

MIGRATION FROM RURAL TO URBAN AREAS IN CHINA

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INTRODUCTION

DURING the Mao Zedong regime the size of China's urban population was determined by the quantity of food that could be supplied to urban areas. Population inflow into urban areas was basically prohibited. People's communes had the social function of containing the increasing rural population and preventing it from moving to urban areas. The government imposed a strict household registration system that forbade spontaneous population movement to urban areas. This system of keeping the peasantry and urban residents in their respective fixed statuses included social discrimination against the peasantry. Under this system, a household registered as urban was entitled to all kinds of privileges: job guarantees, low-priced food rations, low-cost housing, education, and medical services. Since capital accumulation was still at a low level in the cities, it was impossible to allow urban households with all their privileges to increase rapidly.

Population movement from rural to urban areas was, however, partially liberalized in the 1980s. This occurred against the following background. (1) The people's communes were dissolved by the end of 1982, creating visible surplus labor that had been latent in rural communities. (2) In October 1984, the State Council, in a decree concerning peasant movement to and settlement in towns, permitted peasants to move their registry to towns (*zhen*) with a population of 100,000 or less (excepting county capitals). These new entrants were not, however, to be entitled to low-priced food rations. Then, (3) the Ministry of Public Security on July 13, 1985 put into effect provisional measures to control temporary town residents, and (4) in September 1986 the State Council enacted four provisional laws concerning employment in the state sector, which abolished the state allocation of jobs as well as life-time employment practices, leading to the formation of a market for labor.

Peasants began to pour into towns and cities. Migration has thus become one of the main reasons that prompted rapid growth of the urban population, which has been increasing by 30 million–50 million persons annually since 1985, though its explosion in 1983–84 was mainly due to the expansion of urban jurisdictions.¹

¹ The increment of urban population amounted to 30,190,000 in 1983, 89,860,000 in 1984, 53,100,000 in 1985, 56,570,000 in 1986, 62,990,000 in 1987, 40,070,000 in 1988, and 31,250,000 in 1989. Net population increase in the cities for 1987 can be explained by such factors as the expansion of urban jurisdiction (81.2 per cent), natural increases by birth (9.5 per cent), and socially motivated increases such as migration (9.3 per cent).

Consequently, by 1988–89 the urban population came to consist of three strata: (1) the urban registry holders amply protected by the government, who number about 200 million, (2) about 100 million new residents who moved to and settled in towns with a population of 100,000 or less and who do not receive food rations from the government, and (3) the so-called floating population enjoying no government protection. This third strata was estimated by the government at 60 million–80 million in February 1990.

One serious problem facing China today is its growing inability to control the growth of this floating population. Already it accounts for 8 per cent of the total population and more than 30 per cent in urban centers. The traditional system of population bifurcation into urban and rural sectors has thus begun to show its limits and contradictions. The floating population, a product of rapid economic reform, moves back and forth between rural and urban areas, as a result of its precarious living conditions.

This paper deals with the development over time of migration from rural to urban areas and attempts to analyze the factors underlying it, describe its characteristic features, examine problems faced by the cities in receiving migrants, and point out contradictions within the household registration system that are becoming manifest in the process of this kind of population shift (see also [7, pp. 61–62]).

I. POPULATION INFLUX ACCORDING TO CITY SIZE

A national conference on city planning held in 1980 adopted an urban development policy calling for the restriction of the development of large cities, the proper control of medium-sized cities, and the promotion of smaller-sized cities.

Fai Xiaotong and some other sociologists proposed that the rural population leaving their villages should be concentrated in nearby towns to prevent them from moving on to medium and large cities. This is the idea of using rural towns as a buffer to hold back population inflow into major cities. Otherwise, the resulting population explosion in the major cities would generate pathological phenomena. Others pointed to low investment returns in small towns and advocated faster urbanization and freer development of medium-sized cities by concentrating investments there. Demographic geographers considered the idea that multi-staged multi-directional population movement could eventually allow cities to fully absorb surplus rural population. Economists made the point that population influx from rural to urban areas was inevitable because of the 1:1.7 income gap between the two areas, concluding that the population problem could be resolved only by narrowing this gap.

Let us here look at rural town (*zhen*) population over time. The figure stood at 33,720,000 in 1953, grew to 44,450,000 in 1959, 50,400,000 in 1976, and then to 62,310,000 in 1983, a relatively slow increase. But in 1984 it jumped to more than 134 million, contributing greatly to the total urban population increase in that year. Population increase by city size is given in Table I. It can be observed that during 1981–87 small and medium-sized city population increased more rapidly than that of large and extra large cities.

TABLE I
POPULATION INCREASE BY CITY SIZE

	(1,000 persons)		
	Total Nonagricultural Population (1981)	Total Nonagricultural Population (1987)	1987/81 (%)
Total	93,782	129,740	138
Less than 0.1 million	3,320	7,050	212
0.1 million–0.3 million	19,056	29,560	155
0.3 million–0.5 million	11,995	18,690	156
0.5 million–1 million	20,376	21,550	106
1 million–2 million	14,424	22,250	154
More than 2 million	24,611	30,640	124

Sources: [15, 1981 edition] [15, 1987 edition].

A group of researchers led by Ma Xia, a sociologist at the Population Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, conducted a survey in 1986 on the inflow of rural population into cities of different sizes [4]. This survey was conducted on a 0.2 per cent sampling basis over seventy-four cities and towns in sixteen provinces. Migrants defined as such by residency acquired after 1949 were asked when they migrated and why. Migrant attributes were also checked.

