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From Native-Place Affiliation to Cultural Capital: The Historical Construction of Shanghainese Identity and The Formation of Its Boundaries

Abstract: *Urban identity is not determined solely by place of birth, household registration, or geographical affiliation. Rather, it is a social construct that gradually takes shape through historical urban transformations, changes in social structures, and interactions among social groups. As a typical immigrant city, Shanghai has continuously experienced population mobility, economic development, and cultural interaction, all of which have shaped its urban identity. "Shanghainese" thus represents not merely a form of geographical belonging, but a multifaceted identity encompassing economic qualifications, cultural identification, and social recognition. Drawing on the history of Shanghai's urban development and theories of social identity, this article examines the historical formation of Shanghainese identity and its social boundaries through three analytical dimensions: native-place affiliation, economic qualifications, and cultural capital. The findings reveal that the construction of Shanghainese identity has evolved from a form of geographical identification based on kinship, ancestral origins, and long-term local residence, to social differentiation based on economic resources, occupational status, and institutional qualifications, and further to cultural distinctions expressed through language proficiency, lifestyles, and identification with urban culture. These dimensions do not simply replace one another in a linear sequence. Rather, they have become intertwined across different historical periods, jointly shaping the criteria of identity evaluation and the boundaries of Shanghainese identity. Meanwhile, Shanghainese identity retains a degree of openness, allowing migrants to gradually approach this identity through economic participation, social interaction, and cultural practices. However, such openness does not imply the disappearance of identity boundaries. Inequalities in resource distribution and differences in cultural capital continue to shape migrants' prospects of obtaining social recognition. This article argues that Shanghainese identity is not an inherently fixed geographical label, but an urban identity continuously constructed through historical transformations and social interactions. Its boundaries reflect not only the formation of an urban community but also the processes of social stratification and identity differentiation within the city.*

Keywords: *Shanghainese identity; urban identity; identity construction; social boundaries; cultural capital*

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I. Introduction

Urban identity is not a fixed category determined solely by geographical origin or household registration. Rather, it is historically constructed through population mobility, social interaction, and changing urban structures. Since its opening as a treaty port in 1843, Shanghai has attracted migrants from diverse regions, including Ningbo and Jiangsu. Their participation in the city's economic and social development has contributed to the formation of a distinctive urban identity. Yet long-term residence and economic participation do not necessarily guarantee recognition as Shanghainese. This raises a central question: how has Shanghainese identity been historically constructed, and what boundaries distinguish local residents from outsiders?

Existing studies have examined Shanghai's social history from perspectives including native-place networks, economic transformation, and Haipai culture. Research by Bryna Goodman and Susan Mann Jones highlights the role of regional affiliation in migrant communities, while Marie-Claire Bergère and Wen-hsin Yeh explore the relationship between economic development and social change. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital further provides a perspective for understanding cultural distinction and social recognition. However, these dimensions are often discussed separately, leaving room for a more integrated analysis of how they jointly shape Shanghainese identity.

This article examines the historical construction of Shanghainese identity through three interconnected dimensions: native-place affiliation, economic qualifications, and cultural capital. It argues that these dimensions do not represent successive stages replacing one another, but overlapping criteria whose significance has shifted across historical periods. By tracing their interaction, the article demonstrates how Shanghainese

identity has been continuously negotiated through historical change, economic relations, and cultural practices, producing boundaries that are simultaneously open to inclusion and structured by social distinction.

II. THE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS OF SHANGHAINESE IDENTITY

2.1 Native-Place Affiliation and Identity Boundaries

In traditional social structures, identity was initially anchored in systems of household registration and native-place affiliation. The term "Shanghainese" originally referred primarily to residents whose ancestral origins lay in the Shanghai area and whose families had lived there for generations. This mode of identification followed a relatively closed logic of boundary-making: it emphasized kinship, family genealogy, and local residence. Its social foundations can be traced to the administrative divisions of the Ming and Qing periods, including Songjiang Prefecture and Shanghai County.

