

CHAPTER 3

Migration, Hukou, and the City

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Rural–urban migration is playing an increasingly important role in shaping the economic and demographic landscape of Chinese cities.¹ Over the past two decades, China has transformed itself from a relatively immobile society to one in which more than 10 percent of the population are migrants. Although China's mobility rate is still low compared with that of advanced industrial economies, the sheer size of the migrant flows and their dramatic economic and social consequences have already profoundly affected economic growth and urban development. Looking ahead, decision makers at all levels will need to craft policies that address issues of migration and rural–urban migrants—issues that are hotly debated among scholars, Chinese policy makers, and others.

This chapter presents recent findings that describe migration patterns and changes since the 1980s. It complements and extends the discussion in chapter 2, highlighting the salient facets of migration that have direct implications for China's urbanization process.

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¹ Rural–urban migration has been the main driver of urban growth in China since the 1980s (see Duan 2003, Lu and Wang 2006, and chapter 2 of this volume).

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes the *hukou* system and its relation with population movements. The second section summarizes the magnitude, spatial patterns, and reasons for migration and describes migrant characteristics. The third section examines the effects of rural–urban migration on urban and rural areas. The final section discusses the policy implications of increased migration.

The Hukou System and Its Reform

China's *hukou* system became law in 1958, when the National People's Congress passed its "Regulations on Household Registration in the People's Republic of China." Under these regulations, every Chinese citizen is assigned a *hukou* location (*hukou suozaidi*) and an "agricultural" (rural) or "nonagricultural" (urban) *hukou* classification (*hukou leibie*) (Yu 2002; Fei-Ling Wang 2005). For the most part, both are inherited from one's parents. An agricultural *hukou* provides access to farmland; a nonagricultural *hukou* provides access to jobs, housing, food, and state-sponsored benefits. The *hukou* location specifies where one is entitled to receive benefits; in essence, it defines where one belongs.

Until the mid-1980s, it was extremely difficult for rural Chinese to survive in cities, because without an urban *hukou*, they did not have access to the necessities of life, such as food and housing, many of which were centrally controlled and allocated. The *hukou* system therefore kept rural–urban migration to a minimum.

During the past two decades or so, major changes in the *hukou* system have expanded options for rural Chinese to work in urban areas. These changes unleashed large waves of migration.

Temporary Migration

In October 1984, the State Council announced that peasants working in towns would be granted the "self-supplied food grain" (*zili kouliang*) *hukou*, marking the first opening in the rigid division between city and countryside.² In 1985, the Ministry of Public Security issued regulations for rural migrants to obtain "temporary residence permits" (*zanzhuzheng*). The same year the National Congress allowed citizens to use their identity cards as proof of identification (before 1985 only the *hukou* could be used) (Yu 2002).

These measures, as well as the increased marketization of food, housing, and other daily necessities, made it easier for rural Chinese to work and live in urban areas. Although some rural migrants stay in the city for extended periods of time, their lack of an urban *hukou* means that they are considered, at least in an institutional sense, temporary migrants.

"Selling" of Hukou

Beginning in the late 1980s, many city governments began charging migrants high fees—ranging from several thousand to tens of thousands of yuan—in exchange for *hukou* in towns and cities.³ City governments justified this practice on the grounds that they should be compensated for extending urban benefits to migrants.⁴ Beginning in the mid-1990s, large cities, such as Shanghai and Shenzhen, began to offer "blue-stamp" *hukou* to migrants who met high skill requirements and were able to make sizable investments (Wong and Huen 1998). Like the green card in the United States, the blue-stamp *hukou* could be converted into a permanent urban *hukou* after a specified period of time. These practices commodified *hukou* and channeled resources from a very small elite of eligible migrants to the coffers of urban governments (Cai 2001; Cao 2001).⁵

Reform in Towns and Small Cities

In 1997, the State Council approved a pilot scheme to grant urban *hukou* to rural migrants who held stable jobs and had resided in selected towns and small cities for more than two years (Yu 2002). Unlike under earlier practices, this reform did not require qualified migrants to pay a hefty sum. After testing the scheme in 450 towns and small cities, in 2001 the State Council approved plans to expand *hukou* reform (Yu 2002). Since then the principal criteria for obtaining *hukou* in small cities and towns have been a permanent and legal place of stay and a stable source of

3 Varieties of terms have been used to describe these fees. The most popular are *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 are often higher in large cities than in small cities and higher in the city proper of large cities than in the outskirts (Cao 2001).

