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# Managing Internal Migration in Modern China: Regional Interests and Forced Removal, 1949-2010s

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MANAGING INTERNAL MIGRATION IN MODERN CHINA:  
REGIONAL INTERESTS AND FORCED REMOVAL, 1949–2010s

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by

Bryan Winter

2012

## DEDICATION

To my mother and father,  
Whose encouragement throughout the years has made this all possible.

To my wife,  
Whose love and support has supplied me with so much inspiration.

*Xiè xiè.*

MANAGING INTERNAL MIGRATION IN MODERN CHINA:  
REGIONAL INTERESTS AND FORCED REMOVAL, 1949–2010s

by

BRYAN WINTER, B.S.

THESIS

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**Figure 1.** Provincial map of the People's Republic of China  
with location and ranking of the twenty largest cities  
Source: Created by author

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Shanghai  | 11. Hangzhou  |
| 2. Beijing   | 12. Nanjing   |
| 3. Chongqing | 13. Shenyang  |
| 4. Tianjin   | 14. Qingdao   |
| 5. Chengdu   | 15. Zhengzhou |
| 6. Guangzhou | 16. Dongguan  |
| 7. Harbin    | 17. Dalian    |
| 8. Wuhan     | 18. Jinan     |
| 9. Shenzhen  | 19. Hefei     |
| 10. Xi'an    | 20. Nanchang  |

## INTRODUCTION

For the last three decades the People's Republic of China (PRC) has seen an incredible increase in rural-to-urban migration. Internal migrants and increased urbanization have been affiliated with recent economic growth and the emergence of a more open market system, something that was not possible before the economic reforms that began in December of 1978. What makes China's post-reform internal migration so spectacular is the immense size of the migrant population, which has grown from about 7 million in 1982<sup>1</sup>, to over 220 million today.<sup>2</sup> The largest subgroup of this migration process is rural migrants' movement towards China's major metropolitan centers. Rural-to-urban migration is not the only direction of migratory movement in the PRC. There is also rural-to-rural migration, albeit on a very small scale. There have also been short periods of urban-to-rural migration; however these were largely organized around political campaigns, other than the repatriation of migrants from the cities back to the countryside. Although China's citizens now have far greater freedom of movement than they did in the initial decades of the PRC, there are still policies that continue to hamper population mobility to the cities. This is especially so for those who originate from poor rural areas of the country.

Large cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, and Guangzhou have normally been the intended destinations for those from the countryside who wish to find employment in industrial and factory work. Beginning with the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the communist regime had to confront—on a very large scale—the rapid growth of both urban and rural populations,

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<sup>1</sup>National Population and Family Planning Commission of P.R. China, *Nine Trends of Changes of China's Floating Population since the Adoption of the Reform and Opening-up Policy*. Beijing, China Population Today 25, no.4 (2008):1.

<sup>2</sup>*China Daily*, March 6, 2011. *China Daily* is the largest English language newspaper published in the PRC.

urban unemployment, and the rising level of rural-to-urban migration. All of which were seen as obstructions for the PRC government's goals of meeting industrial quotas and reaching plan fulfillment in their regions.

This thesis highlights how the PRC had meticulously attempted to halt rural-to-urban migration in order to maintain socio-political control, and how by the mid-1980s migrants from the countryside had inadvertently created conflicts between authorities from different regions of the country who were either for or against large-scale migration. Examining rural-to-urban migration through a government-oriented approach, we see that the disagreements over migrants presence in the cities does not only lie between the interests of prosperous coastal regions and the poor inland ones, but is engrained in the Chinese political tradition of limiting migration for socio-political stability. When the rural peasants collectively known as China's "floating population" began coming in large numbers to the coastal cities, many local governments reverted to the PRC's long-established method of forcefully expelling them from the cities. Over time, the reasons for expelling migrants from the cities had changed, but the attempts at doing so remained constant. While not an exhaustive study on internal migration in China, this thesis adds to the knowledge of how internal migration is at times aggressively dealt with, and how migration is often a result of rapid economic change.

After rural-to-urban migration quickly escalated in the mid-1980s, urbanites, along with state media, began to see a rise in the number of people from the countryside that were poorer, spoke different dialects, and lived in different communities from those originally from the city. Labeled the "floating population" for the first time by state media in August of 1985, these

migrants were seen by urban authorities as being unstable, directionless, or even dangerous.<sup>3</sup> However, their perceived “floating” nature, or *liudong* in the Chinese language, was not due to their movements across the country or their low economic status alone, but was attached to their lack of attaining an urban household registration or *hukou*, which fixed an individual as being either urban or rural in official status. The latter of these statuses handed one a life of hardship in the countryside that revolved around farming small plots of land that did not belong to them, but to the state. However, with the commencement of economic reform in the late 1970s, rural migrants were granted the option for temporary residence in the cities, setting off the huge migratory process that has led urban governments to strictly deal with the urbanization process in a number of different ways.

For the most part, internal migration in the PRC has not been investigated through a historical lens, and even less has been written on the forced expulsions of migrants from the PRC’s largest cities—during both the pre and post-reform eras. Investigating chronologically the PRC’s goals of suppressing, limiting, and managing rural-to-urban migration via the *hukou* system, we begin to see how differences of opinion arose between provincial leaders as well as the motivations officials have for clearing them out of the city. While not an attempt to bash the PRC’s policies of dealing with rural-to-urban migration, this work attempts to show that new approaches have been taken to deal with the migratory movements as well as the continuation of old methods.

The study is arranged to show the development of mechanisms and policies in China that deal with the monitoring of population mobility. In each chapter we find that the incentives for

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<sup>3</sup>*Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily)*, August 8, 1985. *Renmin Ribao* is the official state-run daily newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. It is known for taking a conventional party line, and new political developments are often first signaled by editorials in the paper.

keeping internal migration in check are determined by different historical periods but are always tied to the leadership's aims of keeping socio-political stability. This paper begins with a brief chapter that traces the historical developments of population registration and mobility control in pre-1949 China. Beginning with the dynastic periods of ancient China, we see the importance of monitoring population mobility for the Chinese rulers and how early forms of the *hukou* registration system came to be. We also investigate how foreign influences contributed to the foundation and shaping of a modern-day migration control system in the PRC.

Chapter two deals with the establishment and implementation of the PRC *hukou* system which was for the purpose of protecting the cities from rural-to-urban migration, which would destabilize Mao Zedong's urban-based development strategy. Following the period from 1949 to the mid-1980s we see how rural-to-urban migration was often dictated by the arrival of industrial projects in the cities and how urban authorities frequently reverted to deporting excess migrants back to the countryside. The third chapter looks at how interprovincial conflict arose between the migrant-sending and receiving regions once migrant labor was allowed temporary employment in the cities since the mid-1980s. Additionally, this concluding chapter provides more examples of the forced removal of migrants from the cities, albeit largely done for different reasons than that of the 1950s and 1960s. The conclusion offers a brief overview of the work and explores the future of the rapidly growing migrant population in the PRC, which in a few decades will equal the entire population of the United States.<sup>4</sup> It also offers insight about the world's ongoing financial crisis and its affect on migrant labor employment in the PRC's coastal provinces.

The data and information used for this thesis was largely reliant on Chinese media sources—both in Chinese and English—which at times provided a direct voice from the

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<sup>4</sup>*China Daily*, February 28, 2011.

government body itself on the issues of internal migration. The study also draws on certain published documents available online from the PRC central government, as well as the National Population and Family Planning Commission of the PRC, and the Chinese Statistical Bureau. Equally important to this study on internal migration are the published works by top, primarily western, scholars of urban and rural China.

## CHAPTER 1

### REGISTERING THE POPULATION: THE ORIGINS OF CHINA'S HUKOU SYSTEM

In 1949, the year of the PRC's founding, more than 60 million people lived in China's cities. 6 million lived in Shanghai; over 2 million lived in both Beijing and Tianjin, and over 1 million in Guangzhou.<sup>5</sup> When the PRC was established, the leadership found itself greatly inexperienced in managing large cities.<sup>6</sup> Establishing and maintaining social order was the primary focus for the communist regime. The evolution and implementation of the PRC's *hukou* system differentiated urban and rural residential groups as a means to control population movement towards the cities, as well as to shape state socialist industrial projects, which were primarily and initially located in China's urban centers. In 1949, at the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central-Committee of the Communist Party of China, PRC Chairman Mao Zedong announced that "the center of gravity of the party's work has shifted from the village to the city" and that "we must do our utmost to learn how to administer and build the cities."<sup>7</sup> During the first decade of the PRC (1949–1959,) the government faced the growing challenge of prohibiting urban population growth, as well as the uncontrolled rate of rural-to-urban migration that had began to occur before the establishment of the PRC. If China was to industrialize under the guidance of Mao Zedong, the PRC would need to confront the issue of rural-to-urban migration aggressively.

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<sup>5</sup>Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1986), 85.

<sup>6</sup>David D. Buck, "Policies Favoring the Growth of Smaller Urban Places in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979," in Laurence J.C. Ma and Edward W. Hanten, eds., *Urban Development in Modern China* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 119.

<sup>7</sup>Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Volume IV* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1961), 363-364.

The idea of registering the population is not new to China. During China's long history, the registration system was primarily used for the gathering of rural and urban statistics, which were both crucial for tax collection as well as military conscription purposes in times of strife or unrest. The Xia Dynasty (21<sup>st</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) was the first to develop a population census and basic form of household registration, while the Shang Dynasty (16<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) developed its own form of household records management which, was also meticulously managed. However, It was not until the Zhou Dynasty (11<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) that primitive forms of *hukou*-like institutions would be devised.<sup>8</sup> According to Fei-ling Wang, “credible evidence” of *hukou*-type population registration and migration controls can be found in the mutual-responsibility or *baojia* system which can be traced back to the late Spring and Autumn eras (8<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) in feudal states like the Zheng and the Qi.<sup>9</sup> By the middle of the Warring States Period (5<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.), the Qin Kingdom in China's west would adopt the *baojia* system in 375 B.C. in order to organize households, and as a tool for the stabilization of taxation.<sup>10</sup> After the Qin had unified China in 221 B.C., the *baojia* system was adopted throughout the entire Qin territory. Expanding on the past *baojia* system, everyone was required to report age, residence, gender and profession to local leaders during the Qin Dynasty.

Following the Qin, the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.) would strengthen the registration system for similar purposes of taxation and conscription, and would become one of the dynasty's nine basic laws.<sup>11</sup> The Han imperial registration system could enforce punishments

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<sup>8</sup>Fei-ling Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China's Hukou System* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 34–35. Wang points out that the *baojia* system was accompanied by serious penalties for those who did not conform to, or violated the system. This in turn, “worked well to make Qin the most powerful of the Warring states.”

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.



as strict as the death penalty, in order to restrict internal migration and to minimize the number of *liumin* (migrant people).<sup>12</sup> The attempt to control internal migrants in China has been part of the country's history for more than 2,000 years. The Qin and Han systems of population registration would be largely incorporated into almost all subsequent dynasties in China. From very early on the idea of population registration would hold an important function of social control and stability.

Many scholars have constructed different views on when the *baojia* system was formally adopted in China. Some, like John King Fairbank and Frederick Mote mention *baojia* being primarily adopted during the Song Dynasty (960–1279), when Song reformer Wang Anshi in 1060 reorganized the population into mutual-responsibility groups for the purposes of better-controlling it.<sup>13</sup> Like previous *baojia* networks, the recording of gender, age, relationship and occupation was demanded. Later on in the Song Dynasty, the system would become the basis for organizing militias and local defense.<sup>14</sup> Fei-ling Wang further points out that, “Sometimes, as for example during the Han dynasty, the term *baojia* was not used” and “at other times the *baojia* system became synonymous with the *hukou* system.”<sup>15</sup> During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), regulations on *baojia* were created in 1548, yet no form of *baojia* was mandatory during this period, although, some county-level officials did choose to enforce a *baojia*-like system in their jurisdiction.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) enforced *baojia*

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.,36.

<sup>13</sup>John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 97. And, Frederick W Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 140-141.

<sup>14</sup>Mote, *Imperial China*, 140.

<sup>15</sup>Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion*, 40.

<sup>16</sup>Timothy Brook, *The Chinese State in Ming Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 35-36.

in all places<sup>17</sup> and even developed a separate system specifically for tax collecting called *lijia*.<sup>18</sup> However, the *baojia* system was, on the whole, ineffective throughout most of the Qing Dynasty, and lead to widespread corruption and abuse of power in the local-setting.<sup>19</sup>

The *hukou* system was frequently combined with the *baojia*, and it survived all the way into the Qing Dynasty, but people for the most part were far freer to move during the final three centuries of dynastic rule. Privately organized geographical movements largely outweighed the restriction of mobility during the late imperial (ca. 1700–1911) and Republican (1911–1949) periods, despite the continuation of ancient practices of registration and taxation through the *baojia* and *hukou* system.<sup>20</sup> During the Republican era (1911–1949) the state never truly held any control over the Chinese population. The combined sway of the struggling Nationalist government, warlordism, foreign interventions and invasion, and civil war against the communists overwhelmed the government. With the fundamental pursuit of the party's survival on the minds of the Nationalists, officials had more pressing concerns than controlling population movements, largely allowing the population both rural and urban, to move freely. However, some measures were taken to adopt a population registration system modeled around the *baojia* system. For the implementation of social-control purposes, the Nationalist government would further institutionalize the existing *hukou/baojia* system with a series of regulations. The Nationalists declared the *hukou* law in 1931 and created the *Detailed Regulations on the Implementation of Hukou Law* in 1934, as well as revise the system further in 1941 with the

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<sup>17</sup>Mote, *Imperial China*, 918-919.

<sup>18</sup>Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 92.

<sup>19</sup>Huaiyin Li, *Village Governance in North China, 1875-1936* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 42-43.

<sup>20</sup>Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 28.

*Regulations on Hukou Verifications*. However, it would be the Japanese occupiers (1937–1945), who would first introduce and effectively implement a form of registration in the cities.

The first comprehensive effort to register all parts of the city was carried out by the Japanese in the late 1930s through collaboration with those in the city's government. Collaborationists in Shanghai, for example, assigned "citizens cards" (*liangmin zheng*) to city residents so that Japanese soldiers could better monitor peoples movements in an out of the city.<sup>21</sup> The enforcement of these "citizens cards" was quickly established, as it would assist in monitoring "illegal activities" and was critical to making the occupation viable.<sup>22</sup> Japanese-controlled pacification teams, made up of city collaborationists would also issue "loyal subject certificates." Every Chinese resident in the city would need to obtain one of these certificates as proof that he or she had accepted the new regimes authority.<sup>23</sup> After WWII, the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek would issue "identity cards" (*shenfen zheng*), which were for the search and subdual of communists in the city.<sup>24</sup> Although the Nationalist government attempted to extend the long-lasting registration system which had been shaped by dynastic and Japanese methods in 1945, it was not used as a tool to restrict migrants from entering the cities. The system was widely used for the "verification of household records" as well as for land measurement—however, for Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, the system had little success once implemented and was always intended as a compulsory military service mechanism.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the revival of the *baojia* system was also largely used as a method to counter

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<sup>21</sup>Lynn T. White, *Careers in Shanghai: The Social Guidance of Personal Energies in a Developing Chinese City, 1949-1966* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 149.

