

Migration, *Hukou*, and the Chinese City¹

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China has experienced more than two decades of rapid urbanization. The level of urbanization increased from 21% in 1982 to 40% in 2003 and is expected to exceed 50% by 2015 (Duan 2003; Zhou and Ma 2005). Migration from the countryside to the city has been the main source of urban growth (Duan 2003; Lu and Wang 2006).² Rural-urban migration is also playing an increasingly important role in shaping the economic and demographic landscape of Chinese cities. Over the past two decades, China has transformed itself from a relatively immobile society to one where more than 10% of the population is on the move. Although China's mobility rate is still low compared to that of advanced industrialized economies, the sheer size of migrants and their dramatic economic and social impacts have attracted great attention from researchers and given rise to a large body of literature. Migration issues are, at the same time, controversial and hotly debated among scholars, observers and Chinese policymakers.

This chapter reviews major issues and findings in the recent literature on migration in China, focusing on the *hukou* system and reform, migration patterns and changes since the 1980s, and the impacts of migration on China's urban and rural areas. The review is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it aims at highlighting the salient facets of migration that have direct implications for China's urbanization process.

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² Lu and Wang (2006) estimate that rural-urban migration accounted for 79% of China's urban growth from 1979 to 2003.

The *Hukou* (Household Registration) System and Reform

The Chinese government implemented the *hukou* system in the late 1950s and since then has used it as an instrument of migration control. Every Chinese citizen is associated with a *hukou* location (*hukou suozaidi*) and an “agricultural” (rural) or “nonagricultural” (urban) *hukou* classification (*hukou leibie*). For the most part, both are inherited from the parents. Agricultural *hukou* provides access to farmland, whereas nonagricultural *hukou* gives urban citizens access to jobs, housing, food and state-sponsored benefits. *Hukou* location specifies where one is entitled to the above resources and is, in essence, where one belongs. Details of how the *hukou* system operates have been extensively reviewed elsewhere (Yu 2002; Wang, Fei-Ling 2005) and are not repeated here. Suffice it to say, until the mid-1980s it was extremely difficult for rural Chinese to survive in cities, because without urban *hukou* they did not have access to the necessities of life such as food and housing, much of which was centrally controlled and allocated. The *hukou* system, therefore, kept rural-urban migration to a minimum.

During the past two decades, expanded options for rural Chinese to work in urban areas have unleashed large waves of migration. Below I highlight the major changes in the *hukou* system since the 1980s.

a. Temporary migration. In October 1984, the State Council announced that peasants working in towns would be granted the “self-supplied food grain” *hukou*, marking the first opening in the rigid border between city and countryside.³ In 1985, the Ministry of Public Security issued regulations for rural migrants to obtain the “temporary residence permit.” In the same year, the National Congress approved the citizen's identity card as an alternative proof of identification to

³ By the late 1980s, the “self-supplied food grain” *hukou* had gradually disappeared (Zhong 2000:

hukou (Yu 2002: 35). All of this, plus increased marketization of food, housing and other daily necessities, has made it easier for rural Chinese to work and live in urban areas. Although some rural migrants may stay in the city for an extended period of time, their lack of an urban *hukou* means that they are considered, at least in an institutional sense, “temporary migrants” (see also *qianyi renkou*).

b. “Selling” of *hukou*. A wave of local governments charging migrants high fees⁴ – ranging from several thousand yuan to tens of thousands of yuan – in exchange of *hukou* in small towns and cities began in the late 1980s. City governments justified this practice on the ground that they should be compensated for extending urban benefits to migrants.⁵ Beginning in the mid-1990s, large cities such as Shanghai and Shenzhen began to offer “blue stamp” *hukou*, with monetary and skill requirements only few could satisfy (Wong and Huen 1998). In reality, these practices commodified *hukou* and channeled resources from the very small minority of highly successful migrants to the coffer of urban governments (Cai 2001; Cao 2001).⁶

c. *Hukou* reform in small cities and towns. In 1997, the State Council approved a pilot scheme to grant urban *hukou* to rural migrants who had a stable urban job and who had resided in selected towns and cities for more than two years (Yu 2002: 379). Unlike earlier practices, qualified

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⁴ A variety of terms have been used to describe these fees, the most popular being *jiangshe fei* (development fee), *chengshi jiangshe fei* (urban development fee), *jiangzhen fei* (town development fee), *jiangshe peitao fei* (development and accessory fee) and *zengrong fei* (accommodation fee). The fees may be higher in large cities than in small cities and higher in the city proper of large cities than in their outskirts (Cao 2001).

