53.58% expect upward mobility, compared to 46.42% of those with hukou transfer. Additionally, a higher proportion of migrants with

transferred hukou (57.02%) expect their social class to remain unchanged compared to 42.98% of those without transfer. Interestingly, among those expecting downward mobility, 52.75% are migrants without hukou transfer, slightly higher than the 47.25% of hukou-transferred migrants. This indicates that while hukou transfer generally enhances social mobility, it also brings greater awareness of the structural challenges and rigidities in the destination area's class system. In contrast, non-transferred migrants, with weaker integration into the local system, are less attuned to such barriers and therefore tend to hold more optimistic expectations about their future social class.

Overall, the findings reveal a complex relationship between hukou status, social mobility, and expectations for the future. Hukou transfer serves as a critical enabler for upward mobility and mitigates risks of downward mobility, but it also exposes migrants to the realities of class rigidity in the destination area. Conversely, non-transferred migrants, though less integrated into local systems, remain relatively shielded from these structural barriers, maintaining higher optimism about their social mobility prospects.

4.2 OLS Regression

This study employs an OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) linear regression model to analyze the relationship between the migration characteristics of internal migrants and their social class identity. The model is specified as follows:

$$Y_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 X_i + \alpha_2 Z_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Where:

- Y_i represents the dependent variable (social class identity).
- X_i denotes the key independent variables (migration characteristics).

- Z_i includes the control variables.
- ε_i is the random error term.

The focus of this study lies in the estimation of α_1 , which captures the effect of the key independent variables on the dependent variable. α_2 represents the coefficients for the control variables, which account for other factors influencing the dependent variable. The model structure allows for isolating the impact of migration characteristics on social class identity while controlling for potential confounding factors.

4.2.1 Effect of Immigrational Factors on Current Self-perceived Social Class

The regression results for the effects of migration characteristics on social class identity are summarized in **Table 7**, where length of residence, migration purpose, and household registration status are introduced step by step into the models.

In **Model (1)**, length of residence has a significant positive impact on social class identity (coefficient = 0.036), indicating that longer residence increases migrants' perceived social status. In **Model (2)**, migration purpose is added and is also significant. Length of residence (coefficient = 0.038) and migration for economic reasons (coefficient = 0.059) positively influence social class identity. In **Model (3)**, household registration status is introduced. Migrants with local hukou have a significant advantage (coefficient = 0.164), while length of residence (0.068) and migration purpose (0.071) remain significant. In **Model (4)**, after adding control variables, the positive effects of all three factors remain, though slightly reduced (length of residence = 0.031, migration purpose = 0.031, hukou = 0.127).

Table 7 The Effect Immigrational Factors on the Current Self-perceived Social Class

Variable	(1) Current Social Class	(2) Current Social Class	(3) Current Social Class	(4) Current Social Class
Length of Residence	0.036** (0.018)	0.038** (0.014)	0.068*** (0.012)	0.031* (0.024)
Migration Purpose		0.059** (0.023)	0.071** (0.036)	0.034** (0.022)
Household Registration			0.164*** (0.032)	0.127*** (0.038)
Age				0.002 (0.001)
Marital Status				0.071 (0.065)
Gender				-0.128*** (0.032)
Education Level				0.153*** (0.032)
Financial Situation				0.077*** (0.020)
Social Security				0.040 (0.043)
Social Attitude				0.201*** (0.029)
Social Identity				0.192*** (0.032)
Constant	2.268*** (0.060)	2.440*** (0.040)	2.285*** (0.034)	0.533*** (0.120)
Sample Size	394	394	394	394

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Control variables yield mixed results. Education level, financial situation, social attitude, and social identity significantly enhance social class identity, with coefficients of 0.153, 0.077, 0.201, and 0.192, respectively. Gender has a negative effect, with males scoring 0.128 units lower than females. Age, marital status, and social security show no significant impact. Overall, migration characteristics and human capital factors are key determinants of migrants' social class identity, while demographic factors play a lesser role.

To further explore the impact of migration characteristics on the social mobility of internal migrants, this study examines the relationship between migration characteristics and both past social class changes and expected future social class changes. The regression results, summarized in Table 8, provide insights into how different factors—length of residence, migration purpose, and household registration status—affect migrants' social mobility over time.

