MIGRATION IN CHINA
Børge Bakken (ed.)

Economic reform in China has led to migration of people within the world’s most populous nation on a scale never before seen. Since China’s new industrial revolution began in the late 1970s, there has been a flow of tens of millions (perhaps even hundreds of millions) of surplus rural labourers and their families moving from rural to urban areas. This phenomenon has been described in terms of both a blessing for China’s economic development and a threat against its social order. It is the aim of this short edited volume to look at the different aspects of internal Chinese migration. This will include a brief introduction to current research and pointers to the methodological traps and misunderstandings that can occur in the field.

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Migration in China

*edited by*
Børge Bakken

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Introduction

Børge Bakken

This edited volume is about migration as well as the study of migration in China. It presents some useful methodological approaches, definitions etc. to migration studies and it will also be valuable for people who want to enter the field of migration studies in China. The first chapter, by Cheng Li, gives an overview of the present situation which would be of great interest for the lay reader as well as the scholarly community. In the second chapter Zhang Kangqing presents a Chinese survey from Shanghai showing how Chinese scholars deal with the topic. Finally Hein Mallee clarifies definitions and methodology pointing out many of the traps and misunderstandings of the field.

The economic reform in China has led to a migration of people on a scale never before seen in the world’s most populous nation, and the phenomenon has been described both in terms of a blessing for economic development and as a threat against the social order. The phenomenon has been closely watched by the Chinese regime as well as the scholarly community in China and abroad. Since the economic reforms
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started in the late 1970s, we have seen a flow of surplus rural labourers. Depending on the definition given, several tens or perhaps hundreds of millions are on the move during China’s industrial revolution. The migration goes from the poor areas to the rich ones with more job opportunities, and some of the most dramatic events surrounding migration have been described by the so-called ‘Spring Festival migration’ when labourers virtually flood the wealthy areas on China’s eastern coast in search of jobs and adventure. For example, in 1992 it was reported that nearly 150,000 travellers were trapped in railway stations in Hunan and Sichuan alone. They were all trying to find employment in other provinces. Rural workers from flood-stricken areas in Anhui fled into neighbouring Shanghai or the rich Fujian Province hoping to find jobs. At the same time (as happened every year), Guangdong government officials warned of their province’s ‘limited absorption capacity’ and urgently called on job-hunters to stop streaming into the province. On the morning of 24 February, 40,000 job-seekers were stuck in the Zhengzhou railway station. One third of them were headed for the Daqing Oilfield to seek seasonal jobs. At the same time, over 100,000 rural workers flooded into Xiamen (one of the country’s special economic zones) in one week as a result of false rumours of a large recruitment drive in the city. The city called on the governments in the labourers’ provinces to take actions to stop the flow of rural people into Xiamen.1 While such dramatic events as this ‘blind flow’ of migrants are real enough, such alarmist reports tend to have dominated the debate on the migrant population. The picture is more balanced and diverse when we look into the scholarly debate on the subject as will be shown in the following articles. The three articles were originally presented at the workshop on Migration, Mobility

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and Labour Relations in China, held in Oslo from 29 May to
1 June, 1995 and co-arranged by the China Research Network
and the Institute of Applied Social Sciences (FAFO).

Professor Cheng Li, from Hamilton College in Clinton, New
York, paints his theme with a wide brush and introduces us to
the question of surplus rural labourers and internal migration
in China. His article is full of information, statistical
material and analysis of the present situation. At the same
time he tries to show us where the development might be
heading in the future. Zhang Kangqing, assistant professor
at the Institute of Population and Development Studies at the
Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences presents findings
from one of the large urban surveys on the floating
population made in Shanghai in 1993. Hein Mallee, who did
his Ph.D thesis on Chinese migration at the International
Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden, writes on the
definitions and methodology used in Chinese migration
studies. Where Li focuses on the whole field, and Zhang on
the situation in the cities, Mallee focuses on the history of
migration in the People’s Republic of China, and on the
mobility of the rural population today.

Li points out that the internal migration is both a cause and
a consequence of socio-economic change. Many issues of
both positive and negative character are at stake here, the two
main issues being the promises of economic development
and the potential loss of control. Li raises the question
whether the industrial growth will be rapid enough to absorb
the rural surplus labour force. He tells us of the regime’s own
worst case scenario of potential chaos, and their haunting
memory about dynasties that were crushed by dissatisfied
migrants (liumin) from the peasant masses. At the same time,
the migration has been a motor of economic development,
but a motor affecting the former tight control over population movements. Some foreign observers have even seen a promise of a civil society and democracy emerging from these peasant masses, but so far – at least in terms of organizing capability – the migrants have been closer to Sun Yatsen’s picture of the Chinese peasant masses at the turn of the century, a sack of loose sand. At the same time the migrant workers can be seen as a great human capital source who have contributed immensely to the place to which they have moved. They have also brought technology, skills and money back to their places of origin, thus contributing to the rural economy as well. But disparities between the urban and rural areas are widening, and the rural areas are losing that race. Li takes us through the push and pull factors of rural–urban migration, what presses migrants out of the rural areas and what leads them to head for the urban areas. He points out that the term ‘surplus’ is an ambiguous one, because one peasant’s job has been shared by more than one peasant for many decades in China, and that this practice might have continued without causing any socio-political problems. The economic reform has pushed peasants away from their land because of geographical disadvantages, improper use of farmland, environmental deterioration, the mere increase of agricultural labourers, and the political and economic reality of agricultural reforms. The pull factors have been the widening income disparity between rural and urban areas with the adventures and promises of the large city, the increased demand of urban construction projects, the increased demand of the non-state sector, and the changing structure of labour markets in urban areas. Li uses the phrase ‘Go East!’ as the slogan of the ‘tidal wave of migrant workers’ much like the American ‘49ers’ who went West under the slogan ‘Westward Ho!’ after gold was found in California in 1848. Unlike the ‘49ers’ who moved into a sparsely populated area, the Chinese migrant wave of today is heading towards one of the most
densely populated areas in the world, one moreover where most of China’s vast population is already living.

Zhang’s article gives us lots of sociologically interesting information about the floating population in China’s biggest and one of the country’s fastest developing cities, Shanghai. Surprisingly enough the vast majority – more than 64 per cent – of the floating population in Shanghai is married. Since most of the migrant population in Shanghai is in construction and other manual work, it might also come as a surprise to most people that their educational background is relatively high. The overall educational level is somewhat lower than among Shanghai’s local population, but Shanghai’s educational level is generally high for China. When it comes to the percentage of illiterates and semi-illiterates, there are more people of this category among the local population (13 per cent) than among the floating population (8 per cent). Less surprising is that the influx of migrants are predominantly young and male and this factor might also explain the relatively higher educational level among migrants since the illiteracy rates are by far the highest among elderly people. It may also account for why migrants are feared and considered to be dangerous and criminal. This branding of the entire group of migrants stems partly from prejudice, but since all crime is done by ‘the young and male’ all over the world, it shows that this fear is based on real problems as well. Zhang presents data on the type of residence among the floating population in the city. While nearly 70 per cent live in permanent households or collective households like dormitories, more than 20 per cent live on their work sites, which are often construction sites. 3.5 per cent live on the streets, in the harbours, at bus and railway stations, in open markets etc. Zhang comments that ‘only a small percentage stay in places with very bad conditions’, and that ‘the survey disproves that the emergence of urban slums is accompanying the increase in number of the floating population’. Since the floating
population in Shanghai consists of nearly three million people, the figures nevertheless tell us that nearly 100,000 people live on the streets and under the bridges in Shanghai. Mallee’s overall statistics for the whole country indicate that only about 0.1 to 1 per cent of the migrant population can be termed ‘vagrants’. This small group, however, has dominated the public discussion about migrants. The reason for that is not difficult to see, since migrants have become a symbol of the dangers of modernity and reform in a society where population mobility has been low for many years, and mobility has been associated with disorder and attacks on both socialist and traditionalist security.

Another important finding in Zhang’s research is that more and more ‘floaters’ now intend to stay in Shanghai on a permanent basis. It has formerly been presumed that most of the migrants have had the intention of returning to their home villages after a shorter stay in the city.

Zhang and Mallee both present the methodology of their projects, and the limitations of the survey methods used. Zhang’s research and questionnaire design are presented as an appendix at the back of the book.

Mallee takes us through the field of sources and definitions of migration in China. He argues that the definitions should include both a spatial and temporal aspect, and also explains more of the history and practices of migration and population control in China, in particular the politics of the household registration or hukou system. The hukou registers were previously used both as a means to constrain migration to urban areas and as a major means to allocate rationed commodities and benefits important to the population.

The limitations of the census and national surveys are discussed, and an overview over different types of sources of migration data is given. Mallee’s article shows us the complexities of migration studies in China and warns us
against many of the traps one can fall into if one does not grasp the overall situation of Chinese politics, culture and administration before setting out to do migration studies in the country. For instance, he explains that the low mobility levels of the decade of the Cultural Revolution to a large extent can be explained by the institutional arrangements binding peasants to their villages. During this decade there were even large scale administrative campaigns sending between ten and twenty million students from the urban areas ‘up to the mountains and down to the villages’, as the propaganda used to phrase the Maoist urban-to-rural migration said. Nevertheless, the migration rates were close to zero during this period, indicating that the outflow of urban residents was offset by an equally large inflow.

There are interesting details here about the social composition of migrants, at first sight seemingly different from Li’s analysis of surplus rural labourers and Zhang’s urban floating population. In 1987, Mallee argues, women dominated population mobility as a result of intra-provincial migration to counties and towns. Men tended to engage more in inter-provincial migration, while women made up the majority of intra-provincial migration. Marriage is often the reason for migration between counties, and since rural China is still predominantly patrilocal, nearly three out of four intra-rural migrants were women. The data from the most recent census, however, shows a sharp shift to male predominance in migration, and the overall sex ratio has increased from 78 to 125 in favour of male predominance. This shift partly reflects the growth of long-term non-official labour migration from the late 1980s, but women still dominate the intra-provincial migration. The predominantly female migrant criteria of ‘marriage’ and ‘accompanying family members’ have become less important in the overall migrant structure, while ‘labour and trade’ – a more male-dominated trend – have increased sharply. Mallee’s statistics
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from the 23 largest cities in China tell us that 17 per cent of the total population was classified as ‘floating’, while Li’s figures show 22.5 per cent of China’s seven biggest cities being populated by a transient population. In Guangzhou – the provincial capital of Guangdong – one out of three belongs to the floating migrants, while in Zhengzhou, a city where the economic reforms have developed particularly fast, a majority of 54 per cent of the population is ‘floating’. Such figures must be watched with caution, Mallee warns us, since definitions of ‘migrant population’ vary. His article ends with a thorough discussion of a rural survey on migration undertaken by the Institute of Population Studies and Development at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. The author has collected his samples from the seven provinces of Shanghai, Liaoning, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Sichuan, as well as the rural areas of Shanghai municipality.

References

*China Daily*, 21, 26 February 1992

*Renmin Ribao*, 20 February 1992
Surplus Rural Labourers and Internal Migration in China

Current Status and Future Prospects

Cheng Li

Introduction
Few issues in the study of Chinese socio-economic development over the past several years have generated as much public concern and a sense of urgency as surplus rural labourers and consequent large-scale internal migration in China. The issue of surplus rural labourers in China is of course not new. Since at least the 19th century, Chinese rulers have been concerned about the lack of arable land and the flow of surplus rural labourers. China accounts for 22 per cent of the world’s population, but has only 7 per cent of the world’s arable land. What is new, however, is the fact that those surplus farmers are now free to move and are increasingly choosing to move to urban areas, owing to the rapid economic growth in Chinese cities during the past decade.
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Like human migration elsewhere, China’s ongoing internal migration is both a cause and consequence of socio-economic change.¹ While no one seems to doubt the magnitude of the impact of migrant workers on the country, students of China differ profoundly in terms of the politico-economic implications of this phenomenon. Jack Goldstone, a sociologist from the University of California at Davis, argues that China’s surplus rural labourers and internal migration pose a major threat to the political stability and economic growth of the country. As the agricultural economy becomes virtually incapable of providing more employment and the industrial growth is not rapid enough to absorb the rural surplus, China is expected to have a ‘terminal crisis’ within the next ten to fifteen years.² Masses of unemployed peasants are likely to be the catalysts if China descends into chaos.³

In contrast, other China experts believe that surplus rural labourers provide great human resources for the country to reconstruct the economy, accelerate urbanization, and further rapid economic growth. The implication of China’s tidal wave of migrant labourers, as some believe, lies in the impulse, not only to reduce the segregation between rural and urban areas that was institutionalized during the Mao era, but also to narrow the widening gap between rich and poor regions during the Deng era. Instead of causing crisis and chaos, the ongoing internal migration will have constructive effects on

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China’s national integration. Some Western scholars who study Chinese politics also argue that the free movement of people will contribute to the formation of a civil society. Dorothy Solinger, for instance, argued that migrant labourers constitute a form of civil society because this social group stands apart and against the state.

The contrasting views concerning surplus rural labourers and internal migration have also reflected policy dilemmas for the Chinese government. It seems neither possible nor desirable for Chinese authorities to keep millions of surplus rural labourers on farmland, but rapid and large-scale internal migration is seen as politically dangerous to the regime. Not surprisingly, hardliners in the Chinese government advocate controlling and restricting the flow of migrant workers. A best-selling book in China during the early 1990s, *China through the Third Eye*, provides the rationale for Chinese hardliners. If the government loses the control over the flow of migrant labourers, according to the author, it would mean the loss of its power to rule, because migrants would lead the country to chaos. The author asserts that all Chinese dynasties without exception were destroyed by migrants (*liumin*) – those who lost or abandoned farmland.

2. Dorothy Solinger, ‘China’s Transients and the State: A Form of Civil Society?’, *Politics & Society*, vol. 21, no. 1, March 1993, pp. 97–98.
3. Wang Shan, *Disanzhi yanjing kanzhongguo* [China through the third eye], Hong Kong, Mingbao Press, 3rd edition, 1994. Jiang Zemin, Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party, was reported to have endorsed the book, which had been banned earlier. The book was published on both the mainland and abroad and was reprinted many times.
4. Ibid., p. 35.
The Chinese government has lately tightened its control of migrant labourers. During a recent ‘clean-up campaign’ in a district of Shanghai, policemen caught over 500 illegal migrants in a single day and immediately sent them back to their home areas. In Beijing, the government recently demolished more than 20 migrant enclaves and ‘vacuumed’ the well-known Zhejiang village – a migrant settlement in which at one time over 100,000 migrants from Zhejiang province had resided. In Shenzhen, China’s first special economic zone, security forces stepped into a dispute between a 500-strong group of migrant workers from central provinces and several hundred local residents at the end of 1995. The security force opened fire to stop a bloody brawl during which several were killed and a dozen were seriously injured. These suppressive actions by the government, however, cannot really reduce the pressure of surplus labourers that the country faces. On the contrary, the tension and conflict between the government and migrant labourers have become even more acute.