⁵ Yu (2002: 374) estimates that by the end of 1993 three million rural migrants had purchased *hukou* in a city or town and through which local governments had collected a total of 25 billion yuan.

⁶ Since the late 1990s, the “selling” of *hukou* has become increasingly unpopular (Cai 2002; Zhang and Lin 2000; Zhong 2000: 195).

migrants were not required to pay a hefty sum. The scheme was tested in 450 towns and small cities, based on which the State Council approved in 2001 plans to further expand *hukou* reform (Yu 2002: 382). Since then, the principal criteria for obtaining *hukou* in small cities and towns have been a fixed and legal residence and a stable source of income (Cai 2003: 210). In 1998, the State Council approved four guidelines that aimed at further relaxing urban *hukou*.⁷ In 2003, the State Council issued a directive affirming the rights of rural migrants to work in cities (Cai 2003: 212). Adherence to these guidelines and directives is, however, up to city governments.

d. *Hukou* reform in large cities. The extent and specifics of *hukou* reform vary greatly. In general, the larger the city, the more difficult it is to obtain a local *hukou*. A number of large and medium size cities such as Zhuhai, Nanjing and Xi'an have indeed relaxed their criteria for granting *hukou* (Cai 2002: 227). Shijiazhuang in Hebei is among the most adventurous cities and granted 450,000 new *hukou* between August 2001 and June 2003 (Wang 2003). Yet, in most large cities, *hukou* reform is minimal; only an extremely small minority of rural migrants, who satisfy stringent criteria such as educational attainment, skills, financial ability, health, and a clean criminal record, are awarded local *hukou* and given access to urban benefits (Cai 2003: 210-211; Qiu 2001; Wang 2003; Zhang and Lin 2000; Zhong and Gu 2000). "Super-large" cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, where *hukou* is still a primary gatekeeper, are especially resistant to *hukou* reform.⁸ Beijing city proper *hukou*, for example, is required of

⁷ First, children can now choose to inherit *hukou* from the father or the mother (previously, *hukou* was inherited from the mother). Second, rural persons who have lived in the city for more than one year and whose spouses hold urban *hukou* may be granted urban *hukou*. Third, elderly parents whose only children live in cities may be granted urban *hukou*. Fourth, persons who have made investment, established enterprises or purchased apartments, who have stable jobs and accommodation, and who have lived more than one year in a city are eligible for local *hukou* (Yu 2002: 381).

⁸ In 2001, Beijing government began to issue three types (A, B and C) of temporary permits, which determine the services migrants have access to and the extent of government control and

university graduates who wish to apply for government jobs (Beijing chenbao 2006). Many enterprises in Beijing restrict hiring to individuals who have Beijing *hukou* (Fazhi wanbao 2006). In addition, city governments can tighten the policy at its discretion. In August 2004, for example, Zhengzhou reversed its *hukou* reform because the large number of new migrants overloaded the city's transportation system and schools (China Daily 2004).

e. *Hukou* classification and *hukou* location. The distinction between nonagricultural *hukou* and agricultural *hukou* is no longer as important and has in fact been eliminated in some provinces (e.g., Anhui, Gansu, Hunan, and Hubei) and some large cities (e.g., Guangzhou and Nanjing) (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2005). *Hukou* location, however, continues to define one's life chances and access to resources. The difference in status between a *hukou* in small cities and towns and a *hukou* in the city proper of large cities persists and is substantial.

In addition to the new measures and guidelines described above, the Chinese government established the goal that by 2005, *hukou* reform in large and medium-sized cities would be completed and the dualistic registration system would be replaced by a unified registration system (Cai 2002: 229). To date, neither of the above has been fully implemented. Still, these official endorsements indicate that the central government is increasingly concerned with reforming the *hukou* system and tackling *hukou*-based barriers to migration.

Migration Patterns and Changes

Volume and spatial patterns

Despite the recent proliferation of research on migration in China, there is still much confusion about the magnitude of migration. This is due in part to the existence of many

monitoring (Cai 2002: 238).

different concepts and terms related to migration and the frequent changes of definition in census and census-type surveys in China (Duan and Sun 2006).⁹ In the following, I shall focus on *liudong renkou* and *qianyi renkou* – by far the two most commonly used measures of migration in China.