4 Yu (2002) estimates that by the end of 1993, 3 million rural migrants had purchased *hukou* in a city or town, raising Y 25 billion in local government revenues.

5 Since the late 1990s, the "selling" of *hukou* has increasingly been replaced by other mechanisms (Zhang and Lin 2000; Zhong 2000; Cai 2002).

2 This type of *hukou* had disappeared by the late 1980s (Zhong 2000).

income (Cai 2003). In 1998 the State Council approved four guidelines that further relaxed the urban *hukou*.⁶ In 2003, the State Council issued a directive affirming the rights of rural migrants to work in cities (Cai 2003). Adherence to these guidelines and directives is, however, up to individual city governments (Sun 2007).

Reform in Large Cities

The extent and specifics of *hukou* reform in large cities varies 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 Nanjing, Xi'an, and Zhuhai, have relaxed their criteria for granting *hukou* (Cai 2002). Shijiazhuang, in Hebei Province, is among the most adventurous cities, having granted 450,000 new *hukou* between August 2001 and June 2003 (Wang 2003). In most large cities, however, *hukou* reform has been minimal, only an extremely small minority of rural migrants—who satisfy stringent criteria on educational attainment, skills, financial ability, and health—are awarded local *hukou* and given access to urban benefits (Zhang and Lin 2000; Zhong and Gu 2000; Qiu 2001; Cai 2003; Wang 2003). The legacy of blue-stamp *hukou* and the logic of creaming thus persist.

Very large cities, such as Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai, where *hukou* is still a primary gatekeeper, have been especially resistant to *hukou* reform.⁷ University graduates who wish to apply for government jobs in Beijing must obtain a *hukou* for Beijing city proper, for example (Beijing Chenbao 2006). Many enterprises in Beijing restrict hiring to candidates holding Beijing *hukou* (Fazhi Wanbao 2006).

City governments can also tighten the policy at their discretion. In 2002, Guangzhou reversed its *hukou* reform on the ground that migrants overloaded the urban infrastructure; Zhengzhou followed suit in 2004 (China Daily 2004; Zhongguo Qingnianbao 2007). In May 2007, the Ministry of

6 These guidelines specify that (a) children can choose to inherit *hukou* from the father or the mother (previously, *hukou* was inherited from the mother); (b) rural residents who have lived in the city for more than one year and whose spouses hold urban *hukou* may be granted urban *hukou*; (c) elderly parents whose only children live in cities may be granted urban *hukou*; and (d) people who have made investments, established enterprises, or purchased apartments, have stable jobs and accommodation, and who have lived more than one year in a city are eligible for local *hukou* (Yu 2002).

7 In 2001 the Beijing government began to issue three types of temporary permits, which determine the services migrants have access to and the extent of government control and monitoring (Cai 2002).

Public Security completed a report on *hukou* reform, highlighting the legal place of stay as the basic criterion for urban *hukou* but once again affirming the autonomy of city governments to establish their own criteria for granting *hukou* (Sun 2007).

Classification and Location

The distinction between nonagricultural *hukou* and agricultural *hukou* is no longer as important as it once was; some provinces (including Anhui, Gansu, Hunan, and Hubei) and some large cities (including Guangzhou and Nanjing) have eliminated it altogether (Congressional-Executive Commission on China 2005). *Hukou* location, however, continues to define a person's life chances and access to resources. The difference 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-size cities would be completed and the dualistic registration system replaced by a unified registration system (Cai 2002). To date, neither 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.