<sup>22</sup>Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>24</sup>White, *Careers in Shanghai*, 149.

<sup>25</sup>Hans J. Van De Ven, *Warfare in Chinese History* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2000), 357.

communist control of towns and villages.<sup>26</sup> In both imperial China and under the Nationalists, the *baojia* system of mutual-responsibility was an effort to enlist nongovernmental structures to keep peace and supply information when the government lacked a formal structure to maintain order by itself.<sup>27</sup> The pre-1949 registration systems in China were not however, meant as a functional, all-embracing tool to control the population and its movements in peacetime.<sup>28</sup> With the exception of the “citizen’s cards” used by the Japanese occupiers, most forms of registration in China were for the collection of detailed statistics, which were needed for taxation purposes and conscription.

Equally as important to the development and idea of the PRC’s *hukou* system was the Soviet passbook system (*propiska*), and the role Soviet advisors played in determining a social order in China, which could be used for socialist developmental transcendence in China.<sup>29</sup> Although it was not nearly as rigid or strictly enforced as would be the PRC’s *hukou* system,<sup>30</sup> the *propiska* specified that every resident residing in provincial capitals, or in cities with populations of more than five hundred thousand, were required to have their residency permit stamped inside of their pass books.<sup>31</sup> The Soviet *propiska* was meant for the “passportization” of the Soviet population, which addressed several similar objectives as the Chinese *hukou* system; such as eliminating all “social parasitism,” as well as, and most importantly for urban leaders,

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<sup>26</sup> Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968,) 368-369.

<sup>27</sup> Ezra Vogel, “Preserving Order in the Cities.” in *The City in Communist China*, ed. John Wilson Lewis, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971,) 85.

<sup>28</sup> Kam-wing Chan, “The Chinese Hukou System at 50,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 50, no.2 (2009): 199.

<sup>29</sup> Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, “The Origins and Social Consequences of China’s Hukou System,” *The China Quarterly* 139 (Sept, 1994): 645.

<sup>30</sup> Wang, *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion*, 158. The Soviet Union, Under Josef Stalin, reinstated the passbook (*propiska*) system in 1932. Each passbook had a stamp proving an individual’s legal place of residence.

<sup>31</sup> Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 34.

limiting the rural exodus and safeguarding the social harmony of the towns and cities.<sup>32</sup> This attempt to halt peasant movement, and keep them in the countryside, where they could be more productive to the state, was a primary motivation for the PRC's development of the *hukou* system.



**Figure 2.** Photograph of a contemporary *hukou* booklet for an individual citizen.  
Source: Photograph taken by author.

The methods of restraining internal migration invented by the Soviet Union, along with the administrative and ideological mindset that came with those restraints, was highly influential in determining how the Chinese leadership restricted population mobility in their own country. Since capitalism was seen as a primary cause for urban overpopulation, the Soviets planted their thoughts towards migration into the realm of Marxist-Leninist doctrine. During the early 1950's the new Chinese socialist state was preparing to be a monopolist employer throughout China by controlling every aspect of work, labor, and population movement. Consequently, it was the

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<sup>32</sup>Carl Watner and Wendy McElroy, eds., *National Identification Systems: Essays in Opposition* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), 116.

rapid industrialization of the cities, and the huge output demands of the 1950s that dictated the pace and rate of rural-to-urban migration in the PRC.<sup>33</sup> Similar to the Soviet model of mobility control, the facilitation of planning, the preserving of social order, the distribution of benefits, and the organization of urban services was strictly held together by the *hukou* system. The *hukou* system under the PRC not only attempted to restrict access to the cities for rural migrants, but also provided the principal basis for establishing identity and status in the PRC to this day. The *hukou* would establish a two-class system which was used to determine who belonged and who did not belong in the cities. During the development of the PRC's *hukou* system, migration rates would fluctuate drastically and were often dictated by frequent economic and political campaigns. The establishment of the PRC's command economy system led to the development of a new, more all-encompassing version of mobility control in the PRC, which required meticulous coordination of both macro and micro facets of Chinese society. In the years following the PRC's establishment in 1949, strict measures would be devised by the government to suppress the free movement of the Chinese population.

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<sup>33</sup>Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 37.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROTECTING THE CITIES: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PRC's MIGRATION CONTROL SYSTEM, 1949–1980s

*Rural peoples do not have a plan, and thus, blindly flow to the city which made the cities unemployment worse, but we also need to realize that this is a natural phenomenon and is different from that of old China...This is something we can solve.*

—*Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)*, 1952<sup>34</sup>

*A huge amount of farmers have moved towards the cities from various locations. Provincial governments and the central government should adopt proper methods to convince them to stop.*

—*Renmin Ribao*, 1953<sup>35</sup>

In 1949, the PRC was steadily establishing its new authority. In Beijing, on the eve of the official creation of the PRC, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Congress, which was made up of representatives of the major political organizations under the guidance of the Chinese Communist Party, took place on September 30, 1949.<sup>36</sup> The conference adopted what became known as the “common program,” which served as the provisional constitution for roughly five years.<sup>37</sup> This provisional constitution allowed for an abundance of abilities and rights when compared with later regulations, some of these freedoms were never mentioned again in official

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<sup>34</sup>*Renmin Ribao (People's Daily)*, August 4, 1952. *Renmin Ribao* is the official state-run daily newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party. It is known for taking a conventional party line, and new political developments are often first signaled by editorials in the paper.

<sup>35</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, April 17, 1953.

<sup>36</sup>Mark Selden, *The People's Republic of China: A Documentary History of Revolutionary Change* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979), 186.

<sup>37</sup>*Documents of the First Session of the First National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1955), 21.

Chinese documentation; one of which was the freedom to migrate and reside anywhere.<sup>38</sup> Article 5 of the 1949 Common Program stated that: “The people of the People’s Republic of China shall have freedom of thought, speech, publication, assembly, association, correspondence, *domicile*, *change of domicile*, religious belief and the freedom of holding processions and demonstrations.”<sup>39</sup>

Although, the Common Program had stated that one had the freedom of domicile and change of domicile under the new communist regime, the *hukou* registration system was in fact being developed and planned for usage in urban areas. What was stated on paper of the Common Program was not what was occurring in the streets of some large cities. Before the Common Program was even promulgated, in March of 1949, government staff conducted *hukou* administering “exercises” in the large coastal city of Tianjin before beginning to apply urban *hukou* checks and registrations throughout the entire city.<sup>40</sup> Although the PRC’s *hukou* system was in its beginning stages, its role to single out, as well as to block migrants from residing in the cities was effectively used from 1949 onwards. In Beijing alone, over 12,000 “spies,” former Nationalist army personnel, drug users, and unregistered people from the countryside were found at the end of 1949 through the use of the evolving *hukou* system.<sup>41</sup> Like many of China’s previous dynasties, social order and the monitoring of migration, especially to the cities, became one of the highest priorities for the PRC government.

Beginning in the early 1950’s the PRC government began to implement centralized planning of the economy. Thus, the arrangement and size of the urban population began to be

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<sup>38</sup>Cheng and Selden, “*The Origins and Social Consequences of China’s Hukou System*,” 646.

<sup>39</sup>Paul Halsall, *Modern History Sourcebook: The Common Program of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, 1949*. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1949-ccp-program.html>.

<sup>40</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, March 29, 1949.

<sup>41</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, February 4, 1950.



under strict control. In the first years of the PRC, planning for economic expansion and the development of soon to come “Five-Year Plans” were always being considered during the first steps of applying the *hukou* system. Some rural migrants who entered the cities attained temporary employment through personal connections, friends, and native-place associations (or *tongxianghui*.)<sup>42</sup> By mid-December of 1949, Beijing, China’s capital and second largest city, had registered 320,000 households, or 73% of the city’s total number of households—including both city and suburban districts.<sup>43</sup> Beijing’s local security bureau announced further information regarding the *hukou*’s legitimacy in a December of 1949 *People’s Daily* editorial:

The new provisional *hukou* registration for the city of Beijing makes all Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) registration obsolete. The new provisional *hukou* registration is a simplified registration system when compared to the former Kuomintang registration system which required a total of fifteen registration forms.<sup>44</sup>

By August of 1950, the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) had been created, and announced its *Provisional Regulation on the Management of Special People*.<sup>45</sup> This 1950 *Provisional Regulation on the Management of Special People* would be the first regulation in a series of steps promulgated by the PRC to establish a *hukou* system. Even before the regulation’s formal establishment in August of 1950, the city of Beijing began announcing *hukou* regulations as early as February and began exchanging the *hukou* sheet for a provisional *hukou* booklet to everyone in the city.<sup>46</sup> The Beijing City Council checked the citizen’s hometown and collected

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<sup>42</sup>*Tongxianghui* is closely examined in Dorothy Solinger’s “Contesting Citizenship in Urban China.” Solinger states that because of pre-1949 regimes’ tolerance of native-place associations (*tongxianghui*), “at least some numbers of the less well-off survived in the cities through their connections.” Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 30.

<sup>43</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, December 19, 1949.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>Wang, *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion*, 44.

<sup>46</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, February 4, 1950.

statistics on Beijing residents.<sup>47</sup> In November that same year, Minister of Public Security, Luo Ruiqing, stated that carrying-out the *hukou* system would be “a major task” for the Chinese government to enforce.<sup>48</sup> Despite the evolution of the *hukou* system, a period of relatively free migration took place during the PRC’s first years. Looking after the proper functioning and limited resources of their cities, some officials exclaimed that too many migrants were already in the cities. For example, Party secretary Rao Shushi added to the PRC’s *modus operandi* of removing migrants out of the city. In regards to Shanghai, Rao stated:

No more than three million of Shanghai’s six million people actually take part, directly and indirectly in productive work. ...We should, first of all, mobilize a great number of refugees and unemployed masses to return to the countryside. We should persuade all refugee landlords, as well as the rich peasants and youths deceived by the enemy to come to Shanghai, to return to their respective places of origin to participate in production.<sup>49</sup>

In the early years of the PRC, the problem of urban unemployment and too many migrants moving into the cities was being addressed by the government with two distinct solutions. The first solution was the PRC’s acknowledgment of its need to properly feed and employ its urban unemployed (those who were residing in their original urban place of origin). A *People’s Daily* report from May of 1950 stated that “local governments and trade unions have been urged to use many ways to help unemployed urban workers.”<sup>50</sup> The local government of Shanghai organized unemployed workers to contribute to the build-up of the city, and in Qingdao, Shandong Province; unemployed workers began working on municipal projects

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Wang, *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion*, 44.

<sup>49</sup>Cheng and Selden, “The Origins and Social Consequences of China’s Hukou System”, 647. This quote by Rao Shushi was fully translated by Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden from a 1950 *Jiefang Ribao* (*Liberation Daily*) article.

<sup>50</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, May 7, 1950.

throughout the city under the management of the local labor bureau.<sup>51</sup> That same year, Mayor Chu Kuang of the large southern metropolis of Guangzhou said in regards to providing economic assistance to the urban needy: “The handling of these cases is essential to the establishment of public order.”<sup>52</sup>

The secondary solution for dealing with unproductive migrants and urban “unemployment,” was the government’s—both, local and central’s—arrangements to remove thousands of unemployed, wartime refugees, and “unproductive” peoples out of the PRC’s largest cities like Shanghai and Beijing.<sup>53</sup> The forced relocation sent unemployed and “unproductive” people back to their province of origin, or dispersed them to develop and farm vacant or sparsely populated areas throughout the PRC, such as Inner Mongolia. During the initial years of the PRC, the only direct and feasible method of maintaining urban social order and reversing urban population growth was the planned relocation of portions of the urban population back to rural areas. The forced relocation of excess and often times migrant populations in the cities could only be successful if public security and other control organs of the local government had adequate power to prevent extensive backflow from the rural areas.

A *Jiefang Ribao* (*Liberation daily*) editorial from May 2, 1950 stated that the central government not only helped create jobs, but provided China’s largest city, Shanghai, with assistance by sending 350,000 people from the city back to Anhui and Jiangsu Provinces between the summer of 1949 and spring of 1950.<sup>54</sup> Shanghai was not the only city deporting

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<sup>51</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, June 6, 1950.

<sup>52</sup>Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949-1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 66.

<sup>53</sup>Cheng and Selden, “*The Origins and Social Consequences of China’s Hukou System*”, 647.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 647.

migrants and unemployed workers from its jurisdiction, as found in a June 19, 1950 *People's Daily* article:

During the spring farming season, the city of Shenyang [In China's northeastern Liaoning province] moved many unemployed people to the countryside in order to participate in agricultural works. The Shenyang local government received permission from the Heilongjiang, Songjiang, Jilin, and Yuandong provincial governments to move 3,300 unemployed workers to their countryside. These four provinces accepted the migrants and prepared the migrants with seeds, farmland, and housing, as well as assigning staff and specialists to welcome them.<sup>55</sup>

That same month, Beijing removed 4,300 people from the city and transported them to Liaoyuan Province (near the Korean border) to start spring agriculture—they were also given assistance from Liaoyuan provincial cadres.<sup>56</sup> The relocation of migrants in the cities and the city's unemployed served the purposes of transforming the frontier landscape with productive manpower, as well as curing the urban problem of “unemployment,” as described by a *People's Daily* editorial from May 7, 1950:

Both Beijing and Tianjin organized and relocated people to the northeast and other regions to participate in rural production. Brotherly assistance from the people's government will help local farmers and create important achievements. The movement will not only partially solve the problems of the victims of unemployment, but will also populate these sparsely populated regions with laborers.

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<sup>55</sup>Both Songjiang and Yuandong are no longer provincial-level administrative regions. Songjiang, which was located in China's northeast and bordered by the USSR to its east and had the Songhua river running through it. Songjiang was a former province of the Chinese Nationalist government, and became part of Heilongjiang province in China's far northeast in 1954 under the PRC. Yuandong was also a former Nationalist province which bordered Songjiang to its east; it would become part of Heilongjiang province as well as small portions of Jilin province in the same year.

<sup>56</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, May 7, 1950. Liaoyuan Province was also a remnant of the Nationalist administration and was incorporated under the PRC into modern day Jilin Province, in China's northeast.