Liudong renkou (floating population)

Liudong renkou, generally translated as the “floating population,” is a unique concept in China and is tied to the *hukou* system (Goodkind and West 2002). When an individual is not living at his/her *hukou* location then s/he is considered “floating.” This concept is based on the notion that the *hukou* location is where one belongs and that any migration is not considered official and permanent until the migrant’s *hukou* location is also moved to his/her destination. Floating population is a stock measure. Regardless of when actual migration occurred, a person is counted as part of the floating population so long as his/her usual place of residence is different from the *hukou* location.

In practice, a temporal criterion usually qualifies the definition of floating population, and the criterion varies from one source to another.¹⁰ The 1990 census specified that a person must have left the *hukou* location for at least a year before s/he would be considered as part of the floating population. In the 2000 census, the criterion was shortened to six months. The spatial criterion also changed. In the 1990 census, the floating population included persons who had moved from one county (or county-level city or urban district) to another county; whereas in the 2000 census, the spatial criterion changed to subcounty units, i.e., townships, towns and streets.

⁹ Yunyan Yang notes that there are at least 20 different and related concepts for describing population movements and floating population in China (Zhou 2002). Jiao (2002) comments that the definitions of migrants in China are the most complex in the world.

¹⁰ The temporal criterion varies greatly between sources and can range from 24 hours to one year (Goodkind and West 2002). Obviously, these variations result in widely varied estimates.

In other words, the 1990 census counted intercounty floating population only while the 2000 census counted both intercounty and intracounty floating population. Intercounty floating population increased from 22.62 million, or 1.97% of the population in 1990 to 78.75 million, or 6.34% of the population in 2000 (Table 1).¹¹ Clearly, mobility had increased considerably between 1990 and 2000.

Table 1. Floating population and migrants.

	1990 census		2000 census	
	Volume (million)	Percent population*	Volume (million)	Percent population*
Floating population (<i>liudong renkou</i>)				
Intercounty	22.62	1.97	78.75	6.34
Intercounty + intracounty	-	-	144.39	11.62
Migrants (<i>qianyi renkou</i>)				
Intercounty	35.33	3.39	79.05	6.74
Intercounty + intracounty	-	-	121.21	10.33
Intercounty migrants				
Permanent migrants	19.13	1.84	20.22	1.72
(Percent)	(54.1)		(25.6)	
Temporary migrants	16.20	1.56	58.84	5.01
(Percent)	(45.9)		(74.4)	
Interprovincial	11.53	1.11	32.30	2.75
(Percent)	(32.6)		(40.9)	
Intraprovincial	23.80	2.29	46.75	3.98
(Percent)	(67.4)		(59.1)	

* For migrants, proportion of population aged 5+.

Sources: 1990 census 1% sample; Liang and Ma (2004); Population Census Office (2002).

Combining intercounty and intracounty counts, the 2000 census reported a total of 144.39 million floating population, accounting for 11.62% of the nation's population (Population Census Office 2002). This number is consistent with most published sources, which estimate that the floating population was about 30 million in the early 1980s, 70-80 million in the early and mid-1990s, and between 100 million and 140 million in the late 1990s (Bai and Song 2002:

Definitions using a short temporal criterion may include transients and travelers (Shen 2002).

¹¹ The effect of the change of the temporal criterion – from one year to six months – is difficult to determine. However, it is reasonable to assume that the surge in the floating population was primarily due to mobility increase in the 1990s, which is consistent with the literature's findings (Liang 2001), rather than to definitional changes.

4; Jiao 2002; Solinger 1999: 18; Wan 2001; Zhong 2000).¹² The 2005 One-Percent Population Sample Survey reported further increase of the floating population to 147.35 million (National Bureau of Statistics 2006).

Qianyi renkou (migrants)

The closest equivalents to the terms migration and migrants in the Chinese language are, respectively, *qianyi* and *qianyi renkou*. Unlike floating population, *qianyi renkou* is a measure of flow. In the 1990 census, *qianyi renkou* was defined as individuals five years or older (1) who had moved from one county to another within the past five years, and (2) (a) whose *hukou* location had moved to the 1990 place of residence or (b) who had left the *hukou* location for more than one year. Those in group (a) constituted permanent migrants because their *hukou* location had moved to the migration destination; while those in group (b) are referred to as temporary migrants because their *hukou* location differed from the migration destination. In the 2000 census, the spatial and temporal criteria were changed respectively to subcounty-level units and six months.

It should be noted that the terms *liudong* and *qianyi* are often used interchangeably in the Chinese literature and media. At the same time, some scholars consider the two terms mutually exclusive. To make it even more confusing, the terms floating population and temporary migrants are also often used interchangeably. Understanding the floating population as a stock measure and *qianyi renkou* as a flow measure is key to distinguishing between these terms.