4.2.2 Effect Immigrational Factors on the Past and Expected Self-perceived Social Class

Table 8 The Effect Immigrational Factors on the Past and Expected Self-perceived Social Class

Variable	(1) Past Class Change	(2) Expected Class Change
Length of Residence	0.162** (0.023)	-0.156** (0.082)
Migration Purpose	0.062** (0.034)	0.058** (0.133)
Household Registration	0.179*** (0.213)	0.221*** (0.043)
Age	-0.99** (0.043)	-0.143* (0.076)
Marital Status	-0.066 (0.037)	-0.112 (0.092)

Gender	-0.078** (0.057)	-0.106*** (0.086)
Education Level	0.031 (0.025)	-0.96*** (0.039)
Financial Situation	0.038*** (0.027)	0.102*** (0.031)
Social Security	0.007 (0.056)	0.025 (0.036)
Social Attitude	0.083** (0.046)	0.124** (0.038)
Social Identity	0.069*** (0.046)	0.030 (0.041)
Constant	0.183 (0.136)	2.563*** (0.156)
Sample Size	394	394

Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

4.2.2.1 Past Social Class Changes

In **Model (1)**, the length of residence, migration purpose, and household registration status are all positively associated with past social class changes, with effects significant at the 5% level. Length of residence shows a coefficient of 0.162, meaning that for every additional unit of residence length, a migrant's past social class increases by 0.162 units. Migration purpose, with a coefficient of 0.062, suggests that migrants who moved for economic reasons experienced 0.062 units more upward social mobility than those who migrated for family or other reasons. Household registration status has the strongest effect, with a coefficient of 0.179, indicating that migrants who transferred their hukou experienced 0.179 units more upward mobility compared to those who did not.

Control variables also play a significant role. Age and gender negatively influence past social class changes, while household financial situation, social attitude, and social identity have positive effects. Specifically, the coefficient for age is -0.99, indicating that older migrants experienced less upward mobility. Similarly, males are disadvantaged, with 0.078 units less upward mobility compared to females. On the other hand, better financial situations, stronger social attitudes, and higher social identity are associated with increases of 0.038, 0.083, and 0.069 units in past social class change, respectively. These results suggest that while personal characteristics like age and gender can create barriers, social and financial capital play a critical role in facilitating upward mobility over time.

4.2.2.2 Expected Future Social Class Changes

In **Model (2)**, the impact of migration characteristics shifts when examining expected future social class changes. Length of residence has a negative effect, with a coefficient of -0.156, indicating that longer residence in the destination area reduces migrants' expectations of upward mobility. In contrast, migration purpose (coefficient = 0.058) and household registration status (coefficient = 0.221) have positive effects. Migrants motivated by economic factors are more optimistic about their future mobility, while those who transferred their hukou expect significantly higher social class changes compared to non-hukou migrants. These findings suggest that while length of residence facilitates integration and stability, it may also lead to a greater awareness of structural barriers, dampening expectations for upward mobility.

Among the control variables, age, gender, and education level negatively affect expected social class changes, while household financial situation and social attitude positively influence expectations. Specifically, each additional year of age reduces expected social class change by 0.143 units, while males expect 0.143 units less upward mobility compared to females. Education

level also has a negative effect (coefficient = -0.96), suggesting that higher educational attainment may raise awareness of systemic barriers, leading to more conservative expectations. Conversely, better household financial situations (coefficient = 0.102) and more positive social attitudes (coefficient = 0.124) contribute to higher optimism about future mobility.

4.2.2.3 Implications of Migration Characteristics

The research results show that there is a complex relationship between immigration characteristics and social mobility. The length of residence has a dual effect. It has a positive impact on the changes in past social classes but has a negative impact on the expectations of future mobility. This dynamic change reflects the interaction between deeper social integration and greater social barriers. Among them, social integration supports upward mobility, while social barriers suppress people's optimism. Those who migrate driven by economic reasons have always demonstrated stronger mobility outcomes. This is because they actively pursue opportunities, promoting past and expected upward mobility. Household registration status has become a key driving factor for social mobility. Household registration transfer enables people to obtain access to resources and services, thereby enhancing the ability of the floating population to climb the social ladder.