At least two quantitative targets in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10) suggest that the government encourages migration (Editorial Group 2006; Fan 2006). First, the level of urbanization is expected to increase, from about 43 percent in 2006 to 47 percent in 2010, indicating that a moderate pace of rural–urban migration is expected and encouraged (Guangming Ribao 2006). Second, by 2010 an additional 45 million rural workers are expected to have shifted from rural to urban sectors. Although it is too early to predict if these targets will be reached, the 11th Five-Year Plan has legitimized a development trajectory of increased urbanization and rural–urban labor transfer that will almost certainly entail further *hukou* reform.

Migration Patterns and Changes

Since the 1980s, the magnitude of migration in China has increased significantly; migration flows to the most developed regions have accelerated, and economic reasons for migrating have gained in importance. Migrant characteristics have also changed.

Magnitude and Spatial Patterns

Despite the recent proliferation of research on migration in China, much confusion remains about its magnitude. The confusion partly reflects the multitude of concepts and terms related to migration and the frequent changes of definition in census and census-type surveys in China (Duan and Sun 2006).⁸ This chapter focuses on *liudong renkou* (the "floating population") and *qianyi renkou* (migrants), by far the most commonly used measures of migration in China.

The "floating population" (*liudong renkou*). *Liudong renkou* is a unique concept in China that is tied to the *hukou* system (Goodkind and West 2002). Individuals who are not living at their *hukou* location are considered "floating." This concept is based on the notion that the *hukou* location is where one belongs and that migration is not considered official and permanent until the migrant's *hukou* location is also changed. The floating population is a stock measure. Regardless of when actual migration occurred, a person is counted as part of the floating population as long as his or her usual place of residence is different from the *hukou* location.

In practice, a temporal criterion usually qualifies the definition of the floating population, and it varies from source to source.⁹ The 1990 census specified that a person must have left the *hukou* location for at least a year before he or she is considered part of the floating population. In the 2000 census, the period was shortened to six months.

The spatial criterion was also changed: in the 1990 census, the floating population included people who had moved from one county (or county-level city or urban district) to another; in the 2000 census, the spatial criterion was changed to subcounty units (townships, towns, and streets). The 1990 census thus counted only the intercounty floating population, while the 2000 census counted both the intercounty and intracounty floating population. The intercounty floating population increased from 22.6 million (2.0 percent of the population in 1990) to 78.8 million (6.3 percent of the population) in 2000 (table 3.1).¹⁰

8 There are at least 20 different and related concepts for describing population movements and the floating population in China (Zhou 2002). China's definitions of migrants are the most complex in the world (Jiao 2002).

9 The temporal criterion can range from 24 hours to one year (Goodkind and West 2002), creating a wide range of estimates. Definitions using a short temporal criterion may include transients and travelers (Shen 2002).

10 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 caused primarily by an increase in mobility in the 1990s rather than definitional changes (Liang 2001).

Table 3.1. Size of "Floating" and Migrant Population, 1990 and 2000

Item	1990 census		2000 census	
	Number (million)	Percentage of population ^a	Number (million)	Percentage of population ^a
Floating population (<i>liudong renkou</i>)				
Intercounty	22.6	2.0	78.8	6.3
Intercounty + intracounty	—	—	144.4	11.6
Migrants (<i>qianyi renkou</i>)				
Intercounty	35.3	3.4	79.1	6.7
Intercounty + intracounty	—	—	121.2	10.3
Intercounty migrants				
Permanent ^b	19.1 (54.1)	1.8	202 (25.6)	1.7
Temporary ^b	16.2 (45.9)	1.6	58.8 (7.4)	5.0
Interprovincial ^b	11.5 (32.6)	1.1	32.3 (40.9)	2.8
Intraprovincial ^b	23.8 (67.4)	2.3	46.8 (59.1)	4.0

Source: 1990 census: 1 percent sample; NBS 2002; Liang and Ma 2004.

— Not available.

a. Figures for migrants include only people over the age of five.

b. Figures in parentheses represent percentage of intercounty migrants.