The government's ability to solve the urban migrant problem was severely limited by a lack of funds. Despite slight economic progress by 1951, urban unemployment was still high. Once early forms of the *hukou* began in the cities, the easiest and most cost-effective way of dealing with migrants and the unemployed was to assist and return them to their native villages. Often times, those residing in cities without employment and adequate income would also accept relocation and resettlement outside of the city. The relocation process in the initial years of the PRC was claimed by state media as being commonly done "without harsh coercion," and frequently supplied the relocates with some form of support such as land, grain, tools, and sometimes housing.<sup>57</sup> For example, 4,000 deported migrants in May of 1950, on their way to in Inner Mongolia were given over 130,000 *jīn* of grain from the Beijing provincial government.<sup>58</sup> Some Beijing migrants on their way to Jilin Province were given a seven-month grain and vegetable allotment.<sup>59</sup> One relocated migrant, named Wang Yixian, went so far as to acknowledge his thankfulness for the government's assistance in his relocation to Inner Mongolia, and submitted a letter which was published in a 1950 *People's Daily* article:

I was originally a citizen of the second district of Beijing. With assistance from the government, I was able to move to Suiyuan [central Inner Mongolia]. The Beijing Municipal People's Government issued us ample meals, paid all carriage fees, and paid comrade Lin to come to Beijing and pick us up. Industry will be able to follow us to the rich fertile lands and rural plains [of Suiyuan]. I was really filled with excitement. On the train, people were chatting with the doctor who would take care of every migrant. I really felt the care of the people from the government. When the train arrived in Datong [northern Shanxi Province] county train station, the station workers gave us a lot of food. They cannot know how grateful we left. First, to our destination! But also thanks to the government for the warm welcome and the proper security which was good. We were assigned to

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<sup>57</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, June 6, 1950.

<sup>58</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, May 7, 1950.

<sup>59</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, June 19, 1950.

rural areas to cultivate land. In the future; we will strive for hard work and a long life in this vast region. I thank the government, cadres, and comrades.<sup>60</sup>

However, this letter “submitted” to the *People’s Daily* might be characterized as government propaganda attempting to entice “unproductive” peoples to leave the cities and develop the frontier regions far away from the urban centers. Also, by moving people to frontier areas and the countryside, the migrants were making up for the loss of human and economic potential of rural areas which state media claimed could be “populated into a region of many laborers.”<sup>61</sup> However, as stated in the *People’s Daily*, not all unproductive people were expelled:

Within the larger cities of China, periodic surveys were conducted by different branches of the local and city governments to try and locate the unemployed, as well as find ways of coping with the problem. Guangzhou’s Education Bureau in 1951, for example, held surveys for unemployed professionals, and labor unions surveyed unemployed workers throughout the city. Their surveys revealed that in the summer of 1951, Guangzhou had over 45,000 unemployed workers from a population of over 1,300,000 in the city.<sup>62</sup> If the city’s Economic Assistance Committee or the local Labor Bureau did not send them back to their original villages or towns, it attempted to find them work doing city projects or street cleaning.<sup>63</sup>

The various initial *hukou* regulations created by the PRC were without any specifics on the migrating of rural peoples into the cities, although the early forms of *hukou* were used as tools to get rid of unwanted, unproductive, or unemployed people living in the largest cities.<sup>64</sup> On July 16, 1951, the government first set up the *hukou* system in the cities through the issuance of the *Provisional Regulations on Urban Hukou Management*. The PRC claimed that these newly-created *Regulations* were to maintain “social peace, order, safe-guard the people’s

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<sup>60</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, May 7, 1950.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>Vogel, *Canton under Communism*, 66.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

security” and “protect their freedom of residence and movement.”<sup>65</sup> The 1951 *Regulations on Urban Hukou Management* were described in the *People’s Daily* and labeled as a “Central People’s Government and Public Security Announcement” which posted the *Regulations’* set of laws:

1. To maintain public safety, insure people’s safety and place of residence and the freedom to move is the purpose of these regulations.
2. These regulations apply to everyone living in the city, except PLA (People’s Liberation Army), public security and police, and foreign consulate staff.
3. Within one home, those living, eating, and sleeping together, no matter the relationship will be called one household. But, if one family has more than one place to live, eat separately, are far away from each other, or a few families living in one place with separate financing will be considered separate households.
4. *Hukou* administration will be under the control of the Public Security Bureau. All booklets and identification should be simplified for the people. When Public Security staff administers the *hukou*, no one can refuse it.
5. When there is any alteration, the *hukou* owner must take his *hukou* to the Public Security office and follow the regulations.
6. When a visitor comes and stays in your name for more than three days, you must report it to the Public Security office.
7. Every household needs to have their *hukou* booklet. For hotels and hospitals, they will need to provide patient check-in lists to the local security office every night before sleep.
8. *Hukou* violations will be punished in accordance.
9. Governmental staff, public groups, and military facilities will all have a local urban *hukou*.
10. The past registration regulations are obsolete.
11. District, province, and cities public security offices will make detailed regulations according to these rulings.

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<sup>65</sup>Wang, *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion*, 44.

12. These regulations are approved by the Government Council and executed under the Public Security Bureau.<sup>66</sup>

This protection on the citizen's freedom to move was surely referring to those with urban (non-agricultural) origins. The PRC's development of the *hukou* system was always for the control and curtailing of unwanted surplus labor from the countryside and the protection of industry-oriented development in the cities. The collection of rural (agricultural) *hukou* files would not begin to take place until the first National Census of 1953. Although the freedom to migrate was stated in the 1950 and 1951 regulations, urban residents were required to have Public Security's permission to migrate to another city even for travelling, business, or permanent movement purposes.

In order to finance and install urban-based industry, the Chinese state actuated and coerced an unequal exchange between the soon-to-be agricultural and industrial strata of Chinese society. The PRC accepted the responsibility of supporting its urban residents, its future industrial workforce, with employment, welfare, and food while relegating the vast agricultural population in the countryside from state assistance.<sup>67</sup> To maintain such inequality between the two populations, the PRC needed to find an apparatus which could block the free flows of migrants between the city and countryside. The *hukou* system would become this apparatus that maintained and upheld the population's division that the PRC needed.

Shortly after the 1951 *Regulations on Urban Hukou Management*, which initiated a provisional *hukou* system in the cities, urban food ration tickets were beginning to be implemented into the urban population. Food rationing required proper *hukou* documentation in order for any member of the household to purchase grain from a state-run grain shop or apply for

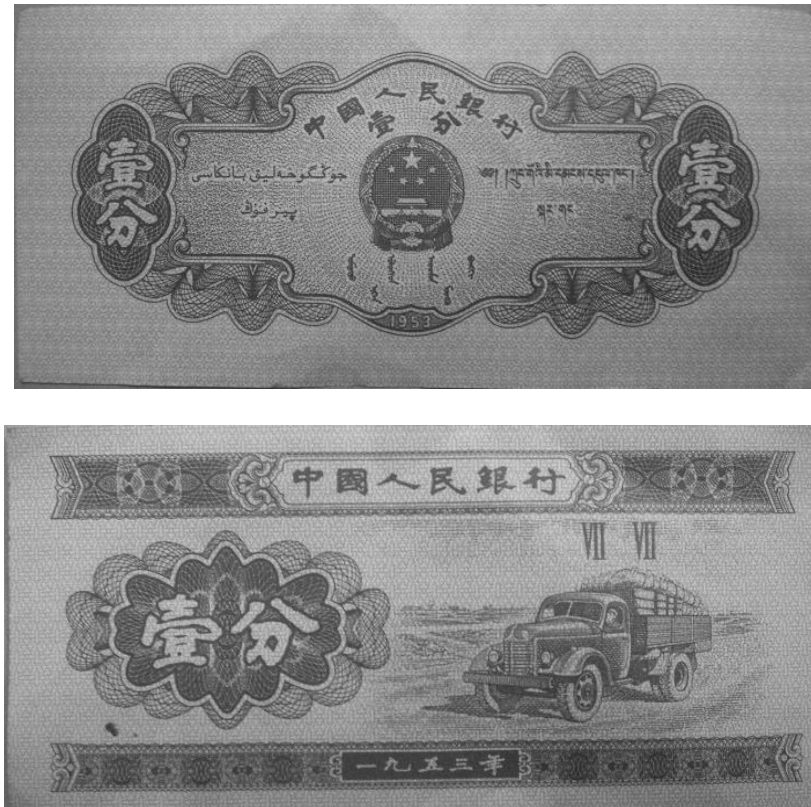
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<sup>66</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, July 26, 1951.

<sup>67</sup>Kam Wing Chan and Li Zhang, "The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes." *The China Quarterly* 160 (Dec., 1999): 821.



a job.<sup>68</sup> The implementation of urban ration tickets in the early 1950's not only helped evenly distribute basic necessities in the cities in times of scarcity and inflationary pressure, but alongside the *hukou* system, eased employment pressures in the city and served as a mechanism to control population mobility.



**Figure 3.** Front and back of a PRC food rationing ticket from 1953.  
Source: Photograph taken by author.

Rationing also helped confirm an individual's place of registration when in the city for authorities since those from the countryside were not eligible for food rations.

In 1952, a further step in the evolution of the government's growing authority over urban control was formulated. The PRC's *Decision Regarding Labor Employment Issues* on August 3,

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<sup>68</sup>White, *Careers in Shanghai*, 149.

1952 appears to be the first regulation to approach and describe the reasons for urban unemployment as well as its connection to the issue of rural peoples “blindly flowing” into the cities.<sup>69</sup> The long-term effects of invasion, imperialism, and the former nationalist government were mentioned as being the primary causes for unemployment in the cities of “new China.”<sup>70</sup> Similar to the 1950 and 1951 regulations, the 1952 *Decision* portrayed itself as a necessary step for the PRC’s development of the *hukou* system, while simultaneously making distinctions between rural and urban residence as well as between groups who were legally able to attain urban employment and who were not.<sup>71</sup> The Chinese state had effectively begun to create two societies—one, urban and privileged, the other, rural and full of hardship. City people, although hard working and given high expectations through industrial labor, were not only advantaged in their entitlements to food, they also benefitted from state-provided housing, and superior education when compared to those from the countryside.

By the end of 1952, the government had finished what it called “three years of economic recovery” and was turning its attention to launch its “ten years of development” phase, which would further expand urban industry. But with the industrialization of the cities during the First Five-Year Plan, an unforeseen and undesirable challenge was brought forth. As urban industrial development grew, the progress of the cities brought into focus the problem of attracting too many migrants to the city.<sup>72</sup> By entering the cities, rural migrants inadvertently challenged the process of the “ten years of development” phase for the PRC. Despite authorities’ increased emphasis on urban order, the rise in rural-to-urban migration was sustained by poor economic conditions in the countryside and the lure of higher income in the cities. In the years when urban

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<sup>69</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, August 4, 1952.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>Cheng and Selden, “The Origins and Social Consequences of China’s Hukou System”, 650.

<sup>72</sup>Meisner, *Mao’s China and After*, 97-98.

job opportunities were at their greatest, migration was at its heaviest. In 1953, the initial year of the First Five-Year Plan, rural-to-urban migration comprised roughly 70 percent of the surge of 2.45 million new workers in the cities.<sup>73</sup> Due to the influence of industrial projects and the limited effectiveness of the *hukou* system in curtailing rural-to-urban migration at the time, many cities became targets for rural migrants to seek employment. Inland cities became the centers of industrial development during the First Five-Year Plan. The city of Xi'an, for example, in China's northern Shaanxi Province, was ordered by the Central government to receive and develop over 40 such industrial development projects, giving it a particularly high rate of immigration.<sup>74</sup> In Xi'an, by April of 1953, the maximum amount of migrants entering the city was averaged at 600 per day, while the first few weeks of April saw a combined 20,000 people enter both cities of Anshan and Shenyang in the northeast. The city of Taiyuan, also in China's north, acquired an incredible 10,000 people during the months of March and April, while the coastal city of Tianjin, received 1,450 people during a ten day period alone.<sup>75</sup>

In April of 1953, while many industrial developments were underway in China's cities, the PRC issued the *Directive on Dissuading Peasants of Blind Flow from entering into the Cities*.<sup>76</sup> This Directive told urban officials to urge peasants who had entered the cities to return to their places of origin and to continue with agricultural production. From 1954 to 1956, the PRC government would create a series of regulations specifically dealing with the migration of peasants to the cities. These regulations consistently referred to migrants as "blindly flowing"

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<sup>73</sup>John Philip Emerson, "Manpower Training and Utilization of Specialized Cadres, 1949-1968," in *The City in Communist China*, ed. John Wilson Lewis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1971), 190.

<sup>74</sup>Ka-iu Fung, "The Spatial Development of Shanghai," in Christopher Howe, ed., *Shanghai: Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 274-276.

<sup>75</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, April 17, 1953.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

towards the city since most rural-to-urban movements were not state-organized. These migrants were described as flowing from the countryside, due to the enormous size of the rural population. The terms “blind flow” and “blind influx” would be used by authorities for decades in order to characterize large-scale rural-to-urban migration. In the summer of 1955, the PRC would establish the *Directive Concerning the Establishment of a Permanent Household Registration System*, which for the first time in the PRC’s history, would initiate a plan for local governments to implement the *hukou* system nationwide.<sup>77</sup> In 1956, the Ministry of Public Security was given total authority by the central government for the management of the *hukou* system and the crucial task of controlling migrants’ entrance into the cities.<sup>78</sup> By 1956, a multi-functional *hukou* system was in place; determining who receives food rationing, urban employment, and medical care. The *hukou* system was also digging deeper the divide which lay between urban and rural China. The *hukou* system restricted a migrant’s chances of surviving in the city, yet it was still not an all-encompassing mechanism for preventing rural-to-urban migration.

In 1957, the Ministry of Public Security established checkpoints at key positions along China’s rail lines. Illegal migrants would be immediately sent back to their places of origin.<sup>79</sup> One of the most important actions that lessened the urban population during this period was the coerced movements of non-migrant people to the countryside. Cities which were lacking in industrial projects often motivated people to leave the city and take part in developing agriculture in rural areas.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Heins S. Potter and Jack M. Potter, *China’s Peasants: The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 296-305.

<sup>78</sup>Wang, *Organizing Through Division and Exclusion*, ” 45.

<sup>79</sup>H. Yuan Tien, *China’s Population Struggle: Demographic Decisions of the People’s Republic, 1949-1969* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1973), 95.

<sup>80</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 1957.



**Figure 4.** This image from a *People's Daily* article in November of 1957 shows a resident from the city of Guiyang, capital of Guizhou Province, departing by train to take part in agricultural work in the countryside.