4.2.3 Validation of Hypotheses

The findings confirm **Hypothesis 3**, as length of residence positively affects past social class changes, and **Hypothesis 2**, as it negatively influences expected future mobility. **Hypothesis 1** is also supported, as migrants with economic motivations show stronger mobility outcomes compared to those with family or other motivations. Finally, **Hypothesis 4** is validated, as hukou transfer significantly enhances both past and expected social mobility.

4.3 Qualitative Analysis

This section presents insights from qualitative interviews conducted with eight migrants residing in Shanghai, capturing their personal experiences and perspectives on social mobility, integration, and systemic barriers. The data, collected through a mix of in-person and online interviews between March 22 and March 30, 2025, as detailed in the **Table 9**, complements the quantitative findings by offering perspectives from personal narratives.

Table 9 Overview of Interview Participants and Details

Interview Code	Interviewee Name (Alias)	Age	Gender	Interview Date	Interview Location and Format	Notes
Z20250322A01	Zhang Ming	31	Male	2025/3/22	In-person (Café in Pudong New Area, Shanghai)	In Shanghai for 7 years
Z20250322A02	Li Fang	27	Female	2025/3/22	Online (Tencent Meeting)	In Shanghai for 3 years
Z20250322A03	Wang Wei	45	Male	2025/3/24	In-person (Teahouse in Jing'an District, Shanghai)	In Shanghai for 15 years
Z20250322A04	Chen Li	36	Female	2025/3/25	Online (WeChat Video)	In Shanghai for 8 years
Z20250322A05	Zhao Gang	29	Male	2025/3/27	In-person (Park in Huangpu District, Shanghai)	In Shanghai for 6 years
Z20250322A06	Zhou Mei	42	Female	2025/3/29	In-person (Bookstore in Yangpu District, Shanghai)	In Shanghai for 13 years

Interview Code	Interviewee Name (Alias)	Age	Gender	Interview Date	Interview Location and Format	Notes
Z20250322A07	Xu Jun	38	Male	2025/3/29	Online (Teams)	In Shanghai for 10 years
Z20250322A08	Lin Yan	25	Female	2025/3/30	In-person (Library in Xuhui District, Shanghai)	In Shanghai for 2 years

4.3.1 Length of Residence Enhance Integration to Certain Extent

The quantitative findings indicate a dual impact of length of residence on migrants' self-perceived class identity, with longer time in Shanghai correlating positively with past upward mobility but reducing optimism for future socio-economic progress. Qualitative interviews provide nuanced insights into this phenomenon. Zhang Ming (Z20250322A01), who has lived in Shanghai for seven years, reflects on how time has facilitated integration: *"I've lived here for 7 years, now I'm almost half a 'Shanghai person.' Sometimes I joke with friends that I'm more familiar with Shanghai's snacks than those from my hometown."* This familiarity has translated into professional opportunities and social connections, supporting the notion that longer residence fosters upward mobility. Similarly, Wang Wei (Z20250322A03), a restaurant owner with 15 years in Shanghai, notes, *"Time has deepened my feelings for Shanghai. This place is like my second hometown,"* highlighting how prolonged residence has solidified his social and economic position through business success.

However, extended time in Shanghai also heightens awareness of systemic barriers, diminishing future optimism. Zhou Mei (Z20250322A06), a bank employee with 12 years in the

city, observes, *“When I first came, I thought hard work alone could lead to success, but over time I’ve realized that mobility is limited, especially in mature industries where breaking through requires more resources and connections.”* This reflects a growing recognition of structural constraints. Likewise, Xu Jun (Z20250322A07), with 15 years in the IT sector, states, *“Opportunities may increase with time due to deeper industry experience, but the space for upward mobility becomes harder to grasp. Shanghai is a brutally competitive place, especially for middle-aged people.”* These accounts illustrate how longer residence deepens integration but simultaneously amplifies perceptions of systemic challenges, leaving migrants feeling both rooted and restrained.

4.3.2 Migration Purpose Effect Social Mobility

Quantitative analysis reveals that migrants driven by economic motives experience greater upward mobility compared to those migrating for family or marital reasons. Interview data vividly captures this disparity. Chen Li (Z20250322A04), who relocated to Shanghai for career prospects in education eight years ago, shares, *“Shanghai’s work opportunities and salary levels have helped improve my economic situation,”* reflecting how economic motivation has translated into tangible gains in stability and living standards. Similarly, Zhao Gang (Z20250322A05), a food delivery worker of six years, underscores the city’s rewarding nature for hard work: *“Shanghai is a place where more effort means more income. As long as you’re not afraid of hardship, you can earn money.”* Despite the physical demands of his job, his economic drive has led to a significantly higher income than in his hometown.

