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# Chinese citizenship 'after orientalism': academic narratives on internal migrants in China.

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In this article I inquire into the possibility of citizenship 'after orientalism' by examining Chinese academics' writings on internal migrants in China. The popular narratives of migrants represent them as 'peasant workers in need of becoming urban citizens'. These representations are based on understanding of citizenship as necessarily urban and modern, which is reminiscent of Weber's theory of citizenship, and is based on mechanisms of 'internal orientalism'. I argue that contrary to the popular understanding of 'post-oriental' as 'resistance to the West', it is the process of the boundary-transgression between rural and urban, rather than the non-Western ideas of citizenship, that opens space for citizenship 'after orientalism' in China. This process of boundary-transgression can be mapped through new practices of naming and narrative-setting in the literature on internal migrants, which emphasise subjective character of group boundaries and appeal for recognition of urban and migrant identities. It is through these instances of boundary-transgression between urban and rural that orientalism embedded in the Chinese notion of citizenship is challenged.

Keywords: citizenship in China, internal migrants, internal orientalism, Chinese academics, boundary-transgression, Max Weber

Citizenship has long been understood as regime particular to 'Western'[2] nation-states and only transplanted to non-'Western' cultures in the process of colonisation. However, the first decade of the 21st century brought forward criticism of such a nation-state-bound and Euro-centric view of citizenship. The reformulation of citizenship beyond the Marshallian triad of civil, political and social rights, towards recognition of rights along the lines of de-nationalisation (Isin and Wood, 1999: vii) marks this trend. The dominant focus on citizenship as a status or practice was challenged as insufficient and a new framework of 'acts of citizenship' was proposed to account for those acts of agents-citizens, which go beyond the legal status or already defined practices of citizenship (Isin and Nielsen, 2008: 1-2). Concomitantly, there has been a push towards decentralisation of citizenship studies from its Euro-centric perspective. The calls for inclusion of 'alternative' theories of citizenship from non-'Western' viewpoints were to account for 'subaltern' voices, which have been marginalised by the processes of colonisation in the non-'Western' world and ensuing orientalisation of these cultures in

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'Western' academia (Delanty, 2009: 129, Isin and Wood, 1999: 5-6). There has been a growing interest in 'alternative' expressions of citizenship in citizenship studies.

However, if we are to turn to those alternative expressions of citizenship in the non-'Western' world, we first need to ask how we divorce them from the orientalised East-West binary divide? How do we describe the 'alternative' forms of citizenship if the very name and definition of citizenship is embedded in European experience? In this light, which developments in Chinese academia can be viewed as breaking away from the influence of orientalism? In this article I will show that conceptualisation of citizenship, which challenges orientalism, does not necessarily have to be 'alternative'. I will argue that attempts at distinguishing traces of thought which are 'Western' from those which are 'indigenous' in order to account for something 'original' would most likely lead to a repetition of the binary divisions introduced by orientalism. Nowadays it is almost impossible to divorce the ways in which Chinese academics build theories from 'Western' influences. The 'Western' influences are deeply ingrained in China through discourses such as modernisation and nationalism, which even if they were remoulded in a Chinese way, originated in the West (Chen, 1995: 4, Delanty, 2009: 256-258). Therefore, while the search for alternative expressions of citizenship stems from a rejection of orientalised and West-centred understandings of citizenship, there is a danger of re-enacting of the orientalised East-West binary instead of problematizing it.

In this paper I will argue that 'challenging orientalism', when this 'challenging' takes form of emancipation from the West, only leads to a repetition of essentialised and nationalised understanding of citizenship. Yet, if one understands 'challenging orientalism' in a wider sense, as an instance of boundary-transgression (crossing, questioning, challenging) between migrants and a host community, between citizens and non-citizens, between Self and Other, and finally between East and West, then indeed the search for citizenship 'after orientalism' in the Chinese academia can gain a new perspective. By analysing Chinese academic discussions around the question of internal migrants' citizenship in China, I will demonstrate that in Chinese academia, the instances of challenging orientalism are located in such practices of boundary-transgression.

In this paper, I will first discuss what can be understood as 'orientalism' and 'post-orientalism'. Next, I will analyse the context behind the citizenship regime in China, especially with regard to internal migrants in China. I will then discuss how 'Western' and 'indigenous' concepts of citizenship have been understood and employed in Chinese academia. I will show why the search for 'alternative' concepts of citizenship does not necessarily lead to citizenship 'after orientalism'. In the final part I will show that it is rather through questioning of the dominant language and narratives representing migrants that Chinese scholars transgress the boundary between rural and urban and redeem migrants as 'citizens'. I will argue that these instances of boundary-transgression also challenge the East-West essentialism by questioning what it means to be a 'citizen' and conclude that it is these moments of boundary-transgression that can be understood as citizenship 'after orientalism'.