The sending of people to the countryside was an effective tool used by the PRC to lower the urban population even now. Many of those who sought work in the cities brought their families with them, causing central planners to be deeply troubled by this growing trend. A November 1957 *People's Daily* article complained about the trend of workers who brought their families to the cities which media emphasized severely stressed food availability and subsidies.<sup>81</sup> One particular article stated that between 1950 to the end of 1956, roughly 150,000 rural people came to the capital of Beijing in search of employment, while those in search of work were said to have brought an additional 200,000 family members into the city.<sup>82</sup> The numbers may well have been much higher than the regime wanted to admit. From 1953 to 1957, an estimated eight million peasant migrants had flocked to the cities.<sup>83</sup> During this period, many of China's largest

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>John Philip Emerson, "Urban School-Leavers and Unemployment in China," *The China Quarterly* 93, (Mar., 1983), 7-8.

cities had high rates of both in-migration and outmigration. This was due to the PRC's heightened sensitivity for order in the city, as well as the communist party's growing efficiency in maintaining that order. Shanghai, for example, saw between the years 1950-1957 an estimated 3.7 million in-migrants and 3.2 million governmentally removed out-migrants.<sup>84</sup> It soon became all too obvious for government authorities that a more thorough, systematic, and powerful mechanism would be needed to halt the large-scale rural-to-urban migration that was occurring in the PRC.

Finally, on January 9, 1958, the National People's Congress promulgated the *Regulations on Household Registration in the People's Republic of China*, just as Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward campaign was about to begin.<sup>85</sup> This *Regulation* set up the *hukou* system to control the movement of people between rural and urban areas nationwide.<sup>86</sup> Drastically different from the first *Regulations* which allowed for the freedom of domicile and movement back in 1951, the 1958 *Regulations* made the *hukou* system the law and erased the freedom of movement. What was promulgated on January 9, 1958, is a doctrine that largely exists today, dividing the PRC into an agricultural and non-agricultural population. According to one scholar, when the 1958 *Directive* was established, the agricultural or rural population, which would be cut off and placed beyond the state's responsibility, was roughly 85 percent of the Chinese population.<sup>87</sup>

In 1958, as the PRC tried to enforce strict measures to keep peasants chained to the land, the numbers of migrants going towards the cities actually grew. Although the PRC had established a full-blown version of the *hukou* system in January of 1958 to stop the "blind

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<sup>84</sup>Gui and Xian, "Urban Migration in Shanghai, 1950-88," 536.

<sup>85</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, January 10, 1958.

<sup>86</sup>*Xinhua*, July 28, 2010. *Xinhua* is the official press agency for the PRC and is the largest network for collecting information and press conference details. The agency reports to the PRC's Propaganda and Public Information Departments.

<sup>87</sup>Chan, "The Chinese *Hukou* System at 50," 200.

influx” of peasants from entering the cities, the Great Leap Forward campaign (1958–1962) actually brought population movement to its peak. Mao’s pursuit of rapid industrial growth rates during the Great Leap Forward led to the transferring of most industrial undertakings from the central to local authorities in a large decentralization scheme that made the tightened *hukou* regulations nearly impossible to enforce.<sup>88</sup> As targets for industrial output were exceedingly revised upwards, urban enterprises started to recruit cheap labor from the countryside, creating the massive flow of migration. More than 15 million farmers from the countryside moved to China’s cities in 1958 alone. Cities like Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Zhengzhou swelled as the total urban population drastically grew from 99 million in 1957 to 130 million in 1960. The *hukou* was largely swept aside in the rush to rapidly industrialize, allowing some to find employment in the city, but few migrants managed to officially change their place of residence or find work in the city. If migrant workers did find employment in the city, they were often times relegated to the most arduous, dirty, and dangerous jobs, but they were never truly assimilated into the urban workplace. As Frank Dikötter has pointed out, “they had no secure status, dwelling in a twilight zone of legality and risking expulsion back to the countryside at any time.”<sup>89</sup>

Since the PRC could only provide food, housing and employment for its urban residents during most of the Great Leap Forward, it left farmers to fend for themselves in the countryside. Furthermore, during the Great Leap Forward, Mao enforced the idea of scientific planning in order to rapidly increase agricultural yields. However, crops were planted too close together or in poor soil leading to mass famine across the country and leaving many no choices but to

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<sup>88</sup>Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution Vol. II: The Great Leap Forward, 1958-1960* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), 36-39.

<sup>89</sup>Frank Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine: The History of China’s Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962* (New York, NY: Walker and Co., 2010,) 230.

desperately seek security in the cities. In order to ease the burden of the desperate and starving masses from entering the city, the state would make a decision to cap the growth of the urban population. By the winter of 1958, urban industry had already swept up all of the cheap labor it needed from the countryside. Even more restrictions were imposed in early 1959 on top of the already strict *hukou* system's barring of rural migrants.

On February 4, and again on March 11, 1959, the PRC stipulated that the market for labor in the cities had been officially closed. No longer could migrants hope to find employment through urban industry, and many who had found jobs in the city were sent back to the countryside to take part in agricultural work. In some districts of Shanghai roughly a fifth of all families had only a temporary permit, and most being migrants from nearby Jiangsu Province. Some, who did not hold employment in the city were sent back to Jiangsu. In the wake of the PRC's repeated directives on limiting urban growth, a quarter of a million people were organized in Shanghai in 1959, and sent back to the countryside. In the summer of that same year, Gaiping County in Liaoning Province, transferred 10,000 people from the cities back to the villages to "assist with agricultural work."<sup>90</sup>

Some commune leaders in the countryside would allow a form of chain migration by agreeing to take care of children and the elderly while some went in search of work, perhaps being some of the earliest instances of labor exporting in the PRC. Remittances from workers in the city could contribute to the survival of the village or the commune. In Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, a third of a million people left for the safety of Beijing during the winter of 1958–1959, while Nanjing, in the eastern province of Jiangsu, saw 60,000-70,000 refugees from the countryside arrive by spring of 1959. In the first four months of 1960, over 170,000 people from

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<sup>90</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, July 1, 1959.



the countryside who were escaping the famine were found ticketless on trains arriving in Beijing, most traveling from Shandong, Hebei and Henan Provinces.<sup>91</sup> In spite of the huge numbers of migrants that were attempting to enter the cities, a total of 10 million were sent back to the countryside in 1960 alone. Although the governmental strictures regarding the *hukou* system intensified during the Great Leap Forward, the cities still saw many desperate people entering the cities in search of food and employment up until the end of the campaign in 1962.

By early 1960, Mao's Great Leap Forward was a disaster, and the nation fell into even deeper famine, so the state began a full-scale implementation of the *hukou* system in a massive effort to regain control of the economy, society, and population movement en route for the cities. The effort to forcefully deal with rural-to-urban migration, ultimately constructed the wall which stood between China's city and countryside. The *hukou* system would provide the state with a central pillar to exile and expel the large majority of the Chinese population from entering the safety of the cities. The failure of the Great Leap Forward, that was aimed to drastically increase industry and agricultural production led to the re-implementation of the *hukou* system. The Communist Party leadership would coerce most of the twenty-five million state employees added during the three Great Leap Forward years to return back to the countryside in order to reduce the burdens felt on the state rationing system in the cities.<sup>92</sup>

During an April 1962 session of the National People's Congress, Premier Zhou Enlai announced that the PRC was undertaking a campaign to continue sending excess population out of the cities and back to the rural areas. This campaign was known as the "return to the village"—or *huixiang*—policy. There was little choice for many former urban workers to leave the city and return to the village since work in the city became nearly impossible to find after the

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<sup>91</sup>Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*, 231-233.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 222-223.

Great Leap Forward period.<sup>93</sup> A *People's Daily* article from May of 1962 published a letter submitted by a farmer from Zhejiang Province named Zhan Tongchao, who wanted to “welcome employees who wished to return to the countryside.” It is also possible that this “letter” was a form of government propaganda. Encouraging unemployed urban workers and migrants to leave the city and return to the villages, the published letter stated:

To those who support agriculture! Last year at this time our team had the help of a group of employees and workers from the cities who supported us; including entire families and students. Once they arrived to this land they were welcomed by all the farmers. We need you very much in our village. Here, we grow grain and are short on work hands. When harvest arrives our minds are hurt and we need people to assist us. Every year, we welcome the comrades, students, and workers from the cities to help us.<sup>94</sup>

In 1966, Mao launched his Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in order to remove traditional Chinese culture and replace them with Maoist orthodoxy. More importantly, the Cultural Revolution was created to expel capitalist elements in the government and population, contributing to Mao’s god-like power-base. During a seven year period from 1967–1974, 12 million urban youths, about 10 percent of China’s urban population, were sent to the countryside, while during the whole Cultural Revolution, which lasted ten years, over 16 million were sent.<sup>95</sup> These “sent-down youths” were middle-school and high school graduates who were to be reeducated by the peasants in the countryside. They would also need to give up their privileged urban *hukou* status. The sending of the young urbanites was also an attempt to relieve some of the pressures felt by China’s top cities like Shanghai and Beijing from population increase. However, with the departure of the millions of urban youths, many urban industries were unable to fill their need for labor, and peasants from the countryside were welcomed as an exploitable

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<sup>93</sup>Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 400.

<sup>94</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, May 9, 1962.

<sup>95</sup>Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008,) 251.

substitute.<sup>96</sup> Despite the PRC's emphasis on decreasing rural-to-urban migration, some 12 to 14 million migrants were hired in the cities between 1966 and 1976.<sup>97</sup>

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, developments both economic and political took a new turn. Late in 1978 a series of contentious debates took place within the Chinese leadership, concluding in the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee in December.<sup>98</sup> During the session, two closely related outcomes of these debates stood out from the previous three decades of the PRC's history. They would also have a profound effect on migration and urbanization in the country. The first was the establishment of reformed policies which were designed to propel the modernization of the Chinese economy. The second was the consolidation of the power of Deng Xiaoping, who had long advocated for the modernization and reform of the PRC.<sup>99</sup> Deng Xiaoping quickly established his position as the country's paramount leader and switched the party's concentration from seemingly unending revolution, to economic modernization and growth. Deng thus became the designer and chief-architect of China's post-Mao era reform process. The modernization goals of Deng Xiaoping differed conspicuously from Mao Zedong's version. Mao largely neglected the infrastructure needed to support and uphold the forces of production, and instead emphasized constant class struggle and a quick path towards the socialist transformation of the country. In lieu of following Mao's methods of crash

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<sup>96</sup>Thomas J. Bernstein, *Up To the Mountains and Down To the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); and Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 42.

<sup>97</sup>Michael Korzec, "Contract Labor, the 'Right to Work,' and New Labor Laws in the People's Republic of China," *Comparative Economic Studies* 30, No. 2 (1988), 121.

<sup>98</sup>Tang Tsou, "Political Change and Reform: The Middle Course," in Norton Ginsburg, and Bernard A. Lator, eds., *China: The 80's Era* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 27. At the meeting, Deng Xiaoping had stated that "the large-scale turbulent class struggles of a mass character have in the main come to an end".

<sup>99</sup>Colin Mackerras, Pradeep Taneja, and Graham Young, *China Since 1978: Reform, Modernisation and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 1.

industrialization and a complete separation of rural and urban society, Deng envisaged modernization as overcoming “China’s economic and technological backwardness”<sup>100</sup> by implementing the use of advanced technology, properly planned industrialization, and creating a higher standard of living for as many people as possible.<sup>101</sup> Rural peasants would also benefit greatly from the changes Deng Xiaoping had planned to implement. However, despite the policies put forth to improve peasants’ livelihoods, the policies that were created during the 1980s were also meant to keep most peasants on the farm rather than in the cities.

The restoration of the country’s economy was an urgent priority for Deng, and during the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress in December 1978, the PRC took decisive steps to push forward with reform. The reforms not only took place in the fields of technology and industry, but in the agricultural sector as well; which gradually raised the purchasing power and living standards of rural farmers, which was also an attempt to keep them from migrating to the cities in search of work. This was achieved in two distinct ways. First, and foremost, was the party’s introduction of the Household Responsibility System which replaced the production team system as the unit of agricultural production and income dispersal for rural peasants. Through a contract, peasant households were allotted a piece of land for use but not for selling. The contracts required farmers to attain state quotas for taxes, crop deliveries, and the like, while the household was permitted to keep whatever it earned beyond these quotas for personal consumption or sale. The household responsibility system had allowed for the creation of rural

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<sup>100</sup>Deng, Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, 1975-1982* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1984), 146.

<sup>101</sup>Mackerras, Taneja, and Young, *China since 1978: Reform, Modernisation and Socialism with Chinese Characteristics*, 1-3.

markets, which was also seen as a method to reduce rural-to-urban migration.<sup>102</sup> By the summer of 1983, most rural areas were using the household responsibility system as the primary method of crop organization and cultivation, despite rural cadres' initial ambivalence to the program.<sup>103</sup> The responsibility system returned the farm back to the peasant family and helped—at least slightly—increase the livelihoods of roughly 80 percent of the Chinese population.<sup>104</sup> Another factor which raised the Chinese countryside's standard of living was the state's promotion of non-farm employment and rural industry. After collective farming was dissolved, non-agricultural work, and “side-line” production—which had formerly been run by the commune, came under the control of private holders and village committees.<sup>105</sup> The increase in non-agricultural work was called “side-line” production because it allowed rural peasants to diversify their incomes as well as maintain agricultural work as well. Overall, the PRC government sought to make little incentive for peasants to come to the city if small-scale industry, rural markets, and increased food security were attained in the countryside.

The PRC leadership realized the promise that increased food security and non-agricultural work in the countryside had as an alternative to migrating to the cities. However, given the slow growth of agricultural production at the outset of the reforms, exports of manufactured consumer products became the principal candidate for the state's economic

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<sup>102</sup>Justin Lin Yifu, “The Household Responsibility System in China's Agricultural Reform: A Theoretical and Empirical Study,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 36, no. 3 (1988): S199.

<sup>103</sup>Dwight H. Perkins, “The Prospects for China's Economic Reforms,” in A. Doak Barnett, and Ralph N. Clough, eds., *Modernizing China: Post-Mao Reform and Development* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986,) 49.

<sup>104</sup>Kenneth Lieberthal, “The Political Implications of Document No. 1, 1984,” *The China Quarterly* 101, (Mar., 1985): 109.

<sup>105</sup>Delia Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999,) 40.

expansion.<sup>106</sup> This, like the massive industrial projects that had developed in the early 1950s, had a tremendous affect on drawing peasant migrants to the city. Deng Xiaoping and his supporters agreed on a goal of expanding production—primarily along China’s coastline—focusing in the manufacturing of consumer-oriented products and light industry.