In her study of native-place associations and native-place consciousness in Shanghai, Bryna Goodman observes that "native place was an indispensable component of personal identity in traditional China. It was the first thing strangers asked one another, the first characteristic recorded about an individual, and a basic fact that had to be established first when a person became involved in litigation."[1] This observation highlights the importance of native-place affiliation in traditional Chinese society. Native place functioned as a socially meaningful marker of identity, playing a crucial role in everyday interaction, social identification, and institutional procedures. Yet native place was also a relatively flexible social construction. When defining their own origins, individuals could refer to the hometowns of ancestors from different generations. The referent of native place was hierarchical: it could denote a particular village or county, or extend to a larger geographical unit such as a city or province.

Historians and anthropologists have long recognized the importance of native place in Chinese self-understanding and collective consciousness. Ho Ping-ti's study of Chinese guilds[2] was among the earliest classic works to draw scholarly attention to the significance of native-place affiliation in Chinese society. Native-place and fellow-provincial ties also feature in G. William Skinner's research on social mobility. Skinner argues that the social environments and cultural traditions of different regions fostered locally distinctive skills and occupational traditions, which were then disseminated throughout China through population mobility. Shanxi bankers and Ningbo merchants, for example, displayed pronounced regional characteristics.[3] Along similar lines, Susan Mann examines the formation of the Ningbo community in Shanghai and argues that Ningbo merchants relied on networks of fellow provincials to build a cohesive economic and social community in the city.[4] James H. Cole's study of Shaoxing people who left their native places in search of a livelihood documents how they relied on fellow-provincial networks to sustain their livelihoods and social connections elsewhere. In their study of nineteenth-century China, Susan Naquin and Evelyn Sakakida Rawski explicitly note that "fellow natives were the most frequently invoked fundamental bond among people who had left their homes to seek a living elsewhere, enabling them to depend on and assist one another."[5] In David Strand's study of urban society in Beijing, native-place ties are not placed at the center of the analysis. Nevertheless, he describes worker factions organized around common origins and notes that fellow-provincial associations continued to play an important role in urban society in the 1920s, showing how such ties could, in certain circumstances, become a basis for urban political power.[6]

Among studies of native-place relations in cities, William T. Rowe's systematic examination of Hankou, a treaty port in central China, is particularly detailed. Drawing on extensive historical materials, Rowe analyzes native-place identification in urban society. He argues that although Hankou's urban society exhibited a degree of cosmopolitanism, native-place identification continued to exert a lasting influence as the city developed. Fellow-provincial ties also played an important role in access to employment and economic assistance: commercial associations, recruitment, and leisure activities were often organized around native-place networks. Residential patterns likewise reflected the persistence of this localism. Rowe finds that some neighborhoods in Hankou were dominated by migrants from particular regions and thus resembled ethnic enclaves in their spatial configuration. Even as new urban institutions gradually emerged, native-place associations continued to play a central role in residents' social lives. On this basis, he concludes that "geographically determined subethnic divisions ... constituted the most important feature distinguishing individual identities in late imperial China."[7]

These studies generally recognize the importance of native place in defining social relations. However, Rowe and other scholars tend to treat native place as a relatively stable geographical label. They pay less attention to how native-place affiliation intersects with class structures and cultural practices, or to how it acquires complex and changing meanings in specific social contexts. When someone is called a Shanghainese person or an Anhui person, the social meaning of the label is often taken for granted rather than understood as a construction formed through historical processes. Anthropological studies of ethnicity offer a new theoretical perspective for reconsidering the social significance of native place. Although these studies do not directly answer the question of when native-place affiliation becomes ethnic identity, they offer a new analytical

approach by treating social groups as relational structures. Junko Yanagisako's study of Japanese Americans in Seattle, Karen Blu's research on the Lumbee Indians of North Carolina, and James Clifford's work on Native Americans on Cape Cod all suggest the need to examine the symbolic meanings underlying identity and the processes through which it is socially constructed.