## Orientalism, China and the theories of citizenship in 'Western' academia

In the field of citizenship studies, the decentralising trend, away from the focus on 'Western' experience, stems from the post-colonial critique of orientalism. One of the main meanings of orientalism, a term originally used by Edward Said, was 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that […] helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image' (Said, 1978: 1-2). Since Said's publication, the theory of Orientalism has been extended to account for a wider experience than just the encounter between the

Middle East and Western Europe. One of such extensions of the original theory was its application to the China-West relations. Ho-fung Hung, for instance, looks at the power politics behind various orientalised representations of China in the West from the 17$^{th}$ to 19$^{th}$ century: those which idealised China, and vilified it. He points out that those representations used the narrative of hierarchical linear progress, where China was portrayed as uniform, timeless and essentialised in contrast to diverse and complex West. This portrayal served the political agendas of actors such as Jesuits and Jansenits in France, French monarch as well as the 19$^{th}$ century German state (Hung, 2003).

While the above understanding of the theory of Orientalism focuses on the East-West relationship, there is also another way of looking at how the discourse of orientalism is being redistributed through mechanisms of modernity. For instance, Maifair Yang (2011) shows how Western orientalist discourse was absorbed in China with disastrous effects on local religiosities. She calls the process of appropriation of Western theories by Chinese elites and official classes 'colonization of consciousness' and explains how in result Chinese started viewing themselves through the lenses of Western orientalism, seeing anything non-modern as 'backward' and 'shameful' (Yang, 2011: 7,13).

This understanding, which emphasises the redeployment of orientalist discourse within the state, is also used in the notion of 'internal orientalism'. 'Internal orientalism' is a situation when one group within the state creates its own image and secures its dominant position through representation of another group as its 'Other'. In China there are many groups who played the role of orientalised 'Others' within the state; for instance minorities and women (see Schein, 1997 and Gladney, 2004). In this paper I will discuss how orientalised representations of internal migrants as 'backward peasants' has helped in establishing of the identity of the modern, urban 'Self'.

An example of how this mechanism of 'internal orientalism' is bound to the forces of modernity is the striking similarity between the understanding of citizenship in contemporary China and Max Weber's description of citizenship as necessarily urban (and Occidental). As Mayfair Yang (2011: 8) fairly pointed out, there is little research, which looks at the microcosmos of influences of orientalism within the postcolonial states. Other than the discussions on the 'alternative modernities' in Asia (see Delanty, 2009: 256-258), there has been little research conducted on the internal struggle which has accompanied the incorporation of Western theories by Chinese elites and officials in China. Such focus can help us understand how citizenship in China is conditioned by internal redeployment of orientalist strategies. One of such theories is the understanding of citizenship which was consolidated in Max Weber's theory, and which is based on mechanisms of 'internal orientalisation' of the rural population. In China, through various processes (that I will discuss in the next section) a remarkably similar understanding of citizenship endures.

The main reason why Weber's theory of citizenship is usually viewed as orientalist is its insistence that citizenship could not be conceived of outside of the city, and more specifically – Occidental city (Weber, 1951: 14, Weber, 1963: 1226 - 1228, 1233). Weber explains that it is so, because the city gives space for formation of solidarities based not on kinship, but on spontaneous association between people who are not related by links of blood (Weber, 1951: 13). This theory of necessitating the city-membership in order to be recognised as a citizen was criticised as Euro-centric because it was modelled after an ideal of the Greek polis (Isin, 2002: 11, 18-21) and it stipulated that citizenship should be automatically equated with 'legal status'. Such interpretation ignored those expressions of citizenship in Western and non-Western locations, which were not necessarily institutionalised (Isin and Wood, 1999: 5).

However, the orientalism of this theory also served as a political instrument, as it was bound to a specific power-politics in the beginning of 20$^{th}$ century, which I will explain in the next paragraph.

The juxtaposing urbanite-citizen with peasant-non-citizen, which Weber introduces in his theory is neither a solitary attempt nor detached from the general spirit of his era. As Eugen Weber explains (1976: 3) that the 'internal orientalisation' of peasants (and impoverished migrants to the city) as 'savages' was rather commonplace in modernising and industrialising 19$^{th}$ century France. Therefore, as what Max Weber solidified into a 'scientific' theory was in fact a commonplace attitude towards peasants as non-citizens in modernizing Western Europe, the theory cannot be separated from the powerful discourses of modernity and industrialisation. More so, Max Weber's understanding of citizenship as urban and Occidental was subordinated to the concrete political aims of the state (in this case – German state). Ho-feng Hung explains that at the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century knowledge of the East was pervaded by discourses of science, rationality and racism, which were used to explain the social changes in Europe and to justify the superiority of Western civilisation (Hung, 2003: 272). The portrayal of China as backward (present in the late writing of philosophers such as James Legge and J.J.M. de Groot) was greatly influenced by the scholarship of Max Muller, whose research was funded by the German government and was to serve building of the unified, ethnic German state. As Hung argues, these writings were the main inspiration behind Weber's critique of Chinese religion and also a main foundation for his argument why rationality and capitalism were unique to Occidental culture (Hung, 2003: 267, 271). As I will present further in this paper, this 'Weberian' understanding of citizenship as non-rural has become a cornerstone of the contemporary regime of citizenship in China. Although Max Weber is not specifically cited in Chinese discussions on citizenship, the way citizenship is understood in contemporary China is remarkably reminiscent of the way it was understood in Europe during the prominence of his theory.