Using the *qianyi renkou* criteria described above, the 1990 and 2000 censuses

¹² Note that figures reported by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) may be considerably lower because they include only the portion of the floating population that registers with local PSB. For example, based on PSB data the floating population in the mid-1990s was only 44 million (Jiao 2002). The Ministry of Public Security estimates that the floating population in 1997 was 100 million but its data shows that only about 38 million were registered (Gongan bu 1997;

documented a total of 35.33 million and 79.05 intercounty migrants respectively, accounting for 3.39% and 6.74% of the population aged five and above (see also footnote #11) (Table 1). These results again support the observation that mobility had increased significantly between the 1985-1990 and 1995-2000 periods (Fan 2005a; Liang 2001). The sum of intercounty and intracounty migrants, according to the 2000 census, was 121.21 million, accounting for 10.33% of the 5+ population.

Among intercounty migrants, respectively 45.9% and 74.4% were temporary migrants according to the 1990 and 2000 censuses. The volume of permanent migrants hovered near 20 million but the number of temporary migrants increased by 3.6 times from 16.20 million to 58.84 million. The dramatic surge of temporary migrants reflects not only *hukou* reform but also increased prominence of market forces in determining population movements in China. In addition, this result indicates that rural migrants, who constitute the bulk of temporary migrants, are playing an increasingly important role in shaping Chinese cities.

Breaking intercounty migrants down into interprovincial and intraprovincial components sheds further light into mobility changes. Interprovincial migration, which is typically of longer distances, accounted for 32.6% and 40.9% respectively of total intercounty migration in the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Thus, not only had mobility increased, but greater proportions of migrants moved long distances in the 1990s than in the 1980s (Du and Gao 2004; Fan 2005b).

Table 2 shows the proportions of interprovincial migration attributable to intraregional and interregional flows, represented respectively by diagonal and off-diagonal cells. Between the two censuses, intraregional flows declined in relative importance while interregional proportions increased. Specifically, the sum of off-diagonal proportions increased from 57.3% to 71.8%. This again supports the observation that more migrants traveled long distances in the

Goodkind and West 2002; Shen 2002).

1990s than in the 1980s. Of the six off-diagonal cells, only two – central-to-eastern and western-to-eastern – increased between the two censuses, indicating an acceleration of migration flows from the two non-coastal regions to the eastern region. The flow from the central region to the eastern region is especially noteworthy, increasing from 21.0% to 41.8% between the two censuses. All of this indicates that interprovincial migration is overwhelmingly from inland to coastal areas and that the concentration of migrants in the eastern region, which is the most urbanized of the three regions, is high and increasing. The province of Guangdong alone received 36.15% of all interprovincial migrants during the 1995-2000 period. Recent studies also confirm that provincial net migration volumes and rates increased between the two censuses; that is, sending provinces lost more migrants and receiving provinces gained more migrants in the 1990s than in the 1980s (Fan 2005a).

Table 2. Interprovincial migration within and between regions.

Proportion of total flows (%)	Origin			
	Eastern	Central	Western	Sum
1990 census				
Eastern	24.4	21.0	11.5	57.0
Central	10.7	9.2	6.3	26.1
Western	3.7	4.1	9.1	16.9
Sum	38.8	34.3	26.9	100.0
2000 census				
Eastern	18.4	41.8	18.2	78.4
Central	3.8	4.0	2.4	10.2
Western	2.4	3.2	5.8	11.4
Sum	24.5	49.0	26.5	100.0

Note: Because of data limitations, Tibet is excluded from the computation. Because Chongqing did not become a separate provincial-level unit until 1996, in the analysis it is combined with Sichuan.

Sources: State Statistical Bureau (1992); National Bureau of Statistics (2002).

Migration reasons

Both the 1990 and 2000 censuses asked migrants to choose from nine options their primary reason for migration. These reasons depict not only the motives, but also the means of migration, circumstances under which migration takes place, what migrants plan to do at the

destination, and above all the degree of state involvement (Fan 1999). The options in the two censuses were the same except that the 2000 census omitted “retirement” and included a new option “housing change” (Table 3).

Table 3. Migration reasons for intercounty migrants (%).