These studies generally argue that ethnic groups should be understood as relational systems continually produced through social interaction. Identities take shape in specific historical and social settings through distinction from, and connection with, other identities. Applying this perspective to the study of native place in Chinese society requires moving beyond an analytical framework based solely on geographical origins. It calls for closer examination of how native-place affiliation intersects with class, culture, and power structures in different social contexts, and how it is continually redefined and reconstructed through social interaction. In the early stages of urban development, social organization was centered on lineages, while identity was grounded in ancestral halls, genealogies, and land relations. Most people identified as Shanghainese were members of a local community, and the legitimacy of their identity derived from being indigenous to the area. This form of identification was distinctly exclusionary: even migrants who had lived in Shanghai for a long time found it difficult to acquire the symbolic status of local residents.

After Shanghai opened as a treaty port in 1843, its social structure underwent a fundamental transformation. The establishment of foreign concessions brought large numbers of migrants into the city, including merchants from southern Jiangsu, northern Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Ningbo. The native-place criterion consequently faced new challenges. As increasing numbers of residents had migrated to Shanghai rather than lived there for generations, defining Shanghainese identity solely through blood ties or ancestral origins became increasingly restrictive. This period reflected a transition from Gemeinschaft, or a community based on traditional ties, to Gesellschaft, or an urban society based on more impersonal relations. Against the backdrop of intense population mobility in modern times, however, native-place distinctions continued to shape everyday interaction. The distinction between the local bang and outside bang, for example, made Shanghainese identity, in the sense of native-place affiliation, a symbolic resource for determining who was entitled to represent the city.

2.2 Economic Qualifications and Urban Position

As Shanghai gradually developed into one of the most important industrial and commercial centers in the Far East in the late nineteenth century, the symbolic system through which urban identities were defined also changed. Compared with the traditional form of identification based on native place, lineage, or local networks, economic position increasingly became a new criterion for measuring identity in modern urban society. The development of the city's financial system and the proliferation of enterprises made internal social stratification increasingly pronounced. Groups that succeeded in the market and accumulated economic resources were more likely to gain social recognition and to be incorporated into the symbolic category of Shanghainese. During this period, urban identity became closely associated with economic capacity. Shanghainese people came to be attributed with a set of cultural characteristics compatible with commercial society, such as being "shrewd and pragmatic," "skilled in business," "efficiency-oriented," and adept at adapting to modern commercial rules. Initially, these traits summarized the city's commercial culture; over time, they evolved into important symbolic markers within systems of social evaluation. An identity originally grounded in geography or native-place affiliation thus gradually became associated with an economic image shaped by market logic.

During the Republican period, the rapid expansion of commercial capital and finance contributed to the emergence of an urban middle class centered on entrepreneurs and technical professionals. Within the structure of social recognition, ownership of a stable business, commercial capital, or professional skills became an important basis for defining urban membership. Some people whose ancestral origins lay elsewhere but who owned property or shops in Shanghai, or worked in professional occupations there, were also regarded as important members of urban society and could even be recognized as "genuine" Shanghainese. After 1949, the comprehensive transformation of the country's political and economic system, together with the danwei (work-unit) system and household registration system established under the planned economy, institutionalized and fixed the boundaries of urban identity. Under this institutionalized classification, the city developed relatively clear structural boundaries, and Shanghainese identity overlapped to a considerable extent with household registration for a prolonged period. Following the launch of reform and opening-up, China's economy gradually shifted from a planned to a market system, once again transforming the mechanisms of resource allocation. As market mechanisms returned to the center of economic activity, economic capacity regained prominence in social stratification. Unlike the planned-economy social structure, which was dominated by institutional status, urban society after reform and opening-up became more dependent on market competition and individual capabilities. Economic forms of Shanghainese identity were consequently reinforced. The criteria for evaluating urban identity gradually shifted from institutional affiliation toward economic achievement. Whether one could purchase a commercial home, enter the white-collar occupational stratum, or work in emerging sectors such as

finance and services became an important marker distinguishing members of urban society. In particular, after the development and opening-up of Pudong, large numbers of enterprises and highly educated professionals entered Shanghai, significantly transforming the city's economic structure. New occupational groups and economic elites emerged and became important elements in narratives of urban identity. In this context, Shanghainese identity increasingly became a symbolic status that could be acquired through economic accumulation and social achievement.