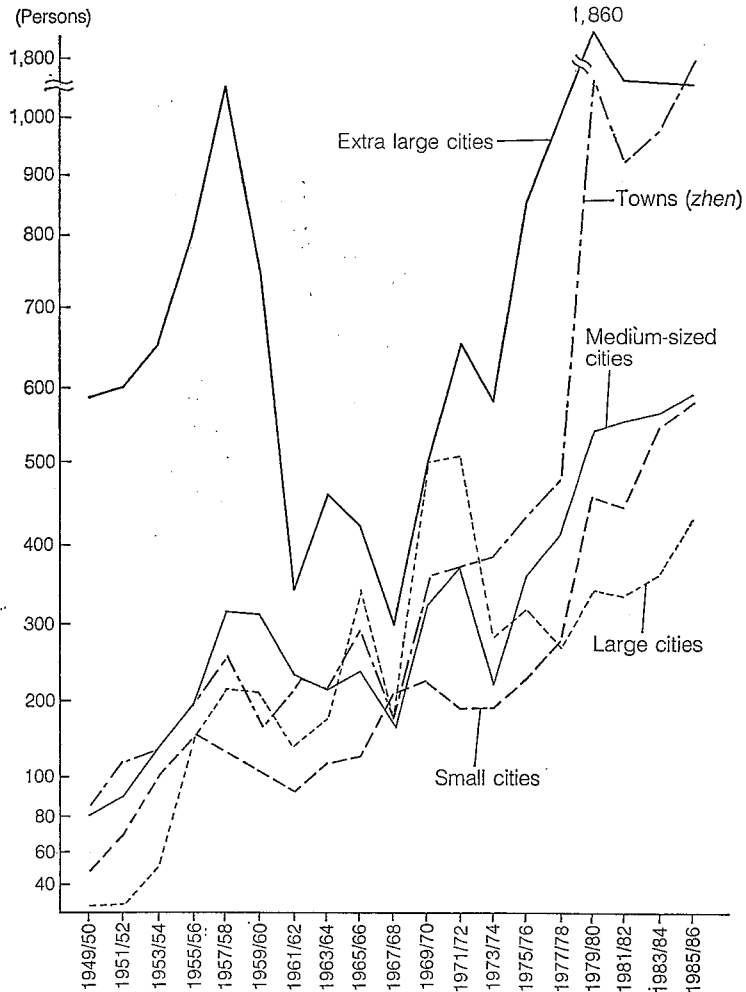
Of 38,102 migrants (or 38 per cent of 100,267 respondents to the questionnaires), 20.7 per cent came to live in cities during the 1950s, 17.0 per cent during the 1960s, 32.9 per cent during the 1970s, and 29.4 per cent during 1980–86.

By city size, the ratio of migrants to the respondents to the survey was 32.7 per cent for extra large cities (with a population of more than 1 million), 46.5 per cent for large cities (500,000–1,000,000), 34.0 per cent for medium-sized cities (200,000–500,000), 39.0 per cent for small cities (100,000–200,000), and 44.7 per cent for small towns (*zhen*).

For the extra large cities, population inflow was largest in 1979–80, reflecting the return of young people sent into rural areas as part of China's rustication campaign. Those people constituted the group of the highest migration ratio, accounting for 12.3 per cent of the total inflow into the extra large cities during the years under survey (1949–86). In the case of rural towns, population inflow has been accelerating in recent years. The migration ratio was 12.5 per cent in 1979–80, 11.3 per cent in 1981–82, 12.0 per cent in 1983–84, and 16.3 per cent in 1985–86. It has maintained a high level since 1979.

Figure 1 shows the results of the survey by depicting year by year annual population influx according to city size. The extra large cities show an extremely irregular line: inflow of population during the 1957–58 Great Leap Forward period, outflow during the following period due to the failure of the Great Leap policies and compulsory rustication, stagnation during the Cultural Revolution period, and the return of rusticated youth in 1979–80. It is also clear from the figure that population migrated in large numbers to rural towns after 1979, reflecting migration liberalization and rural industrialization.

Fig. 1. Population Inflow into Cities of Different Sizes:
A Sampling Survey (1949-86)



Source: [4, p. 6].

Note: A sampling survey was conducted on 15 extra large cities (with a population of more than 1 million), 6 large cities (0.5 million-1 million), 12 medium-sized cities (0.2 million-0.5 million), 10 small cities (0.1 million-0.2 million), and 31 towns (*zhen*).

Table II indicates the origins of the migrants. The larger the city the more distant are the origins of the migrants and vice versa. Forty-one per cent of those migrating to extra large cities are from places outside their provinces, while the

TABLE II
EXTRA- AND INTRA-PROVINCIAL POPULATION INFLOW INTO CITIES
BY PLACE OF ORIGIN: A SAMPLING SURVEY (1949-86)

	Extra Large Cities	Large Cities	Medium-sized Cities	Small Cities	Towns (Zhen)
Extra-provincial inflow:					
(persons)	6,233	1,465	1,558	1,046	1,208
(%)	(41)	(31)	(27)	(25)	(15)
Intra-provincial inflow:					
(persons)	8,859	3,318	4,310	3,200	6,905
(%)	(59)	(69)	(73)	(75)	(85)
Place of origin (%):					
Cities	36.7	36.8	34.7	33.3	15.4
Towns (<i>zhen</i>)	16.0	22.6	24.2	24.7	25.8
Rural areas	44.5	38.7	39.4	40.9	56.9
Others	2.8	2.0	1.7	1.1	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: [4, p. 7].

corresponding percentage of migrants from rural towns is 15. By calculating simple arithmetic averages for all the four categories of place of origin, we get an average of 45.2 per cent of the migrants who came from rural areas, 31.5 per cent from cities, 21.1 per cent from rural towns, and 3.2 per cent from other areas. Rural towns receive 56.9 per cent of their migrants from neighboring rural villages, 25.8 per cent from other rural towns, and only 15.4 per cent from cities. The migrants to extra large cities may be broken down into 44.5 per cent from rural areas and 36.7 per cent from other cities. Only 16.0 per cent are from rural towns.

Male migrants account for 54 per cent of the total migrants for extra large cities, 58 per cent for large cities, 54 per cent for medium-sized cities, 52 per cent for small cities, and 55 per cent for rural towns. This follows the general pattern that men show higher mobility than women. But population movement between rural villages shows a different tendency: 49.6 per cent for men and 50.4 per cent for women. This may indicate that for the major part of the thirty-seven years from 1949 through 1986 mobility of rural population was generally low: people were moving between villages chiefly for traditional reasons, such as marriage.