If the above discussions related to the way orientalism has been understood and redeployed, what developments can be interpreted as 'challenging orientalism'? Nevzat Soguk defines the 'post-oriental' subject as someone who resists 'Western' domination (Soguk, 1993: 364). Such popular understanding of 'post-oriental' as 'resistance to the West' is the one which I wish to problematise, because it re-produces the essentialised category of the 'Self'. Instead, I intend to illustrate that in order to resist the 'internalised orientalism', the scholarship must be seated in the instances of boundary-transgression. Consequently, in order to show the multiple understandings of orientalism (as 'internal orientalism', as 'occidentalism' and as 'orientalist technologies'), I prefer to refer to those attempts in scholarly works I will discuss here as 'challenging orientalism' or 'after orientalism', rather than 'post-oriental'.

## Rural-to-urban migrants in China and the question of citizenship

Before I proceed with the discussion on citizenship as a discourse in China, the historical background on the relationship between citizenship regime, the urban/rural divide and internal migration is needed. The citizenship regime in China has been an on-going product of a hybridisation of domestic and foreign influences. The traditional relationship between city and countryside in pre-modern Qing empire has been often portrayed as based on balanced economic and cultural exchanges between rural and urban, where rural life and identities were not seen as inferior, but rather ideal. Many rural migrants to the cities would return to villages to cultivate land or teach. Such equilibrium shifted after the first Opium War in 1840, which resulted in the rapid

growth of coastal cities, and brought about crime, prostitution, opium addiction and alienation of Chinese inhabitants from public spaces by the colonial overlords. After taking power over in 1949, the Communists wanted to renounce anything that they associated with pre-modern 'feudalism' or 'bourgeois' class (urban merchants) in the Republican Era and with Western colonialism (Whyte and Parish, 1984: 10-16).

In this new regime, the urbanities were to receive secure employment, education and food ratios. In order to realise this modernisation and urbanisation dream and secure inflow of resources to the cities to satisfy the urbanities, the government introduced a hereditary system of *hukou* (household registration number) policy. The *hukou* system emulated the internal passport *propiska* system in the Soviet Union dividing citizens into rural and urban residents. In result the underprivileged workforce was to be contained and immobilised in the countryside in the way which, as Dorothy Solinger argues, reminded the process of 'internal colonisation' (Solinger, 1999: 27). After the economic reforms were initiated in 1978 the *hukou* system has been gradually relaxed. Today the *hukou* system still denies social rights to rural *hukou* holders, such as free medical care, employment benefits or free education for migrants' children, especially in the biggest cities (Solinger, 1999: 4, Hsu, 2009: 130-131).

Although throughout both Empire (from the 12th century) and the Republican period there were no strict restrictions as such of population movement, the system of registration (for tax purposes and neighbourhood patrols) had existed in China during Imperial times (Solinger, 1999: 28-29). Yet, it had never (at least in China) led to a wedge between countryside and cities, that would elevate urbanities as privileged citizens (Solinger, 1999: 32). Only during the Republican era, in cities like Shanghai, did a bourgeois class begin to emerge, for which the notion of *shimin* (urban citizen) was used for the first time. However, Solinger argues that the *de facto* division of Chinese society into two classes, rural and urban, was unprecedented in China and was only introduced by the *hukou* system in the 1950s (Solinger, 1999:27). Yet, while Solinger places blame for the urban-centred idea of citizenship in China solely on the *hukou* system, I will later illustrate that by looking at the academic discussions on citizenship in China, one may learn that citizenship in China should rather be understood through wider discourses at play.

The Soviet version of Marxism introduced and strengthened many of the Western discourses in China; most visibly, that of the teleological idea of history and of linear progress (Chen, 1995: 4). Subsequently, after the 'opening to the world reforms' some new narratives, other than Communism, came to the fore. The narratives of development and progress became even more pronounced and running parallel was the process of further downgrading of peasant identities as anti-modern and not fitting with the 'powerful progressive nationalist historical narrative' (Yang, 2011: 5, 6). Over the past three decades, the inequality of the system came to be even more tangibly experienced by those who migrated to Chinese cities. Nowadays, the migrants (in Chinese most commonly referred to as 'peasant workers' - *nongmingong*) amount to about 200 million people (Tunon, 2006: 5, Amnesty International, 2007). With migration, the process of marginalisation of the peasantry did not only not disappear, but the capitalist and market-orientated mind-set of urbanities enhanced the discrimination (Solinger, 1999: 9). Yet, as migrations exposed the huge inequalities that the *hukou* system caused, they also renewed the academic discussion on citizenship in China.

Today, although the *hukou* legislation still remains unchanged in most Chinese cities, there have been some developments, which to an extent mitigate the negative impact of the *hukou* system. For instance, as part of the membership requirements for

China's accession to the WTO, factories in China were put under a legal obligation to guarantee basic benefits for all workers, including migrants, such as pension funds, medical insurance and workplace accident insurance. However, this has been resisted by the factory owners and scarcely implemented (Cai, 2008: 68). Additionally, in 2008 the government issued a new 'Contract Labour Law', which introduced packages of rights and benefits for all workers. Yet, as Cai noted (2008: 68), the extension of some of the rights to migrant workers changed little in the daily lives of migrants, as the market pressure for cheap labour means that migrants' income remains low, which is the main reason for the poor economic situation of migrants. Chen Yingfang also emphasised that although central government strives to reform the *hukou* system, this process is hindered by the local governments, who oppose such transformation as the existence of the *hukou* system better serves their interests (Chen, 2005: 121). However, the extent to which these 'interests' are determined in the first place by the pressures for meeting development targets imposed by the central government remains an open question.