It is, therefore, crucially important to have a broad assessment of the nature, magnitude, dynamics, causal factors, and policy measures of China’s surplus rural labourers and internal migration. A number of studies on China’s internal

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1. *Xinmin Wanbao* [Xinmin evening news], Dec. 6, 1994, p. 3.
Surplus Rural Labourers and Internal Migration in China

migration have recently been published in the West, but most of them are either highly technical or largely normative.¹

This essay, however, intends to present an overview of the issues concerning China’s surplus rural labourers and internal migration by addressing some basic questions: How many surplus rural labourers does China have? Why has there been such a massive increase in the number of Chinese peasants who want to leave their farmland during the past decade? How many surplus rural labourers have joined the so-called ‘floating population’? What is the main direction of China’s internal migration? What measures can the government take to respond to the pressure, with what costs and consequences? What changes need to take place within a country to accommodate a migrant population? Answering these general questions can provide a comprehensive analysis of the current status and future prospects of China’s surplus rural labourers and internal migration. Most materials in the essay are derived from various Chinese sources that were recently published in China.

How many surplus rural labourers does China have?  
**Push and pull factors**

Any possible solution to the problem of surplus rural labourers should start with a better understanding of the various reasons that drive people to migrate. Some factors that induce China’s internal migration are by now well known, while some other factors are often overlooked. It is necessary, therefore, to briefly review all the factors that have contributed to the increasing number of surplus rural labourers.

*Lack of arable land as a result of a geographical disadvantage*

The phenomenon of surplus agricultural workers in China is a century-long problem. China accounts for 22 per cent of the world’s population, but has only 7 per cent of the world’s arable land and 3 per cent of the world’s forest. Cultivated land now constitutes only 10.3 per cent of China’s vast territory.\(^1\) The arable land of China is only one half of the arable land of the United States, but the number of rural labourers is 120 times that of the United States.\(^2\)

*Decrease of farmland as a result of improper land use*

Not only does China have a shortage of arable land in terms of the ratio of land to labourers, but also its cultivated land has been disappearing at an alarming speed. From 1952 to 1988, the area under cultivation in China decreased from 1.5 billion \(\text{mu}\) to 1.4 billion \(\text{mu}\) (one \(\text{mu}\) is about 670 square metres). According to Chinese official statistics, from 1949

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to 1992 the cultivated land area declined by 2.51 per cent. The cultivable land per capita dropped from 3 mu to 1.33 mu, which is much less than the world average of 6 mu.

Several factors have caused the loss of arable land. The preference for high-yielding cash crops over slower organic farming has led farmers to overuse fertilizers, which have deteriorated the soil. Desertification and deforestation have also been serious problems in China during recent decades. In the first three years of the 1990s, for example, China lost 9.37 million mu land (about the size of Qinghai province) mainly because of local officials’ lack of environmental concern. These factors have reinforced each other and resulted in pollution and deteriorating land fertility. In South China’s hilly terrain, for example, the organic content of soil has fallen from 6 per cent at initial cultivation to 2 per cent now. Environmental pollution in rural areas as a result of the spread of township and village enterprises has also aggravated the shortage of farmland. This fast loss of land is so threatening that the both the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the People’s Congress have held special meetings to discuss this problem.

Another major cause for the decrease is the sale of farmland for industrial and commercial use. During the past three decades, China has turned a total of 15,000 hectare of arable land into industrial and other uses. This number is equivalent to the size of arable land of France and Italy combined. The sale of farmland, which the Chinese call ‘land lease’ or ‘transfer of the land-use rights’ (tudi pizu), has increasingly become a common practice in many coastal regions in the past few years as individuals or institutions are allowed to sell or lease property to individuals, foreign joint ventures, or domestic companies. In Guangdong Province, for example, 100,000 mu arable land were sold for 9.4 billion yuan in 1992. That was equivalent to 44.8 per cent of Guangdong’s revenue during that year.¹ Table 1.1 shows that China’s arable land decreased by 0.5 per cent during the late 1980s.

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Natural increase in the number of agricultural labourers

The number of agricultural labourers increased from 180 million in 1950 to over 400 million in 1988. Each year about 10 million new agricultural labourers have joined the rural labour force. China now has about 500 million agricultural labourers. It is estimated that because of natural factors the number of agricultural labourers will increase to 540 million in the year 2000.

Effect of agricultural modernization

Because of both the increase in grain yield and the advance of agricultural mechanization, farm work requires far fewer labourers. Table 1.2 shows the generally continuous growth of grain yield over the past four decades. This growth is likely to continue in the years to come. According to a recent study completed by Lin Yifu, an economist at Beijing University, the maximum potential of per-unit yield will be about two to three times more than the present figure. Table 1.3 suggests the correlations between the number of rural labourers, the area of cultivated land per capita and agricultural modernization. While China has experienced rapid development in agricultural technology, (especially the wider use of electricity, agricultural machines and chemical fertilizer), the number of rural labourers have increased and arable land has decreased.

Effect of the household contract responsibility system

The abolition of the People’s Commune in the early 1980s ‘liberated’ millions of Chinese peasants. Rural economic reforms, particularly the establishment of the household contract responsibility system, ended the ‘iron bowl system’

Table 1.2: Grain yield and annual growth rate in China

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Grain Yield (10,000 tons)</th>
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### Table 1.2: Grain yield and annual growth rate in China (continued)

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<td>1985</td>
<td>37,911</td>
<td>-6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>39,151</td>
<td>3.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>40,298</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>39,408</td>
<td>-2.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>40,755</td>
<td>3.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>44,624</td>
<td>9.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>43,529</td>
<td>-2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>44,266</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.50</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in rural China and decentralized farming from the collective to the household level. As a result, efficiency increased and the number of labourers decreased.

Economists usually use the concept ‘marginal product of labour’ (MPL) to analyse whether a work unit, a region, or a country has surplus labourers. As more labourers are hired, the marginal product of labour will eventually fall. The work unit, or country, should stop employing labourers at the point at which any additional labour would cost more than it would produce.

How many labourers, then, does Chinese agriculture need at present? In other words, what is the number of China’s surplus rural labourers? The exact number of surplus rural labourers in China is difficult to estimate. This is partially because of rapid changes in the Chinese rural economy and partially because of the confusion caused by the way that the Chinese government defines rural population. In China, the category ‘nongmin’ (rural labourers or peasants) has been a residential identity rather than an occupational one. When the Chinese
Table 1.3: Correlation between rural labourers, arable land per person and agricultural modernization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rural labourers (millions)</th>
<th>Cultivated land (mu/person)</th>
<th>% of power-irrigated area to the total irrigated area (10,000 hectares)</th>
<th>Tractor-ploughed area (10,000 hectares)</th>
<th>Total power of agricultural machinery (100 million watts)</th>
<th>Consumption of chemical fertilizer (10,000 ton)</th>
<th>Electricity consumption in rural areas (100 mil. kwh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>182.43</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>205.66</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>263.6</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>213.73</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>828.4</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>235.34</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>1,557.9</td>
<td>10.99</td>
<td>194.2</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>306.38</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>55.4</td>
<td>4,067.0</td>
<td>117.50</td>
<td>884.0</td>
<td>253.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>310.25</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>4,221.9</td>
<td>133.79</td>
<td>1,086.3</td>
<td>282.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>318.36</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>4,099.0</td>
<td>147.46</td>
<td>1,269.4</td>
<td>320.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>326.72</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>3,647.7</td>
<td>156.80</td>
<td>1,334.9</td>
<td>369.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>338.67</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>3,511.5</td>
<td>166.14</td>
<td>1,513.4</td>
<td>396.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>346.90</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>3,357.2</td>
<td>180.22</td>
<td>1,659.8</td>
<td>428.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>359.68</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>3,492.2</td>
<td>194.97</td>
<td>1,739.8</td>
<td>464.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>370.65</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>3,444.2</td>
<td>200.13</td>
<td>1,775.8</td>
<td>508.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>379.90</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>3,642.8</td>
<td>220.50</td>
<td>1,930.6</td>
<td>586.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>390.00</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>3,839.3</td>
<td>248.36</td>
<td>1,990.7</td>
<td>658.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>400.67</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>4,091.4</td>
<td>265.75</td>
<td>2,141.5</td>
<td>712.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>409.39</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>4,259.3</td>
<td>280.67</td>
<td>2,357.1</td>
<td>790.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>420.10</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>4,825.5</td>
<td>287.07</td>
<td>2,590.3</td>
<td>844.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>430.93</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>5,019.0</td>
<td>293.88</td>
<td>2,805.1</td>
<td>963.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>438.02</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>58.2</td>
<td>5,146.9</td>
<td>303.08</td>
<td>2,903.2</td>
<td>1106.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

government compiles statistics, the ‘rural population’ refers primarily to administrative location and not to occupation.

One of the most salient developments in post-Mao China is the rise of township and village enterprises (TVEs). This change, along with the change in the system of ownership, has led to a diversification of occupational categories in the country, especially in rural areas. The way that China defines rural and urban populations has become increasingly inadequate as a growing number of rural residents are engaged in non-agricultural work. Table 1.4 shows the categories of China’s rural population. The rural population at present is 797 million. This number includes 274 million children and aging people. Of the remaining 523 million labourers, 63 million are engaged in non-agricultural work and 460 million are engaged in agricultural work.

Table 1.4: The rural population in China (1993)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total rural population</td>
<td>797 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>523 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-agricultural labourers</td>
<td>63 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural labourers</td>
<td>460 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and aging people</td>
<td>274 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As mentioned earlier, China has only 1.4 billion mu of arable land. We can also estimate, according to the current condition of agricultural mechanization and electrification in China, a rural labourer is able to cultivate about 5 mu land on average. Using an overly simplified calculation, one divides 1.4 billion mu by 5 mu and derives the number 280 million. Then 460 million minus 280 million is 180 million. One should also add two other numbers – one is the number of the annual increase in the rural labour force, which, as
mentioned earlier, is 10 million, and the other is the number of people who are in the category of children or aging, but who actually are engaged in full-time agricultural work. This number is also estimated at 10 million. Based on this calculation, rural China has roughly 200 million surplus labourers today. This figure appears to be in line with demographic estimates reported by several research institutes in China.¹

The total number of surplus rural labourers in China cannot be accurate because of the complexity of the factors involved. One may argue that the notion of ‘surplus’ is ambiguous, because one peasant’s job can well be shared by three peasants. This has been the case in rural China for many decades and this kind of practice may continue without causing any socio-political problems. But the factors such as geographical disadvantages, improper use of farmland, environmental deterioration, the natural increase in the number of agricultural labourers, and the effects of agricultural modernization are only push factors, there are also pull factors behind China’s rural to urban migration. The following are the main pull factors in China’s internal migration.

Widening income disparity between rural and urban areas
The widening gap in income between different areas and trades is a driving force. The rural–urban income disparity had grown from 1:1.71 in 1984 to 1:2.55 in 1994. In 1993 the income of urban residents was 12 per cent greater than it was in 1992, while the income of a peasant increased only 2 per cent (see Figure 1.1).² Because of the increasing income gap, many peasants move to cities to seek a better life.

Not only is the gap between rural and urban areas widening, but also the disparity between coastal and inland cities is

increasing. According to a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ survey of 20,000 urban households and a China’s Worker Union’s survey of 50,000 urban households, one half of China’s city and town dwellers live in poverty or *wenbao* (just above the poverty line).\(^1\) A report about the average incomes of major Chinese cities released in early 1995 also showed the large income gap between cities on the coast and those inland (see Table 1.5).

**Increased demand of urban construction projects**

Construction projects in urban areas need a great number of labourers. Shanghai, for example, completed more municipal works in the past four years than it did in the previous four decades. The city has witnessed over 1,000 skyscrapers rising from the ground due to the property boom during the past few years. Two bridges and a new tunnel were recently completed across the Huangpu River to link the west side of the city to

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Surplus Rural Labourers and Internal Migration in China

Table 1.5: Average monthly income and expenditure in major Chinese cities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Income (yuan)</th>
<th>Expenditure (yuan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>415.36</td>
<td>385.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>338.12</td>
<td>294.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>274.64</td>
<td>244.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>253.02</td>
<td>239.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>224.30</td>
<td>211.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>214.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongqing</td>
<td>212.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xian</td>
<td>206.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenyang</td>
<td>191.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harbin</td>
<td>169.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


the east side (Pudong). Asia’s highest television tower (the Oriental Pearl TV Tower) and largest department store (Yaohan, a 21-story, 144,000 square meter complex built by a Sino–Japanese joint venture) stand on the east side of the Huangpu River. In 1995, Shanghai had its first subway line and its first overpass highway ring around the city.

Not only Shanghai, but also vast areas near Shanghai have been engaged in what someone called the ‘construction fever’. As a reporter for the Wall Street Journal described it: ‘What’s going on in Shanghai, and up and down the China coast, might be the biggest construction project the planet has ever seen since the coral polyps built the Great Barrier Reef after the last Ice Age.’

1. Migrants are the main source of the workforce

Migration in China

for these urban projects. In Pudong, for example, about 4,000 new construction projects were started in 1994 and more than three-fourths of the construction workers were migrants from other provinces.