Age-wise, 16 per cent of the migrants are 15-19 years old, 24.9 per cent are 20-24 years old, and 15.7 per cent are 25-29 years old. The share declines gradually as age increases. The share of the 15-29 year old group is recorded as high as 56.6 per cent of the total immigrants.

In terms of educational level, 5-7 per cent of all immigrants are college graduates, 18-22 per cent are senior middle school graduates, 21-31 per cent are junior middle school graduates, and 25-35 per cent are primary school graduates. Illiterate people account for 12-17 per cent. Differences in educational level distribution according to the destination of migration are minimal. Generally, educational level of migrants is higher than the national average.

TABLE III
FACTORS BEHIND RURAL POPULATION MOVEMENT INTO CITIES AND TOWNS:
A SAMPLING SURVEY (1949-86)

	Extra Large Cities		Large Cities		Medium-sized Cities		Small Cities		Towns (Zhen)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Job transfer	283	137	101	24	117	51	78	33	493	222
Job allocation	147	46	64	16	75	30	42	10	157	66
Education and training	223	94	23	10	44	25	31	17	51	49
Staying with relatives	282	541	104	183	88	196	87	122	144	185
Retiring from army	227	5	44	0	69	0	25	0	56	0
Return of rusticated youth	505	468	17	15	64	53	23	29	60	59
Retirement	17	7	3	1	5	5	2	1	14	3
<i>Shaogong dingti</i> ^a	664	372	500	85	321	69	134	34	434	104
Performing policy tasks	106	78	9	12	34	40	22	30	87	79
Commercial activities	137	68	12	3	19	7	34	11	141	61
Marriage	64	655	19	264	24	397	19	286	32	577
Family affairs ^b	413	730	112	163	168	300	189	302	559	718
Others	227	221	35	31	56	54	91	86	117	142
Not known	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1
Total	3,295	3,422	1,043	807	1,084	1,227	777	961	2,350	2,266

Source: [9].

Note: M=males; F=females. See also note for Figure 1.

^a Assuming parents' urban residential status at retirement.

^b Moving with family as dependents.

Concerning pre-migration jobs, 23.4 per cent were workers or public employees, 21.5 per cent farmers, 9.3 per cent cadres, 6.4 per cent soldiers, 4.8 per cent specialists, 2.6 per cent office workers, 1.7 per cent engaged in commercial and restaurant businesses, and 3.8 per cent engaged in other jobs; 9.7 per cent were students, 4.2 per cent waiting for job assignment or school matriculation, 8.8 per cent engaged in housework, 0.9 per cent retired or on leave, and 2.8 per cent jobless for other reasons. The total of last three items shows people without occupation: 12.5 per cent.

Table III shows the motivation for migration to cities. The largest group of male migrants to extra large cities are those who moved due to *shaogong dingti*,²

² The *shaogong dingti* system gives regular employees in cities the right to get their children automatically hired by the enterprises they belong to in case they retire or volunteer to retire before regular retirement age. Nonetheless, this system caused many problems, so the government began to tighten control on exercise of this right. Anticipating these restrictions, many rushed to utilize the system from 1979. In 1986, however, the state-run enterprises abolished the system.

namely, assuming jobs held by parents who have retired in cities. Following the *shaogong dingti* group are rusticated intellectuals who came back to the cities. The two major female groups that migrated to extra large cities are made up of those women who came to live with their relatives and those who moved due to marriage. Males migrate to rural towns mostly for seeking employment or some other economic purposes, chiefly working on government projects or participating in *shaogong dingti*.

Overall, the motivations behind migration may be divided into the following five categories: (1) 43.4 per cent for employment or some other economic purposes (19.0 per cent to work on government projects, 9.6 per cent to participate in *shaogong dingti*, 7.4 per cent for government-assigned jobs, 5.7 per cent to take jobs offered to retired soldiers, and 1.7 per cent to take new factory jobs or work in other businesses); (2) 41.9 per cent for social or family-related purposes (9.0 per cent to marry, 23.4 per cent to move with the spouses or parents, 8.6 per cent to live with relatives, and 0.9 per cent as the result of retirement or on leave); (3) 5.6 per cent for policy-related reasons (4.0 per cent to come back to cities after rustication, 1.6 per cent to take assigned official jobs); (4) 3.1 per cent for study or training; and (5) 5.6 per cent for other purposes.

By age group, children below the age of fifteen mostly move as dependents or to live with relatives. The 15–29 years old group shows the highest mobility of all age groups. It moves for economic reasons such as seeking employment and *shaogong dingti*, which is most frequent in large cities. They also move to enter school or to marry. In the prime age group of 30–49 years, people move mainly for professional reasons, such as government project mobilization and execution of policy missions. Those above fifty years old move to live post-retirement lives as dependents or with relatives.

From the results of the 1986 sampling survey, it may be possible to draw a general picture about the whole migration process of the country that has been taking place after 1949. It should be noted that during this long period peculiar Chinese type population movements occurred, such as the 1967–76 outflow of urban population as the result of the rustication campaign.

II. THE INCREASING INFLOW OF POPULATION INTO MAJOR CITIES

A floating population in major cities began to build up in 1983 when the people's communes were dissolved and the system of tying peasants to the land was loosened. The massive population movement to the cities has emerged as a serious social problem since 1984–85. The latest data indicates that the twenty-three major cities, each with a population of 1 million or more, are receiving a total of around 10 million migrants per year. Nationwide 50 million people, or one out of every twenty Chinese, migrate to cities and towns every year.³ Moreover, the Office of Demographic Survey of the State Council has recently announced that the annual

³ Information provided at the International Conference on Population Migration and Urbanization held on December 6, 1989. Also, see *Zhongguo renkou bao*, October 3, 1988.

population movement to cities has increased to 60 million–80 million [5, February 10, 1990].

Table IV gives the ratios of floating population to permanent residents in the seven major cities. In all of these cities the floating population has increased remarkably, but the situation is extreme in Guangzhou and Shanghai. Already in 1987 the floating population of these two cities accounted for 33.2 per cent and 26.2 per cent of their totals, respectively.