The post-1978 PRC undertook actions which transformed policies for the benefit of rural peasants, who had been barred from the privileges of city living for nearly three decades. As a result, the PRC would lose absolute control over population mobility, due to the creation market reforms. This however forced the PRC to initiate new regulations to preserve order of the migration flows into the cities, rather than completely curtail it. In 1982, the State Council put into place the *Measures of Detaining and Repatriating Floating and Begging People in the Cities*, giving further legal authority to local public security to forcefully deal with unregistered migrants.<sup>107</sup> However, the large city of Wuhan, in central China’s Hubei Province, was the first to experiment with a set of laws for “temporary” migrant residence. In May of 1983, notices regarding temporary residence *hukou* (*linshi hukou*) were posted around the city by Wuhan’s Public Security Bureau. This announcement was titled *Circular on Verification and Issuance of the Temporary Residence Certificate for Non-native personnel*. Since the State Council and *People’s Daily* did not announce any document for the months surrounding the time of Wuhan’s notice, the choice can be seen as a purely local one.<sup>108</sup> Peasants or “non-natives”—as the city’s announcement addressed them—were required to apply for the “Wuhan Temporary Residence Certificate” in person, and would be in effect for six months after signing. However, when the

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 43-45.

<sup>107</sup>Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *China’s Household Registration System: Discrimination and Reforms* (Washington D.C., 2005), 31.

<sup>108</sup>Dorothy J. Solinger, “Research Note: “Temporary Residence Certificate” Regulations in Wuhan, May 1983,” *The China Quarterly* 101, (Mar., 1985): 98.

temporary residence time-period was up, the migrant worker was required to return the certificate back to the issuing division and immediately leave Wuhan.<sup>109</sup> This temporary residence permit was also significant in that it was no longer a priority for a migrant from the countryside to enter the city under a group contract signed and dated by the intended city destination and the migrant's original commune in the countryside.<sup>110</sup> The "Wuhan Temporary Residence Certificate" demonstrated that policies toward rural-to-urban migration were different regionally, and was not always initialized by the central government in Beijing. The State Council and Central Government regularly leaned towards order and control of the migrants whereas some locations, like Wuhan, favored and welcomed migrants as agents of economic growth in the region.

Two years later, the Central Government introduced what Wuhan had already begun. In July of 1985, the Ministry of Public Security approved new regulations for individuals who sought temporary residence in China's cities. Applicants for "temporary registration" needed to be 16 years or over, and had to supply proof of identity and a photograph.<sup>111</sup> This regulation was to ensure that proper control and monitoring of the growing migrant population could take place. Authorities also wanted to know the specific reason why the migrant was entering the city, as well as for what kind of employment.<sup>112</sup> The PRC seemed to acknowledge that the large amounts of migrants entering the cities could not be halted entirely, and continued to create regulations at the local level which intended to limit the migrant population's entrance, not halt it. The temporary regulation categorized the peasantry that entered a city by the type of work

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid. 101.

<sup>111</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, September 8, 1985.

<sup>112</sup>Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China*, 50.

they provided and urged “rural visitors” to properly register with local public security.<sup>113</sup> An article titled “Public Security Announcement Regarding Temporary Residents in the Cities Administrative Regulations” in the *People’s Daily* stated:

For visitors sixteen years and older who plan to stay over three days, you need to have a “temporary staying permit” (*jizhu zheng*). For visitors in small business, entrepreneurs, construction, transportation, and services that require a longer stay, the employer and their *hukou* location’s administration department need to work together and register with the local authorities as a temporary staying *hukou*.<sup>114</sup>

Those who migrated to medium sized towns were also required to properly register. For both cities and towns, it was required to sign in and properly sign out with local security if staying for no more than three days. If a person was staying for more than three days, it was mandatory to register with local security and pay to receive a temporary residence permit. This permit, unlike that in Wuhan, was only affective for three months rather than Wuhan’s six.<sup>115</sup> The temporary residence parameters also allowed migrants who had approved registration to rent cheap housing in urban areas, thusly granting an already common practice.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, September 8, 1985.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*, 43.





**Figure 5.** A modern-day temporary residency permit for the city of Beijing.  
Source: *China Daily*, March 12, 2009.

Although migrants could now attain employment and housing on a temporary basis legally, they were still treated and given an agricultural or rural status on their *hukou*. Like Wuhan, they were also required to immediately leave the city after their allotted three month time-period had passed. Yet another change was the government's introduction of identity cards in the mid 1980s. These identity cards became a requirement for everyone over sixteen years of age on September 15, 1989.<sup>117</sup> However, they were first introduced in 1984, and were used by the Ministry of Public Security as an effective way to keep up to date on population and migration trends in their districts.<sup>118</sup> Identification cards were also stated by the *China News Agency* as being "a major reform of the administration of the *hukou* system."<sup>119</sup> One researcher has stated that although the identification cards "were not intended to replace the household registration; on the contrary they were to be issued by the offices that supervised registration and

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<sup>117</sup>"Residential Review Prepares for Census," *China Daily* in English, December 13, 1989, 3, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service-China (Hereafter FBIS), December 15, 1989, 31.

<sup>118</sup>"Household Registers to be Retained Indefinitely," *Zhongguo Xinwen She* (China News Agency) in English, June 17, 1993, in FBIS-China, June 18, 1993, 27.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.

were most likely recognized as a fine-tuning of the *hukou* system.” As migration rates grew, city officials and local security came under stress to keep migrant numbers in-check. City residents throughout the mid-1980s argued that identity cards were needed only for migrants, as the cards were an implement for social control. Like many other stipulations created by the government; identity cards were first established in the largest of cities and eventually into the countryside, but the identity card system was never well established and became of only marginal importance in Chinese life.<sup>120</sup>

Furthermore, in an attempt to limit the amount of rural-to-urban migration to the largest cities, the PRC eased the entry process for rural peasants to attain residency in over 60,000 small towns. The induction of this new type of registration in 1984 allowed migrants to attain a non-agricultural *hukou* for themselves, and their families. However, the requirements to obtain this lower form of urban *hukou* status were not easy. First, the applicant would need to be self-supplying in grain and foodstuffs, as the applicant was not entitled to a rationed food supply. Second, the non-agricultural *hukou* applicant would need to find employment and housing by themselves. A final condition was that they should hand over to the local government their contracted land in the countryside. The new small town policy gave peasants already residing in the towns a chance to legally attain an urban *hukou*. Despite the conditions of the residency transfer not being easy to do for many peasants in the countryside, the measure did allow for the bringing of one’s family to the town. Despite allowing for a small town residency, the new form of small town urban *hukou* was substandard to a normal urban *hukou* registration of the large cities since it did not provide housing, access to food supply, and subsidized healthcare.<sup>121</sup> After four years of the small town *hukou* option, roughly 4.6 million peasants had transferred their

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<sup>120</sup>Davin, *Internal Migration in Contemporary China*, 46.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 40-41.

registration status to small towns, but thereafter, the amount of rural to small town transfers decreased.<sup>122</sup>

In general, reform-era policies that gave official consent for the peasants' ability to leave the land suggest a new approach toward migrants by the PRC government. And yet, rhetoric emanating from many officials of China's largest cities connecting migrants with chaos and disorder did not cease. The permissiveness of reform-era policies allowing peasants to travel thus made migrants bear the brunt of becoming both a symbol and catalyst of institutional change in China. First, the migrants' existence in the cities symbolized a step away—or the decline—from the past Maoist state's structures of the planned economy while simultaneously confirming that former methods of halting the “blind flow” of migrants were outdated. Second, migrants also represented the vast economic disparities between the regions of China, as they commonly migrated towards the more developed coastal localities in search of furthering their source of income. And third, by permitting the ruralites to traverse into the cities on a temporary basis, the state deepened disputes between regional officials who had conflicting view points on economic growth in China and the amount of mobility peasants from the countryside should be able to have. Although policies grew slightly more accommodating for migrants, some urban officials, going into the 1990s, would still retain harsh action against migrants and often times reverted to local protectionism by continuing to expel migrants from the city.

The reforms implemented under Deng Xiaoping lead the PRC down a path towards economic growth and a market-oriented economy. The rapid shift from socialist development to economic reform, as we have seen, also sped up the urbanization process. However, the PRC's expectation of such developments and the high probability that huge numbers of ambitious rural

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<sup>122</sup>Hein Mallee, “China's Household Registration System under Reform,” *Development and Change* 26, No.1 (1995): 15.

laborers would leave their villages to seek out work forced officials to develop new policies allowing for partial or temporary residence in the cities. As rural-to-urban migration quickly grew, rural migrants began to play a significant role in the informal sector, selling their agricultural goods, working on construction projects, and finding work in the rapidly growing number of urban factories along the coast, especially in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces. However, the huge increase in urban in-migration strained the tolerance of city dwellers and urban officials in coastal cities who were not only struggling with the initial sluggishness of the economic reforms, but also with a rise in urban unemployment.<sup>123</sup> By the mid-1980s, the migrants who frequented the cities in search of semi-permanent employment came to be known by as China's "floating population," and would be referred to by this name for the first time by state-run media in August of 1985.<sup>124</sup>

With the onset of increasing rates of migration, some conservative officials along the coast who were strongly against reforms to population mobility predicted disarray as migrants streamed into their cities in large numbers. Other, more radical leaders, who represented the poorer inland and non-coastal provinces, argued that migration was vital to economic growth in their areas, or as one inland provincial governor described, "a path to get rich."<sup>125</sup> The growth and vigor of the Chinese economy during the 1980s and 1990s made a need for greater labor mobility, while the motivations to migrate have proved as strong as those that draw migrants across international boundaries. However, this fundamental change in labor flow was not

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<sup>123</sup>"Influx of Rural Workers Alarms Government," *China Daily* in English, June 14, 1991, 3, in FBIS-China, June 21, 1991, 36.

<sup>124</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, August 8, 1985.

<sup>125</sup>"NPC Deputies View Problems of Migrant Worker Population," *Zhongguo Xinwen She* (China News Agency) in Chinese, March 21, 1994, in FBIS-China, March 24, 1994, 18.

accepted by all of the PRC's leadership because the stemming of migration flows toward the cities had become deeply enmeshed in the political and economic structures of urban China.

## CHAPTER 3

### MIGRANTS, INTERPROVINCIAL CONFLICT, AND THE CONTINUATION OF FORCED REMOVAL FROM THE CITIES, 1980s–2010s

*The more developed rural coastal areas are more likely to recruit more laborers from outside, while those areas which are densely-populated and short on resources may expand the export of labor.*

–*China Daily*, 1991<sup>126</sup>

*We should not lightly talk about the mass relocation of the rural population at this stage... If we talk about the mass relocation of the rural population now, peasants will all wish to go to big cities to make lots of money. How can this be tolerated?*

–Zhu Rongji, Vice Premier of the PRC, 1994<sup>127</sup>

The commencement of economic reforms in 1978 brought drastic changes in regards to population mobility that resulted in conflicting viewpoints between the migrant-sending inland provinces and the migrant-receiving coastal provinces. With the rapidly rising number of migrants by the early 1990s, certain inland provinces sought to intentionally export migrant labor as a tool for economic growth and revenue production. With the advent of free markets, the option for temporary residence and easier availability to foodstuffs, the controlling of the migratory movement across the PRC became increasingly difficult for coastal cities and provinces. As seen in this chapter, the provinces that most migrants hailed from were devoid of industrial employment opportunities, and were exceedingly poor when compared to the coastal provinces. Albeit under constant pressure, authorities from the PRC's inland provinces felt they

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<sup>126</sup>“Influx of Rural Workers Alarms Government,” *China Daily* in English, June 14, 1991, 3, in FBIS-China, June 21, 1991, 36.

<sup>127</sup>“Zhu Rongji On the Present Economic Situation in China,” *Ching Pao Daily* in Chinese no. 208, November 5, 1994, 38-40, in FBIS-China, November 24, 1994, 44.

had little choice but to allow the movement of laborers from within their jurisdiction to the prosperous coastal provinces of Beijing, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, and Tianjin; this would not only benefit migrants at the household level but also the province as a whole via remittances. Despite the increase in demand for migrant labor during the 1980s and 1990s by private and foreign-funded enterprises, some authorities in the coastal provinces urged order over the rapidly growing migrant population.

Before 1978, the migrant population was relatively small in size when compared to the country's population as a whole. This was due to the strict management of the planned economy, coupled with rigid administration of the *hukou* system. Immediately after Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the government urged cadres to "strictly control the development of the large cities, rationally develop the medium cities, and vigorously promote the development of small cities" in an attempt to keep migrants away from cities of 500,000 people or more.<sup>128</sup> Nonetheless, the 1980s saw an increased demand for labor in the PRC's coastal cities, which added to the continuous growing trend of China's floating population. After economic reform began in 1978 there were still only a few million migrants moving long-distances in search of employment. The government's 3<sup>rd</sup> national census in 1982 estimated that there were 6 to 8 million migrants for that year. This would account for only 0.67 to 0.75% of the PRC's total population, but was contradictory to the PRC's focus of maintaining order in the cities.<sup>129</sup>

By the mid-1980s, the PRC's floating population had experienced a period of rapid growth. The migrant population had risen in part due to a central government decision and its consequences. The PRC's decision in 1985 to allow farmers nationwide an opportunity for

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<sup>128</sup>Chaoze Cheng, "Internal Migration in Mainland China: the Impact of Government Policy," *Issues and Studies* 27, no. 8 (June, 1991): 63-64.

<sup>129</sup>National Population and Family Planning Commission of P.R. China, "Nine Trends of Changes," 1.

temporary residency (3 to 6 month stay) in the towns greatly influenced ruralites to seek non-agricultural employment far from their village.<sup>130</sup> The consequence for the coastal governments was an increase in profitability through cheap migrant labor, but also the loosening of state control over population mobility, which allowed the migrant population to reach 18 million by 1984.<sup>131</sup> Also, one cannot ignore the fact that the rural commune structure was dissolving, and by that same year, 98% of rural households had been decollectivized, greatly freeing and motivating rural peasants to search for employment in the cities and towns.<sup>132</sup> However, in spite of the impressive growth of rural industry and its impact on ruralites mobility and job opportunities, the small town-oriented factories were not enough to resolve the problem of the surplus rural laborers, and the inland provincial governments' goals of economic growth which had been stagnant for decades. By August of 1988, the floating population had reached the 50 million mark, with Tianjin having 860,000 migrants, Wuhan with 800,000, Guangzhou with 1.1 million, Beijing with 1.15 million, and Shanghai having nearly 2 million migrants.<sup>133</sup>

In 1988, Guangdong Province was the first to set up a co-operational management system for migrants who crossed provincial boundaries. The system allowed many labor-exporting inland provinces to establish labor service management offices in Guangdong's major cities in order to more easily export their migrants to the coast in an orderly way. However, Guangdong simultaneously began to enforce strict hiring procedures on local manufacturing enterprises which demanded that all migrants from outside the province possess their ID card, an official temporary *hukou*, and a permit to prove that they had employment in one of the province's cities.

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<sup>130</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, September 8, 1985.

<sup>131</sup>National Population and Family Planning Commission of P.R. China, "Nine Trends of Changes," 2.

<sup>132</sup>Gordon White, *Riding the Tiger: The Politics of Economic Reform in Post-Mao China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 100.

<sup>133</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, August 14, 1988.