From the perspective of social stratification theory, this historical process reflects an important shift in the criteria of urban identity from ascribed status to achieved status. Li Qiang points out that "market-oriented reform changed the ways in which resources were allocated in the traditional social structure, making education, occupation, and income important bases of social stratification."[8] Ralph Linton argues that in modern society, social status increasingly depends on achievements attained through individual effort rather than on identities assigned at birth.[9] This transition from ascribed to achieved status does not mean that social opportunities have become fully open. Although the market economy has expanded the possibilities for social mobility, inequalities in access to resources remain widespread. Educational opportunities, capital accumulation, and social networks all affect the position of Anhui migrants in Shanghai within market competition. To some extent, an urban identity standard based on economic achievement therefore constitutes a new, implicit barrier to entry.

In her account of the formation of modern Shanghai's economic society, Marie-Claire Bergère places the city at the center of China's modernization process. She argues that after opening as a treaty port in the mid-nineteenth century, Shanghai gradually developed from a county town in the Jiangnan region into China's most important treaty port and a modern industrial and commercial center. Its urban expansion was closely connected to the foreign concession system and migrant mobility. Bergère particularly emphasizes that modern Shanghai emerged through the combined influence of global capital, local merchants, migrants, and modern institutions.[10] From the perspective of social and cultural history, Wen-hsin Yeh further explores the formation of economic identity in Shanghai. Through her examination of finance, publishing, and modern department stores in Shanghai from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, she traces the emergence of China's first urban middle class. Yeh argues that, when the role of the state was relatively limited in the early twentieth century, Shanghai's emerging middle class developed a new urban economic ethic through finance and commerce, education, and consumption. Commerce gradually acquired the legitimacy associated with "progress" and "success."[11] This suggests that the economic identity of Shanghainese became a form of identity associated with modern occupations, commercial credit, and consumption capacity. From this perspective, those who achieved economic success in modern Shanghai were regarded as groups more closely aligned with the city's spirit. Yeh's discussion of commercial competition and modern comprador merchants shows that Shanghai merchants acquired new social roles through domestic and foreign trade and urban consumption. Modern commerce reconstructed the traditional status order of scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants, while merchants, managers, office workers, and department-store employees gradually became important actors in Shanghai's urban society. Economically defined Shanghainese were, first and foremost, people able to understand and participate in modern market rules. They were familiar with contracts, credit, risk, and opportunity, and were associated with urban character traits such as shrewdness, business acumen, and market knowledge. From the perspective of urban power structures, Xu Jilin argues that the principal actors in modern Shanghai included the urban bourgeoisie, cultural elites, chambers of commerce, and new professional groups. He also suggests that the gentry-merchant stratum in the late Qing and early Republican periods was a transitional group, and that by around the 1920s the modern bourgeoisie had gradually replaced it as the city's central force. He further argues that modern Shanghai's civil society had two major protagonists: the urban bourgeoisie and cultural elites. Together, they constituted a cultural network of power in Shanghai's local society.[12] These studies suggest that the economic identity of Shanghainese signified not only personal wealth but also the capacity to participate in public affairs and join commercial associations and professional networks.

Studies of the Ningbo merchant community are particularly useful for illustrating how economic success could provide an important route into Shanghai's identity order. Ningbo merchants occupied prominent positions in Shanghai's financial sector, shipping industry, native banks, and modern banking sector for an extended period. Through investments in native banks, modern banks, shipping, insurance, and industry, figures such as Yan Xinhou, Ye Chengzhong, Yu Qiaqing, and Qin Runqing contributed to the development of modern Shanghai's commercial economy.[13] Some studies cite the saying that Shanghai ranked first in China in terms of commercial capital, that banks held the largest share of Shanghai's commercial capital, and that Ningbo people accounted for the largest share of Shanghai's banking capital. This suggests that migrants in a city such as Shanghai were not necessarily relegated to the margins. If they gained control of industry organizations and commercial networks, they could attain a higher urban status than local residents. The Ningbo case shows that economically defined Shanghainese identity was closely related to economic position. Many Ningbo merchants