Conversely, migrants motivated by family or marital reasons report slower mobility. Zhou Mei (Z20250322A06), who initially moved to join her husband 12 years ago, admits, *“Life pressure wasn’t too high since both my husband and I have stable jobs, but if I think about buying*

a house or children's education in the future, hukou issues might become a big problem," indicating that her initial lack of professional focus delayed career progression. Wang Wei (Z20250322A03), now a successful entrepreneur, clarifies that while family factors played a role, his primary motivation was economic: *"I came to Shanghai in 2008 because the catering industry in my county wasn't doing well, so I wanted to try my luck in a big city."* These narratives reinforce the importance of economic motivation as a key driver of social mobility, fostering independence and a sustained focus on self-improvement.

4.3.3 Hukou Still Acts as Crucial Barrier

Both quantitative and qualitative data underscore the hukou (household registration) system as a significant barrier to social mobility. Statistical analysis confirms that local hukou status enhances access to education, housing, and resources, thereby boosting economic prospects. Interviewees consistently highlight hukou as a persistent challenge, regardless of economic status. Zhang Ming (Z20250322A01) expresses, *"Having a Shanghai hukou would solve many issues like buying a house and education. I'm definitely willing to apply if possible, but realistically, I might need to work harder for a few more years."* This reflects the critical role hukou plays in alleviating pressures around family planning and stability.

For many, the absence of hukou restricts access to public services. Zhao Gang (Z20250322A05) notes, *"For me personally, hukou doesn't matter much right now, but if I get married and have kids, it'll be important, especially for their school enrollment."* Similarly, Zhou Mei (Z20250322A06) emphasizes, *"The biggest issue is still high living costs. Shanghai's housing prices are hard to afford, and policies like hukou restrictions make it tough for us to access certain resources."* Even for those with stable incomes, like Xu Jun (Z20250322A07), the lack of hukou fosters exclusion: *"Even though I've bought a house and my child is studying here, without a hukou,*

I still feel like an outsider at times.” These accounts reveal how hukou operates as both a practical and symbolic barrier, perpetuating disparities in opportunity and hindering full social mobility.

4.3.4 Integration and Perceptions of Acceptance

Quantitative data show a positive correlation between residence time and cultural integration, while qualitative insights reveal persistent barriers to full acceptance. Many migrants develop emotional ties to Shanghai over time. Wang Wei (Z20250322A03) states, *“After living here for so long, I have deep feelings for Shanghai. This is like my second hometown.”* Zhou Mei (Z20250322A06) echoes this sentiment: *“As time goes by, my sense of belonging has definitely grown stronger compared to when I first arrived.”* Xu Jun (Z20250322A07) adds, *“After buying a house and having my child study here, I slowly feel like I’ve integrated into this city, even without a hukou.”*

Yet, social acceptance and systemic inequalities often temper this sense of belonging. Chen Li (Z20250322A04) points out subtle biases: *“Sometimes I feel that locals have a stronger sense of pride in their identity, so migrants can be at a disadvantage in resource competition, like school quotas for children favoring local families.”* Li Fang (Z20250322A02) similarly notes, *“There’s still a gap, especially in terms of treatment and resource access. Local people seem to have a bigger advantage.”* These micro-barriers hinder full integration, leaving many migrants feeling like outsiders despite their contributions and prolonged residence in Shanghai.