This focus on migrants' lack of substantive citizenship, which was initiated by Solinger, was popularised extensively in the discussion on migrant citizenship within and outside of China. For instance, following Solinger, Chen Yingfang employs the idea of migrants as 'non-citizens', because of their restricted citizenship rights in the city (Chen, 2005: 121). The interest in abolishment of the *hukou* system is now propagated far beyond academia. There are many voices wishing for abolishment of the *hukou* system, such as the calls of editors of some newspapers in China (DaHeWang-DaHeBao, 2010) or some international organisations and NGOs (Amnesty International, 2007, Wang, 2008). The sprouting of NGOs in China, and the involvement of different agents in the process of negotiation of migrants' citizenship increased pressures to abolish the *hukou* system altogether. The increasing interest of international bodies and Chinese and foreign media has publicised migrants' situation and has reshaped attitudes towards them. The attitude of the urban population has also become more inviting and sympathetic towards migrants (personal communication with the head of migrant-orientated student association in Zhejiang University on 24 September 2011 and with a professor working on migrants issues from Zhejiang University on 18 November 2011).

Although many of Solinger's findings are still valid, there is certain limitation to her argument. While discussing migrants' citizenship, Solinger and many who followed in her footsteps, put emphasis on substantive rights of citizenship. This overlooks other understandings of citizenship, which, if acknowledged, could show migrants not as victims, but as active agents, constituting themselves as citizens (such as those propagated by NGOs in China). There is little engagement with the theories of citizenship beyond the focus on *hukou* and little questioning of the discourses, other than *hukou,* which condition the current citizenship regime in China. The *hukou* system, and with it the question of substantive rights, remains the core interest of the Chinese and 'Western' researchers. However, as it will be shown in the last part of this paper, only by going beyond the narrative of *hukou* and by accounting for other factors behind the citizenship regime in China can the rift between rural and urban population be challenged.

**The conceptualisation of citizenship in Chinese academia**

In this section I will present how 'Western' and Chinese ideas of citizenship have been incorporated into the process of Chinese state-building. I will show how the notions of rural and urban were played out in the discourse of citizenship in the way, which is reminiscent of Weberian understanding of citizenship.

'Western' theories of citizenship were first adapted in Chinese context in the Republican period (1912 - 1949). The Chinese terms for 'citizen' started emerging in parallel to the implementation of the modernisation project in China and they were hybrids of 'Western' and 'indigenous' influences (Zarrow, 1997: 5). Contemporarily there are several Chinese words, which could be translated as 'citizens', most important of which are *gongmin* (public people)*, shimin* (city people) and guomin (people of the state)[3]. All the above terms for 'citizen' share the second character of *min*, which means 'the people' (who are both ruled and who sanction the ruler's authority). Therefore, the first concept that could actually be understood as a concept of 'citizenship' was the pre-modern Confucian term of *minben* ('people as the basis'), which used the above explained meaning of '*min*' (Harris, 2002:187). However, since Confucianism holds that the relationship between state and society is a 'harmonious pact' (*minyue*), the contract between society and the state was unthought-of (Zarrow, 1997:13). Chih-Yu Shih further argues that the relationship between emperor and the people was compared to the relationship between father and son and the state itself was portrayed as a form of extended family (Shih, 2002; 233).This Confucian representation of state-society relations is still present in China, with a striking example of the current usage of 'harmony' (*hexie*) rhetoric in the Chinese public space and propaganda. Yet, it is this strategy of stressing unity and 'harmony' that has long helped to marginalise 'the internal Other' in order to strengthen the project of building a unified, modern nation-state (Barabantseva, 2011: 4-5). This does not only relate to ethnic and religious minorities, but also concerns the way peasants and consequently, internal migrants, have been portrayed in the discourse on citizenship.

This tension between urban and rural is encapsulated in the very name for 'citizen' in Chinese language. Although *gongmin* (public people) is a core of the notion for citizenship (*gongminquan*), indeed a word most commonly used in China to depict 'citizen' is *shimin* (urban citizen). *Shimin* originated in the Republican period to reflect the city associations' attempts at self-governance in a relative autonomy from the state (Harris, 2002: 188). In this sense it directly incorporated the Weberian understanding of citizen, although there are arguments that the urban merchant class in the late Qing and Republican Era had never attained similar autonomy to that of their counterparts in Western European cities (Yujiro, 1997:137). In contemporary China, however, the notion of *shimin* is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand it is used to depict 'citizen', but on the other hand it is also popularly understood as an administrative term meaning 'an urban-*hukou*-holder living in a city' (as it did during the Maoist period) (Harris, 2002: 188, Chen, 2008: 120). However, there is certain politics of exclusion present in both, even the latter, more 'casual' usage of the notion of *shimin*.