Combining intercounty and intracounty migrants, the 2000 census reports a floating population of 144.4 million (11.6 percent of China's population) (NBS 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 100–140 million in the late 1990s (Solinger 1999; Zhong 2000; Wan 2001; Bai and Song 2002; Jiao 2002).¹¹ The 2005 National One-Percent Population Sample Survey reported an increase of the floating population to 150 million in 2005 (NBS 2006). According to one estimate, the floating population is increasing by about 5 million people a year (Beijing Sheke Guihua 2000). According to this estimate, it will reach 200 million in 2015 and 250 million in 2025.

Migrants (*qianyi renkou*). The closest Chinese equivalents to the terms *migration* and *migrants* are *qianyi* and *qianyi renkou*. Unlike the floating population, *qianyi renkou* is a measure of flow. In the 1990 census, *qianyi renkou* were defined as individuals five years or older who had moved

11 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 PSBs. 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 show that only about 38 million were registered (Gonggan Bu 1997; Goodkind and West 2002; Shen 2002).

do at the destination, and above all the degree of state involvement (Fan 1999; forthcoming). (table 3.3).

The reasons for migration can be represented by two intersecting dichotomous sets. The first set distinguishes economic reasons from social (including family and life-cycle) reasons (Rowland 1994). "Job transfer" (the transfer of workers by the state to specific jobs and regions); "job assignment" (the assignment of jobs by the state to recent graduates); and "industry/business" (defined as self-initiated moves for engaging in industrial, commercial, or trade sectors) are economic reasons for migrating. Research shows that most migrants who cite "industry/business" as their reason for migrating are of rural origin and do not have urban *hukou* (Fan 1999). Social reasons include "friends/relatives" (migration to seek the help of friends and relatives); "joining family"; and "marriage." "Retirement" and "study/training" are not readily categorized as economic or social reasons. The second set involves "state-sponsored," "planned," or "official" migration versus migration that is "self-initiated," "unofficial," or driven by the "market." The first type of migration is usually associated with permanent migration (with *hukou* change); the second type is usually associated with temporary migration (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* in the city where their university is located. "Industry/business" and

Table 3.3. Self-Declared Reasons for Intercity Migration, 1990 and 2000 (percent)

Reason	1990 census		2000 census	
	All migrants	Temporary migrants	All migrants	Temporary migrants
Job transfer	12.0	18.1	4.8	3.1
Job assignment	6.8	10.2	2.7	2.6
Industry/business	23.6	1.8	49.3	7.8
Study/training	12.9	21.4	2.7	46.4
Friends/relatives	9.7	6.6	13.4	3.9
Retirement	1.6	2.1	1.0	3.4
Joining family	11.0	13.7	7.8	n.a.
Marriage	13.8	15.6	11.6	7.9
Housing change	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10.0
Other	8.7	10.4	6.7	7.3
				17.2
				10.4
				2.5
				4.4

Source: 1990 census: 1 percent sample; Liang and Ma 2004.

n.a. = Not applicable.

Note: The options in the two censuses were the same, except that the 2000 census omitted "retirement" and included a new option ("housing change").

"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* (and have access to farmland) at their new location; it is much more difficult for rural-urban marriage migrants to obtain urban *hukou*. Because 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; Fan forthcoming).

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. The proportions of "job transfer" and "job assignment" migrants dropped sharply between the two censuses, however, 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 percent of all temporary migrants. The overwhelming objective of rural migrants is to increase income and diversify their sources of household income (Croll and Huang 1997; Fan 2002); these migrants have little access to state-sponsored channels of migration (Solinger 1999). The 2000 census results show that economic motivations are becoming increasingly prominent (Yang 2004). At the same time, the larger proportion of temporary migrants in the "joining family" category suggests that more rural-urban migrants are bringing their families to cities (Zhou 2004).

Migrants' Characteristics

Migrants in China tend to be young, single, and male (Cao 1995; Chan, Liu, and Yang 1999; Cai 2003). Since the 1980s, female migration has increased more rapidly than male migration.¹² Rural-urban migrants have a mean age in the mid-20s (Wang and others 2002). They are more likely to be male than female, but the gender ratio varies considerably

12 The proportion of women among interprovincial migrants increased from 41.3 percent in the 1990 census to 47.7 percent in the 2000 census (Fan forthcoming).

from place to place (Wang and others 2002). Female migrants are younger than male migrants, and they are more likely to be single (Fan 2004b; Wang and others 2002). Rural-urban migrants' modal educational attainment is junior secondary; they have more formal education than rural nonmigrants but less than urban residents (Cai 2003; de Brauw and others 2003; Du, Park, and Wang 2005). The effect of education is likely nonlinear: the most- and least-educated people are less likely to migrate than those in the middle, because those in the middle have the desire to economically better themselves as well as the means to pursue migrant work (Li and Zahmiser 2002; Du, Park and Wang 2005).