4.3.5 Challenges to Future Mobility

While many migrants express optimism about future upward mobility, structural challenges often temper these aspirations. Zhang Ming (Z20250322A01) remains hopeful, stating, *“I’m relatively optimistic. I work hard and am building more professional skills, hoping to get promoted to a higher salary and position.”* Xu Jun (Z20250322A07) shares similar ambitions: *“I*

hope to transition from technical development to technical management to adapt to aging and stay stable in the industry.” However, high housing costs and education expenses pose significant obstacles. Zhou Mei (Z20250322A06) laments, *“The biggest problem is still high living costs. Shanghai’s housing prices are hard to afford, and our savings can’t keep up with the rise.”* Chen Li (Z20250322A04) adds, *“The biggest impact is on children’s education. Many quality schools require Shanghai hukou for admission, so we can only opt for more expensive private schools.”*

For lower-income migrants like Zhao Gang (Z20250322A05), prospects are even grimmer: *“Honestly, my job has no long-term development potential. I just plan to keep delivering, save some money, and maybe go back home to buy a house or start a small business.”* Lin Yan (Z20250322A08) also expresses concern about stagnating wages: *“The difficulties are mainly economic pressure. I want to save money, but living costs are too high.”* This juxtaposition of optimism and systemic constraints highlights the precarious balance migrants navigate in pursuit of greater socio-economic stability.

The qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with migrants in Shanghai offers detailed and contextualized perspectives on the multifaceted nature of social mobility, integration, and structural impediments in an urban setting. The data suggest that prolonged residence in the city contributes to a heightened sense of belonging and supports historical upward mobility through the development of social networks and professional opportunities. However, it concurrently amplifies awareness of systemic barriers, particularly concerning future socio-economic advancement and entrenched inequalities. Economic motivations for migration are identified as a significant determinant of social progress, with individuals driven by career objectives reporting more substantial improvements in their socio-economic status compared to those relocating for

familial reasons. Nevertheless, the hukou system persists as a formidable obstacle, limiting access to critical resources such as education and housing, and reinforcing social exclusion even among long-term residents. While cultural integration and emotional attachment to Shanghai strengthen over time, persistent social biases and disparities in resource allocation impede complete societal acceptance. Lastly, although many migrants express optimism regarding future mobility, this is frequently moderated by challenges such as escalating living costs, educational barriers, and constrained career progression, particularly for those in lower-income brackets. Results confirm the analysis done in 4.2 and adheres to the theoretical model.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

This paper studies the mobility characteristics of the floating population in Shanghai, which include aspects such as residence time, mobility purpose, and household registration status, to see what kind of impact they have on the class identity perceived by the floating population themselves. By analyzing 394 valid questionnaires, this paper discovers that in the context of rapid urban development and social stratification, The rather delicate dynamic relationship between social mobility and class identity.

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 Dual Impact of Length of Residence

The research of this article reveals that there are multiple relationships between the length of residence in Shanghai and social class identity. Long-term residence in Shanghai has a positive effect on past social mobility, which indicates that those immigrants who have lived in the city for a relatively long time have experienced upward changes in social status. However, even if the period of residence in Shanghai is extended, However, it has had a negative impact on their

expectations of future social mobility. This dual impact indicates that although long-term residence in Shanghai enables immigrants to integrate into the local society and obtain a higher social status, it also makes immigrants more clearly aware of the systemic obstacles that have always existed, thus reducing their optimism about development.

5.1.2 Migration Purpose Drives Upward Mobility

The purpose behind immigration has a very prominent impact on the outcome of social mobility. Compared with those who originally moved to Shanghai for family reasons or marital reasons, those who moved to Shanghai for economic reasons show a stronger upward mobility trend. Economic motives can enable migrants to adopt active and self-reliant strategies. And this is very crucial for enhancing their social class status. This discovery highlights the crucial role of economic incentives in promoting social mobility among domestic migrants.

5.1.3 Hukou Status as a Critical Determinant

In Shanghai, household registration status, also known as "hukou", has become the most crucial factor determining the social mobility of the migrant population. Those who successfully transfer their hukou to the city can obtain more resources and development opportunities that the city possesses, and these resources and opportunities are very important for them to overcome the existing institutional obstacles. This privileged status obtained through household registration enables them to achieve a higher degree of upward mobility, which also highlights the crucial role that the household registration system plays in shaping the social and economic development trajectory of immigrants.

5.1.4 Summary of Key Findings

Overall, the research results show that mobility characteristics, namely the length of residence, the purpose of mobility, and household registration status, play a particularly crucial role in the formation of self-perceived class identity among the floating population within Shanghai. Although economic motives and the successful realization of household registration transfer can promote the upward mobility of the floating population, the longer the residence time, the more crucial. The more one can discover the long-term challenges brought about by structural inequality. The insights gained from these studies can help us understand the complex situations in the process of social mobility and the formation of class identity against the backdrop of rapid urbanization.

