

*Social Construction of Target Groups and Policy Design: Lessons from the Housing Policy for Migrant Workers in China**

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Abstract

Why does the government apply different policies to diverse social groups? This study attempts to answer this question by employing a social construction framework and a document analysis to explain the logic underlying housing policies for rural-to-urban migrant workers in China. After documenting the transformation of the social image of migrant workers from “deviants” to “dependents”, this study elaborates main factors of change in social construction and discusses how change can affect policy design and distribution of housing benefits. The study finds that, despite a significant improvement in their social image, Chinese migrants still receive few substantive benefits from new housing policies, which are explicitly meant to provide more services to them. Similar to the pattern in western societies, decision-makers tend to offer promises

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