This exclusionary character of *shimin* is reflected in the notion of *shiminhua* ('becoming a citizen' or 'turning/being turned into citizen'). In Chinese academic texts, the transformation from rural to urban, as in the culture, the identity, the sense of belonging, but also, more technically, as an instance of attaining urban citizenship rights, is generally called *shiminhua* (eg. Cai, 2008). S*himinhua* is often used interchangeably with the most common translation for 'citizenship' (*gongminquan* or *shiminquan*) to simply depict a state of possessing citizenship rights (Wang, 2009: 126). To illustrate the pervasiveness of understanding citizenship as urban privilege, the politics behind the notions of *gongminquan/shiminquan* is illustrative. *Shiminquan/gongminquan* literally means 'citizenship rights' and it is different from the translation for citizenship status-*gongmin zige* (or *shimin zige*). Chen Yingfang argues that *gongmin zige/shimin zige* is a more inclusive term than *gongminquan/shiminquan* (Chen, 2005: 120). For instance, Ren Lixin understands the 45th article of the Chinese constitution as endowing all

Chinese citizens (*gongmin*), including migrants, with 'citizenship status' (*gongmin zige)* (Ren, 2010: 63). The notion of *gongminquan/shiminquan,* on the other hand, although originally it was simply a translation of the English word 'citizenship', it came to represent the privileged state of those, who 'possess urban *hukou* endowing them with social rights of citizenship and a privileged identity of urban citizens' (Chen, 2005: 120). The term *shimin* is therefore a *de facto* marker of the boundary between those who 'have citizenship rights' and those who do not, and between those who deserve to be identified as 'citizens' and those who do not. It can be said that in contemporary China, the exclusionary and orientalised Weberian understanding of citizen indeed pertains to those who are *de facto* endowed with citizenship rights, status and identity.

## Why 'indigenous' theories do not challenge orientalism – instrumental application of 'Western' and Chinese theories

So far, I have presented the process of the incorporation of 'Western' concepts of citizenship as theory and praxis and their hybridisation with Chinese philosophical foundations. In order to better understand why looking for 'alternative' conceptualisations of citizenship in Chinese academia is not tantamount to citizenship 'after orientalism', I will now demonstrate how both 'Western' and Chinese influences are played out in Chinese academic texts in the wider context of political struggle.

While both 'Western' and 'indigenous' Chinese theories have served as a foundations for contemporary understandings of citizenship, it is 'Western' theories that dominate Chinese scholarship on citizenship. Chinese academics have been borrowing 'Western' (mostly positivist) theories of citizenship, migration, urbanisation and integration because incorporation of 'Western' theories is often seen as a necessary hallmark of emphasising their 'scientific', and therefore true, accurate and unarguable quality. This belief in 'science' is reflected in a widespread application of positivist methodology in Chinese academia (large-scale statistical study, discourses of linear progress, quantitative over qualitative methods of research and usage of 'scientific' theories and vocabulary) (eg. Ren, 2010, Mao and Wang, 2006, Mao, 2009)[4]. Such methodology reflects belief in science and linear progress, and resonates with dominant discourses in China. For instance, in order to convince the readership that the equal citizenship rights between migrant and urban-*hukou*-holding workers are essential attributes of a modern and progressive nation-state, Ren Lixin (2010) evokes Marshall's theory of citizenship, which presents the development of citizenship rights in an evolutionary manner from civil, to political and social rights. He explains that Marshall's theory is accurate because it describes a 'natural process' of development of rights and something that has already turned into 'common knowledge' (Ren, 2010: 63).

On the other hand, while the incorporation of Chinese theories remains popular, it seems to be done more *ad hoc* (rather than systematically) and is done instrumentally. Chinese theories are evoked to justify the uniqueness of the situation of migrants in China (and more generally – of citizens, civil society and society-state relations in China) by presenting it as 'Chinese exceptionalism' which 'cannot be simply explained by Western theories'. Such rhetoric is vividly reminiscent of European academia's usage of orientalist practices for state-building purposes, as discussed earlier in this paper. Indeed, while many have looked at orientalism as a political instrument of Western countries, some scholars have pointed out how orientalism has been re-appropriated within China in the same way as it has been used in the West – to distinguish oneself from the Other (in this case Occident, rather than the Orient) for political purposes.

Xiaomei Chen proposed (1995: 4-5) that such instances of re-appropriation of orientalism within the state and academic discourse in China should be called 'Occidentalism'. She argues that it is impossible to divorce Western influence from what is 'authentically Chinese' because what is 'authentically Chinese' 'has already been "contaminated" and even constructed by cultural and inter-cultural appropriations that belong to the whole of Chinese-Western relationships' (Chen, 1995: 4). In a current trend-review of popular and academic publications on China, William A. Callahan points out that China is being increasingly represented as predestined to follow its own 'unique' way to modernity (2012a). Callahan argues that some authors both in China (eg. Pan Wei, 2009 and Mingfu Liu, 2010 quoted in Callahan, 2012a) and in the West (eg. Martin Jacque, 2009 and David Kang, 2007, quoted in Callahan, 2012a) support the 'Chinese exceptionalism' argument with selective readings of history and use essentialised categories of China and the West to convey their arguments. He points out that their scholarship is interestingly close to the Chinese government's official propaganda, and remains more of a political tool than a solid piece of research (Callahan, 2012a: 35-51). Similarly, Mayfair Young also argues that there is a Chinese version of orientalism and that too little attention has been paid to how orientalism has been re-appropriated in China (Yang, 2011: 8).