5.2 Discussion

This paper combines the characteristics of immigration and subjective class identity for research, making up for the deficiency that previous studies only focused on macro-structural factors but ignored the dynamic changes at the individual level. The results of the research enrich the theoretical framework by demonstrating how the characteristics of immigration affect objective mobility and subjective self-perception. It also makes our understanding of class identity in a stratified urban environment a little more complicated.

This study also particularly emphasizes that institutional barriers such as the household registration system have a long-standing correlation in influencing the outcome of immigration. Although economic opportunities are helpful for the upward mobility of immigrants, systemic inequality remains a significant obstacle for immigrants to fully integrate into urban life. Policy makers need to give priority to reform. Find ways to eliminate these obstacles to promote the development of the city in a more inclusive direction.

5.3 Future Research Directions

When conducting future research, mediating variables can be added. This way, these findings can be expanded and presented. The purpose of doing this is to analyze exactly how the characteristics of immigrants affect class identity, that is, to study the mechanisms involved, such as:

- **Social integration:** Examining how social networks, community engagement, and cultural adaptation mediate the relationship between length of residence and class identity.

Other **limitations** include:

- Analyzing cross-sectional data lacks dynamic temporal explanations. This limitation can be addressed by using panel data to apply time series models.
- Among the migrant population, there are more specific subgroups such as migrant children and elderly migrants, which require further detailed analysis.
- The sample size and regional limitations of the survey may differ from the actual migration characteristics and class mobility observed in real-life scenarios. Future research can expand the survey regions and increase the sample size.

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6 Appendix

6.1 Survey Questions (English Translation)

Due to limitation of space, the original Chinese questionnaire is available upon request from the author.

Research on Social Class Identity and Migration Characteristics of the Floating Population in Shanghai

Dear Participant: Hello! Thank you for participating in this survey. This questionnaire aims to explore the social class identity and migration characteristics of Shanghai's floating population, examine the factors influencing changes in their social class identity, and evaluate its impact on social mobility. Your sincere feedback will help us better understand the shifting identities of Shanghai's floating population and provide data support to policymakers, aiding in the optimization of social integration and development strategies for this demographic.

Instructions for Using the Questionnaire:

1. Please respond to each question based on your actual situation. All information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for academic research.
2. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Instructions for Completion:

1. This questionnaire includes questions on personal basic information, social class identity, migration experience, and work and living conditions.
2. Please answer truthfully, as each response is critical for this study.

Thank you for your participation and support!

Questions:

1. What is your year of birth? (Open-ended) *
2. What is your gender? (Single choice) *
 - Male
 - Female
3. Are you currently residing in Shanghai? (Single choice) *
 - Yes
 - No (skip to the end of the questionnaire and submit survey)

4. Were you born in Shanghai? (Single choice) *
- ☐ Yes (skip to the end of the questionnaire and submit survey)
 - ☐ No
5. Which district in Shanghai are you currently residing in? (Single choice) *
- ☐ Huangpu
 - ☐ Xuhui
 - ☐ Jing'an
 - ☐ Changning
 - ☐ Putuo
 - ☐ Hongkou
 - ☐ Yangpu
 - ☐ Minhang
 - ☐ Baoshan
 - ☐ Jiading
 - ☐ Pudong
 - ☐ Jinshan
 - ☐ Songjiang
 - ☐ Qingpu
 - ☐ Fengxian
 - ☐ Chongming
6. Your household registration location is: (Single choice) *
- ☐ Shanghai
 - ☐ Non-Shanghai (skip to Question 8)

7. When did your household registration move to Shanghai? (Open-ended) *
8. Have you lived in Shanghai for at least six months? (Single choice) *
- ☐ Less than six months (skip to the end of the questionnaire and submit survey)
 - ☐ Over six months
9. How many years have you lived in Shanghai? (Single choice) *
- ☐ 0–3 years
 - ☐ 4–7 years
 - ☐ 8–11 years
 - ☐ Over 11 years
10. What is the primary reason for your move to Shanghai? (Single choice) *
- ☐ Employment/work
 - ☐ Study/training
 - ☐ Relocation/demolition
 - ☐ Marriage
 - ☐ Accompanying family member
 - ☐ Visiting relatives or friends
 - ☐ Caring for grandchildren
 - ☐ Children's education
 - ☐ Retirement/wellness
 - ☐ Other (please specify): _____ *
11. What is your education level? (Single choice) *
- ☐ High school or below
 - ☐ Vocational school/technical school or associate degree