According to a survey conducted on October 20, 1988, Shanghai had a floating population of 2.09 million per year (1,246,000 inflow and 344,000 outflow). Similarly, Beijing had 1,310,000 infloating population.⁴ The floating population includes those people from other provinces who move between rural areas and city areas, between the inner city districts and its surrounding counties, and between suburban counties, as well as people arriving from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, repatriated Chinese, and foreigners.

The floating population indicates persons who live outside the areas where they are registered. It is increasing in its number, demonstrating the widening discrepancy between actual and registered place of residence. Floating populations are welcomed in cities with vigorous economies since there are many peddlers and cheap workers within their ranks. But once the economy slows down, the floating population is seen as a social problem. It contains individual contract workers, temporary workers, contract construction worker teams from the countryside, street vendors, and peddlers. There are also visiting relatives helping with housework and baby sitting. Generally, the floating population comes to cities for economic reasons. Therefore, once economic activity ebbs, its ranks cannot find jobs and become a *mangliu* or drifting population, putting heavy burdens upon the cities.

The floating population is overwhelmingly male. Surveys in 1987 of Wuhan, Chengdu, and Lanzhou indicate that the number of men were 2.76 times more than the number of women in the floating population. Their average age ranged between twenty-eight and thirty, and their educational level was relatively high. They lived in inns, guest houses, construction site barracks, private houses, and dormitories.

The July 1987 interim population census on a 1 per cent sampling basis conducted for the first time a national population movement component survey. In the five years from July 1982 through June 1987 population movement involved 30,530,000 persons. Of them, 50.6 per cent moved from rural to urban areas, 6.2 per cent from urban to rural areas, 25.8 per cent from urban to urban areas, and 17.4 per cent from rural to rural areas. Approximately 13,500,000 from the rural population flowed into the urban areas.

Population movement within provinces totaled 24,200,000 (79.3 per cent), while 6,310,000 persons moved to other provinces. Those who moved from inland provinces and autonomous regions to coastal areas and industrial and mining areas totaled 1,530,000. Nineteen provinces saw more population outflow

⁴ The city's temporary residents increased from 186,000 in 1980 to 660,000 in 1984 and further to 788,000 in 1987.

TABLE IV
INCREASES IN THE FLOATING POPULATIONS OF MAJOR CITIES

(1,000 persons)

	1984			1985			1987		
	Permanent Residents (A)	Floating Population (B)	Ratio B/A (%)	Permanent Residents (A)	Floating Population (B)	Ratio B/A (%)	Permanent Residents (A)	Floating Population (B)	Ratio B/A (%)
Total	25,910	3,271	12.62	26,540	4,652	17.53	27,590	6,209	22.50
Beijing	4,980	700	14.06	5,100	870	17.06	5,220	1,150	22.03
Shanghai	6,730	1,026	15.25	6,780	1,650	24.02	6,990	1,830	26.18
Tianjin	4,120	275	6.67	4,200	417	9.93	4,240	661	15.59
Wuhan	2,900	350	12.07	2,960	455	15.37	3,020	658	21.79
Guangzhou	2,490	500	20.08	2,570	620	24.12	2,650	880	33.21
Shenyang	3,170	200	6.31	3,250	370	11.38	3,340	500	14.97
Chengdu	1,520	220	14.47	1,590	270	16.98	2,130	530	24.88

Source: [19].

Note: Permanent city residents do not include the agricultural population living in inner-city districts.

TABLE V
FACTORS BEHIND POPULATION MOVEMENT: A SAMPLING SURVEY (1982-87)

Motivation	Destination			
	Total	Cities	Towns (<i>Zhen</i>)	Villages
Total for intra-provincial movement (persons)	242,206	78,897	107,272	56,037
Percentage breakdown:	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Job transfer	11.4	13.5	13.4	4.5
Job allocation	6.6	7.8	7.7	2.8
Commercial activities	9.3	12.4	10.4	2.6
Education and training	8.0	15.3	6.6	0.3
Staying with relatives	8.8	11.5	8.1	6.7
Retirement	2.2	1.1	1.8	4.3
Family affairs*	15.0	16.2	18.2	7.3
Marriage	30.8	13.8	25.4	65.2
Others	7.9	8.5	8.4	6.3
Total for extra-provincial movement (persons)	63,124	33,169	13,834	16,121
Percentage breakdown:	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Job transfer	19.9	24.0	21.1	10.4
Job allocation	5.3	7.8	4.2	1.0
Commercial activities	9.6	9.8	11.6	7.3
Education and training	9.0	16.4	1.3	0.5
Staying with relatives	13.4	13.1	12.2	14.9
Retirement	2.5	1.8	2.5	4.1
Family affairs*	18.7	19.1	24.4	12.8
Marriage	15.5	4.8	16.0	37.1
Others	6.2	3.2	6.7	11.8

Source: [16].

* Moving with family as dependents.

than inflow. In Qinghai Province net outflow amounted to 1.7 per cent of the province's total population.

Table V shows population movement by destination and motivation. Long-distance migration to cities and towns outside home provinces occurred overwhelmingly for economic reasons, such as job transfer, while short-distance movement was mainly due to marriage (65.2 per cent).

It should be added that figures pertaining to population movement are not fully reliable because of unclear definitions of concepts and flawed survey methodology. A clearer and more accurate picture may emerge out of the Fourth National Census held in July 1990⁵ as well as future surveys.

⁵ According to the preliminary summary publicized in October 1990, people whose permanent residency corresponds to the place of registration amounted to 97.37 per cent of the total population. The rest (2.63 per cent or 29,755,860 persons) reside at the places other than registered due to various reasons including being not registered anywhere (8,164,236 persons).

Whatever the case, new population movement trends in the 1980s resulted from expanding inter-regional disparities due to institutional reforms under the open economy system. The 1980s population movement patterns clearly featured an exodus by inland rural population to the major cities and coastal areas. Behind this was an ideological shift from the value-oriented ideology of socialism to materialistic pragmatism. Having awakened from the dream of an idealistic society where people were poor but equal, the Chinese people seem to have acquired new values and presently show no intention of returning to those past ideals.