Here, I will extend this existing scholarship on Chinese re-appropriation of orientalism discourse by looking at how it is played out in the context of citizenship. Here 'Chinese exceptionalism' is not only used to suit dominant political discourse and achieve certain political goals in support of the state's propaganda. It is also employed to carve out space for certain social and political goals and agendas, which only seemingly applaud state propaganda. It often seems that Chinese academics somehow uncritically reproduce state's discourses across their texts. However, as discussed earlier, in relation to state-society model of relations in China, the mechanisms of resistance in the contemporary academic writings in China are not necessarily manifested in an open confrontation with the state-set discourse, but remain more conciliatory. While evoking 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*) as an ultimate aim (in line with the Party's propaganda aim), academics also use the word 'harmonious' as a justification of their critical stance towards the current system denying migrants social rights. Cai Jingcheng (2008), for instance, says that the 'process of turning migrants into (urban) citizens (*shiminhua*) promotes urban harmony', by which he means that only if migrants attain citizenship rights which are granted to urban *hukou* holders, can there be a truly 'harmonious society'.

Similarly, Mao Dan's incorporation of the neo-Confucian rhetoric that the state-society relationship in China is modelled after the father-son relationship seems to be only superficially subscribing to the government's propaganda. He compares different patterns of state- civil society relationships to different types of father-son relationships ('if father is authoritarian, son becomes handicapped'; 'if father is weak, son becomes unrestrained' etc.). He concludes that the model of 'friendly relationship' between father and son (*fuzipengyouxing*) is the best, as it allows greater freedom in moulding the type of son (citizen) which is the most desirable for the society. Therefore, he makes a wishful recommendation for the current state-society relationship not to remain an authoritarian father-handicapped son model but to be transformed into the relationship of friendship (Mao, 2010: 27-28). Through this usage of neo-Confucian analogy Mao indeed writes himself into the state-set and acceptable discourse, but he does it to express his reservations about the current state-society arrangement. Callahan (2012b) pointed out a similar process occurring among intellectuals-artists in Shanghai, when they willingly participate in the dominant state discourse, yet they manipulate this

discourse in order to reach their own goals of claiming public space for the 'new civil society'.

All in all, it seems that looking at the authors' usage of Chinese theories does not necessarily challenge orientalism. What emerges from the intermingling of 'Western' and Chinese theories in Chinese texts is rather characteristic of political power struggles whereby both strands of theories are used in order to justify academic arguments, and support appeals for change, but also to support state propaganda. It rather seems that the usage of Chinese theories and philosophical concepts leads to orientalised and essentialised understandings of the Self, as it better suits the state-led processes and discourses, especially nationalism.

## Migrants in the citizenship narratives in Chinese academia – transgressing the boundary?

However, what is also emerging in these academic texts are attempts to transgress the urban/rural divide. These moments of questioning are often triggered by the category of migrants, which by appearing as neither rural nor urban compels academics to rethink the rural/urban divide and the corresponding understanding of citizenship. This changing vocabulary and attitudes, I argue, more than the non-Western ideas of citizenship make citizenship 'after orientalism' possible.

Chinese rural migrants who have been the main engine behind the rapid urbanisation process have long been portrayed as outsiders and criminals, or at best as a backward (under)class in the media and urban space (culminating in practices such as walling migrant communities in Beijing (He, 2010)). As they have been treated similarly to peasants, as non-urban, they have also become the Other against whom the image of the modern, urban, middle class citizenry has been created. In academia, similarly to wider representations, the vocabulary has long been pervaded with the narratives of migrants-criminal, migrants-peasants or at best migrants-victims, even if such portrayal is evoked to explain the need for change in the current situation of migrants in China. It is often in this context that the discussion on migrants' citizenship is being conveyed. Cai Jingcheng, for instance, lists the 'inferiority complex' and criminal behaviours among migrants as those aspects, which can be best tackled by 'the transformation [of migrants] into (urban) citizens' (*shiminhua*) (Cai, 2008: 69-70). By 'turning [migrants] into citizens' Cai means a thorough process of transformation of migrants' very identities and ways of life:

> While treating migrants kindly and helping them to shake off their poverty, the society should also help migrants to undergo a gradual process of 'becoming (urban) citizens' (*shiminhua*); to allow them to participate in the fruits of industrialisation and urbanisation processes (…). The vigorous progress of urbanisation advances the process of 'turning migrants (*nongmingong*) into citizens' (*shiminhua*). (…) The process of urbanisation is also the process which involves the transformation of rural identities into (urban) citizens' identities; [this process of 'turning into (urban) citizens' involves following changes:] employment in the non-rural sector, modernisation of lifestyle, urbanisation of accommodation and production [and] the socialisation into the welfare benefits system.(…) Therefore, progress of marketization of agriculture, urbanisation and turning migrants into (urban) citizens is the only way towards a realisation of the humanitarian [aim] of the development of the harmonious society (Cai, 2008: 70).