	1990 census			2000 census		
	All	Permanent migrants	Temporary migrants	All	Permanent migrants	Temporary migrants
Job transfer	12.0	18.1	4.8	3.1	5.1	2.4
Job assignment	6.8	10.2	2.7	2.6	7.8	0.8
Industry/business	23.6	1.8	49.3	46.4	3.9	65.0
Study/training	12.9	21.4	2.7	13.7	39.9	4.7
Friends/relatives	9.7	6.6	13.4	5.0	3.4	5.6
Retirement	1.6	2.1	1.0	-	-	-
Joining family	11.0	13.7	7.8	10.0	7.9	10.7
Marriage	13.8	15.6	11.6	7.3	17.2	3.9
Housing change	-	-	-	4.5	10.4	2.5
Other	8.7	10.4	6.7	4.4	4.2	4.4

Sources: 1990 census 1% sample; Liang and Ma (2004).

These migration reasons can be represented by two intersecting sets of dichotomy. The first set distinguishes economic reasons from social (including family and life-cycle) reasons (Rowland 1994). “Job transfer” and “job assignment,” which refer to the state’s allocation of human resources by, respectively, transferring workers to specific jobs and regions and assigning jobs to school graduates, are economic reasons. So is “industry/business,” which is defined as self-initiated moves for engaging in industrial, commercial or trade sectors. Research has shown that most “industry/business” migrants are of rural origin and do not have urban *hukou* (Fan 1999). Social reasons include “friends/relatives,” which refers to migration to seek the help of friends and relatives, “joining family,” and “marriage.” “Retirement” and “study/training,” however, are not as readily categorized as economic or social reasons.

The second set of dichotomy involves “state-sponsored,” “planned” or “official” migration versus migration that is “self-initiated,” “unofficial” or driven by “market.” The

former is most likely associated with permanent migrants (with *hukou* change) and the latter temporary migrants (without *hukou* change). Generally, "job transfer" and "job assignment" are part of state planning and are thus usually accompanied by *hukou* change. Because admission to universities is highly competitive, "study/training" migrants who enter universities are awarded urban *hukou* at the city where the university is located. "Industry/business" and "friends/relatives" constitute self-initiated migration and are usually not accompanied by *hukou* change. "Retirement," "joining family" and "marriage" may or may not involve *hukou* change. Generally, marriage migrants moving from one rural area to another can obtain *hukou* at the destination (and will have access to farmland), but the same is not true for rural-urban marriage migrants. Since the vast majority of marriage migrants are rural-rural migrants, marriage as a migration reason tends to describe permanent migrants whose moves are accompanied by *hukou* change (Fan and Huang 1998).

A new category "housing change" was included in the 2000 census, in part because of rapid increase in housing construction in many cities since the 1990s. It primarily describes intracounty moves and migration of short distance.

As expected, according to the 1990 census, "study/training," "job transfer" and "job assignment" were prominent reasons for permanent migrants (Table 3). The proportions of "job transfer" and "job assignment" migrants dropped sharply between the two censuses, however, further supporting the observation that market mechanisms are increasingly overtaking state-sponsored channels in job-related moves. Marriage continued to be a prominent reason for permanent migration in the 2000 census. "Industry/business" was an important and leading reason for temporary migration in the 1990 census but its dominance increased further so that in the 2000 census it accounted for 65.0% of all temporary migrants. It is well known that the overwhelming objective of rural migrants is economic – to increase income and diversify sources

of household income (Croll and Huang 1997; Fan 2002) – and that they have little access to state-sponsored channels of migration (Solinger 1999). The 2000 census results show that the economic explanation, vis-à-vis social reasons, is increasingly prominent (Yang 2004). At the same time, the increased proportion of temporary migrants in the “joining family” category suggests that more rural-urban migrants are bringing their families to cities (Zhou 2004).

The above has illustrated the continued centrality of the *hukou* system to understanding migration in China. Specifically, state-sponsored migrants are mostly permanent migrants that are awarded *hukou* at the destination, while self-initiated migrants to cities are mostly temporary migrants denied *hukou* at the destination. Studies have shown that permanent migrants are correlated with high education, urban origins, and urban destinations; while temporary migrants are associated with low education and rural origins (Fan 2002). Thus, the state is selectively awarding skilled and urban migrants permanent residence in the city while relegating the less qualified and rural migrants to unofficial and temporary statuses. The *hukou* system, therefore, has played an important stratification role by engineering a two-track migration system, whereby a superior track is set aside for the qualified and urbanites and an inferior track is designated for the less-skilled and those from rural areas (Chan et al. 1999; Fan 1999; Gu 1992). In the last section of the chapter, I shall review the criticisms toward this policy and recommendations for change.