III. THE EMERGENCE OF SURPLUS AGRICULTURAL LABOR: THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE FLOATING POPULATION

Due to economic reforms, peasants were given the opportunity and means to take nonagricultural jobs though they continued to be registered as peasants. The dissolution of the people's communes⁶ suddenly brought to the surface a surplus labor force in the countryside that had been concealed under collective management. Following the reform, peasant migration between industries (from agriculture to nonagricultural industries) and between regions (from rural areas to towns or medium and large cities) has begun on a large scale. The peasant surplus labor force was freed from bondage to the land after the communes were disintegrated and was allowed to take up business pursuits. This surplus labor force thus has become open and visible in the form of unprecedented large-scale migration and the breakup of village communities.

The chief absorber of this rural surplus labor force has been village and township enterprises engaged in manufacturing and other sideline businesses.⁷ These enterprises have realized phenomenal growth as Table VI indicates. At the end of 1988 they consisted of 18,881,600 organizations employing 95,454,600 persons, or 23.8 per cent of the total rural labor force. Classified by industry, 59.7 per cent of workers were employed in manufacturing, 15.6 per cent in construction, 14.9 per cent in commercial services and restaurants, 7.2 per cent in transportation, and a meager 2.6 per cent in agriculture. Altogether these enterprises played a positive role in the national economy by employing close to 100 million surplus labor force in rural areas and contributing immensely to the state's financial position.

However, the situation changed in 1989. As the government adopted austerity policies, village and township enterprises saw their business base undermined, or at least threatened, and many were forced to close down. The government hammered out five principles whereby village and township enterprises were to

⁶ In October 1983, the Party Central Committee and the State Council issued a directive for the separation of administration from economic matters and the establishment of *xiang* (village) government. The separation process was completed by the end of 1984.

⁷ Village and township enterprises are originated from people's commune-run or brigade-run enterprises; they are now run by village or township governments but there are also enterprises collectively or privately owned.

TABLE VI
SIZES OF VILLAGE AND TOWNSHIP ENTERPRISES

	Number of Enterprises (1,000 Units)	Number of Persons Engaged (1,000 Persons)	Gross Output Value (Million Yuan)
1978	1,524.2	28,265.6	49,307
1979	1,480.4	29,093.4	54,841
1980	1,424.6	29,996.7	65,690
1981	1,337.5	29,695.6	74,530
1982	1,361.7	31,129.1	85,308
1983	1,346.4	32,346.4	101,683
1984	6,065.2	52,081.1	170,989
1985	12,224.5	69,790.3	272,839
1986	15,153.1	79,371.4	354,087
1987	17,446.4	87,764.0	474,310
1988	18,881.6	95,454.6	649,566
1989	18,686.3	93,667.8	742,838

Source: [15, 1990, pp. 399-401].

be screened and reorganized. These five principles were addressed to energy supply, market demand, economic efficiency, product quality, and environmental pollution. Criticism was voiced that village and township enterprises had devastated agricultural production by using up arable land for their construction sites, by attracting too much labor from the agricultural sector, and by polluting the agricultural environment.

In 1989 3 million village and township enterprises had to either stop production altogether, change lines, or merge, and a total of 8 million workers employed by them were forced to return to their villages and resume agriculture.⁸ A surplus labor force had again emerged. The *Beijing Review* reported that the number of employees at village and township enterprises had decreased to 92 million, with 3.35 million returning to agriculture. Incidentally, the inflation rate in 1989 reached 17.8 per cent [2, Vol. 33, Nos. 13 and 14].

Moreover, with approximately 14 million fresh labor force arriving every year, unemployment in cities has risen from 2.0 per cent, or 1,860,000 in 1988 to 2.6 per cent, or 3,779,000 in 1989 [15, 1990]. All this exerts heavy pressure on the Chinese economy. In sum, the rural surplus labor force now totals approximately 220 million (30-40 per cent of a total of 400 million agricultural labor force). The surplus labor force in state enterprises is estimated at 15 million and that at collective enterprises is about 5 million. They are joined by 3.8 million unemployed workers in the cities.⁹

Take Hainan Island, a model case in China's economic development program and an experimental area where the Chinese system meets the capitalist economy.¹⁰

⁸ Such information was provided in a report presented to an international symposium on village and township enterprises held in December 1989.

⁹ These are relatively underestimated figures. One publicized data denotes that the total unemployment rate is estimated to be 27 per cent.

¹⁰ Hainan Island was promoted to the status of province in April 1988. The permanent residents registered there numbered 6,280,000 at the end of 1988.

In a single month following the Spring Festival of 1989, about 100,000 people rushed to the island as migrant workers. To cope with them the Hainan provincial government in March 1989 enforced a nine-point regulation program to curb and control the inflow of people who have no definite place of residence in the province. According to the program, all those visiting the Hainan special economic zone, i.e., domestic tourists, workers, merchants, and those visiting their relatives on the island, must secure entry permits in advance.

Migrant workers came to Hainan from Sichuan, Hunan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Shaanxi provinces. Believing ungrounded rumors, some came to make a fortune. The public peace was undermined, and about half of the 100,000 who flowed into Hainan are still there today looking for jobs.

The Hainan provincial government urged other provincial governments concerned to take measures to stop the flow of their citizens to Hainan. On March 2, 1989 the labor and public security bureaus of Haikou City issued a joint decree for controlling immigrant workers, stating that all workers arriving in Haikou in March be expelled from the island [5, March 13, 1989].

On the other hand, Hainan suffers from a shortage of scientific and technological experts needed for the construction of the special economic zone. Experts who have applied for transfer to Hainan are prevented from going through necessary transfer procedures because the enterprises they are currently working for refuse to agree on the transfer. As of March 1989 170,000 scientific and technological experts wanted to move to Hainan, but only 1,700 were able to officially file applications. To overcome this difficulty, the provincial labor department, working jointly with public security, financial, tax, and food bureaus, adopted a new set of rules making those experts the province urgently needed able to move to the island if only they secured from their enterprises and the personnel sections of the provincial governments certificates proving their resignations [5, March 6, 1989].