Recent studies have highlighted a new generation of rural-urban migrants who have more education than earlier migrants and little farming experience (Qiu, Xie, and Zhou 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 selective about the type of urban work they perform (Jian and Zhang 2005).

Studies have shown that permanent migrants tend to be associated with high education, urban origins, and urban destinations, while temporary migrants are associated with low education and rural origins (Fan 2002). The state is selectively awarding skilled and urban migrants permanent residence in the city while relegating less-qualified and rural migrants to unofficial and temporary statuses. The *hukou* system has played an important stratification role by engineering a two-track migration system under which a superior track (permanent migration) is set aside for qualified workers and urban residents and an inferior track (temporary migration) is designated for less-skilled migrants and migrants from rural areas (Gu 1992; Chan, Liu, and Yang 1999; Fan 1999).

Impacts of Rural-Urban Migration

The notion that rural-urban migration has been a key component of China's economic development is widely accepted (Cai 2001). The impacts of migration on urban and rural areas are deep and multifaceted, and evaluations of these impacts are mixed.

Impacts on Urban Areas

The impact of rural migrants on urban areas is hotly debated (Jiao 2002). Migrant labor is seen as important for stimulating the urban economy and boosting the expansion of urban industries and services (Cao 1995; Zhong and Gu 2000). Because most rural-urban migrants engage in low-paid,

manual and services types of work, they fill jobs that are shunned by most urbanites, who can specialize in more prestigious jobs. Migrants in cities also increase consumption, which creates employment for others (Zhong and Gu 2000).¹³

By augmenting labor in urban areas, rural migrants indirectly suppress wage increases in cities (Qiu, Xie, and Zhou 2004). It is well documented that rural migrants' labor cost is substantially lower than that of local urban labor (Cai 2002).¹⁴ Moreover, the large agricultural labor surplus supports a continuous 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; they are especially relevant for cities experiencing or expecting to experience population aging (Wang and others 2002). Recent labor shortages in the Pearl River delta and other areas specialized in labor-intensive manufacturing, however, suggest that rural migrants are becoming more selective in urban work; they are more mobile than they once were and more willing to follow better paid jobs to new and different locations (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 spreading sexually transmitted diseases (Cao 1995; Solinger 1999; Zhong and Gu 2000; Yang 2006; Yang, Derlega, and Luo 2007; Messner, Liu, and Karstedt forthcoming). Migrants are also blamed for exacerbating urban unemployment, especially given the increase in 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), although research has shown that migrant labor and urban local labor are complementary rather than competitive (Zhong 2000; Wang and others 2002). Workers laid off from state-owned enterprises are more experienced and skilled than the average rural-urban migrant.¹⁵ Some studies nevertheless warn that the

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

¹⁴ Cai (2002) cites reports that estimate that the cost ratio between local labor and migrant labor is 5:1 in Shanghai and 1.8:1 in Nanjing.

¹⁵ A study by Jiao (2002) concludes that the replacement ratio between the two types of labor is only 0.1.

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

In China's large cities, the social and economic segregation of rural migrants, the status hierarchy based on geographic origin, and the segmentation the urban labor market persist (Gu 1992; Cao 1995; Chan, Liu, and Yang 1999; Solinger 1999; Cai 2002; Fan 2002; Yu 2002). In these cities, most rural migrants occupy the lowest social and occupational rungs and are treated as outsiders rather than being assimilated (Solinger 1995; Fan 2002). Under the dualistic *hukou* structure, rural Chinese are still excluded from the system of entitlements designed only for urbanites. Rural migrants lack 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 numbered more than 14 million in 2000 and nearly 20 million in 2005, is rapidly becoming a burning question in Chinese cities (Fang Wang 2005).