Increased demand of the non-state sector in urban areas
Not only urban construction projects but also urban private enterprises and foreign joint ventures have sought to hire cheap labourers. For the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China, the government strictly restrained the existence of private enterprises. Private enterprises began to reappear in the mid-1980s, but at that time each private firm was allowed to hire no more than eight workers. Private enterprises have been growing rapidly in the early 1990s. By the end of 1992, approximately 7.7 million – 89 per cent – of the retail sales outlets in China belonged to private firms or individually owned businesses. About 80 per cent of the 140,000 shops and markets in Beijing, for example, are either owned or run by private entrepreneurs.¹ The number of private enterprises in the country increased from 91,000 in 1989 to 420,000 in 1994.²

The private sector has developed fastest along the south-east coast of China where 70 per cent of the country’s private businesses are located. Another 19 per cent are in Central China and only 1 per cent are in the western part of the country.³ It is not clear how many workers employed in the private sector are from local areas or elsewhere, but some

2. Before 1992, the official dividing line between a getihu (individual business firm) and a siren qiye (private enterprise) was determined by the number of full-time personnel it employed: when a business reached eight or more it became a private enterprise. But more recently, a capital value of 500,000 yuan or more has become the criterion.
case studies show that migrants constitute an overwhelmingly majority of workers in the non-state firms, including private, collective and foreign-owned firms, in the coastal area. As the China Daily recently reported, in some economically advanced market towns in southern Jiangsu, the number of non-local labourers has surpassed local residents.¹

Foreign companies or joint ventures, especially those from Hong Kong and Taiwan, have employed a large number of migrant workers. Table 1.6 shows that the increase in the number of migrant labourers in Dongguan, Guangdong, is synonymous with the flow of foreign capital into the area. Dongguan, bordering the Shenzhen Economic Zone, is one

of the leading counties in China in terms of foreign investment. In 1990, the number of migrant workers was 4.2 times the number in 1986. In Shenzhen, in 1990 out of a total population of 1.7 million in 1990, 980,700 were migrants.1

Table 1.6: Correlation of the increase of migrant labourers and the growth of foreign investment in Dongguan, Guangdong (1986-1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Foreign Investment (Million USD)</th>
<th>Exports (Million USD)</th>
<th>Migrant Workers</th>
<th>% of Migrant Workers in Total Labour Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>156,000</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>253,000</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>369,000</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>482,000</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>656,000</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The changing structure of labour markets in urban areas

The development of a market economy in urban areas has increased the demand for low-wage labour in service sectors. Permanent city residents, however, have become increasingly unwilling to do ‘dirty jobs’ such as lavatory cleaning or garbage collecting. According to a recent investigation, migrant

Surplus Rural Labourers and Internal Migration in China

labourers have shouldered 80 per cent of the ‘dirty, heavy, and dangerous jobs’ in Shanghai.¹

All these push and pull factors have contributed to the ongoing rural-to-urban migration. None of them will disappear in the foreseeable future. There is every reason to expect the issues related to rural surplus labourers and internal migration will become even more acute, especially as China’s urban unemployment rate continuously increases. Due to the low cost of transportation, distances are no longer a significant barrier to China’s internal migration. The snowball effect will compound the problem as more surplus rural labourers flood into the cities. The multi-causes of China’s surplus rural labourers and consequent large-scale internal migration also suggest that the Chinese government needs to adopt various measures to deal with China’s rural crisis. Before discussing governmental measures, we may first look at some of the main characteristics and trends of China’s internal migration.

How many surplus rural labourers have joined the floating population? The main direction of China’s internal migration

A large number of surplus rural labourers inevitably have to migrate to urban areas to seek job opportunities. Some of them have already joined what the Chinese call the ‘floating population’ (liudong renkou). The floating population includes the rural-to-urban migrant labourers, but the two terms are not identical. The floating population also refers to children, aging people and non-agricultural workers who flow from one place to the other, including urban-to-urban, rural-to-rural, and urban-to-rural types of migration. Some Western

scholars and journalists, by mistake, use these two terms interchangeably. The floating population refers loosely to those people who stay in places where they do not have a permanent household registration status. This category would include temporary residents, contract rural workers, short-term visitors, people on business trips, etc.

A recent study conducted by China’s Ministry of Public Security reports that the floating population at present stands at 80 million. Of course, not all of the floating population come from the countryside, although the dominant migratory pattern is the movement from rural areas to urban centres. Table 1.7 shows the migration distribution in terms of urban–rural direction. More than half of migrants move from rural to urban locations. A nationwide survey of large cities conducted in 1990 showed that 60 per cent of the floating population was from the countryside and the rest from inter-

urban flows.\(^1\) In addition, about two-thirds of the floating population are short-term visitors. If one also deducts the number of children and aging people (reported to be 6 per cent) in the floating population, one arrives at the figure of about 15 million – this is the estimated number of surplus rural labourers in the floating population. The figure seems too small and it is only 7.5 per cent of the total 200 million surplus rural labourers. This small number is inconsistent with findings of many other studies.\(^2\) For example, Guangdong Province alone had 10 million migrant workers from other parts of the country in 1993.\(^3\)

There is no reliable source to show how many surplus rural labourers have joined the ‘floating population.’ This is partially because of the definitional confusion mentioned above and partially because of the fact that data on migrants are not systematically collected. China’s Administrative Bureau of Population Registration estimated 30 million migrant labourers flooded cities in 1995, 20 per cent more than in 1994.\(^4\) Based on this figure and the figure of 15 million mentioned earlier, we have a rough idea of the number of surplus rural labourers in the total floating population. This means that the flow of migrant workers in China is only the tip of the iceberg. Fifteen to 30 million surplus rural labourers

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2. For example, according to a recent study, about 10 million people joined China’s floating population annually in the first three years of the 1990s. *Shehuixue yanjiu* [Sociological studies], July 1993, p. 65. It is estimated by some Chinese demographers that the number of migrants nationwide topped 100 million in 1992, *China Population Today*, July 1994, p. 12.
Migration in China

Table 1.7: Migration by rural–urban differentiations based on 1% sample survey in 1987 (percentage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direction of Flow</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From rural to urban</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From urban to urban</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From rural to rural</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From urban to rural</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


in the floating population at present is only the ‘beginning’ of a migration of 200 million in the years to come. Although it is only the ‘beginning’, it has already had a strong impact on China’s urban areas and caused tremendous pressure.

During the Spring Festival, China’s most important holiday, almost all migrants return to their native places where they spend about two weeks with their families. Then they go back to their workplaces in the cities, usually bringing more surplus rural labourers from their home villages with them. This is what the Chinese call the ‘tidal wave of migrant workers’ (mingongchao). Faced with the ‘tidal wave of migrant labourers), the entire railway system in China almost shut down during the Spring Festival season in the past few years.\(^1\)

An analysis of the direction of migration shows that an overwhelmingly large portion of inter-provincial migrants

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1. Even during the regular season, China’s railway transport can meet only 40 to 60 per cent of the national demand. Zhou Zong-min, ‘China All Out to Ease Economic Bottlenecks’, New China Quarterly, December 1993, no. 30, p. 9.
moved from the west and the north of China to its east and south coast. Just as ‘Westward Ho!’ became a catchword for American ‘49ers’, the idea ‘Go East’ has inspired millions of Chinese migrants. But, unlike the American west in 1849, which was a primitive and relatively uninhabited area, China’s east and south coast is the most developed region in China and one of the most populous areas in the world.

The uneven distribution of China’s population is well-known. As demarcated by the famous Hu’s line (see Figure 1.2), approximately 94 per cent of China’s population inhabit the eastern and southeastern parts of the country, which account for only 46 per cent of China’s territory, while the western and northwestern parts of China account for 54 per cent of the country’s land area but only 6 per cent of the national total population.¹ In Shanghai, for example, the population

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density is 2,118 persons per sq. km compared with 2 persons per sq. km in some inland provinces such as Xizang Autonomous Region (Tibet). Qinghai, Xingjiang, and Nei Mongol provinces have five, eight, and sixteen persons per sq. km respectively. These four provinces contain 50 per cent of China’s land area but only 4 per cent of its population. Table 1.8 shows the urban density in China by region. Chinese cities and towns are crowded within the eastern region of the country. Furthermore, the densely populated eastern and southeastern coastal areas – despite their high level of economic development – have inadequate deposits of natural resources, whereas the less developed western and southwestern areas of the country, with their sparse population, are richly endowed with natural resources.

Table 1.9 shows the population migration in China by province. The data are based on a national 1 per cent sample survey in 1987 and the 1990 census. We can see three general trends from the table: First, almost all the coastal provinces have net migration, the net migration of Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin, China’s three metropolitan cities, is particularly evident. Second, although the two surveys are only a few

1. Ibid.
### Table 1.9: Population migration in China by province (1982–90)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Migration 1982–87 (National 1% Sample Survey)</th>
<th>Migration 1985–90 (the 1990 Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intra-province</td>
<td>Outward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebei</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanxi</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neimenggu</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaoning</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jilin</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heilongjiang</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.9: Population migration in China by province (1982–90) (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Migration 1982–87 (National 1% Sample Survey)</th>
<th>Migration 1985–90 (the 1990 Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intra-province</td>
<td>Outward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangxi</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunan</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangdong</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangxi</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 1.9: Population migration in China by province (1982–90) (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Migration 1982–87 (National 1% Sample Survey)</th>
<th>Migration 1985–90 (the 1990 Census)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intra-province</td>
<td>Outward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hainan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yunnan</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaanxi</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gansu</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qinghai</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ningxia</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinjiang</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Migration in China

years apart (and actually overlap for three years), the rate of
gross migration increased significantly during the more
recent period. Third, both intra-province and inter-province
migration rates are high in both periods, but in the more
recent period the intra-province rate in most provinces
dropped while the inter-province migration rate in almost all
provinces increased. This suggests the trend that migrant
workers choose a long-distance destination.¹

Table 1.10 reaffirms the rapid increase in the floating
population in China’s major cities during the past decade.
Migrants already constitute a significant portion of the
population in China’s major cities (see Table 1.11). In 1994,
Shanghai’s floating population reached 3.3 million, almost
doubling the 1986 figure, according to statistics compiled by
the Shanghai Public Security and Statistic Bureau. This means
that there is one newly arrived migrant for every three
residents in the urban area of Shanghai. The ratio between
the floating population and the permanent population in these
cities increased from 12.6 per cent in 1984 to 22.5 per cent in
1987 and to 25.4 per cent in 1994. Table 1.12 illustrates the
mobility types of the floating population in terms of purposes
in ten major cities. Not surprisingly, in all these cities being
surveyed, the most important motivation of the rural-to-
urban migrants is to seek employment.

Several studies show that most migrant workers are in their
late teens or early 20s. About 80 per cent have primary
or intermediate school education. Fully three-quarters are unmar-
rried. About 70 per cent are male.² In Shanghai, for example, a

¹. This discussion is based on Li Shuzhuo’s ‘Zhongguo bashi
niandai de quyu jingji fazhan he renkou qianyi yanjiu’ [A study on
the development of regional economy and population migration in
China in the 1980s, Renkou yu Jingji [Population and Economics]
². Zhongguo renkou nianjian [Yearbook of Chinese population], 1990,
p. 553; and Shehuixue yanjiu [Sociological studies], July 1993, p. 68.
Table 1.10: The growth of the floating population in ten major cities of China (10,000 people/day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>167#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>120*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chongqing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengdu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhengzhou</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiyuan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Mengbai, 'Liudong renkou pengzhang yu xiangcun laodongli zhuanyi' [The explosion of migrant population in cities and the transfer of rural labourers], Nongcun jingji yu shehui [Rural Economy and Society], no. 2, 1994, p. 23.
Some more recent data are from the Shanghai Star, 22 March, 1994, p. 2; and 15 April, 1994, p. 1.
Notes: (*) This number refers to the floating population in Wuhan in 1990, not 1992.
(#) Estimated and not the final result of the investigation. Cankao xiaoshi [Reference news], 6 Nov., 1994, p. 8.
### Table 1.11: The floating population in seven Chinese cities and their percentage of the permanent population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>1984 Floating Population (10,000 people)</th>
<th>Ratio between Floating Pop'n and Permanent Pop'n %</th>
<th>1987 Floating Population (10,000 people)</th>
<th>Ratio between Floating Pop'n and Permanent Pop'n %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>14.60</td>
<td>115.0</td>
<td>22.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>102.6</td>
<td>15.25</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>26.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianjin</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>15.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuhan</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>12.07</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>21.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>20.08</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>33.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shenyang</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>14.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengdu</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>14.47</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>24.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>327.1</td>
<td>12.62</td>
<td>620.9</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

large number of migrants are engaged in construction work. Other migrant labourers work as waiters, maids, repairmen, furniture makers, factory workers, shop assistants, tailors, street peddlers, packers, haulers, road and lavatory cleaners, garbage collectors and mortuary attendants.\(^1\)

Although many other developing countries have been confronting the population explosion in their overcrowded cities, few countries in the world cope with such high population pressure as China. Some Chinese officials admit that ‘social,  

\(^1\) *Shanghai Star*, 22 March 1994, p. 2; and 15 April 1994, p. 1.
What are the economic-political implications of surplus labourers to China? Government measures responding to the pressure

The most politically sensitive implication of 200 million surplus rural labourers is its potential negative effect on social stability. It is not difficult to imagine that Chinese leaders feel great anxiety if 200 million people in the country remain ‘surplus’ or ‘floating’. China’s history, as some Western scholars have noted, is almost compulsively patterned: when the peasants could not make a living on farmland, they would rebel; when they rebelled, dynasties fell. The prolonged problem of surplus rural labourers will cause large-scale economic, and environmental problems are an inevitable consequence of such pressures’.¹

disruption in the countryside and will inevitably spoil any urban boom.

Grievances among Chinese peasants have increased in recent years, especially because many new levies have been imposed on them for reasons such as road construction, rural education and communication. In Henan Province, for example, in the first seven months of 1993, 251 groups of peasants, altogether 6,947 people, went to Beijing or the capital of the province to appeal to the authorities for justice.¹ One group protested in front of the province headquarters for three days and nights. The Chinese government recently issued an order that prohibits any appeal in the form of group protest. However, anti-government disturbances, and even peasants’ riots, such as the one that occurred in Sichuan in May 1993, still took place.²

Migrant workers have increased the pressure on urban infrastructure, housing, transportation, health care and social welfare, both within the city and across the country. The migrant population has often been blamed for rising crime in the country. According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Public Security, China’s crime rate has increased 6 per cent annually during the past ten years. Serious crimes have increased as much as 18 per cent annually. In 1992, about 1,540,000 crimes were reported in the country. A significant number of these crimes were committed by migrants.³

¹. *Lilun dongtai* [Theoretical news], 20 October 1993, p. 2.
². In May 1993, the local authorities of Sichuan Province decided to build a highway and asked relatively poor peasants to help pay for construction. When asked to pay $5 to $10 per person, the outraged farmers attacked the tax office and local officials. The protest lasted several weeks until the government cracked down. Mitsuru Kitano: ‘The New China: Dynamism and Vulnerability’, *The Pacific Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, p. 155.
Migration in China

According to the statistics recently released by the Chinese authorities, the country had 649,000 crime cases conducted by migrants in 1995, a 14 per cent increase over 1994. In Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin, migrants committed 50 per cent of crimes; in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, over 80 per cent. In Shanghai’s Pudong District, the crimes committed by migrants increased from 33 per cent in 1988 to 52 per cent in 1991 and 70 per cent in 1993. These crimes were usually committed by groups rather than by single individuals. For instance, about 60 per cent of crimes by migrants in Beijing during 1991 were group crimes. The rapid increase in the crimes perpetrated by migrants also leads to an increase in city residents’ hatred-related crimes against migrants.

The massive internal migration has also significantly affected birth control in the country. For over two decades, every family in China has been allowed to have only one child. Local officials have been closely watching the effectiveness of the ‘one child policy’. But birth control is practically impossible to enforce among migrant workers. Some couples come to urban areas in order to avoid birth control in their native villages. They have a female baby, but they still want a son. Many have two children or more. A newly-wed couple migrated to Amoy nine years ago and now they have nine children! According to a recent survey conducted in Shanghai, over 60 per cent of migrant workers want to have two children. Unplanned childbirth among the floating population is 30 times higher than that of Shanghai residents.