Guangzhou City (with a population of 3.49 million) in Guangdong Province is another typical city plagued by a rush of migrant workers from the countryside. In 1989 around 2.5 million people came to the city and stayed there. Daily 5,000–6,000 people from other provinces were arriving by train. Young people in their late teens and early twenties¹¹ came in large groups from Sichuan, Guizhou, and Hunan provinces, lured by rumors that Guangzhou abounds in money-making opportunities. The plaza in front of Guangzhou station is occupied by these young people. In neighboring provinces, peasants queued up at all stations waiting for trains bound for Guangzhou.

But the tight-money policy followed by the Tiananmen Square Incident caused an increase in unemployment among Guangzhou's residential population, resulting in reduced job opportunities for newcomers. They have thus become a vagrant population. Around the station are 2,000 squatters sleeping outdoors. Both the hygienic and security situations have apparently worsened [12].

¹¹ Among them 93.1 per cent were men; 70.4 per cent were below the age of twenty-five and 20.2 per cent between twenty-five and thirty years old; and the average educational level was relatively high.

The rural surplus labor force was once absorbed by village-based enterprises, but recent economic adjustments have eliminated economically inefficient enterprises. This had generated more unemployment. The recent explosion in the floating population is a good example of this. Workers looking for jobs have rushed to Guangzhou, a city whose economy is expanding rapidly with active investment from Hong Kong, but the vagrant population was forced to return to home villages under the government's emergency decree. However, after the summer harvest it began to come back to Guangzhou and during the slack season more arrived.

Thus, after August 5, 1989, Guangzhou saw 5,000–6,000 people arriving daily from other provinces as well as from villages within Guangdong Province. The provincial government had to issue another decree that no worker from outside the province shall be employed in Guangdong, a province with 200,000 surplus workers in its own countryside. The decree stated that local governments should check to see if local enterprises had any employees from other provinces and would be held responsible and punished if any existed. In the provincial authority's concerted effort to prevent the inflow of workers from outside provinces, it has organized round-up teams composed of labor and public security officials [11].

Now let us turn to the population situation in Shenzhen City, a city bordering on Hong Kong. There, a principle of "separation of individuals (social benefits) from household registration" has been implemented. This means that the various livelihood privileges related to registration and granted at the expense of the state treasury are not necessarily provided by the government. This is the basis on which Shenzhen has recruited outside workers. Now 244,000 workers from outside the city are employed, of which 100,000 are hired on a permanent basis.

The large portion of the Shenzhen population that has settled there without having acquired officially registered permanent residency may be subdivided into three categories [18].

The first category is composed of provisional residents who have lived in Shenzhen for one year or more and who are not required to obtain permanent residency. They are managerial and technical personnel and skilled workers invited from inland provinces on a three to five year contract basis. They are required to register only as temporary residents.

The second category consists of the floating population. They have been in Shenzhen for a comparatively short period, six months or less. They do not go through the procedures to obtain temporary residency. They entered the zone by obtaining an entry permit when they crossed the border.

The third category consists of people who entered the zone to visit their relatives. They have to complete procedures for "temporary sojourner" permits.

In addition to the above three categories of people who have been officially registered in one way or another, there is also the vagrant population (*mangliu*)¹² flowing in and out of Shenzhen. They are unemployed, poor, homeless peasants who drift into large cities or coastal open economy zones. This vagrant phenome-

¹² The word *mangliu* means "aimlessly flowing back and forth." This phrase came into use a couple of years ago to describe the portion of the floating population having no definite place to settle.

TABLE VII
PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY RESIDENTS IN SHENZHEN CITY

	Total Area (1,000 Persons)		Special Economic Zone (1,000 Persons)		Hongkou District (Persons)		Ratio B/A (%)
	Total Population	Temporary Population	Total Population	Temporary Population	Total Population (A)	Temporary Population (B)	
1979	314.1	1.5	70.9	—	3,832	151	3.9
1980	332.9	12.0	84.1	—	4,244	303	7.1
1981	366.9	33.0	98.3	—	5,597	1,024	18.3
1982	449.5	95.0	178.1	49.5	8,261	2,953	35.7
1983	595.2	190.0	284.9	119.9	11,853	5,203	43.9
1984	741.3	306.1	337.5	146.1	28,046	20,085	71.6
1985	881.5	402.9	469.8	237.9	37,120	27,924	75.2
1986	935.6	421.1	488.7	231.3	33,494	22,539	67.3
1987	1,154.4	598.4	599.6	312.7	—	—	—
1988	1,531.4	930.0	784.0	462.1	—	—	—

Sources: Uchida [18] (original sources are various data from Statistical Bureau of Shenzhen City); see also [17, p. 319] [20].

- Notes: 1. Temporary population is not included in the total population of the special economic zone for 1978–81.
2. According to the national census of July 1, 1990, the city's total population was 1,667,360, of which permanent residents were 631,108 (37.85 per cent), temporary residents 1,021,488 (61.26 per cent), and others 14,764 (0.89 per cent).

non occurred as the results of village and township enterprises bankruptcies as well as dwindling cultivated acreage per household. These vagrants came from Sichuan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and other inland provinces. Regional economic inequality is behind this phenomenon. They have no official papers to prove their identity, nor do they have any sanctioned jobs or legal domiciles [18]. They illegally settle in new areas and eke out a living by illegal means. They are considered a destabilizing factor in the Chinese society. The *mangliu* population has emerged in a very short period of time and on a large scale, giving rise to a serious social problem hitherto unknown in the history of the country.

As Table VII shows Shenzhen City has a larger temporary population than its permanent resident population. Since temporary residents are not registered in Shenzhen, they find it difficult in marriage and birth registry procedures. Cases of unmarried mothers, unregistered children, living together out of wedlock, and students without a permanent resident status are increasing. Birth control stipulations are ignored and violated. The crime rate is climbing. Some claim that there is an estimated 150,000–200,000 vagrant population in the city, but no one knows exactly how many.