In this regard, Guangdong had found the co-operational system particularly effective as a labor managing mechanism but not as a method to stop the stream of migrants which made the province the most popular destination for migrant labor. Furthermore, Guangdong began to stop hiring migrant workers during the peak spring travel period of January and through February.<sup>134</sup> Despite attempts like Guangdong's to create a more regulated and orderly movement of laborers into their region, many coastal provinces would revert to launching campaigns to stop unregistered migrants from staying in their cities. Termed "local protectionism" by one newspaper, these campaigns involved "discharging rural laborers" and "forbidding the free movement of farmers."<sup>135</sup>

In March of 1989, the *People's Daily* published an article claiming that there were 1.3 million migrants in Beijing. Being the capital of the PRC, the city normally had a particularly aggressive stance towards migrants and repeatedly made efforts to protect the city's image from the growing number of migrant laborers in the city.<sup>136</sup> Despite claims made by the poor inland provinces expressing their migrants' economic contribution to both sending and receiving regions, Beijing continued enforcing its priority of order in the cities. For example, on the morning of March 17, 1989, over 100 of the city's top public security personnel gathered to "consolidate and ban" certain illegal migrant labor markets that took place throughout the city.<sup>137</sup> These labor markets were commonly frequented by women from the countryside who were in search of employment as housemaids and helpers for the urban elderly. During the officials' gathering, one of the largest labor markets targeted by authorities was located near to the

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<sup>134</sup>"Untitled," *Banyue Tan* (Half-Moon Journal) in Chinese, February 25, 1994, 9-11, in FBIS-China, April 12, 1994, 57-58.

<sup>135</sup>"Influx of Rural Laborers Alarms Government," *China Daily* in English, June 14, 1991, 3, in FBIS-China, June 21, 1991, 36.

<sup>136</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, March 15, 1989.

<sup>137</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, March 17, 1989.

Jianguomen underpass in eastern Beijing and was deemed “illegal” by security personnel.<sup>138</sup>

Migrants found at the underpass were urged to find ways of returning to their native villages at once, and at 4:00 p.m. that same day, Beijing Public Security had detained more than 130 migrants who refused to leave or had nowhere else to go.<sup>139</sup> Hours later, city media described the disbanded migrant labor market:

The spontaneous labor market under the Jianguomen underpass has been active for 5 years...this market was not thoroughly banned for a long time, and the maximum amount of laborers in the market has reached over 1,000. They [the migrants] come from over 16 different provinces. This market has seriously affected the capital’s public security, traffic order, and city appearance.<sup>140</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, state media had confirmed that many of the major cities and provinces along the coast had resorted to “local protectionism,” by rounding up and removing migrants from the city.<sup>141</sup> In spite of some authorities professing that rural-to-urban migration was “an indication of social-progress” and an “inevitable trend in reform, open-door policy, and economic development,” coastal provinces unceasingly backed their priority of maintaining order in their cities.<sup>142</sup> The constant actions to effectively limit the growth of migrant numbers in the cities led to renewed efforts to forcefully expel migrants back to their provinces of origin. In some cases, the motive to clear migrants out of the city was in an effort to prepare the city for special events such as the Asian Games which were held in Beijing in 1990, where an estimated

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<sup>138</sup>“Beijing Cracks Down on Illegal Labor Market,” *Beijing City Service* in Chinese, March 17, 1989, in FBIS-China, April 11, 1989, 46.

<sup>139</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>141</sup>“Influx of Rural Workers Alarms Government,” *China Daily* in English, June 14, 1993, 3, in FBIS-China, June 21, 1991, 36.

<sup>142</sup>“Beijing Hosts Conference on Internal Migration,” *Xinhua* in English, December 6, 1989, in FBIS-China, December 15, 1989, 29.

200,000 migrants were cleared from the city.<sup>143</sup> That same year, Beijing's neighboring city Tianjin also expelled roughly 50,000 migrants to improve the city's image for the games.<sup>144</sup>

Despite the constant removal of migrants out of the coastal cities by authorities, leaders from the inland provinces urged the coastal provinces to acknowledge their desperate economic situation. Throughout the 1990s most Chinese officials along the coast acknowledged that migrant labor came from all provinces of the country. However, a group of inland provinces with huge rural populations were all considered by many coastal officials to be the top migrant exporting regions since the mid-1980s: Anhui, Guangxi, Guizhou, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Sichuan—all of which rank among the poorest in the country.<sup>145</sup> Officials from Sichuan Province in 1993 had said that the steady rise in the migrant population coming from their region was caused by a drop in the revenues earned from farming coupled with only a marginal increase in province's total income during the reform period. Similarly, Sun Tongchuan, mayor of Chongqing in the country's mountainous west-central region, claimed that the "migrant problem" that the coastal regions faced was "a reflection of the economic gap between inland and coastal regions of the country." In March of 1993, Xiong Qingchuan, party chief of southwestern China's Hunan Province, voiced his concern towards the coastal provinces while attending the National People's Congress. Xiong stated: "for the good of the nation" it would be "unwise" to "forcefully prevent" rural farmers from going eastward and seeking employment and, if anything, the central and coastal governments should "train and organize" migrants more properly, rather than removing them and attempting to prevent them from

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<sup>143</sup>Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship*, 69.

<sup>144</sup>"Untitled," *Agence France-Press*, May 29, 1990, in FBIS-China, May 30, 1990, 67.

<sup>145</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, January 7, 1994.

migrating.<sup>146</sup> Even officials from China's northeast had emphasized the importance of migration for their region. In February of 1994, one provincial leader from Heilongjiang Province stated that "after one person leaves home, the entire family will be freed from poverty!" While yet another official from nearby Jilin Province further asserted that, "We should send the surplus rural labor force to work elsewhere and deem the action an important way or even a strategic measure to free the people from poverty."<sup>147</sup> That same year, then Governor of Sichuan Province, Xiao Yang, in an interview with Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, defended the practice of migrants that search for work in the developed coastal regions:

During harvests and other busy times, the rural work hands stay in the fields... in slack seasons, they go outside the province and look for work. They [the migrants] provide cheap labor for the richer provinces and remit their earnings back home. This is a sound economic principle for labor management.<sup>148</sup>

While leaders of the inland regions defended their claim for exporting labor, coastal provinces continued to put pressure on the migrant sending regions, especially Xiao Yang's Sichuan Province. Beijing urged Sichuan to establish a quota on the number of migrant "exports" that leave the province at the very least, but no agreement was reached. Guangdong Province and its most prosperous cities of Guangzhou and Shenzhen had agreed to make "financial contributions" to Xiao Yang's province of Sichuan in an exchange "for an end to unwanted Sichuan laborers," however, this also failed.<sup>149</sup> The stance taken by Sichuan's leaders on the

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<sup>146</sup>"Deputies Discuss Flow of Rural Surplus Labor," *Xinhua* in English, March 30, 1993, in FBIS-China, March 30, 1993, 53.

<sup>147</sup>"Another Year of Ups and Downs in the Annual Upsurge of Migrants," *Banyue Tan* (Half-Moon Journal) in Chinese, February 25, 1994, 9-11, in FBIS-China, April 12, 1994, 57.

<sup>148</sup>"Beijing Criticizes Sichuan Over Migrant Labor Flows," *South China Morning Post* in English, June 20, 1994, in FBIS-China, June 20, 1994, 37.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.* 38.

topic of migration shows how important the exporting of labor was for the province's development. Hence, migration to the coastal provinces was non-negotiable and necessary.

Remittances that were sent back to the sending province were a major reason for the poor provinces to defend their actions of releasing migrant labor from the province. A radio broadcast from Jiangxi Province's capital Nanchang in 1992 acknowledged that "by the end of November this year the province exported more than 500,000 persons to those coastal open and developed areas" and that migrants "annually earned more than 2 billion *yuan* from labor service exports."<sup>150</sup> Similarly, that same year, the 5 million migrants, who left Sichuan Province sent back an estimated 8 billion *yuan* in remittances.<sup>151</sup> The movement of ruralites to coastal regions was not always done randomly by ruralites themselves, but was sometimes planned and coordinated by the inland provincial government. Cheng Kejie, Chairman of the Government of the Guangxi Zhuang National Autonomous Region, admitted that the most effective method of alleviating poverty in rural areas is to relocate people to more developed regions both in and out of Guangxi. Cheng confessed that he had plans to export 1.3 million rural laborers every year to Guangdong and Hainan Provinces.<sup>152</sup>

As we have seen, the problem of large-scale rural-to-urban migration in the PRC was contentious not only due to the overall large number of migrants, but was also the result of conflicting economic interests between the migrant exporting and migrant-receiving regions. In an attempt to grow economically some of the country's inland provinces like Hunan, Guangxi, and the populous Sichuan Province intentionally took advantage of the coastal areas' difficulty in

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<sup>150</sup>"Untitled," *Nanchang Jiangxi People's Radio Network* in Chinese, December 1, 1992, in FBIS-China, December 11, 1992, 51.

<sup>151</sup>"Article Views Problem of Migrant Laborers," *China Daily* in English, January 31, 1994, 6, in FBIS-China, February 3, 1994, 44-45.

<sup>152</sup>"Guangxi Leader on Migration to Solve Poverty Problem," *Zhongguo Xinwen She (China News Agency)* in Chinese, March 9, 1995, in FBIS-China, March 21, 1995, 44.

controlling and enforcing proper migrant inflow. These provinces which had been largely left out of the development scheme of the reform era saw an opportunity to use their large rural populations to their advantage. As the floating population's numbers grew rapidly into the early 1990s, leaders from the financially impoverished provinces of China's interior vigorously defended themselves and their exporting of rural surplus labor against the criticisms from developed regions. Urban officials were frequently constrained by state protocol to deal with the migrant situation by way of deportation, or were blinded by their own biases against ruralites from their prominent position as an urban citizen that held an urban *hukou*. But, as migrants became generators of profit in the cities, some officials from the central and local governments embraced a more relaxed approach to dealing with the migrant population.

While various local governments were exploring ways to better manage the floating population, the Ministry of Labor published the *Urban and Rural Employment Coordination Plan* in October of 1993. This plan urged for a national organized effort to "guide the rural labor exodus through legitimate channels" and for the hiring regions to form an up-to-date incoming laborer management system which would better manage the peasants' trans-regional migration and lessen the conflicts between provincial leaders. Although Guangdong was the first to devise such a plan in 1988, it was overrun by the huge amount of migrants coming from outside of the province. By putting the *Urban and Rural Employment Coordination Plan* into operation, the Ministry of Labor expected to make certain an orderly labor flow was to take place to and from all localities in three years time.<sup>153</sup> By 1993, the amount of migrants who left inland provinces

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<sup>153</sup>"Untitled," *Banyue Tan* (Half-Moon Journal) in Chinese, February 25, 1994, 9-11, in FBIS-China, April 12, 1994, 57-58.

was in the tens-of-millions. In Jiangxi Province alone, the outflow of migrants to another province grew from 200,000 in 1990 to 3 million in 1993.<sup>154</sup>

One year later, in December of 1994, an interview with Vice Labor Minister Zhu Jiazhen was broadcast on the *Beijing Central People's Radio Network*. The Vice Minister said,

Basically, the migration of peasant laborers in recent years was pretty much without planning and order. Their movement was concentrated especially around the Spring Festival (January through February), causing what we called a tidal wave of peasant laborers. This tidal wave has truly caused many problems and has had a tremendous impact on agricultural production, transportation, and social life...Therefore, it is very important and urgent that we strengthen the control of the migration of peasant laborers to ensure that they move in an orderly way.<sup>155</sup>

While migrant labor did help China's coastal regions reach their developmental goals through their low-wage labor, urban leaders continued to criticize the less developed interior provinces for not curbing the flow of laborers from their regions.<sup>156</sup> Even leaders from the central government initially sided with the coastal regions to denounce the lack of management over the migrant labor by the inland provinces. Vice Premier Zhu Rongji, one of the most devoted supporters of economic reform in the PRC stated in 1994: "Nowadays about 20 million peasants are migrating to the cities each year. This cannot be tolerated. Today, we still need to practice economies of scale...and make peasants stay in the rural areas."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, December 9, 2009.

<sup>155</sup>"Untitled," *Beijing Central People's Radio Network*, December 24, 1994, in FBIS-China, January 4, 1995, 21.

<sup>156</sup>"Shanghai Experiences Negative Population Growth," *Xinhua* in English, February 21, 1994, in FBIS-China, February 22, 1994, 60.

<sup>157</sup>"Zhu Rongji On the Present Economic Situation in China," *Ching Pao Daily* in Chinese no. 208, November 5, 1994, 38-40, in FBIS-China, November 24, 1994, 44.

By 1994, Hunan Province alone was exporting more than 5 million rural laborers a year. Furthering Guangdong's initial management system six years earlier, Hunan along with seven other southern provinces had begun to establish a labor service cooperation information network—with more than 60% of Hunan's counties setting up offices in Guangdong, primarily in the cities Guangzhou and Zhuhai.<sup>158</sup> Some migrant-receiving cities had stipulated that each migrant worker group that came from major labor exporting provinces, like Sichuan and Hunan, must have a leader or work coordinator present upon the migrant group's arrival in the city. If it was a larger than normal group then a government cadre from the sending province would need to accompany them. As the floating population's numbers grew towards the hundred million mark, these coordination rules were still largely ignored by the labor seeking ruralites and their exporting regions.<sup>159</sup>

Building off of Guangdong Province's establishment of a migrant labor market system, Beijing was also able to better manage the floating population coming from other parts of the country. Although no quota was ever reached between Beijing and the sending regions, Beijing had begun to establish a "cooperative relationship" in labor flows with many of its surrounding provinces like Hebei and Henan. The idea to disperse rather than block the migrant population was effective in that it helped move laborers to where their work was actually needed, which limited the amount of jobless migrants in the cities. But it certainly did not stop the millions of migrants coming towards them. The dispersal method worked in two primary ways—coordinated dispersal, and physical dispersal.