- Undergraduate degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Other _____ *

12. What type of work position do you currently hold? (Single choice) *

- Government or public institution
- Professional/technical personnel
- Management staff
- Freelancer/business owner
- Not employed

13. What is your current marital status? (Single choice) *

- Single
- First marriage with spouse
- Remarried with spouse
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Cohabiting

14. Last year (2023), what was your overall income and expenditure situation? (Single choice) *

- Income > expenses
- Income = expenses
- Income < expenses
- [Prefer not to say]

15. Do you currently have government-provided medical insurance or public health coverage? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Unsure

16. What type of housing do you currently reside in? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Purchased property
- ☐ Rented property
- ☐ Housing provided by employer
- ☐ Housing provided by relatives or friends
- ☐ Other _____ *

17. Do you consider yourself a local or an outsider in Shanghai? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Local
- ☐ Outsider
- ☐ [Unsure]

18. How would you classify your current socioeconomic status in Shanghai? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Upper
- ☐ Upper-middle
- ☐ Middle
- ☐ Lower-middle
- ☐ Lower
- ☐ [Unsure]

19. How would you classify your socioeconomic status in Shanghai five years ago? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Upper

- ☐ Upper-middle
- ☐ Middle
- ☐ Lower-middle
- ☐ Lower ☐ [Unsure]

20. How do you anticipate your socioeconomic status in Shanghai to be five years from now? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Upper
- ☐ Upper-middle
- ☐ Middle
- ☐ Lower-middle
- ☐ Lower
- ☐ [Unsure]

21. In the past two years, have you joined any neighborhood social groups (e.g., resident groups, community groups)? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

22. In the past year, have you had social interactions with neighbors or community residents? (e.g., participating in community activities, mutual aid, etc.) (Single choice) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

23. Do you feel that you are part of your community? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Strongly feel included
- ☐ Somewhat feel included
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very included

- ☐ Not included at all

24. Have you perceived the level of local residents' acceptance of outsiders? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Very accepting
- ☐ Quite accepting
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Not very accepting
- ☐ Not accepting at all

25. Do you think not being able to speak Shanghainese affects your integration into local life? (Single choice) *

- ☐ Very significant
- ☐ Quite significant
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Minimal
- ☐ No impact
- ☐ I can speak Shanghainese

26. Do you believe the income and wealth gap among different groups in Shanghai is reasonable? (Single choice: scale from "extreme gap" to "no gap") *

- ☐ 1 (Extreme gap) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (No significant gap)

27. Do you believe Shanghai provides equal access to quality education for all, regardless of background or economic status? (Single choice: scale from "very unequal" to "very equal") *

- ☐ 1 (Very unequal) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (Very equal)

28. Do you think different social groups (e.g., gender, race, background, hukou status) have equal opportunities in Shanghai's employment market? (Single choice: scale from "very unequal" to "very equal") *

- ☐ 1 (Very unequal) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (Very equal)

29. Do you believe Shanghai's laws are applied fairly to all citizens and that the judicial system effectively enforces them? (Single choice: scale from "unfair" to "completely fair") *

☐ 1 (Unfair) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (Completely fair)

30. Do you believe Shanghai's social welfare system fairly supports all, especially low-income groups? (Single choice: scale from "very unfair" to "very fair") *

☐ 1 (Very unfair) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (Very fair)

31. Based on the five aspects above, how would you evaluate the overall fairness of Shanghai's society? (Please choose a score between 1 and 10) *

☐ 1 (Very unfair) ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10 (Very fair)

6.2 Interview Guide

Section 1: Background and Migration Experience

Purpose: To establish demographic and migrational context, inform factors contributing to variability in self-perceived class identity, and understand initial motivations for migration.