In the majority of narratives the process of 'becoming citizens' (*shiminhua*) is understood as the migrants' ultimate need and aim. The majority of academics use this

kind of migrant-victim narrative to make requests for migrants' 'rightful access to social benefits', 'education rights for their children' 'respect for physical labour' etc. (Fan and Mao, 2008, Cai, 2008: 69, Chen, 2005: 121). However, this process also means refusal, rather than acceptance, of the pre-existing (rural) identities of migrants. In this dominant narrative the process of 'becoming (urban) citizen' is the process of replacement of rural identities with one of 'a better kind'; modern and urban. Rural is not only portrayed as the inferior; rural migrant is an unfortunate victim of the underdevelopment of the countryside, and an answer to her/his problems is to 'become (like) an urban citizen'.

In popular imagination, the disparity between the backward rural and modern urban is rarely challenged. However, there is limited questioning of this boundary taking place in the academia. This questioning takes form of the twin processes of naming and narrative-setting, which re-draft and problematize group boundaries.

The first one, naming, is the way the migrants have been portrayed through the use of particular names and definitions. The other process is the one related to the narratives through which migrants have been represented, and which remain closely intertwined with the labelling process. I will argue that the shift from the vocabulary and narratives which represent migrants as passive victims to those recognising migrants' identities and problematising current conceptualisation of citizenship in China are also those which challenge its internal orientalism.

### Questioning the boundary through new practices of naming; from xinshimin to deconstruction

Some academics call migrants 'new urban citizens' (*xinshimin*) (eg. Mao, 2008: 52), which although it does not question the boundary, it attempts to re-draft the position of migrants in the popular imagination. This attempt is also innovative, as Mao Dan does not imply that migrants have to swap their *hukou* to an urban one to be worthy of the label of 'urban citizens', but rather that the very fact of them living and working in the city is already deserving of the new label. Although there is no serious deconstruction of the category of migrants as a group, by redefining migrants as 'new citizens' he shifts the boundary between citizens and non-citizens and breaks away with the dominant *hukou* narrative. These instances of a more inclusionary vocabulary are worthy of attention as there is still little questioning as to why all migrants are instantly perceived as a unified group with certain indispensable characteristics.

This representation of migrants as 'a unified group' is encapsulated in the label of 'peasant workers' (*nongmingong)*. Chen Yingfang claims that the popularisation of the label of 'peasant workers', resulted in the prejudiced attitudes towards migrants as transient, uprooted 'third group', belonging to neither rural, nor urban (Chen, 2005: 130). Chen criticises the temporality embedded in the notions of *nongmingong* and 'floating population' (*liudongrenkou*) not necessarily because migrants indeed do not return to their native place in the countryside, but rather because such labelling outright denies the right for migrants to permanently associate with the city. Such a situation is even more dramatic, since the label of 'peasant workers' is hereditary and passed down to children, even if they grow up in the cities and might never set foot in the native place of their parents (Chen, 2005: 131). He proposes to move beyond the rhetoric of rights to see that migrants' situation also resides in aspects other than just their economic situation or formal *hukou* status, but that it also extends to elusive realms of language and perception (Chen, 2005: 132).

The process of re-naming, and more so, the questioning of the mechanisms behind this process are the steps towards re-drafting and problematizing of group boundaries. Some academics deconstruct the understanding of 'migrants' as a group.

Wang Xiaozhang, following Chen's critique of *nongmingong* and drawing on Benedict Anderson's idea of 'imagined community', concludes that the notion of 'peasant workers' (*nongmingong*) depicts a group, which came to life as an imagined construct in popular consciousness, and does not necessarily correspond with the 'real' identities and problems of migrants (Wang, 2009: 129). Using Wittgenstein's theory of 'family resemblance' he argues that *nongmingong* is just a category reflecting certain relations between exclusionary and recognition practices, rather than a fixed characteristic which can be applied to determine who is/is not a *nongmingong* (just like the resemblance between the members of a family is rather elusive and cannot be pinpointed) (Wang, 2009: 135). As such, he argues that 'there is a need [in China] to rethink anew the sociological conceptualisation of citizenship, to understand afresh who migrants are as a group; what they strive for and how they attain citizenship (*gongminquan*)' (Wang, 2009:133).

The new practices of naming range from including migrants into urban citizenry by calling them 'new urban citizens', criticising popular naming practices, especially the label of *nongmingong* as well as questioning the social imaginary of migrants as a unified group with indispensable characteristics. This process of re-naming is intertwined with the critique of the dominant narratives on migrants' citizenship.

### *Questioning the boundary through change in narratives*

Wang Xiaozhang argues that recently there has been a shift from the predominant 'economic subsistence narrative' on migrants to the so-called narrative of 'status-politics'. While the first narrative represents migrants as a group preoccupied with economic struggle (Wang, 2009: 121-125), the second one represents migrants as a rights-bereft and passive group struggling for social rights associated with the *hukou* system (*ibid:* 125-127). He believes that both narratives are missing some important points.