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<sup>158</sup>"Untitled," *Banyue Tan* (Half-Moon Journal) in Chinese, February 25, 1994, 9-11, in FBIS-China, April 12, 1994, 57-58.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*



In Tianjin, the coordinated dispersal method was extremely effective, reversing its aggressive policies in prohibiting rural-to-urban migration. In the Hongqiao district of Tianjin, which was a famous gathering place for rural laborers from Hebei and Shandong Provinces, the district labor department had set up an employment agency which helped accommodate the job seeking process for migrants, many of whom spoke distinct provincial and rural dialects. Some agency's were even noted as providing food and lodging service to them.<sup>160</sup> However, before these services could be given to migrants in the cities, physical dispersal was at times needed. Another example of physically dispersing migrants instead of blocking them from entering the cities occurred just outside of Shanghai in early 1994, as migrants moved eastward by train. The scene was described by the *China News Agency*:

A fifteen-car train arrived in Shanghai from the city of Fuyang in Anhui Province on February 14. On board were 2,850 laborers from outside the municipality, signaling the beginning of the spring labor influx. Of this group, most were between 20 and 30 years of age, and more than half had never left their home villages before. Most will stay in Shanghai, while others will head to Hangzhou, Wenzhou, Ningbo, and Changzhou to seek work. The Shanghai Public Security Department already has prepared a number of vehicles to transport laborers to other places outside the city, and the Shanghai police have strengthened their forces to keep public order.<sup>161</sup>

The burdens that migrants put on a developing railway network were enormous. This was especially so during the Spring Festival season when many migrants made their annual trip home. In December of 1994, local authorities along the coast actually urged migrants to stay in the cities in order to protect the rail network which commonly saw trains jam packed with

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Except for Shanghai, the other four coastal destination cities in the passage are all located in either Jiangsu or Zhejiang Province. "Laborers Pour into Shanghai in Spring Labor Influx," *Zhongguo Xinwen She (China News Agency)* in Chinese, February 16, 1994, in FBIS-China, March 22, 1994, 62.

standing room only. This method of not letting migrants leave the cities came from a State Council meeting, which required coastal cities to restrict at least 60 percent of the migrant laborers in the city to spend the Chinese New Year there in the city. The cities of Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai were urged to suspend all outside labor recruiting for an entire month. All of these changes, state media claimed, were to “ensure the orderly movement of migrant laborers.”<sup>162</sup> Over time, urban bureaucracies were urged to work patiently and meticulously in order to “convince the public and make arrangements for migrants in an effective and orderly manner.”<sup>163</sup> This was especially important in the Special Economic Zones along China’s southern coast, which had some of the highest rates of rural-to-urban migration, and where migrants comprised 10 to 25% of a city’s population.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>“Orderly Movement of Migrant Laborers is Conducive to Social Stability,” *Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service* in Chinese, December 3, 1994, in FBIS-China, December 7, 1994, 22.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>164</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, December 2, 1994.



**Figure 6.** Article Heading, *People's Daily*, July 11, 1995. This newspaper heading from a *People's Daily* article urged officials in the coastal city of Xiamen in Fujian Province to deal with the incoming migrants in an organized manner. Translation: “Work from a Non-Orderly State to an Orderly State: The Xiamen Floating Population Administration has Governmental Regulations to Follow.”

Later that year, while the coastal cities began taking a more accommodative approach to dealing with rural-to-urban migration, the Ministry of Public Security still focused on maintaining public order. As the bureaucracy that oversaw *hukou* registration as well as deportation campaigns, Public Security continued to urge coastal provinces and cities with high rates of in-migration to better coordinate the migratory movements with those provinces that export their labor.<sup>165</sup> By the summer of 1995, the migrant population was 70 million people, this brought forth increasing challenges for Public Security to proper manage the movement of

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<sup>165</sup>Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship*, 86.

migrant laborers and the proper distribution of it.<sup>166</sup> One attempt at better dealing with the incoming migrants was the establishment of Migrant Service Centers throughout the country. The migrant worker service center in Beijing was created in April of 1996, although some cities like Guangzhou and Shenzhen had established centers earlier. Unsurprisingly, the first of Beijing's migrant service centers was located in close proximity to one of the city's primary railway stations. These service centers were said to have replaced "illegally run employment centers," and could help "broaden the recruitment of migrant workers" as well as "place the employment of emigrant workers under proper control."<sup>167</sup> With urban officials' accommodation approach, the PRC was taking a step away from simply giving order to migrants as to where they should go, and began to take into account the job seeking goals of migrants—ultimately benefitting national growth at the same time.<sup>168</sup> However, when migrant-sending and receiving regions sought to coordinate the floating population's movements, it also put Public Security in a difficult position, since their organization's primary tasks were to maintain public order and administer the proper registration of those entering the cities.

During the 1990s and into the 2000s, coastal regions were the harshest critics of uncontrolled flows of interprovincial migration despite their attempts to better accommodate migrants. The coastal provinces also remained the most sought after destinations for job-seeking migrants due to the higher wages found there. Between 1990 and 2000, the size of the PRC's migrant population increased the fastest in the eastern provinces of the country, such as Zhejiang (270 percent), Shanghai (430 percent), Beijing (196 percent), and Guangdong (272 percent). In

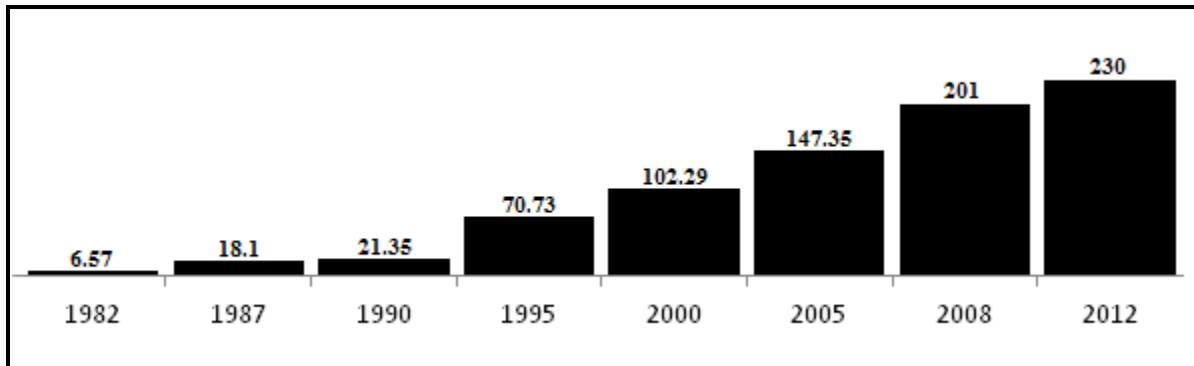
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<sup>166</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, July 9, 1995. This article estimated that only 40 percent of the PRC's total migrant population had actually registered properly with the Ministry of Public Security once in the city.

<sup>167</sup>"Untitled," *Zhongguo Xinwen She* (China News Agency) in English, April 18, 1996, in FBIS-China, April 22, 1996, 43.

<sup>168</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, December 2, 1994.

spite of the central government's efforts to regulate the hiring of rural labor from within the province, Guangdong, which was home to 3 out of 4 of the original special economic zones established by Deng Xiaoping, became an especially frequent recruiter of outside labor. With less than 7 percent of the country's total population, the province had roughly a quarter of internal migrants by the year 2000. From 1990 to 2000, the migrant population in Guangdong roughly tripled in size, growing to more than 20 million.<sup>169</sup> In 2000, the floating population's numbers reached over 100 million people.<sup>170</sup>



**Figure 7.** Numbers of China's Migrant Population, 1982 to 2012 (in millions).  
Source: Data from the PRC's Report on Annual Migrant Population Development, posted in, *China Daily*, August 8, 2012.

As migrant numbers grew, coastal provinces and cities had two different ways of dealing with migrants. First, too better coordinate and manage the migratory movement in a more productive and orderly way which would benefit both receiving regions and the migrants or, secondly, to continue forcefully expelling migrants from the cities. Coastal leaders commonly chose to better manage urban in-migration, but conducted ad hoc drives to remove migrant

<sup>169</sup>Zai Liang, and Zhongdong Ma, "China's Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census," *Population and Development Review* 30, No. 3 (Sept., 2004): 480-484.

<sup>170</sup>National Population and Family Planning Commission of the PRC, *Nine Trends of Changes of China's Floating Population since the Adoption of the Reform and Opening-Up Policy*, Beijing: China Population Today 25, No.4 (2008): 3.

populations from the city at the same time. However, the forced relocation of migrants and the unemployed during the Mao era was largely done to protect limited resources and most importantly to safeguard the proper socialist development of the cities. In more recent times, the removal of migrants was commonly done not for the progress of industrial or socialist development, but to protect a city's image, as urbanites and urban authorities saw migrants from the countryside as an eyesore. In some cases, unregistered migrants were forced to leave in order to secure public spaces throughout the city, like during the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the founding of the PRC, when in 1999 an estimated 16,000 people were removed from the central districts of Beijing.<sup>171</sup>

During the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, many of the PRC's largest cities had launched an attack on "illegal migrant schools" to pressure unauthorized city dwellers to leave. Most of the migrant parents, who are scarcely educated themselves, are desperate to provide a better education for their children but cannot afford the public school fees nor to properly enroll them due to their lack of a local *hukou*. In October of 2001, letters were handed out by Public Security officials throughout Beijing's Fengtai District as they blocked the entrance to more than 50 primary schools which served roughly 10,000 young students of migrant laborers. The letter stated, "So that your child can receive a regular education in a safe environment, the Fengtai District Education Committee has decided to close down schools that have not received approval from authorities." A semester at Fengtai's migrant schools cost under \$40. In a Public school, migrant children must pay the tuition, alongside an extra nonresident fee of \$72 and an additional \$100 in so-called "general fees."<sup>172</sup> Such fees are normally out of migrant parents' abilities and

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<sup>171</sup>"AFP: Beijing Expels Migrant Workers Prior to Anniversary," in FBIS-China, September 8, 1999.

<sup>172</sup>"District in Beijing to Shut Schools for Migrants," *New York Times*, October 31, 2001.

commonly results in the children being sent back to the village or attending no school at all. Although detrimental to the success of migrant families, the ad hoc campaigns to rid the cities of migrant schools, which often times lack basic necessities, is not an effective deterrent in preventing the migrant inflow from rural areas since the migrant population has grown rapidly. It does however, pressure migrants to think first about bringing their families to the city, a growing trend which has become an increasingly larger characteristic of rural-to-urban migration in the PRC during the last two decades.

In March of 2001, the central government made a decision to reform the *hukou* system in an attempt to limit rural-to-urban migration to the largest cities, and to make it easier for rural migrants to attain urban residency. On October 1, 2001, the PRC launched the experimental *hukou* policy in more than 20,000 small towns. The *hukou* reform of 2001 allowed for three changes. First, the option of attaining residency in the small towns was made more open to migrant laborers who had legally found employment there. Second, the small-sized cities and some inland provincial capitals had removed the restrictions on the amount of migrants who could apply for permanent residency status, albeit still at a high fee. And third, mega cities like Beijing and Shanghai had adopted a policy of “widening the gate, raising the price,” which allowed a higher number of migrants to attain legal residency, but at an increased price.<sup>173</sup> During the 1990s, employers in large cities could only recruit laborers without an urban *hukou* if they held a temporary permit through selected local government branches.<sup>174</sup> In January of 2003, these rules were abolished with the promulgation of the Chinese State Council’s *Circular on the*

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<sup>173</sup>Huang Ping, and Zhan Shaohua, “Internal Migration in China: Linking it to Development,” (International Organization for Migration: Regional Conference on Migration and Development in Asia, 2005): 7-8

<sup>174</sup>Beijing Municipal People’s Congress, *Regulation of the Management of People coming to Beijing for Work or Business* (Beijing, 1995) 2.

*Improvement of the Services and Management of Migrant Workers*. According to the *Circular*, local governments no longer had the amount of control over the recruitment habits of private enterprises, and exclaimed that migrant workers should receive the same rights and status as local *hukou* holders and would not be subjected to the “forced repatriation policy” should they be properly registered.<sup>175</sup>

Two months after the State Council’s *Circular*, in March of 2003, a young male migrant worker in the city of Guangzhou named Sun Zhigang was mistakenly arrested by police for staying in the city without temporary registration and taken to a “custody and repatriation” center. These centers were a kind of prison where migrants and beggars found without a local *hukou*, working permit, or identity card were detained.<sup>176</sup> Sun Zhigang was later found beaten to death during his incarceration while awaiting deportation from the city. The situation set off a massive public outcry and eventually led to the elimination of the “custody and repatriation” centers that were established after the 1982 promulgation of the *Measures of Detaining and Repatriating Floating and Begging People in the Cities*.<sup>177</sup> After the incident involving Sun Zhigang, the police and public security in the PRC had lost one of the most effective measures of forcing migrants to properly register, as well as a legal basis to deport them from the city. However, this did not mean that police and public security did not continue to deport someone on the basis of their *hukou* status. By the mid-2000s, the large-scale efforts to round-up and expel migrants and migrant communities from the city came to be known by urban officials as “strike

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<sup>175</sup>Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, *Circular on the Improvement of the Services and Management of Migrant Workers* (Beijing, 2003), [http://202.123.110.5/zwgk/2005-08/12/content\\_21839.htm](http://202.123.110.5/zwgk/2005-08/12/content_21839.htm).

<sup>176</sup>The Public Security and Police in the PRC refer to the offense of not having proper residency, a work permit, or an identity card in the city, as the “three withouts.”

<sup>177</sup>Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, *The Assistance and Management Measures of Beggars and Homeless People Living in Cities* (Beijing, 2003), <http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/PI-c/351679.htm>.



hard campaigns.”<sup>178</sup> In July of 2003, the large industrial city of Shenyang in China’s northeast became the first city to claim that it would abolish the temporary permit system.<sup>179</sup> Shenyang was soon followed by Jinan, Wuhan, Beijing, and later Shanghai.<sup>180</sup> However, these claims were either never fully implemented or put into effect for very long because of the cities’ top priority was still controlling the migrant population. With more power given to the companies and enterprises in the hiring process due to the 2003 promulgation of the *Circular on the Improvement of the Services and Management of Migrant Workers*, coastal cities continued rounding up migrants and either detaining, or sending them back to their province of origin.

One of the largest attempts at expelling migrants in order to improve a city’s image occurred before the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. In September of 2006, the state-run *Beijing Morning Post* reported that as many as 1 million migrant workers in the city could be expelled before the games began in August of 2008.<sup>181</sup> Although one Beijing official claimed the idea to expel migrants was merely “a suggestion put forward by experts,” he confirmed that migrants in the city would be “persuaded to return to their homes.”

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<sup>178</sup>Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *China’s Household Registration System: Discrimination and Reforms* (Washington D.C., 2005), 21-22.

<sup>179</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, October 14, 2006

<sup>180</sup>For Jinan and Wuhan, *Renmin Ribao*, March 28, 2005; For Beijing, “Regulations on the Management of Visitors to Beijing will be Repealed, But the Temporary Residency Permit still Applies,” *Xin Jing Bao* (New Beijing Daily,) January 26, 2007, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2005-01-26/02274945845s.shtml>; For Shanghai, “Migrant Workers in China,” *China Labour Bulletin*, June 6, 2008, <http://www.china-labour.org.hk/en/node/100259>.