But certainly not all people see the large-scale internal migration negatively. Some people look positively at the tidal wave of migrant labourers. Xiao Yang, Governor of Sichuan, believes that the tidal wave of migrant workers is the third great undertaking in China’s rural reform, after the successes of the household contract responsibility system, and the Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs). Xiao told Chinese journalists that migrant workers have made three contributions: 1) they have contributed to the economy of the place to which they have moved; 2) they have brought advanced technology, experience and a new way of thinking to their native places; and 3) they have sent money back to their home villages.¹ In Sichuan for example, migrant workers have sent 5 billion yuan back to Sichuan Province annually – equivalent to the value of a year’s stock issued in China.

The implication of China’s tidal wave of migrant labourers, as some scholars believe, lies in the impulse not only to reduce the segregation between rural and urban areas that was institutionalized during the Mao era, but also in the long run to narrow the widening gap between rich and poor regions under Deng Xiaoping. The availability of 200 million surplus rural labourers provides great human capital and is a positive factor for continuing rapid economic growth in the country.

Regardless of the way in which people perceive the issue concerning surplus rural labourers, probably no one will disagree that the crucial question for China is how to absorb this huge number of labourers. What measures can the Chinese government take to respond to the pressure? Again, people – in both the government and academia – differ profoundly in the approaches they think should be taken to handle this problem.

¹. *Dangdai* [Contemporary], 15 August 1994, pp. 70–72.
The following list includes some measures that the government may adopt to deal with the pressure. Some of these have been used since the 1950s, but they have recently become less effective. Some measures are currently in use or under consideration by policy makers. Because of the large scale and the multiple causes of China’s surplus rural labourers and internal migration, no easy solution is available and no single measure will be sufficient to deal with the complicated issues involved. It is therefore necessary to have a more comprehensive approach to respond to the pressure. Not all these measures are complementary, there are tensions and conflicts among certain policy measures:

- to re-enforce of administrative control – previously used measures.
- the household registration system.
- control of the supply of grain and cooking oil.
- the labour and employment system.
- to absorb into urban state-owned enterprises.
- to absorb into township and village enterprises (TVEs).
- to develop labour-intensive infrastructure projects.
- to help migrant labourers to settle down in small/medium-sized cities.
- to abolish household registration system at the county-town level.
- to develop tertiary industry (service sector).
- To establish job information/service centres at all level of administration and to facilitate various kinds of training program.
- To intensify farmland protection and establish both preventative and curative measures to protect the environment.
- to increase the investment on agricultural infrastructure.
- to raise the price of farm products to keep up with those of manufactured goods. (The real problem is that the
government has failed to raise the prices of farm products to keep up with those of manufactured goods. In 1993 the price of fertilizer, fuel, and other farming necessities rose nearly twice as fast as those of farm commodities.)

• to reallocate financial resources and to increase funds for social welfare.
• to create an early-warning mechanism for situations likely to cause protests by migrants, especially concerning violations of human rights.

One can imagine that there is a powerful force within the Chinese government that advocates controlling and restricting the flow of migrant workers. From the 1950s to recent times China’s population has been relatively immobile geographically, due in part to the country’s tight control on movement.¹ The term ‘floating population’, according to a Chinese scholar, is uniquely Chinese. Citizens in democratic countries are free to move from one region to the other.² For Americans, moving from one state to another is quite a common phenomenon. The annual interstate rate of moving in the US is 4 per cent. But in China, the annual cross-province rate of moving was as low as 0.12 percent in the 1980s.³

Two major reasons account for the difference. First, China is traditionally not a mobile nation. Only war or natural disaster could persuade Chinese peasants to leave their beloved farmland. Secondly, the Chinese Communist government adopted a household registration system soon after it came to power in 1949. There are three main categories of registration: city, town and rural. Moving one’s registration location from an undesirable to a desirable place, as Judith Banister observes, ‘has normally been difficult or impossible’.⁴

². Shehui [Society], August 1993, p. 39.
City registration carries with it more privileges, such as, financial and educational benefits, than the other categories. Each family in an urban area had a household registration book (*hukoubu*). A copy was kept on file at the local police station. *Hukoubu* indicated legal permission for a family to live in an urban area. The family also needed this household registration book to receive certificates for grain, cotton, cooking oil, milk, sugar, meat and other necessities. These administrative control measures, including the control over employment, were very effective in the Mao era.

During the post-Mao era, however, the rationing system dissolved because all products could easily be bought at slightly higher prices on free markets. Although the household registration system remains, it has lost its effectiveness as a means of controlling where people live. Rapid urban economic growth pulled more labourers from rural areas to join work-forces in construction, commerce and civil service in Chinese cities, especially in the non-state sectors.

Some officials in major cities have advocated that local governments should adopt a more restrictive policy to limit the flow of migrant labourers. They have recently adopted some measures to constrain the ‘influx of migrant workers’, or what they called discriminatively the ‘reckless flow of job-seeking farmers’ (*mangliu*). In 1994, the Shanghai municipal government issued a year-long and renewable blue card (*wugongzheng*), a work permit card system to permit migrant labourers to work in the city. This new measure intends to make it more difficult for those who don’t have ‘blue cards’ to work in Shanghai. According to the new regulations of the municipal government, any firms that hire migrant labourers should offer jobs only to those migrants who have three cards – a work permit card, a temporary household registration card, and an I.D. card. But very few private firms in the city really adhere to the government regulations.
The restrictive government policy towards migrants has received much criticism from the public. Chen Zhenhui, a senior economist with the Guangdong Province Labor Services Company, argues:

If the migrant workers are stopped, there would be at least a stagnation in the coastal areas. At worst, the economy of the coastal areas would collapse, causing the national economy to collapse. That will create far greater chaos in China, a much bigger threat than the disorder in the cities from the floating population. If we drive these people back to their home towns, they become different people. They cannot stay there peacefully. The whole country will become unstable.¹

This does not mean that the government should not provide guidance for the direction of the flow of migrant workers. Major Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou have already been overcrowded and on the verge of paralysis. The state-owned enterprises in Chinese cities need to cut their workforce and certainly cannot absorb migrant workers. It would be strategically sound for the Chinese government to use policy measures to guide migrants to settle down in small and medium-sized cities. The government can, for example, abolish the household registration system at the county-town level, extend small-sized cities and help peasants pursue permanent residence there. This policy could reduce the pressure caused by the influx of migrants to major cities.

One of the most successful cases in absorbing surplus rural labourers in small-sized cities and towns is southern Jiangsu. Over the past decade that region has absorbed a large number of surplus rural labourers, both from within the region and from elsewhere, in its rural industries. The whole region has undergone rapid urbanization and, as a result, many new jobs have been created there. During the mid-

¹ Jim Landers, ‘A Crisis in Motion’, p. 8A.
1980s, township and village enterprises in southern Jiangsu successfully transformed 3,360,000 agricultural workers – 65 per cent of the total labour force in the region – into non-agricultural employees.\(^1\) By 1993, Sunan absorbed over two million surplus rural labourers from other areas to work in the region. This number does not even include the temporary workers hired without work permits or the floating population.\(^2\) The experience of southern Jiangsu in absorbing surplus rural labourers from other areas is particularly remarkable because southern Jiangsu itself is one of the most populous regions in China. Some scholars call southern Jiangsu’s TVEs the ‘sponges’ or ‘reservoirs’ of surplus rural labour.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that TVEs are unlimited ‘labour reservoirs’, which could employ 200 million surplus labourers. Many recent studies indicate that although rural township enterprises continued to develop rapidly since the end of the 1980s, they did not necessarily create new jobs. This situation will not change unless a large amount of capital is poured into rural township enterprises.\(^3\) Many TVEs are transforming from labour-intensive to technology-intensive firms.

The Chinese government should relocate resources to initiate labour-intensive projects to consolidate water and soil conservation and to construct more railways and highways – the bottleneck of China’s economic development. The shortage of highways has been particularly notable. The density of China’s highways, for example, is only one-fifth of India’s, one-seventh of the United States’ and one-thirtieth of Japan’s. According to a study conducted in 1992, the total

\(^1\) Zhongguo xiangzhen qiye [China’s rural enterprises], no. 11, 1987, p. 10.
\(^2\) Weishi, no. 8, 1993, p. 6.
capacity of China’s five types of transportation (railway, highway, water, air, and pipeline) was 2.07 million km. This figure was even less than 50 per cent of the capacity of highway transportation alone in the United States in 1938.\footnote{Zuang Jian, ‘Zhongguo disan chanye de fazhan yu wenti’ [The status and problems of the development of China’s tertiary industry], Zhongguo disan chanye nianjian [Almanac of China’s tertiary industry], 1993, p. 969.} The timing is ideal for the Chinese government to launch more labour-intensive transportation and infrastructure projects while millions of inexpensive surplus rural labourers are available.

One important policy measure that would absorb surplus rural labourers would be to encourage the development of the service sector in China’s economy. The service sector, also called the tertiary industry, accounts for only 13 per cent of China’s labour force; some experts estimate that if the percentage increases to 30 per cent by the year 2000, 120
million jobs will be created. A comparative study of employed workers in tertiary industries in various countries shows that the percentage of employed labourers working in the service sector of the total workforce in 1991 was 18.9 per cent in China, 47 per cent in Taiwan, 58.7 per cent in Japan, and 71.6 per cent in the US.¹

Meanwhile, the Chinese government should increase the protection of farmland and adopt a more constructive and protective policy towards agricultural development. Investment in agricultural infrastructure accounted for only 1.7 per cent of state expenditure in 1994, the lowest percentage in history. Some experts agree that the privileges accorded to urban residents, such as housing, social welfare benefits, subsidized food and public transport, education and medical services, must either be removed or extended to rural residents as well.²

The government should facilitate various kinds of service and training programs at all levels of administration to help migrant workers. A nationwide information centre must be set up to provide information to migrants regarding their rights and obligations. Some priority should be given to social facilities.³ The way in which the government deals with surplus rural labourers and migrants will necessarily affect the welfare of vast numbers of Chinese people. To a certain extent, the future of China – its political stability, economic growth, and social progress – largely depends on how successfully the large number of ‘surplus’ people are integrated into all aspects of Chinese society.

In conclusion, China’s surplus rural labourers have already had an overwhelming impact on all aspects of Chinese society.

¹. Ibid., p. 991.
³. Ibid.

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society. Because of its tremendously large scale and scope, the issue of surplus rural labourers will perplex China for many years, if not many decades, to come. The economic growth, political stability, and social structure of the country will largely depend on how the problem of surplus rural labourers is handled. This may become a serious crisis as millions of jobless peasants converge on cities where there are no jobs either. However, it may also become a great opportunity as these surplus labourers provide human resources for reconstructing the economy, accelerating urbanization, and furthering rapid economic growth.

People in China often liken the Chinese migrant labour force to a tidal wave. China is often seen as a boat sailing on an uncharted sea. ‘A tidal wave can either carry the boat or capsize it,’ states a well-known Chinese idiom shuineng zaizhou yeneng fuzhou. Probably at no time in contemporary Chinese history has this idiom been more relevant to the country than at present.

For the Chinese government, probably no advice is better than the remark made by a framer of the American Constitution in 1787: ‘Bad governments are of two sorts: First, the ones that do too little, and secondly, the ones that do too much: one type fails through weakness, the other destroys through oppression.’
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Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population

by Zhang Kangqing

Introduction
Since the late 1970s, with the economic reform in China, migration from rural to urban areas has assumed an increasingly important role in demographic change and in both national and regional development. However, due to administrative constraints such as the hukou (household registration) system in China, current migration demonstrates mainly temporary forms of mobility apart from officially sanctioned, permanent migration. Thus, the temporary character of migration does not refer to a short duration of mobility, but unchanging hukou registration. On the contrary, some of the floating population migrate for long periods, for example

1. Permanent migration in China is defined as a change of place with hukou registration. Otherwise, migration is considered as temporary, regardless of the actual duration of movement.
Migration in China

more than three or five years. Therefore, a special term, *liudong renkou* (floating population), is used in Chinese to describe non-official, temporary migration.

The main direction of movement of the floating population is to towns, large cities and more advanced regions in the east coast areas (Rural Section of the Policy Department of the Central Committee). Shanghai is located at the mid-eastern coast of China. It is one of the most advanced cities in China, in terms of socio-economic development, civilization, living conditions, and so forth. For many of the floating population, therefore, Shanghai is an ideal place to move to. The volume of the floating population in Shanghai has increased dramatically over the past decade, although no precise data were available up to 1993.

In order to understand the volume, characteristics, and consequences of population mobility in Shanghai, the Shanghai Municipal Government approved a floating population sampling survey project. The survey was conducted in December 1993.

The objective of this paper is to present some findings of the project. It will focus on the issues of the methods used by this survey and its limitations, and give a basic description of data obtained. This paper constitutes more of a report of the progress of the sampling survey rather than a presentation of final results.

**Background Information about the Survey**

**Objective of the survey**

The objective of the survey is to understand the total volume and characteristics of the floating population in Shanghai. This is the fifth survey of the floating population in Shanghai since 1984. The previous surveys were conducted in 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1988 respectively. The main purpose of the survey is to observe the historical changes of the volume and characteristics of the floating population in Shanghai on the
Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population

one hand, and to predict the possible trend of the floating population in the future on the other.

Definition

The notion of the floating population varies from time to time according to different purposes. In this survey, the definition of floating population has three categories:

1. people living or staying outside their places of permanent household registration, at the reference time of the survey, at 00:00 o’clock 10 December 1993;
2. foreign visitors in Shanghai (including consular staff, students, experts and scholars and tourists) at the reference time of the survey; and
3. those with hukou registration in Shanghai who had moved out at the reference time of the survey.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used by this survey is basically an individual one containing information for only one person. It consists of two parts, one for the people who moved in and one for the people who moved out. The variables are generally classified into three categories: demographic characteristics, geographic distribution, and socio-economic characteristics. For more detailed information, see Appendix A.

Sampling

Once the concept of floating population has been defined, the issue coming up is how to find them. This is an issue concerning the sample design, which is crucial for the quality of the data being collected. Because of the large number, complexity of composition, and uneven distribution of the floating population in Shanghai, any simple sampling method will have difficulty to reflect reality properly. Based upon previous experience, therefore, a stratified multi-stage random sample by types of residence was employed in this survey.
The sample found migrants in households, hotels, guesthouses, enterprise housing and other institutions. This photo was taken at a dormitory for migrant workers in Shanghai. (Photo: Cheng Li)

- **Types of Residence**
  From the definition of floating population outlined above, it follows that the people involved can be found in households, hotels, guesthouses, enterprises, institutions, and so forth. The sample is classified into five types of residence: Households, Hotels and Guesthouses, Enterprises and Institutions, Ships, and Others. Each type has sub-classifications. For more detail, see Appendix B.

- **Stratification**
  Stratification of the sample is employed mainly for those resident in households, where the majority of the floating population can be found. All households in Shanghai were divided into six strata according to their locations. Among the six strata, three are in urban areas, namely central, medium, and remote, and another three strata are in suburban areas, namely town, farm, and village.