Impacts on Rural Areas and Rural-Urban Inequality

It is widely acknowledged that labor migration helps raise income and diversify income sources for rural households and alleviates poverty in rural areas (Cai 2001; CASS/NBS 2003). Estimates of remittances vary, but most studies find that they account for at least 20 percent of the total income of migrant households (Du and Bai 1997; Li 1999; Wang and Fan 2006). Overwhelmingly, rural households use remittances to fund household projects (such as building or renovating a house); support household members (by financing education, for example); maintain regular household activities (such as living expenses and agricultural input), and lift households out of financial difficulties (by repaying debts) rather than to engage in new investment activities (Murphy 2002; Fan 2004a; 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 nonmigrant workers. He argues that migration raises the productivity of nonmigrants, because the departure of migrants results in reallocation of resources within the household and increased efficiency of the remaining labor. Hare

and Zhao (2000) find that marginal returns to labor from migration are higher than returns from agriculture.

The rural-urban income gap in China is large and increasing, as Albert Park indicates in chapter 2 and other researchers, including Knight and Song (1999) and Sicular and others (2007), have noted. Li (2003) shows that if urban nonmonetary income is taken into account, the ratio of urban income to rural income in China was 3.62:1 in 2000—the largest gap in the world. The Chinese government reports that urban income is five to six times as high as rural income (Guomin Jingji 2005). At the 16th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2002, former President Jiang Zemin stated that a widening rural-urban gap impedes progress toward a *xiaokang* society and that this trend should be reversed (CCP 2002).¹⁶ This point is also emphasized in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10) (Guomin Jingji 2005). In this light, the economic benefits of rural-urban migration to the countryside have national importance, as they are expected to reduce, if not eliminate, rural-urban inequality.

Skeptics question the equilibrating effect of migration. Croll and Huang (1997) note that remittances are an unstable source of income. Migration is also seen as accelerating brain drain from already deprived rural areas (Cao 1995). Labor migration may also discourage profitable sectors from moving inland and accelerate industrial agglomeration in coastal areas, thus increasing the coastal-inland gap (Hu 2002).

These arguments notwithstanding, 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 economic development in the place of origin (Zhong 2000; Fan 2004a).

A small body of work since the late 1990s has focused on urban-rural return migration. While systematic data on return migration are sparse, research based on surveys suggests that significant proportions of rural-urban migrants have returned to their places of origin (Bai and Song 2002; Murphy 2002). Other studies note that the desire for peasant migrants to settle in cities is not as strong as expected and that the

16 A *xiaokang* society is a society in which most of the population is of modest means or middle class. Although the term has its roots in classical literature, 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 of widening gaps in Chinese society (see Yusuf and Nabeshima 2006).

majority wish to return (Solinger 1995; Cai 2000; Wang 2003; Zhu 2007). 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, Xie, and Zhou 2004). Wang and Fan (2006) argue, however, that return migrants are negatively selected, and they question the extent of the returnees' economic contributions to their communities of origin. In short, the literature's main findings indicate that rural-urban migration has positive impacts on the countryside but that its impacts on overall rural-urban inequality are mixed.

Policy Implications

Chinese society is increasingly mobile. Both the magnitude and geographic extent of migration have expanded since the 1980s, and both trends are expected to continue (Zhang and Lin 2000).

The roles of economic and market forces in shaping migration have increased (Fan forthcoming; Poncet 2006). Migration is considered the engine of urbanization and economic development in 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, the efficient allocation of human resources, and the establishment of a nationally integrated labor market (Cao 1995; Zhong 2000; Zhang and Lin 2000; Cai 2001; Qiu 2001; Yu 2002). It is also seen as a major, albeit diminishing, source of the inequality between rural and urban Chinese, a gap that threatens social stability and undermines the government's new goal of "getting rich together" (*gongtong fuyi*), as embodied in the 11th Five-Year Plan (Du, Park, and Wang 2005; Fan 2006; Guomin Jingji 2005). Problems in accurately documenting urban statistics are also attributable to the *hukou* system (Wan 2001; Chan 2003).