<sup>181</sup>“Official Denies Reports Beijing Plans to Expel Migrants for Olympics,” *USA Today*, September 27, 2006. [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/summer/2006-09-27-beijing-migrants\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/olympics/summer/2006-09-27-beijing-migrants_x.htm)



**Figure 8.** Migrant workers waiting in a Beijing train station to depart before the Olympics begin. The poster in the background reads “Beijing Welcomes You.”  
Source: *New York Times*, August 8, 2008

Beijing officials had also ordered all construction work to cease in the city for the following year in order to free the city from construction-related pollution during the games.<sup>182</sup> The abandoning of construction projects also served as a method to force thousands of migrant workers to leave Beijing and return back to their villages in the countryside. One migrant worker returning to Hebei Province said, “The Olympics have finally come to China, and I won’t even be here.” Like thousands of others who packed the capital city’s train stations in the months and weeks before the games, he was encouraged to leave town by a lack of construction work and an unwritten government policy to clear migrant workers out until the tourists, dignitaries, and journalists went home. Some migrants admitted that they were leaving the city not only due to a lack of employment, but also out of fear. One woman, a seamstress from Sichuan, claimed that

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

she and her co-workers at a local suitcase-making factory were insisted by Public Security that anyone who remained in Beijing without a residency permit would receive a steep fine and quickly deported. Miss Li tried to attain the temporary document, but like many, she was too late. “I should be happy for the Olympics, but I’m angry,” Miss Li said, “I don’t think I will be coming back.”<sup>183</sup> Adding to the attempts made to limit the migrant population in Beijing, on March 25, 2010, the Beijing government publicized that it would be removing between 150,000 and 1 million migrant workers from the city’s central Chaoyang district. Beijing authorities also declared plans to destroy over 50 district villages that had high densities of low-income migrant workers. The relocations and demolitions, one state media report said, were to “improve the population structure” and make Chaoyang district more attractive to “civilized residents.”<sup>184</sup>

Interprovincial labor movements have become far more coordinated than they have been since the beginning of the PRC’s reform period. However, the 2003 *Circular on the Improvement of the Services and Management of Migrant Workers* has given private and local enterprises located in Beijing and the coastal provinces huge amounts of control over the migrant hiring process. This increased control by private enterprises increased the flow of migrants towards the coast as they frequently hire migrants without proper registration or a contract.

Starting in early 2011, the Beijing government passed strict regulations for living conditions in an attempt to improve the city’s image. On February 1, 2011, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development issued a regulation that forbids the renting-out of basements to migrant workers. A few months later, the Beijing government issued another

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<sup>183</sup>“Olympic Message to Some in Beijing is ‘Please Leave’,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2008.

<sup>184</sup>“China: Beijing Relocations Put Migrants at Risk,” *Human Rights Watch*, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/03/31/china-beijing-relocations-put-migrants-risk>

regulation insisting that a rental living space shall not be less than five square meters, affecting an estimated 1 million migrants who share small cramped spaces with other migrant laborers.<sup>185</sup>

While Beijing was enforcing strict regulations on living conditions to convince migrants to leave, far to the south, another city was also involved in a campaign to remove migrants. From February to April of 2011, the city of Shenzhen in south China's Guangdong Province had evicted about 80,000 "potentially unstable people" in a bid to secure social stability and a positive image for the then upcoming 26<sup>th</sup> Summer Universiade.<sup>186</sup> In an interview with the *Shenzhen Economic Daily*, the Vice Director of the Shenzhen Police Bureau Shen Shaobao stated that, "people living in Shenzhen without proper identity and those acting suspiciously are what we call unstable residents." Eight particular groups of people were listed as being "high-alert" category and included "nomads, unemployed vagrants, unregistered residents, and unclassified floating residents." Shen further emphasized that city-wide inspections would have a "special focus on the floating population."<sup>187</sup>

The differences of opinion that arose over the floating population between the poorer inland provinces and the wealthier, more developed coastal provinces are still a matter of contention. However, despite the continuation of local campaigns that aim to clear out migrants, some cities have tried to make life a little bit easier for migrant laborers. For example, in 2009 the Beijing government supported local lawyers to assist migrant workers with effective legal aid

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<sup>185</sup>"Beijing Faces Exodus of Migrants," *Zhongguo Hulanwang Xinwen Zhongxin* (China Internet Information Center,) Government of the People's Republic of China, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-09/10/content\\_26478596\\_2.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2012-09/10/content_26478596_2.htm).

<sup>186</sup>The Universiade is an international event in which university athletes from around the world compete in multi-sport competitions.

<sup>187</sup>"Shenzhen Evicts 80,000 'Unstable' Residents," *China Daily*, April 11, 2011. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2011-04/11/content\\_12305335.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/2011-04/11/content_12305335.htm).

when injured on the job.<sup>188</sup> In 2011, Shenyang had built a series of libraries throughout the city specifically for migrant workers.<sup>189</sup> Many cities have increased the number of service centers to help migrants find employment in the city. However, the removal of migrants from the cities has been constant in the PRC, but has also been relatively ineffective in deterring rural-to-urban migration. Deporting migrants back to the countryside is now largely done to protect the cities' image rather than to safeguard economic development like it was during the 1950s and 1960s.

Measures that involve the expelling of migrants from the city may have some small effect on controlling the floating population's total numbers in the urban centers, but as long as a significant gap exists between the rural and urban living standards, peasants from the countryside will continue to evade migration controls in hope of improving their quality of life. Yet, the repatriation of migrants back to their villages still remains a preferred tactic by local officials to quickly deal with the issue of urbanization in the PRC today. How any government, local or central, could successfully contain a population movement of this magnitude without mending the economic disparities that lay between urban and rural China is hard to imagine.

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<sup>188</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, October 13, 2009.

<sup>189</sup>"Library Built for Migrant Workers Opens in Shenyang," *Xinhua*, September 20, 2011.  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/photo/2011-09/20/c\\_131149073.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/photo/2011-09/20/c_131149073.htm).

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the pace of internal migration in the PRC was accelerated after the economic reforms began in 1978, but it would be false to claim that there was no such movement before then. State management of rural-to-urban migration during the Mao years (1949–1976) was not immediately enforced as a measure to prohibit urban in-migration. Instead, disallowing entrance to the city was combined with a few periods of when rural-to-urban migration was allowed, and at times even encouraged. However, for the most part, peasant migration to the major metropolitan centers was stringently denied by the PRC's urban and central authorities. The tradition of preventing rural-to-urban migration was constant throughout Maoist China, and the apparatus that is the *hukou* system allowed the state to sort and divide rural and urban society as well as control, and at times suppress non-state sponsored population movement.

The restrictive stance of the PRC towards geographic mobility was first established in order to maintain the correct path headed for the launching of the First Five Year Plan. This could only be done if cities were securely restricted and scarce resources protected in the cities. By using the *hukou* system to restrict the majority of the population from entering in the cities; peasants were shut out from legally residing in urban zones. Initially, migrants were banned from coming to the city in order to protect the cities importance as industrial centers. This was enforced through the long evolution of the *hukou* system, and the PRC's transformation of it to suit their needs of controlling society and its movements.

During the three decades of Mao Zedong's rule, the cities were sealed off from the countryside which allowed for extraordinary economic, cultural, and social differences to develop between urban and rural society in the PRC. Over time, urbanites and officials in the

cities began to view migrants differently as dirty, poorly educated, and un-modern. Fueled by state-media reports labeling the migratory movements as a “blind flow” or “blind influx” of laborers, peasants from the countryside became even further marginalized.

At first, the post-1978 reform era policies relaxed the measures on mobility adopted by the PRC toward the migrating peasants, yet never fully allowed them to integrate into urban society. Migrants could thus enter the cities, but the state would not need to care for them. The economic energies along the coast that produced the push and pull factors that prompted migrants to move across provincial boundaries in post-Mao China was strikingly similar to migrants crossing international borders. The economic growth of modern China relied on its capacity to offer these industries with cheap, abundant, and closely controlled labor. As the demand for workers was concentrated within the coastal provinces, it suddenly drew rural laborers across provincial boundaries from the poor inland provinces.

Since the option for temporary residence in the cities was made available by the central government in 1985, it has served both to benefit economic growth as well as increase peasant’s income in the countryside.<sup>190</sup> The temporary *hukou* system that hires cheap labor from outside of the city, allows the city to benefit from the seemingly endless line of workers from the countryside who sought employment along the coast. In an effort to protect urban resources and the rate of rural-to-urban migration, the temporary system also served as a device to lessen the effects migrants had on the cities. By forcing migrants who want to come to the city into a temporary status, local urban governments have kept control over the recruitment of cheap “non-native” laborers from outside the province. Additionally, by only permitting farmers from the countryside to have a

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<sup>190</sup>*Renmin Ribao*, September 9, 1985.

temporary registration in the cities and local officials have intentionally made it more difficult for migrant laborers to succeed in the city.

The lower wage that migrants have earned in comparison to urban residents does not allow them to afford an urban living standard. Furthermore, by permitting migrant laborers to possess a temporary permit, local governments are given further justification to round up and forcefully expel those during “strike hard” campaigns who are not properly registered with the city labor bureau or public security. Despite the temporary *hukou*’s contribution to allowing migrants to work in cities, it has served the vital purpose of protecting the cities from overwhelming rates of in-migration and has given the government access to a massive labor force. The temporary status of registered migrants has done much to raise millions out of poverty, helped develop the Chinese economy, and has been a key factor in the contemporary rise in China’s rise to power. However, it can also be seen as a migration control system which attempts to limit the amount of migrants who come into the city. Working long hours, doing menial work, and toiling in dangerous workplaces, these migrants from the countryside accept pay that very few urban locals would work for. The rise in importance of migrant labor was quickly recognized by PRC officials, and eventually concurred that labor mobility should be managed rather than repressed entirely. However, by viewing how the ways the PRC government has continued to dictate population mobility, we can see how much, or how little, the PRC has changed.

At the center of the PRC’s ongoing internal migration process is the *hukou* system. The *hukou* has solidified the division between rural and urban China which had been firmly established during the 1950s in order to provide political stability for the



Communist Party's rule. This also wielded a tighter control over society because it made it very difficult to unite on common issues. However, the survival of the *hukou* after economic reform, and the establishment of a market system had not only created divisions within Chinese society, but also made migrant laborers from outside the city or province more susceptible to discrimination in the coastal cities, thus, leading to interprovincial conflicts over migration. Despite the *hukou*'s aims of dividing society, the difference of opinion over interprovincial migration between the inland and coastal provinces can be seen as an unintentional outcome of the PRC's migration control system.

Like many rapidly growing economies, the PRC is faced with millions who want to leave the countryside and work, or even live in the city. However, with the emergence of a global recession, how will migrants from the Chinese countryside be able to move to the cities if, one after another, the factories begin to shut down? In 2007, for instance, the shoe manufacturing industry in Guangdong Province, which supplies half the global demand for footwear, saw 1,000 shoe making factories shut down after laying off nearly 200,000 workers. That same year, millions of migrant workers from Sichuan, Hunan, Guangxi, and other inland provinces started to leave Guangdong to return to their villages in the countryside, creating a huge backflow of migration away from the coast. In the first ten months of 2008 alone, more than 15,000 small to medium-sized manufacturers either shut down their industries in Guangdong or relocated to Southeast Asia. In the city of Dongguan, 117 factories closed between September and October, leaving more than

20,000 workers without pay.<sup>191</sup> The next year, roughly 10 percent of the 65,000 Hong Kong-owned factories in the Pearl River Delta (Guangdong) closed after major profit losses.<sup>192</sup> In February of 2009, the central government issued a notice that required companies to notify city labor authorities before layoffs of over 20 employees was to occur. However, there were no clarified legal penalties for those companies that did not adhere to the policy. In April that same year, the central government released figures showing that since 2008 around 25 million migrant workers had lost their jobs throughout the entire country as a result of business failures and factory closings.<sup>193</sup> As the rural-urban gap in China continues to widen, will migrants from the countryside be compelled to continue their migration towards the coast even during the current financial crisis? And will the world economic situation fuel a change in opinions between the migrant-sending and receiving regions of the PRC, or will they remain the same?

In this thesis, we have put together the history of the PRC's attempts at suppressing, controlling, and managing rural-to-urban migration, and how those attempts have changed over a period of roughly 60 years. We have seen how the early PRC had forcefully removed and repatriated migrants back to the countryside as well as how massive campaigns to expel migrants from the cities have persisted into the modern day. Also, Migrants continue to fuel regional conflict between the coastal and inland provinces, much like they had begun to do by the late-1980s. Despite the huge impact migrant labor has had on the rise of contemporary PRC, the historical and regional complexities of controlling such a huge movement of people, and the

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<sup>191</sup>"Factory of the World: Scenes from Guangdong," *China Labour Bulletin*, October 3, 2012, <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/110142>.

<sup>192</sup>"Factory Closure in China A Sign of Deeper Pain," *USA Today*, October 19, 2008, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-10-19-1174310442\\_x.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-10-19-1174310442_x.htm).

<sup>193</sup>"Impact of the Financial Crisis on Employment," *The World Bank*, <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK>.

reaction given to it by urban authorities in the PRC are still strongly rooted in the limited freedom of movement from the Maoist past.

## APPENDIX

### Inter-regional Floating Population in the PRC by Province, 2000

	Total Provincial Population (1,000)	Floating Population in Province (1,000)	Percentage of Floating Population as Portion of Provincial Population (%)
<b><u>Coastal Provinces</u></b>			
Beijing	13,569	2,603	19.2
Fujian	34,098	3,807	11.2
Guangdong	85,225	21,054	24.7
Hainan	7,559	654	8.7
Jiangsu	73,004	5,007	6.9
Liaoning	41,824	2,306	5.5
Shandong	89,972	2,687	3.0
Shanghai	16,408	4,360	26.6
Tianjin	9,849	791	8.0
Zhejiang	45,931	5,426	11.8
<b><u>Inland Provinces</u></b>			
Anhui	59,000	1,189	2.0
Chongqing	30,513	884	2.9
Gansu	25,000	717	2.9
Guangxi	43,885	1,843	4.2
Guizhou	35,248	1,254	3.6
Hebei	66,684	2,131	3.2
Heilongjiang	36,238	1,794	5.0
Henan	91,237	2,012	2.2
Hubei	59,509	2,239	3.8
Hunan	63,274	1,770	2.8
Inner Mongolia	23,323	1,773	7.6
Jiangxi	40,398	1,008	2.5
Jilin	26,802	945	3.5
Ningxia	5,486	367	6.7
Qinghai	4,823	308	6.4
Shaanxi	35,365	1,041	2.9
Shanxi	32,471	1,459	4.5
Sichuan	82,348	2,748	3.3
Tibet	2,616	151	5.8
Xinjiang	18,460	1,917	6.7
Yunnan	42,360	2,512	5.9

Source: Zai, Liang, and Ma, Zhongdong. "China's Floating Population: New Evidence from the 2000 Census." *Population and Development Review* 30, No. 3 (Sept., 2004). Data was tabulated from the Population Census Office and the Beijing Statistics Bureau, 2002.

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