  From each stratum, a two-per-cent equal probability sample was drawn, which means that two per cent of the Residents’
Committees in each stratum were selected randomly as sampling units. The total number of Residents’ Committees in Shanghai is 6,480, which makes 131 sample units by two-per-cent sample probability. The distribution of samples over the six strata is shown in Table 2.1. In each sampled Residents’ Committee, all households were interviewed.

- **Multi-stage Sampling**
  In the other types of residence, the sampling proceeded in two stages. First, for the purpose of estimating the total number of floating population, a census was the basic means of investigation. For instance, in the case of the survey at hotels and guesthouses, the census was based on registration documents at each hotel and guesthouse, of which there are a total of more than 4,000 in Shanghai. For the survey on ships, interviewers counted the number of all kinds of ships on the waters of Shanghai. Then they estimated the average

**Table 2.1. Distribution of samples by strata**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stratum</th>
<th>Ward</th>
<th>Residents’ committee</th>
<th>Sample units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Shanghai</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>6480</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Subtotal</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>4035</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Central</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Medium</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>976</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Remote</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2517</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Subtotal</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2445</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Town</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Farm</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Village</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>1825</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
number of persons on the ships according to the tonnage. Finally, they calculated the total floating population on ships by multiplying the average number of persons per ship and the total number of ships in Shanghai.

Secondly, for the purpose of understanding the characteristics of the floating population, a two-per-cent equal probability random sample of persons, according to the total population estimated with the methods described above at each type of residence, was selected to be interviewed.

**Field Work**

The field work of the survey was undertaken sequentially in three stages. The first period was devoted to survey preparation; in the second the survey was conducted; and the third one was for quality control.

- **Survey Preparation**
  The preparation of the survey began in September 1993, and lasted three months. The preparation included establishing the organizing and coordinating group under the leadership of the Shanghai Municipal Government, forming a consulting group, framing a working network, selecting coordinators and supervisors at each stratum as well as 3,000 interviewers, compiling an introduction manual for questionnaire and coding, training interviewers, pretesting of the survey, and promoting the survey.

- **Survey Conduct**
  The reference time of the survey was 10 December 1993. However, due to the large scale of the survey, the survey was conducted simultaneously all over Shanghai from 9 December 1993 to 11 December 1993. Regardless on which day the interview was undertaken, the actual situation on 10 December 1993 was recorded.

  In-home interviews was the major method of the survey. The interviewers visited sampling units one by one, and
recorded every floating person in the sampling units according to the questionnaire. If the interviewee was absent, the interviewer would have to go there again when the interviewee could be visited.

- **Quality Control**
  The quality check of the records was made immediately after the interview. The quality check was run step by step, and included interviewers’ self-check, interviewers’ mutual-check, sample units’ self-check by logical examination and group discussion. Then, the coordinators and supervisors in each district, county and institution checked again before the questionnaires were accepted. After that, a final check was made when the records were submitted to the municipal organizing group.

  If any errors and incorrections occurred, they would be accurately redressed at each step. For reasons of precision, re-interviewing of the interviewee was highly recommended.

  Finally, all the records were computerized by the Institute of Population and Development Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

**Findings**

A basic descriptive analysis of the survey results is presented here. The following main arguments are going to be examined: (1) migration is dominated by the young and male; (2) both distance between origin and destination and historically framed social networks play important roles in migration; (3) the more in-migrants come, the greater the likelihood that urban slums will occur; (4) in-migrants’ ‘quality’ is worse than that of local population; and (5) due to the worse ‘quality’, in-migrants have to accept manual work at the bottom of the job hierarchy as their economic strategies. Therefore, three aspects are going to be discussed in turn, namely demographic characteristics, geographic distribution, and socio-economic characteristics.
Demographic characteristics

• Absolute Numbers
The 1993 survey estimated that the total floating population in Shanghai was 2.81 million people. Among them, 2.51 million were in-migrants from other provinces, and 0.30 million were migrating within Shanghai either from urban to suburban or from suburban to urban. Another 0.47 million were out-migrants and another 0.50 million were people passing through Shanghai. According to the objective of the survey, the in-migrants were considered as more important than the others. Therefore, the floating population in Shanghai, hereafter, refers to the in-migrants. In other words, the 2.81 million is the main target of the analysis.

Compared with the previous surveys, the total volume of the floating population in Shanghai had increased considerably. The number in 1993 was 5.63 times of that in 1982 (see Table 2.2). The majority of the floating population – over 83.28 per cent (amounting to 2.34 million) – moved into the urban areas. The remaining 16.72 per cent (amounting to 0.47 million) moved into the suburban areas.

• Age and Sex Structure
The age and sex structure of the floating population shows an uneven composition (Figures 2.1–2.4). The majority is male and in the working age brackets. The proportion of the working age population is 88.15 per cent, which is 22 percentage points higher than that of the local population. The total male component accounts for 63.8 per cent, and the sex ratio for all age groups is 176.6 (see Table 2.3). This picture, corresponding with one of the arguments mentioned above, suggests again that the migration process is a highly selective one in terms of age, sex, and some other characteristics of migrants. The young and males are more likely to move than elderly or non-adults. The destination (in this case Shanghai)
Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population

Table 2.2: Floating population and local population, selected years 1982–93

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Floating population</th>
<th>Local population</th>
<th>Floating population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number (10,000)</td>
<td>Average annual increase (10,000)</td>
<td>Average annual rate of increase (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>50*</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>1180.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>70*</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>1194.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>45.71</td>
<td>1204.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>111**</td>
<td>8.82</td>
<td>1216.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>25.23</td>
<td>1232.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1262.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>1294.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: * Results of field work done by the Institute of Population, Fudan University.  
** Floating population only in urban area.

Sources: Sampling survey on floating population in Shanghai, December 1993; Division of Hukou Registration, Shanghai Public Security Bureau (1984); Statistical Yearbook of Shanghai (1994); Zhang (1989).
requires two kinds of migrant. Priority, but in small numbers, is given to intellectuals. However, intellectuals are difficult to attract from other provinces which have an even more serious lack of intellectuals. Secondly, large number of manual

Table 2.3: Floating population by age and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sampled population</th>
<th>Age ratio</th>
<th>Deviation</th>
<th>Sex ratio M per 100 F</th>
<th>Age sex ratio dif.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0–4</td>
<td>1,134 996</td>
<td>113.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5–9</td>
<td>750 669</td>
<td>92.3 93.7</td>
<td>-7.7 -6.3</td>
<td>112.1 -1.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–14</td>
<td>492 432</td>
<td>30.9 28.8</td>
<td>-69.1 -71.2</td>
<td>113.9 1.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15–19</td>
<td>2,431 2,332</td>
<td>73.5 109.0</td>
<td>-26.5 9.0</td>
<td>104.2 -9.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>6,127 3,846</td>
<td>149.2 150.8</td>
<td>49.2 50.8</td>
<td>159.3 55.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>5,784 2,769</td>
<td>119.7 104.2</td>
<td>19.7 4.2</td>
<td>208.9 49.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–34</td>
<td>3,540 1,471</td>
<td>83.1 77.8</td>
<td>-16.9 -22.2</td>
<td>240.7 31.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>2,734 1,014</td>
<td>96.7 92.7</td>
<td>-3.3 -7.3</td>
<td>269.6 29.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–44</td>
<td>2,112 716</td>
<td>104.7 95.1</td>
<td>4.7 -4.9</td>
<td>295.0 25.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>1,300 491</td>
<td>93.7 98.7</td>
<td>-6.3 -1.3</td>
<td>264.8 -30.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–54</td>
<td>662 279</td>
<td>73.1 69.8</td>
<td>-26.9 -30.3</td>
<td>237.3 -27.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55–59</td>
<td>511 309</td>
<td>94.8 104.9</td>
<td>-5.2 4.9</td>
<td>165.4 -71.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–64</td>
<td>416 310</td>
<td>NA NA</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
<td>134.2 -31.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>406 451</td>
<td>NA NA</td>
<td>0.0 0.0</td>
<td>90.0 0.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample total: 44,484 Total male: 28,399 Total female: 16,085
Sex ratio total: 176.6 males per 100 females
Corrected for population (sample ) size 97.0

Source: Sampling survey on floating population in Shanghai, December 1993.
Figure 2.1: Floating population by age and sex, Shanghai: December 1993
Figure 2.2: Per cent of each sex of floating population in Shanghai: December 1993.

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Figure 2.3: Floating population per cent of total population
Figure 2.4: Sex ratios by age of floating population in Shanghai: December 1993
labourers are also welcomed to meet the structural shortage of labourers in Shanghai.

In addition, an interesting phenomenon can also be noticed from the age–sex pyramid. The school-age group is almost the smallest one among all age groups of the floating population. This might imply that school-aged people, whether they are potential migrants or not, are left behind for school education at their origins. This implies again that Shanghai has made little effort in the field of basic school education for the floating population in Shanghai.

• **Marital Status**

The majority of the floating population in Shanghai are married. The share of married people is about 64.1 percent, and the unmarried is about 34.4 per cent (see Table 2.4). This picture of the marital status of the floating population in Shanghai is quite different from the hypothesis in migration research that single people are more likely to migrate than married people. A possible explanation is that the predominance of married people among the floating population in Shanghai follows from the temporary character of migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Sampled number*</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40002</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Unmarried</td>
<td>13768</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Married</td>
<td>25623</td>
<td>64.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Widow/widower</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Divorced</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Those over 14 years of age.

Source: Sampling survey on floating population in Shanghai, December 1993.
After a certain period, the married migrants will return to their origins for family reunion.

**Geographic distribution**

*Origins*

The floating population come from different provinces all over China. At the provincial level, all of the 30 provinces in China are involved, with a small group from abroad. On the other hand, the origins of the floating population are relatively concentrated. The first ten provinces of origin are listed in Table 2.4, according to their share in the floating population.

Interestingly, this list corresponds with the geographic distribution from near to far between Shanghai and origins.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Origins</th>
<th>Percentage of floating population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
<td>36.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Anhui</td>
<td>25.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Zhejiang</td>
<td>14.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jiangxi</td>
<td>5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sichuan</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Henan</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
<td>2.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Fujian</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Guizhou</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Sampling survey of the floating population in Shanghai, December 1993
On the other hand, Shanghai historically is a city of in-migrants. Most Shanghainese today are descendants of former migrants from some of the provinces on the top of the list. Previous migration has gradually formed a social network from generation to generation. Therefore, the sequence of the origins suggests a strong impact of distance from Shanghai to the origins as well as historically grown social networks on the migration process.

- **Duration and Place of stay**

The results of the survey show that the floating population tends to stay in Shanghai longer, although slightly more than half of the floating population stayed for less than six months (see Table 2.6 and Figure 2.5). Coupled with the considerable increase in volume and the fact that the majority moved into urban areas, does the longer period of stay of the floating population make the emergence of urban slums more likely? The survey suggests no. Most migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of Stay</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–3 days</td>
<td>1136</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–30 days</td>
<td>6475</td>
<td>14.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–6 months</td>
<td>15078</td>
<td>33.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–12 months</td>
<td>8953</td>
<td>20.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>7217</td>
<td>16.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–5 years</td>
<td>2690</td>
<td>6.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 5 years</td>
<td>2945</td>
<td>6.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>44484</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.5: Duration of stay for floating population

1–3 days (2.5%)
4–30 days (14.6%)
1–6 months (33.9%)
6–12 months (20.1%)
1–3 years (16.2%)
3–5 years (6.0%)
5 years over (6.6%)

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live in households, in dormitories, or at work sites, and only a small percentage stay in places with very bad conditions (see Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7: Type of residence of floating population in Shanghai**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of residence</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residence or permanent household</td>
<td>45.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective household (dormitory)</td>
<td>22.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction/work site</td>
<td>20.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/guesthouse</td>
<td>6.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat/ship</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Other</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: At open markets, trade centres, and in the open at harbours and railway/bus stations, etc.

**Source:** Sampling survey on floating population in Shanghai, December 1993.

*Socio-economic Characteristics*

• **Educational Background**

Education is one of the most important yardsticks for measuring the ‘quality’ of migrants.¹ Some researchers have argued that the ‘quality’ of the floating population is relatively low, which influences their opportunities on the labour market and results in some social security problems. However, the results of this survey call the above argument into question. Comparing the education level of the floating population and the local population, we find no evidence to prove that the

¹ ‘Quality’ of migrants is measured normally by education level, skills, and other characteristics of them. The survey has little information about skills of in-migrants, unfortunately.
The education level of migrants is significantly higher than that of non-migrants left behind. The educational level of about 66.4 per cent of the floating population is above junior middle school, compared to only 37.12 per cent of that in the whole of China, 1992. Therefore, education level is another

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1. Statistical Yearbook of China 1993: 89
important factor in the selective process of migration, in addition to the age, sex and marital status.

• Employment

Employment is an important aspect in migration research. People migrate from one place to another primarily for employment reasons, searching for better opportunities of employment, better payment and working conditions, and better living conditions. As shown by the results of the survey, the floating population in Shanghai can be classified into three categories according to their activities in Shanghai, namely economic, cultural and social. The majority is engaged in the economic activities, amounting to 74.63 per cent of total floating population. The proportion engaging in cultural and social activities is rather small, amounting to 0.71 per cent and 24.66 per cent respectively.¹

Among those engaging in economic activities, most are working as manual labourers, handicrafts-men, or working in the construction industry and small-scale businesses. This amounts to 90.5 per cent of the total floating population engaging in economic activities (see Table 2.9). These jobs can generally be viewed as being at the bottom of the job hierarchy in the urban economy. Why is the majority of the floating population concentrated in these jobs? The ‘Worse

1. With regard to this classification, I would stress that these activities are defined as reasons of migration in the questionnaire. However, I suspect that this kind of classification needs correction because the reasons of migration and actual activities being engaged in have different implications. The former is to explain why migrants move from one place to another and the latter reflects what they are doing at the destinations. Due to the lack of information collected about the employment situation at the destination in this survey, my analysis must depend on variables of economic activities in Shanghai, instead of variables of actual employment. The problems of classification of the variables will be discussed in the following section.
Quality’ approach is a weak explanation because the ‘quality’ of floating population is not significantly worse, as discussed above. There must be some other reasons. I would suggest that the radically different institutional arrangements for urban residents and others are more significant. Under these arrangements, more and more local people are reluctant to accept such jobs.

Table 2.9: Distribution of floating population by activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Sample Number</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44,484</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Economic</td>
<td>33,198</td>
<td>74.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social</td>
<td>10,968</td>
<td>24.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsumed under economic subtotal</td>
<td>33,198</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Job change/assignment after graduation</td>
<td>532</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Handicrafts</td>
<td>3,483</td>
<td>10.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Construction</td>
<td>7,916</td>
<td>23.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Other manual work</td>
<td>12,078</td>
<td>36.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Housekeeping</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Business</td>
<td>6,570</td>
<td>19.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) Farming</td>
<td>1,245</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8) Stock-market trading</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9) Other</td>
<td>862</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sampling survey on floating population in Shanghai, December 1993.
Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population

Local people desire better jobs, with better payment, relaxed working conditions, etc. The resulting gap at the bottom of the job hierarchy is naturally filled in by floating population.