Migrants’ characteristics

Research has consistently found that migrants in China are young, that they are more likely to be single than married, and that male migrants outnumber female migrants (Cai 2003: 182; Cao 1995; Chan et al. 1999). The characteristics of rural-urban migrants are, likewise, well documented. First, they are young, with mean age near the mid-20s (Wang et al. 2002). Second,

there are more male migrants than female migrants but the sex ratio varies considerably from place to place (Wang et al. 2002). Third, female migrants are younger than male migrants and larger proportions of female migrants than male migrants are single (Fan 2004a; Wang et al. 2002). Fourth, rural-urban migrants' modal educational attainment is junior secondary; they are more highly educated than rural non-migrants but less highly educated than urban residents (Cai 2003: 183). The effect of education is likely quadratic, namely, the most and least highly educated are less likely to migrate than those in the middle, because the latter have the desire to economically better themselves as well as the means to pursue migrant work (Li and Zahniser 2002).

Recent studies have highlighted a new generation of rural-urban migrants, who unlike earlier migrants are more highly educated and have little farming experience (Qiu et al. 2004). These recent migrants may be less concerned with augmenting family income than with the prospect of obtaining urban *hukou* and staying in urban areas. They are also likely to be more selective in urban work (Jian and Zhang 2005).

Impacts of Rural-Urban Migration

Impacts on urban areas

The notion that rural-urban migration is a key component of China's economic development is widely accepted (Cai 2001: 326). Migrants' impacts on urban areas are, however, hotly debated (Jiao 2002). Migrant labor is seen as important for stimulating urban economy and boosting the expansion of urban industries and services (Cao 1995; Zhong and Gu 2000). Since the bulk of rural-urban migrants engage in low-paid, manual and services types of work, they fill jobs that are shunned by most urbanites who can then specialize in more prestigious jobs. Migrants in cities also generate consumption, which in turn creates employment for others

(Zhong and Gu 2000).¹³ Thus, rural-urban migrants are a major force in shaping the urban economy.

By augmenting labor in urban areas, rural migrants are indirectly suppressing wage increase in cities (Qiu et al. 2004). Cai (2002: 218) argues that since rural migrants' labor cost is low, their productivity is in fact higher than that of local urban labor.¹⁴ Moreover, the large agricultural labor surplus supports a continued supply of new, young and cheap migrants for cities (Yang and Ding 2005). Rural migrants are, therefore, a source of "perpetually young" labor for urban development and are especially relevant for cities experiencing or anticipated to experience population aging (Wang et al. 2002). Recent labor shortage in the Pearl River Delta and other areas specialized in labor-intensive manufacturing, however, suggests that rural migrants are increasingly selective in urban work and that their supply may dwindle in the future (Jian and Zhang 2005).

Despite migrants' contributions to the urban economy, public and official evaluations of rural-urban migration are mixed. Rural migrants are criticized for overloading urban infrastructure such as transportation and housing, engaging in criminal activities, violating the birth-control policy, and creating chaos in urban management (Cao 1995; Solinger 1999; Zhong and Gu 2000). Migrants are also blamed for exacerbating urban employment, especially given the increase of laid-off urban employees from state-owned enterprises (Jiao 2002; Yang and Ding 2005). This criticism prompted many cities to tighten migration control in the mid-1990s (Cai 2002: 236), although scholars have shown that migrant labor and urban local labor are complementary rather than competitive (Wang et al. 2002; Zhong 2000: 208). Workers laid off from state-owned enterprises are more experienced and skilled than the average rural-urban

¹³ Based on a survey in the mid-1990s, Zhong and Gu (2000) reports that migrants' consumption accounts for more than half of the total retail consumption in Wuhan.

¹⁴ Cai (2002: 218) cities reports that estimate that the cost ratio between local labor and migrant

migrant.¹⁵ Some studies, nevertheless, warn that the competition between migrants and laid-off workers in cities may have increased (Cai 2002: 218). In general, a consensus among researchers is that the positive impacts of rural-urban migrants on urban areas outweigh their negative impacts (Jiao 2002).

Rural migrants in cities are institutionally inferior and socially marginalized. Numerous studies have shown that the dualistic structure embodied by the *hukou* system has reinforced the social and economic segregation of rural migrants, fixated hierarchical statuses based on geographic origin, and segmented the urban labor market (Cai 2002; Cao 1995; Chan et al. 1999; Fan 2002; Gu 1992; Solinger 1999; Yu 2002: 40-41). The bulk of rural migrants occupy the lowest social and occupational rungs of urban society, are treated as outsiders and have poor prospect of assimilation in cities (Fan 2002; Solinger 1995). Under the dualistic structure, rural Chinese are shut out of a system of entitlements designed only for urbanites. Thus, rural migrants do not have access to retirement, health and unemployment benefits, government-sponsored housing schemes, jobs that prioritize urban residents, and the urban education system (Lu 2005). The education of migrant children, who amounted to more than 14 million in 2000, is rapidly becoming a burning question in Chinese cities (Wang, Fang 2005).