Despite criticisms of the *hukou* system, most researchers favor an "orderly" reform rather than wholesale abolition of the system.¹⁷ This in part reflects the resistance of urban residents, who want to protect their interests and entitlements (Cai 2001), but it also reflects concern over

explosive growth of cities and the spread of slums, with the associated social problems and poverty traps. Moreover abolition of the *hukou* system cannot be achieved without reforming housing, health insurance, social security, labor, and employment policies (Qiu 2001).

Most scholars favor a two-pronged approach that gradually reduces the prominence of the *hukou* system. They suggest that urban entitlements be reduced so that urban residents are encouraged to compete in the labor market rather than relying on state protection (Cai 2001; Zhong 2000). They also argue that certain conditions—including freer capital flows, higher educational attainment of migrants, and a smaller rural-urban income gap—must be met before *hukou* reform can be thoroughly implemented, in order to ensure that migrants will not flood cities and cripple the urban infrastructure (Zhang and Lin 2000; Cai 2001).

Given the likelihood that the *hukou* system will not be dismantled in the foreseeable future, researchers have highlighted several issues that require policy makers' attention. The first has to do with the criteria for awarding urban *hukou* to rural migrants. Most scholars favor merit-based criteria, which are viewed as useful for monitoring the number, quality, and composition of migrants (Zhang and Lin 2000). This "elite" migrants approach has characterized migration policies in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and other large cities. Related to this is the view that the urban *hukou* should be more accessible in small towns and more strictly controlled in large and mega cities (Wan 2001; Cai 2003).

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). Some scholars suggest that the *hukou* should be replaced by a single identity card that is individual rather than household and location based. Such a card could replace the multiplicity of permits required of rural migrants and enable better and more standardized data collection (Qiu 2001).

Many researchers, including Jiao (2002), have urged policy makers to pay more attention to the rights and well-being of rural-urban migrants, whose voices often go unheard and who have few resources for collective activities, such as bargaining. Many scholars have pointed to the need to educate migrants' children, with some researchers recommending legalizing selected *liudong ertong xuexiao* ("migrant children's schools") and integrating them into the urban education system

¹⁷ These views are consistent with the gradualist approach that has characterized China's economic reforms since the late 1970s. This approach is sometimes described as "crossing the river by feeling the stones."

(Zhong and Gu 2000; Zhou and Chen 2004; Fang Wang 2005).¹⁸ Cai (2003) warns that without a systematic plan to educate migrants' children, these children will repeat their parents' marginality, creating a vicious intergenerational cycle.

Policies that serve migrants on a long-term basis can help foster their sense of belonging and contributing to the cities in which they live. Such policies can also address concerns over equity. The desire to prevent further polarization between rural and urban people is at the heart of the debate on migration policy and will be the basis for further *hukou* reform.

The debate, however has tended to focus on the city rather than the countryside. This approach is inappropriate, because rural migrants in China straddle the city and the countryside, with most remaining heavily involved in the economic and social infrastructure of their home villages (Fan forthcoming). Failure to recognize this will result in piecemeal policies that ignore the needs of those who still depend on the countryside and plan eventually to return to it. Agricultural productivity, nonagricultural economic opportunities, the cost and quality of education and other services, and the left-behind children and elderly are just some of the concerns that should be addressed if a migration policy is to be comprehensive and effective.

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- 18 Many migrants' children in cities are enrolled in schools organized by migrants. These schools receive minimal or no support from city governments (Kwong 2004). It is estimated that in 2004 there were 280 such schools in Beijing alone, enrolling about 50,000 migrant children (about one-fifth of all school-age migrant children in Beijing) (Li 2004). Migrants can also send their children to local schools by paying an extra fee (*jiadufei*) (Zhang and Lin 2000; Cai 2003). Although some cities have eliminated or reduced the extra fee, many migrants may still prefer to send their children to migrant children's schools, which are less expensive (Zhou and Chen 2004; Zhongguo Renmin Daxue 2005; Liang and Chen 2007).
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