With the installation of market mechanisms in China recently, administrative restrictions on rural–urban migration and radically different institutional arrangement for urban resident and others have been lifted somewhat. However, the situation of the labour market in Shanghai is facing a dilemma. On the one hand, there is a structural shortage of labour, and on the other hand, there is an unemployment rate of about 2.4 per cent. The Municipal Government and the public view unemployment as a very important issue for economic and political stability. Therefore, a package of policies has been launched to improve the employment situation in Shanghai. Among these, some policies are directly

related to the employment of the floating population in Shanghai. For instance, some jobs, such as cashier, taxi driver, telephone operator, waiter, etc., are forbidden to the floating population.¹ This will doubtlessly create new barriers for the floating population in the labour market. Jobs the floating population can obtain are again those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

¹. Wenhui Bao (Wenhui Daily), 14 February, 1995; ‘Shanghai Shi Danwei Shiyong he Pinyong Waidi Laodongli Fenglei Guanli Banfa’. 
Limitations of the Survey

A sampling survey is a powerful tool for pursuing specific problems in migration analysis. However, it cannot avoid all the problems inherent in population censuses (Skeldon 1989). With regard to this survey conducted in Shanghai in December 1993, a number of limitations must be pointed out from an academical research perspective.

Limitation of Measurement

The measurement of migration has always proved to be difficult in population research. To measure migration changes, two perspectives are crucial. One is the definition and the other is the sampling method.

Due to the definitions of this survey, it ignores the differences in duration of stay prior to the survey time of migrants, which results in the overestimating of the total volume. In migration research, migration is normally viewed as involving a process with time and space dimensions. A certain period of time, for instance ten days, or one month, or half a year, or one year etc., should be defined to determine who is a migrant or not. Otherwise, the results of a survey will tend to be misleading.

Compared to the definition, the method of sampling is more important. The sampling method employed by the survey is rather confusing in estimating the total volume by sampling. It is difficult to estimate the sampling errors. Moreover, the representativeness of the samples is also limited. I am not saying that the results of the survey are untrue, but estimating of the volume based upon the sampling method is, to some extent, ambitious and laborious. It would be better if an unified systematic sampling method were applied.

Limitations of Questionnaire Design

A well-designed questionnaire should include as much important information as possible. Based upon the objective
of a research survey, relevant variables must be included in the questionnaire.

However, the questionnaire used by this survey is too simple on the one hand, and misclassifies some important variables on the other. Firstly, the questionnaire mainly collects individual-level variables on the floating population in Shanghai. This was because the designers anticipated that this micro-level information would form an important base to which information derived from the more macro-level census and surveys could be extended. Unfortunately, some important individual variables were excluded – for instance, variables concerning the level and trend of income in Shanghai, ways of obtaining the current job, the time spent waiting for a job, and so forth. All these omitted variables, I would argue, have a strong theoretical basis for inclusion in a survey.

Secondly, some variables in the questionnaire are improperly classified. For instance, the employment situation at destination is misdefined as reasons of migration. The classification of employment situation and the character of working units can hardly be used to analyze the floating population in terms of formal and informal sector employment, or in terms of primary, secondary, and service sectors, etc. The situation of the self-employed floating population cannot be illustrated either. China is one of the extreme cases of segmentation of the labour market into a ‘formal sector’ and an ‘informal sector’, which is common in urban economies of many developing countries. Due to the strict government control over rural–urban permanent migration and radically different institutional arrangements for registered urban residents and others, it can be hypothesized that most of the floating population have no choice but to engage in informal sector or self-employed work. However, the results of the survey do not provide the evidence to test this.

Clearly, these imperfections of the questionnaire result primarily from the narrow objective of the survey and from a lack of a clearly defined approach.
Limitations of the General Approach

In migration research, numerous approaches can be found in the literature. Each approach emphasizes different factors influencing the migration process. However, the 1993 survey in Shanghai lacked an explicit supporting approach. Without a clear theoretical guideline, one inevitably runs into the difficulties in designing the variables to be included and in analysing the results of the survey accordingly.

Conclusion and Policy Discussion

This report has presented the progress of the sampling survey of the floating population in Shanghai, 1993, as well as a basic descriptive analysis of the results. The emphasis is primarily on the issues of methods of the sampling survey. The objective of the survey, the definition of ‘floating population’, the questionnaire, the sampling methods and field work have been described in turn.

Apart from the survey methods, a basic description of the survey data, intended to give a general impression of the recent floating population in Shanghai, was given. To this end, demographic characteristics, geographic distribution and socio-economic characteristics of the floating population in Shanghai have been analysed.

According to the survey data, we find that the total number of the floating population in 1993 reached 2.81 million. Compared with previous surveys, the total number increased considerably. The results of the survey suggest that male, working-age and married people are dominant in the migration process. The distance between Shanghai and their origins and historical social networks have a significant impact on migration. The survey disproves that the emergence of urban slums is accompanying the increase in number of the floating population, and that the ‘quality’ of the floating population is worse than that of the permanent population. Therefore, the
concentration of floating population employment at the bottom of the labour hierarchy must be explained by other reasons, such as the radically different institutional arrangements for urban resident and others and new barriers created to protect urban residents’ employment.

Finally, the limitations of the survey were discussed. These remind us of the need to improve the imperfections of the survey in future research.

Apart from these, I would conclude by discussing some of policy implications concerned.

**Occupational training**

As suggested by the survey, educational ‘quality’ of the floating population is not significantly worse. However, it would be a different situation if we take the factor of occupational skill into account. It might be safe to say that the industrial skills of the floating population are not very satis-
factory, due to their rural and agricultural background, etc. If this is really the case, occupational training should be provided to them to improve their occupational ‘quality’ and to meet the demands of economic development in Shanghai.

**Integrating policy**
Currently, most policies with regard to the floating population in Shanghai seem to be based upon the principle that permanent migration to Shanghai is to be strictly restricted. The floating population is presumed to be temporary and is expected to return to its origins some day. Nevertheless, the survey data suggest that more and more ‘floaters’ intend to stay in Shanghai.

If the longer stay of ‘floaters’ becomes an inevitable tendency, is it necessary for the Municipal Government to rethink the policy principles and concrete policy package? The answer is likely to be a ‘yes’. Otherwise, the relevant policies in the field of floating population would become somewhat mis-guided.

Apart from the existing policies, an important policy field which may be called ‘integration policy’ calls for more attention in the future. Such integrating policy should cover the perspectives of the people who are to be integrated, as well as the issues of how to promote integration and impact of integration or non-integration, etc.

**Gender issues**
Along with others, the gender issue has become one of the serious issues with regard to the floating population. In the case of Shanghai, the absolute number of female ‘floaters’ is considerable, although it accounts for only 36.2 per cent of the total floating population. Young and unmarried female form a large proportion. Those female migrants sacrifice more than their male counterparts in terms of searching for employment opportunities, remuneration, and social activities.
Migration in China

According to the media, the most significant problems the female ‘floaters’ face are unequal employment opportunities and payment, sexual harassment, marriage and divorce, family and social position, etc. Some kinds of grass-roots organization, such as Family of Female Migrants and Women’s Federation, have been newly established to help female migrants.

More importantly the government needs to implement a set of policy dealing with the problems that female ‘floaters’ are facing. In order to do so, detailed studies on these issues should be carried out to understand the nature of the problems.

Acknowledgement

The author appreciates the organizers of the workshop for which this paper was originally prepared for providing the financial support for my participation. My thanks also to Mrs Zhu Ci, senior statistician, for actively and disinterestedly contributing important information about the survey. The helpful comments on an earlier version of this report by Prof. Dr. Zuo Xuejin are gratefully acknowledged.

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Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population


Skeldon, Ronald (1989) Population Mobility in Developing Countries: A Reinterpretation, Belhaven Press.


Statistical Yearbook of Shanghai (1994).


Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this survey consists of two parts. One is for in-migrants and the other is for out-migrants.

Survey of the Floating Population in Shanghai

• (Questionnaire 1: In-Migrants)

Residents’ Committee:
Shanghai Municipality______District/County:
Neighbourhood/Town/Township:

Q1. Head of the household (as indicated in registration)

Q2. Migrant’s name

Q3. Relation to the household head
   1. Self
   2. Direct family member
   3. Other relative
   4. Other non-relative

Q4. Sex
   1. Male
   2. Female

Q5. Age

Q6. Education
   1. Completed College or higher education
   2. College undergraduate – not completed
   3. Senior middle school
   4. Junior middle school
   5. Primary school
   6. Illiterate or semi-illiterate
Q7. Marriage status
   1. Unmarried
   2. Married
   3. Widowed
   4. Divorced

Q8. Place of permanent residence
   1. Shanghai city _______district/county
   2. _______Province
   3. Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan
   4. Foreign country

Q9. Type of permanent household registration
   1. Non-agricultural
   2. Agricultural
   3. Other

Q10. Actual duration of stay in Shanghai
   1. 1–3 days
   2. 4–30 days
   3. 1–3 months
   4. 4–6 months
   5. 7–12 months
   6. 1–3 years
   7. 4–5 years
   8. 6–15 years
   9. 16 years and over

Q11. Have you registered for temporary/lodge residence?
   1. Have registered for temporary residence
   2. Have registered for lodge residence
   3. Have not registered for temporary residence
Migration in China

4. Have not registered for lodge residence

Q12. Type of temporary/lodge residence
1. Permanent household
2. Collective household (dormitory)
3. Construction/work site
4. Hotel/guesthouse
5. Boat/ship
6. Other

Q13. Employment/occupation before migration (choose the most suitable item)
1. Scientist/engineer
2. Professor/teacher
3. Physician/nurse/medical worker
4. Economic professional
5. Other professional/technician
6. Head of enterprise/institute
7. Clerical staff
8. Store assistant/worker
9. Service worker
10. Agriculture/forestry/animal husbandry/fishing
11. Manufacturing worker
12. Preschool-age child
13. Pupil/student
14. House work
15. Waiting for school enrolment
16. Waiting for work assignment after graduation
17. Looking for a job in a city or a town
18. Quit a job
19. Retired
20. Other (please specify)

Q14. Reason for migration (choose the main type)
1. Economic reason:
   (1) Job change/assignment after graduation
(2) Handicrafts
(3) Construction
(4) Other manual work
(5) Housekeeping
(6) Business
(7) Farming
(8) Stock-market trading
(9) Other

2. Research/training:
   (1) Study or training
   (2) Attending a meeting/work-related visit
   (3) Lecturing
   (4) Science and technology cooperation
   (5) Performance/show
   (6) Other

3. Demographic/social/other:
   (1) Visit relatives/friends
   (2) Marriage
   (3) Family reunion after retirement
   (4) Health care
   (5) Sightseeing/tour
   (6) Returning after release from jail/labour camp
   (7) Collecting garbage for recycling/flee from famine
   (8) Transfer during travel
   (9) Other

Q15. Type of employer here
1. Enterprise
   (1) State-owned
   (2) Collective
   (3) Joint-venture with foreign/overseas Chinese investors
   (4) Private
   (5) Other
2. Governmental agency
Migration in China

3. Institute
Q16. Frequency of your visits to the city during the past year
   (only for those who stay in hotels/guesthouses)
   1. Once
   2. Twice
   3. Three times
   4. Four times
   5. Five times or more

Survey of Floating Population in Shanghai
• (Questionnaire 2: Out-Migrants)

Residents’ Committee:
Shanghai Municipality_______District/County:
Neighbourhood/Town/Township:

Q1. Head of the household (as indicated in registration)

Q2. Migrant’s name

Q3. Relation to the household head
   1. Self
   2. Direct family member
   3. Other relative
   4. Other non-relative

Q4. Sex
   1. Male
   2. Female

Q5. Age

Q6. Education
Some Findings from the 1993 Survey of Shanghai’s Floating Population

1. Completed College or higher education
2. College undergraduate – not completed
3. Senior middle school
4. Junior middle school
5. Primary school
6. Illiterate or semi-illiterate

Q7. Marriage status
1. Unmarried
2. Married
3. Widowed
4. Divorced

Q8. Place of destination
1. Shanghai city _____district/county
2. _____Province
3. Hong Kong/Macau/Taiwan
4. Foreign country

Q9. Type of permanent household registration
1. Non-agricultural
2. Agricultural
3. Other

Q10. He/she has out-migrated for
1. 1–3 days
2. 4–30 days
3. 1–3 months
4. 4–6 months
5. 7–12 months
6. 1–3 years
7. 4–5 years
8. 6–15 years
9. 16 years and over

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Q11. Employment/occupation before migration (choose the most suitable item)
1. Scientist/engineer
2. Professor/teacher
3. Physician/nurse/medical worker
4. Economic professional
5. Other professional/technician
6. Head of enterprise/institute
7. Clerical staff
8. Store assistant/worker
9. Service worker
10. Agriculture/forestry/animal husbandry/fisheries
11. Manufacturing worker
12. Preschool-age child
13. Pupil/student
14. House work
15. Waiting for school enrolment
16. Waiting for work assignment after graduation
17. Looking for a job in a city or a town
18. Quit a job
19. Retired
20. Other (please specify)

Q12. Type of employer before out-migration
1. Enterprise
   (1) State-owned
   (2) Collective
   (3) Joint-venture with foreign/overseas Chinese investors
   (4) Private
   (5) Other

2. Governmental agency

3. Institute
Q13. Reason for migration (choose the main type)

1. Economic reason:
   (1) Job change/assignment after graduation
   (2) Handicrafts
   (3) Construction
   (4) Other manual work
   (5) Housekeeping
   (6) Business
   (7) Farming
   (8) Stock-market trading
   (9) Other

2. Research/training:
   (1) Study or training
   (2) Attending a meeting/work-related visit
   (3) Lecturing
   (4) Science and technology cooperation
   (5) Performance/show
   (6) Other

3. Demographic/social/other:
   (1) Visit relatives/friends
   (2) Marriage
   (3) Family reunion after retirement
   (4) Health care
   (5) Sightseeing/tour
   (6) Returning after released from jail/labour camp
   (7) Collecting garbage for recycling/flee from famine
   (8) Transfer during travel
   (9) Other
### Appendix B: Types of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLDS</th>
<th>– individual households in sampled communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– collective households in sampled communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– small enterprises, stores and schools in sampled communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES</td>
<td>– urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTERPRISES AND INSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>– industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHIPS OR WATERS</td>
<td>– inland waterway transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– overseas transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– small/mini boats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– others on the waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– institutions on the waters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHERS</td>
<td>– those stationed in Shanghai from other provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– harbours, railway/bus stations and airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– stations for internment and repatriation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– those passing the night in the open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– all kinds of open markets and trade centres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Definitions and Methodology in Chinese Migration Studies

by Hein Mallee

Introduction
Population mobility in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was relatively low during the 1960s and 1970s, and has increased spectacularly since the beginning of the reform period in the late 1970s. Casual observations, media reports and government documents all attest to this. In addition, several sets of statistics support such reports, but there is very little unity in these sets of figures. This research note tries to shed some light on how these figures are generated by looking at the main concepts and definitions employed in their production. The focus is on the sources of mobility data, rather than on the literature that discusses and uses these data, although the most important works will be mentioned in the references.
Sources and Definitions of Migration in China

Defining migration

In comparison to the other main components of population change, fertility and mortality, which consist of discrete events, migration is difficult to measure because a subjective element is involved. Although every person moves during their lifetime, what moves are labelled as migration depends on the definitions used by the researcher. The basic concept of migration is relatively straightforward: it involves a change of usual residence from one place to another. The main features of this concept are movement in one direction and permanence, which means that an operational definition of migration or migrants must at least include a spatial and a temporal criterion (cf. Skeldon 1990: 11–20; Jones 1990: 179–181; Goldstein and Goldstein 1981: 50–57).