entered the core of Shanghai's urban economy through shipping and import-export trade and gradually became prominent representatives of its commercial society. By contrast, traditional merchant groups that failed to adapt promptly to modern economic transformation were gradually marginalized as Shanghai's economic structure changed. Relevant studies suggest that one important reason for the Ningbo merchants' sustained advantage in modern Shanghai was their ability to respond to new economic trends by transforming traditional native banks, shipping operations, and commercial networks into modern banks, shipping companies, and new industrial and commercial enterprises.[14] The Ningbo case indicates that economically defined Shanghainese were those who possessed industry-specific resources and accumulated capital in urban competition.

From the perspective of occupational structure, economically defined Shanghainese identity was closely related to the formation of modern office-worker groups and the urban middle class. Yeh notes that the development of different industries in Shanghai gave rise to new occupational groups, including white-collar workers and professionals formed through modern divisions of labor. These groups developed lifestyles distinct from those of traditional rural society.[15] The economic dimension of Shanghainese identity thus included office workers who had secured stable incomes and an urban lifestyle within the modern occupational system. This economic identity profoundly shaped popular perceptions of Shanghainese character. Since the twentieth century, public narratives about Shanghainese people have repeatedly invoked descriptions such as "shrewd," "good at calculating," "efficient," "respectful of contracts," and "familiar with rules." These expressions summarize the operating logic of Shanghai's commercial society, although they may also become stereotypes about Shanghainese people. The prosperity of modern Shanghai's commercial society brought market rationality into everyday life. Some studies suggest that modern Shanghai could largely be understood as a commercial society in which merchants were the most influential social group and commercial activity had a profound impact on the formation of Haipai culture.[16] Economically defined Shanghainese identity refers to a mode of action and set of values shaped by commercial society. This identity is also ambivalent and, compared with identity based on native place, relatively open. Migrants who find employment in Shanghai, accumulate economic resources, and enter industry networks may gradually be regarded as Shanghainese or as people who have established a secure foothold in the city. However, migrant groups differ significantly in occupational mobility and access to resources. Those who remain in low-income, low-status jobs for a long time may find it difficult to gain recognition through economic achievement. Compared with the Ningbo merchants, people from northern Jiangsu, and Jiangnan merchants frequently mentioned in narratives of modern Shanghai, the Anhui population has remained relatively invisible in Shanghai's economic history and urban identity narratives. Since reform and opening-up, people from Anhui have entered a wide range of industries in Shanghai, including construction, renovation, logistics, catering, domestic services, and manufacturing. They have been important to the functioning of the city and its spatial expansion, yet their labor contributions have mostly been classified under the categories of migrant workers or the floating population and have rarely been incorporated into positive narratives of Shanghainese identity.

The concept of economically defined Shanghainese breaks with the closed nature of traditional native-place identity, but it also establishes new barriers to entry. The specific content of this identity standard has varied across historical periods: modern Shanghai emphasized commercial capital and merchant networks; the planned-economy period emphasized danwei status and urban household registration; and the period after reform and opening-up has emphasized market competition and occupational mobility. For Anhui migrants in Shanghai, the economic dimension of Shanghainese identity is both an important route to urban integration and a central arena in which they encounter structural constraints.

2.3 Cultural Capital and Social Recognition

Whereas native-place-based Shanghainese identity emphasizes place of birth and household registration, and economically defined Shanghainese identity emphasizes occupational achievement and social status, culturally defined Shanghainese identity refers more directly to an urban lifestyle and a symbolic form of identity. Since the twentieth century, Shanghai has been an important site for the emergence of modern urban culture in China. Its urban identity has been continually constructed through the history of its opening as a treaty port, the system of foreign concessions, and the circulation of mass media. Li Tiangang points out that "Haipai culture cannot simply be equated with being 'Westernized' or with Western influence. It does not conflict with traditional culture or Jiangnan culture; rather, it is a cultural form characterized by the convergence of Chinese and Western elements and by local innovation, formed under the particular historical conditions of modern Shanghai."[17] This observation suggests that culturally defined Shanghainese identity is a cultural category continually produced through Shanghai's modernization.