Impacts on rural areas and rural-urban inequality

It is widely acknowledged that labor migration contributes to raising income and diversifying income sources for rural households and alleviating poverty in rural areas (Cai 2001: 329; CASS 2003: 54). Estimates of remittances vary, but most studies find that they account for 20% or more of the total income of migrant households (Du and Bai 1997: 131; Li 1999).

labor is 5:1 in Shanghai and 1.8:1 in Nanjing.

¹⁵ Jiao (2002) cites a work by Cai and Wang which concludes that the replacement ratio between the two types of labor is only 0.1.

Moreover, rural households exhibit a high degree of consistency in the use of remittances. Overwhelmingly, remittances are used to fund household projects (such as building or renovating a house), support household members (such as education), maintain regular household activities (such as living expenses and agricultural input), and lift the household out of financial difficulties (repaying debts), rather than engage in new investing activities (Fan 2004b; Murphy 2002: 91; Wang and Fan 2006).

When rural Chinese migrate to the city, their direct economic contribution to the countryside is lost, except when they return during planting and harvesting seasons. Even after factoring in this opportunity cost, labor migration is still desirable. Li (1999) shows that the marginal contribution of migrant workers to household income is higher than that of non-migrant workers. Hare and Zhao (2000) find that marginal returns to labor input to migration are higher than that to agriculture. In addition, Li (1999) argues that migration raises also the productivity of non-migrants, as the departure of migrants results in reallocation of resources within the household and increased efficiency of the remaining labor.

It is widely documented that rural-urban inequality in China is very high (Knight and Song 1999: 338). Li (2003) shows that if urban non-monetary income is taken into account then in 2000 the ratio of urban income to rural income in China was 3.62:1 and was the largest in the world. The Chinese government reports that urban income is 5 to 6 times that of rural income (Guomin jingji 2005: 9). Former President Jiang Zemin stated in the 16th National People's Congress (November 2002) that a widening rural-urban gap impedes the progress toward a *xiaokang*¹⁶ society and that this trend should be reversed (CCP 2002: 19). This point is further

¹⁶ *Xiaokang* society is a society in which most of the population are of modest means or middle-class (see entry in <http://www.youencyclopedia.net>). Though of classical literature roots, the concept has been widely used by China's national leaders as a goal to reach in the next two decades. Its newfound popularity is probably a response to increased criticisms on widening gaps in Chinese society.

emphasized in the current 11th Five Year Plan (2006-2010) (Guomin jingji 2005: 8). In this light, the economic benefits of rural-urban migration to the countryside have national importance as they are expected to alleviate, if not narrow, rural-urban inequality.

Skeptics, however, question the equilibrating effect of migration. Croll and Huang (1997) point out that remittances are an unstable source of income. Migration is also seen as accelerating brain drain from the already deprived rural areas (Cao 1995). Others warn that labor migration discourages profitable sectors to move inland and accelerate industrial agglomeration in coastal areas, thus enlarging further the coastal-inland gap (Hu 2002). Despite the above, most researchers conclude that rural-urban migration has positive effects on rural areas and that its negative effects are small. Moreover, many studies have shown that migrants bring back not only remittances but also new skills, information and ideas that are beneficial to the origin's economic development (Fan 2004b; Zhong 2000: 162).

A small body of work since the late 1990s has focused on urban-rural return migration. While little systematic data about return migration exists, research based on surveys suggests that significant proportions of rural-urban migrants have returned to their places of origin (Bai and Song 2002: 8-27; Murphy 2002: 125). Most studies on return migrants highlight their positive contributions, including their skills, capital, experience, demonstration effect, information transfer and entrepreneurial activities (Ma 2002; Murphy 2002; Qiu et al. 2004). Wang and Fan (2006), however, argue that return migrants are negatively selected and they question the extent of the returnees' economic contributions to the origin communities.

In short, the literature's main findings indicate that rural-urban migration has positive impacts on the countryside but its impacts on overall rural-urban inequality are mixed.