On the spatial dimension, crossing the boundaries of a specified geographical unit is taken as an indication of
Definitions and Methodology in Chinese Migration Studies

migration. Of course, the smaller this spatial unit is, the more moves will be classified as migration (Kosinski 1975: 107). Whether a move is permanent or not, can in principle only be ascertained when a person dies. Before that time, the migrant might return to her place of origin or move to a third place. Therefore, in most investigations, either the migrants’ intentions are used as an indicator of permanence (thus introducing a volatile element into the investigation, as intentions might change over time, or not be realized), or a minimum length of stay is used as a requirement for classification as migration.

In China, most definitions of migration contain a third element: whether or not the person in question has transferred her official registration (hukou) to the new place of residence (although this distinction is often expressed in temporal terms by the use of the terms ‘permanent migration’ for migration with transfer of registration and ‘temporary migration’ for migration that is not officially approved). The importance attached to this formal criterion is explained by the fact that the household registration system has long been used as a means to restrict rural–urban migration, and by the extensive privileges that are connected to urban registration status, which make the rural and urban hukou holders two distinct social strata.

The ways in which population mobility and other concepts are defined in Chinese research are intimately tied up with the type of data source and the purpose for which the data were collected. I shall distinguish six different types of data source, which, although there is some overlap, all approach the definition problem from a different angle and therefore also produce different sets of figures. They are: (1) official registration figures; (2) estimates of urban net migration using residual methods, based on official statistics; (3) the national censuses and large-scale intercensal surveys; (4) surveys of migrant (floating) populations in urban areas; (5) the ‘74 Cities and Towns Survey’ of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); and (6) surveys of rural population mobility. For each
of these types, relevant concepts and definitions are discussed, and the main findings or conclusions are briefly outlined, or a few typical findings are presented as an illustration of what sort of data come forth from that specific source. The basic characteristics of the six data sources are presented in Table 3.1 overleaf.

Migration data from the household registration system

Like most modern governments, the Chinese state keeps records of its population, usually referred to as the household registration system (HRS). Unlike most other governments, the Chinese state also used these registers both as a major criterion for allocation of rationed commodities and a host of other benefits, and as a means to constrain migration to urban areas. Records were kept of all citizens, in the countryside by the local administration, and in cities and some towns by the local police. Urban records are more elaborate, and include information on temporary residence, in addition to births, deaths, marriages, political status, and migration. The figures generated by this system form the basis for most of the population statistics of the period prior to the Third Census in 1982,1 and also of a considerable portion of the statistics since then.

The HRS defined migration as moves accompanied by a transfer of registration, which crossed the boundaries of townships, towns, or cities (Shen and Tong 1992: 142). The statistics based on these definitions remain largely unpublished, and when information comes out, it usually consists of very general figures, such as provincial in- and out-migration numbers and rates (e.g. Population Statistical Yearbook 1988: 232–247). Also, the HRS provides no data on non-official (‘temporary’) mobility. Because relatively little

1. Prior to that date, population statistics were hard to come by. During the early and mid-1980s, much additional material was published, inter alia from the 1953 and 1964 censuses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Type</th>
<th>Spatial definition criterion</th>
<th>Temporal definition criterion</th>
<th>Sample, type of place</th>
<th>Problems, limitations</th>
<th>Strong points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration statistics</td>
<td>Boundaries of township, town, or city</td>
<td>None, but with transfer of registration</td>
<td>All China</td>
<td>Reliability for some years and places doubtful, no temporary mobility, no characteristics of migrants, etc.</td>
<td>Covers entire post-1949 period, insensitive to urban boundary changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual estimates of urban migration</td>
<td>Boundaries of total urban area</td>
<td>None, but usually annual estimates made</td>
<td>All urban areas</td>
<td>Choice of figures, changes urban boundaries, only net migration</td>
<td>Covers entire post-1949 period, allows some international comparison, make up for absent/bad HRS data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Census</td>
<td>(a) Boundaries of country or city</td>
<td>(a) 5-year migration period, 1-year residence</td>
<td>(a) All China</td>
<td>No direct information on temporary mobility, changes in urban boundaries, design problems (a)</td>
<td>Comprehensive geographical coverage, inclusion individual characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Intercensal survey</td>
<td>(b) <em>Idem.</em>, plus intracountry migration to towns</td>
<td>(b) 5-year migration period 6 months residence</td>
<td>(b) All China, one per cent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Migration in China

temporary migration took place during the 1960s and 1970s, especially when compared to the 1950s and the reform period, the HRS data for that period are probably a somewhat better approximation of total mobility than those of the preceding and following decades. They should nevertheless, be used with caution. Migration being notoriously hard to measure and check, these figures were sometimes used to cover up unwelcome demographic facts in other fields. In 1960–62, during the disastrous aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, under-reported deaths in Qinghai were concealed by reporting increased out-migration. In Tianjin, from 1973 to 1981, 4.2 per cent of births were not registered and entered into the books as in-migration the following year. Thus, in spite of negligible international migration, the national in- and out-migration figures sometimes did not match. For example, in 1961–62, there was a ‘net out-migration’ of 3.05 million persons; in 1984–87, a ‘net in-migration’ of 8.8 million persons (Zhang Shanyu 1992; also Population Statistics Yearbook 1988: 232).

In the absence of other materials and when used with due caution, the HRS figures still provide some useful indication of migration in general up to the early 1980s and of officially sanctioned migration after that as well. This includes the figures on total migration in Wei Jinsheng (1988), on urban migration in Ren Suhua (1988), and on inter-provincial migration in Won Bae Kim (1990). At the provincial level, the HRS migration figures have been used in conjunction with the 1982 census data (and usually supplemented with other data and some ‘qualitative’ information from local government sources) in the volumes of the series.¹ These migration figures are regarded as relatively reliable, with the exception

Table 3.1 (continued): Overview of the six types of sources of migration data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Survey</th>
<th>Spatial definition criterion</th>
<th>Temporal definition criterion</th>
<th>Sample, type of place</th>
<th>Problems, limitations</th>
<th>Strong points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban ‘floating population’ surveys</strong></td>
<td>To place in question usually city boundaries or central district</td>
<td>None, but without registration transfer</td>
<td>Local urban</td>
<td>Includes all kinds of subgroups and flow, local, varying definitions</td>
<td>Many types of mobility, many variables, flexible design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CASS’ 74 cities and towns</strong></td>
<td>Boundaries of sampled places</td>
<td>varies with group</td>
<td>74 urban places, 1986 boundaries, large but nationally representative</td>
<td>Only households sampled</td>
<td>Many types of mobility, historical depth, many variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural surveys</strong></td>
<td>Local/non-local, township boundaries</td>
<td>Focus on temporary mobility</td>
<td>Rural varying size and type, usually attempt at representativeness</td>
<td>Misses permanent out-migration of entire households</td>
<td>Attention to rural factors, in context of household economy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Migration in China

of those from Sichuan, Anhui, and Hunan (see the discussion in Zhang Shanyu 1992). One source of more disaggregated migration data that deserves mention is the so-called New Local Gazetteers (Xin difangzhi) or local histories that have been coming out since the mid-1980s. Usually compiled at county level, they sometimes contain rare pieces of information. The gazetteer of one county in Sichuan, for example, contains a detailed table by marital status and rough age groups, of women and children who were apparently sold to places in Henan, Hebei, Anhui, and Inner Mongolia, plus data on those who were ‘rescued and restored to their original registrations’ (Sichuansheng: 123–124).

Estimates of net urban migration with the residual method
Several authors have constructed series of estimates of net (‘implied’) migration to urban areas, by calculating the difference between annual urban growth and urban natural increase (Kirkby 1985; Chan and Xu 1985; Chan 1988, 1994a, 1994b; Wu 1994). The resulting figures are an indication of the mechanical growth of the total urban population, including the effects of in- and out-migration and of administrative reclassification. There are a number of problems and complications associated with these estimates, which can be discussed here only briefly. One major bone of contention is which set of urban figures should be used as the basis of the calculations: the non-agricultural population figures of the HRS or the figures on total population of urban administrative areas. The first set, favoured by Kirkby (1985) and, with modifications, by Wu (1994), is more restrictive, and has the advantages of being relatively insensitive to changes in administrative boundaries, and of excluding most ‘rural’ residents of the urban fringes. Its drawbacks are that it ignores changes in employment structure that are not acknowledged by the HRS, and also that it fails to take account of unofficial migration to urban areas. The second set, used by Chan and
Definitions and Methodology in Chinese Migration Studies

Xu (1985) and Chan (1988, 1994a, 1994b) yields larger urban population totals, and can be assumed to reflect the increased urban-ward migration and sectoral transfer of the reform period in a better way. Prior to the 1982 census, overbounding of urban places was not a serious problem, but the usefulness of the second set of urban figures was fatally eroded by the enormous expansion of the numbers and area of urban places from 1983 onwards. In order to correct this problem, the Chinese statistical authorities introduced a new urban definition in the 1990 Fourth Census, and adjusted the figures for the period from 1982 to 1990 accordingly.\footnote{This new series is found in the recent Statistical Yearbooks. The new urban definition is quite complicated, and although the figure for the overall urbanization level (26.23\%) is regarded as acceptable, the validity of the figures for individual cities and per extenso for provinces has been questioned. For the new definition, see Census 1990 and Chan 1994a.} Another problem with this type of migration statistics is that separate reliable figures on natural increase for towns and cities are not available for the entire period.

The resulting migration figures do not provide information about migration other than between rural and urban areas, nor about individual places. Nor are there separate in-, out-, and gross migration figures. Analysis beyond the overall figures, for example of characteristics of migrants, is also impossible. The importance that these data sets have assumed in the Western literature is therefore mainly due to lack of other data (especially for the pre-reform period), and perhaps also because they allow comparison with data from other countries. The picture of the pre-1982 period that emerges from the HRS and residual estimate data, is one of fairly low overall levels of migration, but with great fluctuations over time (see Figure 3.1).

In terms of urban population growth and contribution of net migration to this growth, the PRC experience between 1950
Figure 3.1: Residual estimates of rural-urban migration 1950–90

Sources: Chan 1988, 1994a; Kirkby 1985; Wu 1994
and 1982 was roughly comparable to that of other large developing countries (Chan and Xu 1985; Chan 1988). The fluctuations in migration rates directly reflect the socio-political shifts and changes which characterize much of China’s recent history. The 1950s, after the national economy had recovered and a rapid industrialization drive had started, was a period of large-scale migration to cities. In the late 1950s, migration rates to urban areas exceeded 12 per cent, as the pace of industrialization was stepped up further during the Great Leap Forward, and migration control mechanisms fell into disorder. In the disastrous aftermath of the Great Leap, millions of recent migrants were repatriated to the countryside, leading to net urban migration rates of under 10 per cent, after which the overall mobility level stagnated by and large.

Depending on what set of statistics is used, net urban migration between 1965 and 1973 was either slightly positive or just under zero. HRS urban migration data were not available for the period 1961–65. The relatively low mobility of the Cultural Revolution decade (during which China showed considerably lower mobility levels than comparable developing countries) can to a large extent be ascribed to institutional arrangements which tied peasants to their villages, and made finding jobs in or migrating to urban areas difficult. This was also a period during which China was known to have sent tens of millions of (mainly young) urban residents to the countryside. The fact that net migration rates were close to zero points to the somewhat surprising fact that apparently the outflow of urban residents was offset by an equally large inflow. From the mid-1970s onwards, migration increased again, with a peak in the late 1970s.¹ This peak was primarily the result of the return to the cities of the rusticated urban dwellers, but even after this great return

¹. The HRS data in Ren Suhua 1988 and in Wei Jinsheng 1988 do not show this upturn.
Migration was over, net urban migration rates remained much higher than during the previous decades. In fact, the migration experience of the 1980s was more reminiscent of the early and mid-1950s. Still, because of the much larger urban population, the absolute numbers of migrants were much bigger.

**Census and Intercensal Survey**

Since the Third National Population Census of 1982, one more census (1990) and 1 per cent intercensal national survey have been taken. The census and national survey provide information on migration in three ways. Firstly, they can be used in conjunction with data on natural increase to calculate net migration figures for different geographical areas (usually provinces) using the residual method described above for urban migration. In the absence of reliable regional natural increase figures, the population increases of different areas can be compared and contrasted with the national average.

Secondly, in contrast with the first three censuses, and in recognition of the increased importance of population mobility, the 1987 survey and 1990 census included direct questions on migration. This will be discussed at some length below. Thirdly, some information on population mobility can be gleaned from census data on registration status. This is in a way a by-product of the complexities of the HRS and the way enumeration took place.

Central to the national surveys and censuses is the concept of permanent residence, the definition of which includes *de jure* and *de facto* elements. The 1990 census enumerated people as permanent residents of a place when (1) they had an official household registration there; or (2) they had been living in the place but had left their place of registration more

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1. A new intercensal survey was to take place in 1997.
than one year before; or (3) they were living in the place while waiting for their household registration to be settled; or (4) they used to be registered in the place but at the time of the census had no registration because they were abroad working or studying (Census 1990 10%: 696). People whose work involved continuous mobility were enumerated at their place of permanent residence registration. The criteria in the 1987 National Census were similar, but there the residence limit was six months instead of one year. In 1990 some 22 million people, or about 1.8 per cent of the total population, were enumerated in category (2), and can be regarded as long-term migrants (TJNJ 1992: 88). At the time of the Third Census in 1982, only 6.6 million people (0.65 per cent) had been away from their place of registration for over one year (Shen and Tong 1992: 208). Thus, in only eight years, long-term migration without hukou transfer had more than tripled.