In discussing the relationship between Haipai culture and Shanghai's urban spirit, Xu Jinjiang and Zheng Chongxuan emphasize that "Haipai culture should be understood as a normative concept of urban culture and reconsidered in terms of its origins, emergence, evolution, connotations, and contemporary value."[18] Xu Jinjiang notes that Haipai culture is a distinctive cultural form of Shanghai, with architecture, intangible cultural

heritage, folk customs, and dialects all forming important components of the city's cultural lineage. Shanghainese identity therefore also includes people who gradually identify with and practice Haipai culture through their lifestyles and urban memories. Existing studies suggest that culturally defined Shanghainese identity has roughly four dimensions. The first is identification with Haipai culture, including acceptance of urban values such as openness, pluralism, and respect for rules. Yang Jirong argues that Haipai culture is a cultural form produced through the integration of multiple regional cultures and an important component of Shanghai's urban culture. Its core values include freedom, innovation, respect for rules, the rule of law, and professional dedication. The second dimension is an urban lifestyle, involving adaptation to efficiency, order, and consumer culture. The third is linguistic practice: the ability to switch flexibly among Putonghua, Shanghainese, and other dialects, and to communicate appropriately in different social settings. The fourth is shared historical memory: familiarity with collective memories of Shanghai's history of foreign concessions, shikumen (stone-gate) living, nostalgic narratives of old Shanghai, and the city's transformations since reform and opening-up.[19]

With regard to historical memory and cultural identification, Li Peide observes that "since the 1990s, a wave of nostalgia has emerged in Shanghai, and large numbers of books and illustrated volumes themed around old photographs, records of former prosperity, and memories of the past have become popular. This nostalgia represents an important way in which Shanghainese people have sought to recover their history and identity amid the city's dramatic transformations."[20] This suggests that culturally defined Shanghainese identity depends on contemporary lifestyles as well as selective memories of the city's past. Whether a person understands the historical narratives behind symbols such as old Shanghai, shikumen, the Bund, Nanjing Road, and lilong (lane) life has become an important criterion for determining whether that person has genuinely entered Shanghai's cultural order. Xu Jilin's research on modern Shanghai's cultural elites offers another explanation from the perspective of urban cultural production. Xu argues that "the urban culture of modern Shanghai was constituted through a cultural network of power jointly formed by the urban bourgeoisie, newspaper and publishing figures, cultural elites, chambers of commerce, and local society."[21] Comparing Shanghai with Beijing, he regards Shanghai as a city with its own internal logic, historical lineage, and soul.[22] This observation helps explain the distinctiveness of Shanghainese identity: it is an imagination of urban community formed in media spaces and urban life.

Culturally defined Shanghainese identity has gradually taken shape as a social imagination of the city's character. Descriptions such as "refined," "particular," "knowing how to draw clear distinctions," "having a sense of boundaries," "respecting rules," and "caring about dignity and appearances" are continually reinforced through literature, media reports, film and television, online communication, and everyday conversation, eventually becoming a recognizable "urban personality." From the perspective of architecture and urban studies, Li Xiangning argues that Shanghai's urban culture is characterized by diversity and marginality, and that its urbanization has continuously interacted with architectural and spatial-planning practices.[23] This indicates that the cultural image of Shanghainese people is embedded in urban space, architectural landscapes, and the order of everyday life. From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, culturally defined Shanghainese identity can be understood as a form of symbolic resource that can be converted and can generate social distinction. Bourdieu argues that cultural capital can exist in embodied forms, as durable dispositions; in institutionalized forms, as qualifications; and in objectified forms, as cultural goods.[24] He further explains that taste and lifestyle are manifestations of social class structure in the cultural domain.[25] Applied to the Shanghai context, command of the Shanghainese dialect, familiarity with the city's spatial structure, understanding of symbols associated with Haipai culture, and knowledge of how to speak and interact appropriately in different situations all constitute important resources for entry into the cultural category of Shanghainese. Although these abilities appear to belong to the realm of everyday life, they perform a clear function of social distinction.