1. Can you share some basic information about yourself? (Age, education, marital status, occupation)
 - ☐ Purpose: To collect demographic data, providing context for analyzing subjective class identity differences.
2. When did you first move to Shanghai, and what was your main reason for coming?
 - ☐ Purpose: To identify migration motivation (economic, family, marital) and its role in shaping mobility and social integration (Hypothesis 1).
3. Did you transfer your hukou to Shanghai? If yes, how did you achieve it? If no, what challenges have prevented it?
 - ☐ Purpose: To assess hukou status and hukou-related barriers impacting access to opportunities compared to non-local migrants (Hypothesis 4).
4. How would you describe your initial expectations about living in Shanghai before you moved? (Career opportunities, social integration, economic outcomes)
 - ☐ Purpose: To examine migrants' pre-migration aspirations and how these align with post-migration realities.

Section 2: Current and Past Class Identity

Purpose: To investigate how migrants perceive their current social class identity and compare it with their perceived pre-migration status.

5. How do you perceive your current socio-economic status in Shanghai? (Upper, Upper-middle, Middle, Lower-middle, Lower) Why do you think so?
 - Purpose: To examine current self-perceived class identity and key determinants of perceived social standing (e.g., education, income, social networks).
6. In comparison, how would you classify your socio-economic status before migrating to Shanghai?
 - Purpose: To gather perception of past class identity and uncover drivers of upward or downward mobility, validating Hypothesis 3.
7. What specific factors have contributed to any changes in your socio-economic status since moving to Shanghai? (Education, job opportunities, social networks, hukou)
 - Purpose: To identify primary drivers of self-perceived class identity changes (economic progress, institutional barriers, cultural factors).

Section 3: Length of Residence and Integration

Purpose: To probe how duration of stay correlates with deeper social integration or barriers, testing the dual effect of length of residence (Hypotheses 2 & 3).

8. How long have you been living in Shanghai, and how has that time shaped your sense of belonging or integration into local society?
 - Purpose: To explore perceived social integration and structural limitations related to duration, testing Hypotheses 2 & 3.
9. In what ways has your perspective on social and economic mobility changed the longer you've lived in Shanghai?
 - Purpose: To assess how migrants' awareness of structural barriers increases with time, potentially reducing optimism (Hypothesis 2).
10. Do you think having lived in Shanghai longer has increased or decreased your opportunities for upward mobility? Why?
 - Purpose: To understand if longer residence strengthens migrants' social networks but simultaneously exposes them to systemic inequalities, validating Hypotheses 2 & 3.

Section 4: Future Mobility Perceptions

Purpose: To explore expectations for upward mobility and class identity, while contextualizing optimism/pessimism within structural realities.

11. How do you perceive your potential for upward mobility in Shanghai over the next five years? Are you optimistic, pessimistic, or uncertain? Why?
 - Purpose: To identify expectations of future social class changes (Hypothesis 2).
12. What challenges do you foresee in achieving upward socio-economic mobility in Shanghai? (Hukou obstacles, job discrimination, education access)
 - Purpose: To examine perceived barriers to higher mobility and refine future policy implications.
13. How does your hukou status influence your confidence in achieving upward mobility in Shanghai?

- Purpose: To validate the critical influence of hukou status on mobility and class improvements (Hypothesis 4).

Section 5: Societal and Cultural Context

Purpose: To investigate how societal attitudes and cultural integration influence migrants' identity and their perceived opportunities.

14. Do you feel local residents perceive migrants as equals, or is there a divide between locals and migrants in terms of opportunities and acceptance? Why?
 - Purpose: To explore social integration and cultural acceptance as factors shaping subjective class identity.
15. What role does language (e.g., speaking local dialect) or cultural familiarity play in how you're perceived by others in Shanghai? Has it influenced your experience or mobility?
 - Purpose: To investigate the role of cultural and linguistic barriers in perpetuating social exclusion and its impact on self-perception.

Section 6: Policy and Inclusion

Purpose: To gather participants' reflections on institutional systems and suggestions for achieving broader inclusion and fairness.

16. What changes do you believe could help improve the inclusion and mobility of migrants in Shanghai? (Policies, housing, education, equal rights)
 - Purpose: To identify actionable suggestions for improving structural integration, addressing systemic inequalities, and enhancing mobility outcomes.
17. If you had the opportunity to advise the local government, what improvements would you propose to better support migrants in achieving their aspirations?
 - Purpose: To encourage critical reflections on institutions, generating valuable policy recommendations tailored to migrants' needs.