Generally, the economic gap is widening between the rich coastal areas blessed by investment from foreign firms and the economically more backward inland areas. And so inside China, the north-south problem has also cropped up. The pressure of the country's 1.1 billion population has generated floating and vagrant

populations, a phenomenon which is affecting an increasing number of coastal cities.

IV. FACTORS BEHIND THE EMERGING FLOATING POPULATION

One serious population problem China faces now is that its floating population no longer has to conform to the state's family planning control policy of one child for each married couple. Wang Jianmin, president of the Shanghai Demographic Society, told me that the great city of Shanghai had become *bifenggang*¹³ or a haven for those who want to give birth to more children than were permitted by the state, this without fear of inviting "social censure." Since having more than one child is difficult in localities where birth control supervision is strict, many mothers come to Shanghai to give birth to more children than family planning guidelines will allow.

There being no way to control child-bearing within the floating population free from household registry, the increasing amount of "covert [unregistered] children" has become a serious social problem.¹⁴ Cases of farmers coming to cities to abandon extra-family planning children are also increasing. Many of the forsaken children are said to be mentally and physically handicapped.

Provincial governments are trying to cope with this phenomenon by enforcing family planning guidelines among migrant workers and vendors. Zhejiang Province, for example, makes it mandatory for outside merchants seeking business licenses in the province to present "family planning certificates" and other related documents. Also Xiamen City, Fujian Province, enacted "procedures for family planning control among migrants" on September 20, 1985 and "provisional rules for stricter family planning control of the floating population and private enterprise employees" on October 19, 1986. Both measures penalize parents who violate the family planning program.

The State Family Planning Commission said it would conduct a full survey of the reproductive capacity of the floating population and on that basis promise to make rules for controlling its birth rate. But the implementation of such rules will be extremely difficult.

The burgeoning floating population in the cities not only makes population control difficult but also generates another series of serious social problems: a shortage of transportation, overburdened water and electricity services, a jeopardized public peace and increasing crime, and difficulties in providing preventive and curative medical services and general health services.

It is said that Beijing needs to spend an additional 40,000 yuan for each new urban resident, which includes the cost of housing, food, education, health,

¹³ Later the word *bifenggang* appeared in *Zhongguo renkou bao*. This phenomenon now applies to most areas having large floating populations.

¹⁴ According to the fourth national census of July 1990, the total amount of unregistered population is estimated to be around 15 million, which has accumulated over the last eight years with an average increase of 1.8 million persons every year.

transportation, and cultural services. In Shanghai a food subsidy of 8 yuan is paid to every resident per month. If the 1.8 million floating population in Shanghai were made permanent residents, state expenditures would increase by more than 14 million yuan per month, or more than 100 million yuan per year. In addition, housing, transportation, food grain, cooking oil, and non-staple foods will have to be provided to the new citizens. The state would not be able to bear such a burden should household registry be liberalized [14].

The hereditary status certificate and other practices of the household registration system had doomed Chinese households to fixed statuses. But despite all its evils, it is not easy to abolish this system because of a scarcity of funds for urban construction of livelihood-related social capital.

But it is not totally out of reach. In Beijing, accepting new citizens would have been possible if like after 1983 each new citizen had to pay 10,000 yuan to the municipality [3]. In Shanghai it has already been decreed that 40,000 yuan per person shall be paid to the municipality by the enterprises and offices concerned if a person is invited to work for them [14].

Take the case of a physician who successfully obtained urban registry for his wife and three children in 1987 by paying 8,900 yuan. The doctor himself as an individual had obtained urban status by graduating from a university, but his children bound by their mother's place of registry could not. By moving the whole family registration from rural to urban, the doctor now has no worries about the future of his children, because they can automatically get state-allocated jobs. He feels that he has left his offspring a precious asset, despite the exhausting change of status process involved [14].

A notice put up on a bulletin board in Tongji-xin-cuali-nong, Jiangxi Province on April 4, 1989 said that should an intellectual in the district who had come for periphery support in the rustication campaign have children sixteen years of age or older, one of those children could transfer his or her registration to a relative's household in Shanghai.

There is another system called *jiji huji*, a system under which writers or artists can temporarily move their registration to Shanghai, while retaining their original registration. The system, which was put into effect in 1986, was designed to encourage the movement of well-known writers and artists to Shanghai. For this application a special folder with a red silken cover is used. Once this application is accepted, writers or artists can move to Shanghai where they can enjoy the same housing, welfare, and education privileges as original Shanghai citizens.¹⁵

Another case of registration transfer concerned 3,350 teachers at private primary and middle schools in Shanghai's suburban counties. After these schools were made into public schools, the teachers' registration was transferred to Shanghai City [1, September 20, 1988].

Nationally, more than 40 million people have been reported to have transferred from rural to urban status during the first nine years of the 1980s, an average annual rate of 4.7 million. The annual food grain and cooking oil subsidy per

¹⁵ [1, September 27, 1988]; original source is *Shenhuo zhoukan* (Shanghai).

TABLE VIII
COMPARATIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN THE EASTERN, CENTRAL,
AND WESTERN DISTRICTS

	Gross Social Output (Million Yuan)		National Income (Million Yuan)		Per Capita National Income (Yuan)		Gross Social Investment (Million Yuan)	
	1981	1987	1981	1987	1981	1987	1981	1987
Eastern districts	516,710	1,301,808	217,083	506,685	530	1,142.88	62,317	202,022
Central districts	285,023	666,637	128,701	289,892	361	757.04	34,241	96,753
Western districts	133,219	318,469	63,731	145,123	279	591.01	17,828	50,463
Eastern districts*	3.88	4.09	3.41	3.49	1.90	1.93	3.50	4
Central districts*	2.14	2.09	2.02	2	1.29	1.28	1.92	1.92
Western districts*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: [8].

Note: Eastern districts comprise eleven provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions, namely, Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Liaoning, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong (including Hainan Province), and Guangxi (Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau are not included). Central districts comprise nine provinces and autonomous regions, namely, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Anhui, Henan, Jiangxi, Hubei, and Hunan. Western districts comprise nine provinces and autonomous regions, namely, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang.