Policy Implications

The Chinese society is increasingly mobile. Both the volume and geographic extent of migration have expanded since the 1980s and this trend is expected to continue (Zhang and Lin 2000). As described earlier, the roles of economic and market forces in shaping migration have increased. Migration is considered as the engine of urbanization and economic development of China, and it is generally acknowledged that the overall impacts of migration on both rural and urban areas are positive. At the same time, the *hukou* system is increasingly criticized for impeding labor flows, efficient allocation of human resources and establishment of a nationally integrated labor market (Cai 2001: 342; Cao 1995; Liu et al. 2004; Qiu 2001; Yu 2002: 5; Zhang and Lin 2000; Zhong 2000: 200). It is also seen as the main source of persistent inequality between rural and urban Chinese, which threatens social stability and undermines the government's new goal of "getting rich together" (*gongtong fuyu*), as embodied in the 11th Five Year Plan (Guomin jingji 2005: 8). In addition, the difficulties and problems in accurately documenting urban statistics are also attributable to the *hukou* system (Chan 2003; Wan 2001).

Despite the criticisms toward the *hukou* system, most researchers favor an "orderly" reform rather than a wholesale abolition of the system.¹⁷ This in part reflects the resistance of urban residents who desire to protect their interests and entitlements (Cai 2001: 330-331), but it is also due to the concern over exploitive growth of cities. In addition, complete abolition of *hukou* cannot be achieved without also reforming housing, health insurance, social security, labor and employment policies (Liu et al. 2004; Qiu 2001). Instead, a two-pronged approach toward incrementally reducing the prominence of the *hukou* system summarizes most scholars' recommendations. First, they suggest that urban entitlements should be reduced so that urban residents are encouraged to compete in the labor market rather than relying on state protection

¹⁷ These views are quite consistent with the incremental, gradualist approach that characterizes China's economic reforms since the late 1970s. This approach is sometimes described as "crossing the river by touching the stones."

(Cai 2001: 342; Zhong 2000: 200). And second, scholars argue that certain conditions – including freer capital flows, increased educational attainment of migrants, and reduced rural-urban income gap – are necessary before *hukou* reform can be thoroughly implemented, to ensure that migrants will not flood cities and cripple the urban infrastructure (Cai 2001: 335-336; Zhang and Lin 2000).

Given the likelihood that the *hukou* system will remain relatively intact in the foreseeable future, researchers have highlighted several issues that require policymakers' attention. The first issue has to do with the criteria for awarding urban *hukou* to rural migrants. Most favor merit-based criteria, which are seen to be useful for monitoring the amount, quality and composition of migrants (Zhang and Lin 2000). This is, in essence, an “elite” migrants approach, which has indeed characterized migration policies in Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai and other large cities. Related to this is a popular view that the extent of *hukou* reform should decrease with increasing rank of the urban hierarchy, namely, urban *hukou* should be most accessible in small towns and most strictly controlled in large and super-large cities (Cai 2003: 210-211; Wan 2001).

Another issue concerns the functions of *hukou*. An increasingly popular view is that *hukou* should serve the purpose of population registration rather than migration control (Zhong 2000: 200). Scholars argue for a single identity card as an alternative, as it is individual rather than household and location based, it can replace the multiplicity of permits required of rural migrants, and it can enable better and more standardized data collection (Qiu 2001).

Finally, numerous researchers have urged for greater attention on the rights and well being of rural migrants in cities (e.g., Jiao 2002), especially since their voices are often hidden and they have few resources for collective activities such as bargaining. In particular, there has been increased attention on the education of migrants' children, including recommendations to legalize selected “floating children's schools” and integrate them into the urban education system

(Wang, Fang 2005; Zhong and Gu 2000; Zhou and Chen 2004).¹⁸ Cai (2003: 205) warns that without a systematic plan to educate migrants' children they will repeat their parents' marginality and thus a vicious cycle will be passed down from one generation to the next. Furthermore, policies that aim at serving migrants on a long-term basis can help foster their sense of belonging and contribution to the cities. These recommendations are, above all, rooted in concerns over equity and a dualistic social and opportunity structure, which are at the heart of the debate on migration policy and which will be the driver for *hukou* reform.

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¹⁸ Many migrants' children in cities are enrolled in schools that are privately organized by migrants (*liudong ertong xuexiao* or floating children's schools) and that receive minimal or no support from city governments. By 2001 there were more than 200 such schools in Beijing (Duan 2001). Alternatively, migrants may send their children to local schools by paying an extra fee (*jiedufei*) (Cai 2003: 194; Zhang and Lin 2000). More recently, some cities have eliminated or reduced the extra fee, but migrants may still prefer to send their children to migrant children's schools because of lower fee (Zhou and Chen 2004).

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