Language is a key mechanism in the construction of culturally defined Shanghainese identity. Bourdieu argues that language functions as symbolic capital whose value is assigned within a particular linguistic field. Whether a dialect accent or mode of expression is recognized depends on the power relations operating in that field.[26] Shanghainese has long served as a marker of local identity and cultural belonging. In an interview on "identity, dialect, and urban boundaries," Liang Jie notes that important factors influencing regional identity include length of residence and degree of integration, with dialect proficiency being a particularly significant factor.[27] He Wei and Li Xiaomin argue that dialects, as carriers of regional culture, influence social trust among strangers by strengthening a sense of identity.[28] Shanghainese thus serves as an important marker for identifying individuals and signaling degrees of social closeness.

Culturally defined Shanghainese identity has an open dimension. Compared with native-place and household-registration identities, cultural identity places greater emphasis on learning, practice, and identification. Those who identify with Shanghai culture and Haipai culture may be regarded as authentic Shanghainese in a cultural sense.[29] This reflects the relative openness of Shanghai's cultural identity compared with identities based on blood ties and native place, and creates the possibility for migrants to enter

the urban cultural community through everyday practices. Such openness, however, does not imply complete equality. The accumulation of cultural capital takes time. For ordinary migrant workers, becoming familiar with Shanghai's urban spaces, acquiring proficiency in Shanghainese, and entering local social circles are difficult to achieve through individual effort alone. Migrants may participate in urban construction for many years yet remain at the margins of the city's hierarchy of identities because of differences in cultural practices. Contemporary criteria for recognizing Shanghainese identity are also situational and field-specific. In the employment field, the criteria may include Putonghua communication skills and service professionalism. In the community field, they may involve neighborly interaction, lifestyle habits, and awareness of public order. In the educational field, they may concern children's educational pathways and family approaches to education. In the marriage field, they may involve compatibility in family background and lifestyle. Culturally defined Shanghainese identity thus offers possibilities for inclusion through practice while also containing implicit mechanisms of distinction. For Anhui migrants in Shanghai, "becoming Shanghainese" means gradually accumulating cultural capital recognized by local society in areas such as language, space, consumption, social interaction, and historical memory. On this basis, cultural identity provides an important analytical perspective for understanding the identity construction of Anhui migrants.

III. CONCLUSION

In sum, the meaning of Shanghainese identity has undergone three major shifts in logic: a "kinship–geographical" logic emphasizing long-term local residence and local ancestral origins; an "economic–resource" logic emphasizing market capacity and institutional resources; and a "cultural–symbolic" logic emphasizing lifestyle and cultural identification. This transformation is both a consequence of urban modernization and a direct reflection of social stratification. Shanghainese identity has shifted from a simple administrative or demographic classification to a system of social identity incorporating symbolic capital. Its boundaries are flexible, yet they also conceal implicit barriers to entry. In the following chapters, I will examine how Anhui migrants in Shanghai seek recognition as Shanghainese within the dual structures of institutions and culture. The question "Who is Shanghainese?" is answered through kinship and place of birth under the native-place logic, through capacity and capital under the economic logic, and through lifestyle and cultural identification under the cultural logic. From early international migrants to Ningbo merchants, migrants from northern Jiangsu, and contemporary migrant workers from Anhui, the boundaries of Shanghainese identity have remained in flux. Shanghainese identity is therefore, in essence, an urban identity formed through ongoing processes of competition and integration. This section has examined the concept of Shanghainese identity through the dimensions of native place, economy, and culture, demonstrating its complexity and historical construction. It also provides a point of reference for migrants in assessing their differences from local residents. For Anhui migrants in Shanghai, the existing structure of Shanghainese identity is both an established order they encounter upon entering urban society and an important condition shaping how they understand their own social position, assess their distance from local identity, and develop a sense of urban belonging.

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