

Smart 'green cards' now available

A new ID card designed to give foreign permanent residents easier access to public services in China was issued across the country on Friday to expats holding "green cards".

The machine-readable Foreign Permanent Resident ID Card – similar to the second-generation ID cards held by Chinese citizens that store information about the card holder on an embedded chip – can be used independently as legal proof of identity when dealing with such issues as finance, education, health, communication, accommodations, telecommunication, employment, taxes, social security, property registration and lawsuits in China.

While the new card can be used by itself for such transactions, the previous permanent resident's permit needed to be used along with the holder's passport.

The change is a response to the long complaint from holders of "green cards" – as permanent resident cards are known – who said the card was more like a long-term visa rather than something that made their lives in China more convenient.

On Friday, the first group of foreigners, including 10 top-talent expats in Shanghai, eight in Beijing and five in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, received the new cards issued by the Ministry of Public Security.

"I absolutely believe the new card will give foreign permanent residents more convenience to enjoy all the rights related to residency," said Anders Lindquist, a chair professor of automation at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and a permanent resident in China from Sweden. "It also renders us a stronger sense of belonging in China."

Fan Weishu, a 48-year-old Chinese-American who is a senior manager at an international insurance company in Beijing, said he was really excited to receive the card.

"I was born and raised in China, and today I felt that I'm back and I'm a real 'Beijinger'," he said.

Expats who obtain permanent residence in China as of Friday will be granted the new ID cards. Those who have an old permanent resident card can go to exit and entry administration bureaus of local public security agencies to replace their cards. The old cards are valid until the expiration date, according to the ministry.

Ghulam Sajid, who is from Pakistan and obtained permanent residence in China four years ago, said he planned to exchange the permit for the new smart card soon.

"Currently, I need to bring along my two thick passports together with the permanent resident permit to show my identity if I go to banks or purchase

train tickets with manual service," said Sajid, a 43-year-old manager of an import and export company in Shanghai.

"With the new card, I'll be able to buy the train tickets on machines and get on a train by swiping the card like Chinese citizens," he said.

China began issuing permanent resident permits for foreigners in 2004. More than 10,000 foreigners have been granted the status so far.