Firstly, academics who incorporate both of these narratives do not try to inquire into what it is that migrants really want or who they feel they are. Wang argues that describing migrants in terms of their need for survival and the economic criteria obscures other needs and behaviours, those clustered around their cultural, political and social needs (Wang, 2009: 123-124).

Secondly, both narratives do not allow for space to see migrants as people who cross the boundary between them and the city-dwellers through overlapping identities, other than those ascribed to them as a group. For instance, migrants form solidarities with other employees (who might possess urban *hukou*) when it comes to employment rights or with peasants when it comes to property rights (Wang, 2009:136). He puts forward a lengthy critique of authors such as Chen Yingfang and Dorothy Solinger, who use the 'status-politics' narrative, arguing that it restricts the understanding of migrants' citizenship to a single problem of *hukou* system. Wang argues that the biggest problem of migrants' subsistence in the cities is not the limitations associated with the *hukou* system, but rather the question of accommodation, wealth disparities and the discriminating attitudes related to perception of migrants as 'lacking quality' (Wang, 2009:130-131). The difference in the access to citizenship rights, as defined by Solinger, has been greatly transformed because of the encroachment of market rules which have already deprived urban citizenry of the majority of the privileges associated with the urban *hukou* (Wang, 2009*:* 132).

Here, he also problematizes the relationship between the 'status-politics' narrative (focusing on *hukou*) and the notion of 'turning migrants into citizens'

(*shiminhua*). He argues that the process of *shiminhua* is treated uncritically in Chinese academia, and that it is too often associated with the one-way process of becoming included into the group of urban citizenry through acquiring of urban *hukou* social rights and the transformation of peasants' identities. Basing on Chantal Mouffe's 'The return of the political', instead of expecting migrants to transform their identities to fit urban categories, Wang postulates the 'recognition' of migrants' needs and identity (Wang, 2009: 133). Similarly, instead of appealing to grant citizens with urban *hukou* rights, these very rights should be redrafted so that they can fit all groups (Wang, 2009: 132). He criticises the current understanding of 'citizenship' (*shiminquan)* as simply associated with the status of possessing urban *hukou*. He finally argues that the reconfiguration of relations between migrants and other groups will be achieved through change in relations between exclusion and recognition in the present-day understanding of migrants and citizenship in China (Wang, 2009: 135). In other words, the inclusion of narratives emphasising recognition of migrants' and rural citizenship identities (instead of those which merely focus on economic situation and the struggle for attaining urban *hukou*) has the potential to dissolve the boundary barring migrants from being recognised as 'citizens'.

Through critique of popular narratives and definitions of migrants' citizenship in China Wang Xiaozhang emphasises the fluidity of intergroup boundaries. Through deconstruction of the understanding of both *shiminquan* (urban citizenship) and *shiminhua* (being turned into citizen) he exposes that the meaning of citizenship can be understood alternatively – as based on relationship between exclusion and recognition, rather than on rights. By liberating the notion of citizenship (*shiminquan* and *shiminhua*) from its equation with the rights of urban *hukou,* or with being an urban dweller, he establishes that the understanding of citizenship in China does not have to retain its orientalised sense.

**Conclusion**

In this paper I have illustrated how the inheritance of orientalised understanding of citizenship has been present in the Chinese academia not just in the form of essentialised categories of East and West, but also in the understanding of 'citizen' as necessarily modern and urban. This is so because such understanding of citizenship stems from 'internal orientalisation' of migrants, which re-enacts the modernist meaning of 'citizen' solidified in Weber's theory. I have argued that in the case of Chinese scholarship on internal migrants, the influence of orientalism is not necessarily challenged when 'Western' concepts are replaced with Chinese ones. Breaking away from the discourse of orientalism is rather seated in the academic attempts to overcome alienation of migrants as a group through re-representations of migrants as citizens and by questioning existing definitions of who is a citizen in China. It is through attempts to understand migrants not as a uniform group of 'peasant workers in need of being turned into (urban) citizens', but by emphasising the subjective character of group boundaries and by appealing for recognition of urban and migrant identities instead, that the transformation of migrants from Other into Self can be achieved. I argue that this kind of resistance to the dominant understanding of migrants as peasants-non-citizens rather than the search for non-Western ideas of citizenship in China opens spaces for citizenship 'after orientalism'.

1. While referring to Western European and American scholarship and philosophical foundations as 'Western' throughout this article might be viewed as a reproduction of orientalist categories, I find it necessary for the cohesion of the argument and to relate to literature on orientalism which uses these notions extensively. Throughout the paper I rather intend to demonstrate how the essentialised usage of these concepts hinders development of scholarship 'after orientalism'.

2. There is also a separate term for 'citizenship', as in 'passport holding' of (国籍 *guoji*), which I do not include into the discussion.

3. The criticism of such widespread and uncritical usage of 'Western' methods and concepts in Chinese academia was raised by Peng Xingting (2007: 67). His criticism, however, still echoes the anti-Western, orientalist and nationalist sentiments.

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