* Index figures are calculated with western district data taken as the base.

transferee being 120 yuan, the registration transfer of 4.7 million persons a year means a 500 million–600 million yuan additional outlay by the state treasury. The estimated total expenditure during those nine years amounts to 4.8 billion yuan, a heavy burden indeed. But this calculation does not take into consideration the fact that the authorities must provide housing to 40 per cent of the transferees who had no other source. Also 40 per cent of them had no jobs, and so employment had to be allocated to them. Housing, employment, medical services, and transportation required by newcomers add to the already heavy burdens that the city must shoulder on their account [6].

In 1987 a national conference was held at Guangzhou on the problem of the floating population in the major cities. The conference concluded that the existence of a floating population overall had more positive than negative significance, since it helped cities to make the transformation from a single-function, closed body into a multi-functional, open entity, thereby contributing to urban prosperity which depends on a market economy.

The floating population is not only a phenomenon accompanied by the transformation of cities, but is also seen to be a step toward the transformation of

China into a freer society characterized by population mobility. One interesting case in this context is a new village that was established in a very remote area in Fujin County, Heilongjiang Province. The whole village population consists of people who have moved from other areas. In order to obtain the regional government's recognition, the village community elected the leader of the production brigade and secretary of the village party committee [13]. This may be a sign that something new is beginning to happen in China.

Generally the drastic modification of the system under Mao Zedong regime is the background on which the growing floating population had made its appearance. Two major factors are at work under this modified system: (1) widening regional economic gaps, and (2) institutional change. As Table VIII indicates, the economic gap between the eastern and western districts of China has significantly widened during 1981-87 [8].

CONCLUSION

The factors underlying the institutional and economic reforms that have been made are (1) the surfacing of a surplus labor force; (2) the liberalization of population mobility triggered by the 1984 October directive on registration transfer and settlement of peasants; (3) the enforcement by the Ministry of Public Security of July 13, 1985 interim provisions concerning the control of temporary residents in towns; and (4) the enforcement of the September 1986 laws concerning employment in the state sector, which abolished general job allocation and life-time employment system, thus opening the way to the formation of a labor market.

Under these circumstances, household registration is losing its binding power in rural areas. China has obviously entered a transformational period whose current dominating feature is a floating population. Even so, as far as the overall system is concerned, the household registration system that divides the population into rural and urban statuses remains intact as the written law of the land. The household registration system is a static population maintenance system created to facilitate a planned economy. Under the new situation, however, it is apparently losing its effectiveness. With the shift to a market economy, the rationing and household registration systems exist in name only. The changes in Chinese society are so dynamic that traditional static population control is no longer the social reality. Closed rural society is being opened. Without a relaxing of the peasant's ties to the land, the desired enlargement of farming enterprises through the concentration of land use cannot be implemented.

Mao Zedong once proposed the eradication of the three major inequalities: between the urban and rural areas, the agriculture and manufacturing sectors (i.e., peasants and industrial workers), and physical labor and mental labor. Under this slogan, Mao used his coercive power to rusticate urban intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution. The household registration system served at that time to prevent major cities from expanding chaotically and urban slums from emerging. But ironically, this system also aggravated the inequality between rural and urban residents in education, job opportunities, food and fuel provision, housing, medical services, and social welfare. Today population mobility is rapidly increasing even

though a labor market has not fully matured. Under such circumstances, the household registration system now is facing a whole new set of problems.

Ma Xia, vice-director of the Population Research Institute at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, noted that population size should not be used as the only criterion to determine whether a city is developing normally or not. "That is only a partial criterion theoretically as well as practically." He has warned that the mechanical application of this sole criterion would "nip in the bud the growth capacity of those cities that have large potential resources and can develop." He has classified China's cities into the following four categories: (1) those which need population pressure to be alleviated; (2) those whose population growth should be limited at a controlled rate; (3) those (both in coastal and inland areas) whose population should be encouraged to increase with influx from the countryside controlled on a well-planned basis; and (4) those having special functions and population needs (port cities designated for special development, special economic zones, energy bases, future-oriented scientific cities, tourist spots, places of scenic and historic interest, and ecological preserves) [10].

Ma Xia also proposes a relaxation of regulations concerning the transfer of registration in the case peasants want to move to cities. He has grouped cities together in accordance with the factors of size and natural environment as well as political, cultural, and economic conditions. The major cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Guangzhou form one group. Nanjing, Hangzhou, Suzhou, and Fuzhou, cities having much in common, form another group. Some other provincial capitals are also to be grouped together in reference to common characteristics. In concluding Ma has proposed that population movement among cities in the same group should be liberalized. Intellectuals and high-grade professionals should be free to move anywhere regardless of city grouping. Retirees should be permitted to return to the cities where they were originally registered. Rural residents who have funds above certain levels should be permitted to start up businesses or engage in other urban activities.

Liberalization of the registration system has become a topic fervently discussed recently. Ren Xianliang and others argue as follows:

Urbanization is a necessary process in human progress. This process inevitably involves some hardship and social problems: population explosion in urban areas, deteriorating public safety, and increasing unemployment. Urbanization in China will probably follow this pattern. The social ills involved are negative, but it would be impossible to regulate the size of cities and slow the urbanization process by recourse to any registration system. It is only by giving in to currents and reforming the outdated registration system that we can expect to ameliorate the problems while promoting the urbanization process. . . . Flowing water never goes sour. . . . Through freedom from the bondage of household registration and by relaxing the long-term ban on population movement, we can liberate the people, the masters of society, and realize human freedom, release human creativity, and restore human dignity. This is the path that leads to our future! [14]¹⁶

¹⁶ A quotation from an article in the monthly magazine *Nanfengchuang* published by the Guangzhou Municipality. This article, printed in August 1988, reportedly drew overwhelming support in Guangzhou and later in Shanghai.

If what is advocated in the above quotation captures the imagination of the public at large and generates a popular movement, far broader sections of the people than were involved in the democratization movement in 1989 would certainly be mobilized and confront the Chinese authorities with an enormous task. The pressures for freer mobility of people has very serious implications for contemporary Chinese society.

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