During the 1990 census, all people aged five and above were asked what their place of permanent residence had been on 1 July 1985 (i.e. five years earlier). If this was a place in another county or city, the person was regarded as a migrant. Thus, five-year migration across county and city boundaries was measured, a method common in other countries as well. The place of previous residence was divided into the three usual categories: cities, towns and countryside. Here, the administrative divisions of 1985 were used, not those of 1990, if changes had taken place. This is not unimportant, as the area and population defined as urban had grown enormously between 1983 and 1990 due to administrative reclassification. When a person was identified as a migrant, the reason for the move was asked.

1. A complication that cannot be dealt with here at length is that the period of measurement in the case of migration without registration transfer was actually from 1 July 1984 to 1 July 1989, as a result of the one-year residence criterion. See Si Xiu 1991: 54–55.
The 1987 survey used the same criteria for establishing permanent residence, but included persons who had been away from their place of registration for over six months instead of one year. Migrants to a certain place included:

- persons who have migrated to this city, town, or county from another city, town, or county between 1 July 1982 and 30 June 1987, and have lived here continuously until 00.00 hours, 1 July 1987. This thus includes persons who have migrated with their registration, and also includes persons who have migrated without their registration, but who have left their place of registration over half a year before, and have lived in this place for less than five years. (*National Survey 1987: 816–817*)

In cases where people had moved to a place two or more times, the most recent move was recorded.

The data resulting from the census and national survey have their limitations. This is first of all inherent in the large-scale census-style setup of the investigations, in which only a few questions can be asked, and migration is reduced to an
individual phenomenon, rather than viewing it as part of household dynamics and strategies. Such information can only be obtained in specialized surveys. The major advantage of census-style data collection is of course that it covers the entire nation, and even when lacking in-depth information, the results offer a baseline with which data from more specific research can be compared. A second shortcoming is related to the definitions of migration adopted. The five-year interval method misses multiple moves and moves by people who died before the investigation took place, and takes no account of return migrants. More importantly, temporary mobility falls completely outside the scope of investigation. A last problem has to do with the way the results have been tabulated. In the national volumes, which were used here, the smallest geographical unit is the province, and provinces in China are usually considerably larger in population and area than many independent nations. With the exception of Guangdong Province, which has separately published detailed tabulations of the migration data, the provincial volumes of the census data I have been able to consult were all restricted to a handful of tables with province-level information. Although important insights can be gained from the provincial data, I would argue that fundamental understanding of geographical patterns of population migration in China requires analysis at county level, as provinces often consist of several regions with distinct characteristics.

The 1987 National Survey and the 1990 Fourth Census provide us with two valuable sets of migration data, roughly covering the first and second half of the 1980s, with an overlap of two years. The similarity in the definitions employed makes comparison of the two data sets possible, but it is important to keep the following differences in definitions in mind, as they affect the evaluation of the data:

(1) the census employed a five-year lower age limit for inclusion;
(2) the census excludes non-official migrants of 6–12 months which the survey does count;

(3) both define migration as movement across city or county boundaries, but the survey also included *intra-county* migration to towns (Zhu and Gu 1992);

(4) the 1987 survey counts the last of multiple moves, whereas the census registers differences of place of permanent residence between 1985 and 1990 as migration.

The fourth point only involves very limited numbers of people, and its impact is probably minimal, but the first three items all have the effect of under-estimation of migration by the census in other words, all circumstances being equal, the national survey can be expected to yield higher migration figures.

A last problem that deserves mention concerns the use of the city/town/countryside division in the 1990 census. In the Chinese administrative hierarchy, city and county are places of the same level. Counties are further subdivided into towns and townships (xiang). Cities mainly consist of city wards (chengshi jiedao), but can also contain towns and townships in the suburban areas. The census classified the place of residence in 1985 (the origins of the migrants) as ‘city wards’, ‘towns’, or ‘townships’. These towns and townships could be located either in counties or in cities. The place of residence in 1990 (the destinations), however, uses ‘city’, ‘town’, and ‘county’. Here the towns and townships can be part of counties only. The result is that, in comparison to the supposed equivalents of 1985, the 1990 divisions include larger areas in the category ‘city,’ while less area is covered by ‘town’ and ‘county’ (Zhu and Gu). The problems this that lack of congruence between origins and destinations entails are obvious. A person, for example, moving from a township within the boundaries of a city, is recorded as having migrated from a rural place, while the person moving into the vacated house is said to have
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migrated to a city. Strictly speaking, net migration to the different types of place is therefore impossible. Also, the present data tend to underestimate out-migration from cities and in-migration to towns and town-ships; and at the same time over-estimate mobility in the reverse directions. In the absence of detailed information on the administrative subdivisions (down to township and town level), it is impossible to say how big the problem is. There is no hope for new tabulations to solve the problem, however, as the division is used in the original census questionnaires.

The migration data from the 1987 National Survey and 1990 census can only be outlined very briefly here. The five-year migration rates in 1987 and 1990 were 28.59 and 29.90 per 1,000 respectively. In view of the under-estimation of migration in the census the increase in population mobility towards the end of the 1980s was no doubt more pronounced than these figures suggest. Migration mainly took place within provinces (80 per cent in 1987), but inter-provincial migration had increased to 32 per cent by 1990 (an increase in absolute numbers of 70 per cent). The inter-provincial migration rate thereby rose from 5.87 to 9.55 per thousand per five years. Although part of this increase is due to technical reasons, it also reflects a real increase in long-distance mobility. The direction of flows was decidedly towards urban areas: towns and cities gained about 13 million inhabitants between 1982 and 1987, and about 15 million between 1985 and 1990 (but mind the definition problem!) Migration to cities gained in importance during the late 1980s.

In 1987, women dominated population mobility, the sex ratio (number of men per 100 women) being 78. This was the result of the low sex ratio (69) of intra-provincial migration, especially to counties, and, to a lesser extent, to towns. Men tended to engage more in inter-provincial migration (rate: 118). Regardless of the type of destination, there were always more women among intra-provincial migrants from counties and
Migration in China
towns. Marriage is often the reason for migration between
counties, and as Chinese rural society is still predominantly
patrilocal, nearly three-quarters of intra-rural migrants were
female. The data from the census present us with a sharp shift
to male predominance in migration: the overall sex ratio had
increased from 78 to 125. This was due both to an increase in
the number of men (up 41 per cent) and a decrease of women
(down 13 per cent). Although women were still in the majority
in rural-to-rural migration, their share had dropped to 59 per
cent. This shift to male-dominated migration probably to some
extent reflects the growth of long-term non-official labour
migration of the late 1980s: among the reasons for migration
the more ‘female’ items of ‘marriage’ and ‘accompanying family
members’ dipped from 43 to 25 per cent, while the reason
‘labour and trade,’ which presumably is more male-dominated,
grew from 9 to 24 per cent.

In terms of migration rates, the three centrally administered
cities were the main destinations of inter-provincial migration.
The coastal provinces in general tended to gain population
while most inland provinces show net outflows (also cf. Wei
National Survey and 1990 census data show that the province
of Guangdong has only recently become a major focus of
inter-provincial migration. While most migration took place
between neighbouring provinces, five regions with higher than
average internal population flows could be distinguished:
Manchuria plus Shandong, the lower Yangzi region, Guangdong-
Guangxi-Hunan in the south, Sichuan-Yunnan-Guizhou in
the southwest, and Shaanxi-Gansu-Qinghai-Ningxia-Xinjiang
in the northwest. Sichuan stands out because it sends relatively
large numbers of migrants to many provinces in various regions.

Floating population surveys
From the mid-1980s onwards, local authorities in Chinese
cities became increasingly aware of the sometimes large
groups of migrants that were attracted by the cities. In order to gain insight into this relatively new phenomenon, in many localities city planners, Public Security Departments, and academics joined forces to undertake sample surveys of this ‘floating population’. These surveys form the main source for various estimates of the total (urban) floating population that found their way into the media. The total floating population of the late 1980s and early 1990s has been variously estimated as numbering anywhere from 50 to 100 million (e.g. Shen and Tong 1992: 209; Kuhn and Kaye 1994; SWB FE/2067 G/6–8; People’s government of Beijing City, 1991; SWB FE/2216 G/6). In the larger cities, like Shanghai, Beijing and Guangdong, the floating populations are reported to number in millions. In the 23 largest cities, an average of 17 per cent of the total population was classified as ‘floating’, with a maximum of 54 per cent (!) in Zhengzhou (Shen and Tong, 1992: 210). Such figures must be approached with some caution, however, as definitions vary, and the groups included are not always co-terminous with what in other contexts would be labelled as ‘labour migrants’.

A variety of terms are employed in China to refer to the (temporary) migrant population that has emerged during the reform period. In daily usage, rural workers in cities are called mingong (derived from nongmin, ‘peasant’ and gongren, ‘worker’), and the term ‘outside population’ (wailai renkou) is also commonly used. The rather derogatory word ‘vagrant’ (mangliu, litt. ‘blind flow’) is basically a product of the centrally planned economy, in which all unplanned ‘spontaneous’ population movement was a priori suspect. Most academic publications use liudong renkou, usually translated as ‘floating population’ or ‘transient population,’ to indicate temporary

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1. There is a separate literature on small towns, although there the focus is more on small town formation than on migration itself. Cf. Jiangsusheng 1986; Ma Rong 1992; Ma and Lin 1993; Middelhoek 1989; Goldstein, Goldstein and Gu 1991.
migrants, and *qianyi* (‘migration’) for permanent migration. Since 1985, according to the Ministry of Public Security, persons temporarily staying in cities are issued different temporary residence cards depending on whether they are engaged in economic activities (*jizhuzheng*) or not (*zanzhuzheng*).

With the mobility boom of the 1980s and the resulting increased official and scholarly attention, considerable discussion ensued over the definition of the concept of *liudong renkou*. The argument focused on whether the object of study should be limited to economically active temporary migrants; whether or not to include people in the process of moving (such as arrivals and departures at railway stations and airports); as well as on more arcane questions such as if the floating population should be considered part of the migrant population in general or the other way around. One conclusion emerged quite clearly from the debate: migration (*qianyi*) is defined as spatial movement across certain boundaries accompanied by transfer of official household registration (*hukou*), whereas ‘floating population’ refers to mobility without registration changes. The defining characteristic of the floating population thus is bureaucratic status rather than any feature of the population itself, and as such the floating population can be regarded as a creation of the household registration system (cf. Shi Songjiu, 1991: 1–2) Of course, it must be noted that the *hukou* system has become a social institution which plays an exceedingly important role in Chinese daily life, making a wide scala of benefits available to holders of urban registrations and denying them to temporary residents, and as

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1. For contributions to this discussion, see Da Yang 1990; Gao Qingxu 1989; Wu Ruijun 1990; Xie Bailing 1990; and Zhang Qingwu 1988.
such it is more than just a bureaucratic classification (cf. Mallee 1995). Also, official and non-official migration tend to have different characteristics and are governed by different processes, so this distinction is not wholly unreasonable.

Mobility without hukou transfer is still a broad concept and within its limits many variations have been employed. As an illustration, the following table summarizes the definitions used in four major surveys of the floating population of Shanghai between 1984 and 1988. The differences between the figures derived from one and the same survey (1986) by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) and the Population Institute of Fudan University illustrate the fact that definitions create their own results. While there is no doubt that temporary mobility greatly increased, especially during the mid-1980s, the growth shown by these figures must also partly be ascribed to definitional changes, particularly when the PSB definition is employed.

What then, does all this imply for the estimates of the total floating population mentioned at the beginning of this section? Coming mainly from reports in the media, it is often not at all clear how these figures have been derived, and one can only guess what the precise referent of the term is. Where the derivations are given, the validity of the estimate is open to question. Let me illustrate this with one example. Shen and Tong (1992: 209) have estimated the floating population of the entire country in 1990 at 70 million. This number was arrived at in the following way. From floating population surveys of seven large cities in 1989, they found that on average 28.7 per cent of the ‘floaters’ had been in these cities for over one year. The 1990 census identified just under 20 million people who had been in a place for more than one year while being registered elsewhere. By assuming these 20 million were 28.7 per cent of the total national floating population, they obtained the estimate of 70 million. The accuracy of this estimate is hard to assess, as this percentage
Table 3.2: Surveys of Shanghai’s floating population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10-8-1984: All those Shanghai city districts, engaged in socio-economic</td>
<td>590,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities, and not in possession of a permanent city district <em>houkou</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-9-1985: Ibidem plus dependent population of under 15 and over 65 years</td>
<td>1,110,000 (in/out-flow 354,000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>of age.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-8-1986: (12) Floating population of the city districts, both from the</td>
<td>(a) PSB definition*: 1,834,000, of which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suburban counties and other provinces. (2) Floating population of Shanghai</td>
<td>876,000 in the city districts (in/out flow 442,000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including (1) and those who entered the suburban counties from other</td>
<td>(b) Fudan definition: 1,340,000 in the city,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provinces.</td>
<td>of which 1,110,000 in the city districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) PSB definition*: 1,834,000, of which 876,000 in the city districts</td>
<td>(in/out flow 338,000 person/ times).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Fudan definition: 1,340,000 in the city, of which 1,110,000 in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city districts (in/out flow 338,000 person/ times). (PSB definition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>would yield 2.09 million).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-10-1988: The floating population between other provinces, abroad and</td>
<td>Total 1,246,200, of which 817,400 in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai, and between the city districts and suburban counties and</td>
<td>city districts (in/out flow 883,000 person/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>among and suburban counties; and excluded movement within the city</td>
<td>times). (PSB definition would yield 2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>district and within the counties, as well as the active military population.</td>
<td>million).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(#) In addition to the floating population staying in Shanghai and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flow into and from the city, temporary out-migration was also surveyed in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this investigation. This survey, being one of the most comprehensive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carried out in China up to the present, also includes a separate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>questionnaire for ship-board migrants and one for women in the child-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bearing ages concerning fertility. See Zhang Kaimin 1989b.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Shanghai Statistical Bureau (1989): 158-159

Notes: (*) The Public Security Bureau added the population flow to the migrant population, and also included mobility across township and town boundaries within the countries.

(#) In addition to the floating population staying in Shanghai and the flow into and from the city, temporary out-migration was also surveyed in this investigation. This survey, being one of the most comprehensive carried out in China up to the present, also includes a separate questionnaire for ship-board migrants and one for women in the child-bearing ages concerning fertility. See Zhang Kaimin 1989b.
will vary across places of different sizes and across rural-town-city divisions.

Another way to gain insight into how this reported floating population actually is made up, is by looking at the subgroups that are usually covered by surveys that use the definitions outlined above. Li and Hu (1991: 19–22), in their useful digest of research on mobility in China’s million-plus cities during the late 1980s, give the following breakdown of the floating population:

(1) People on official business trips, generally of short duration: 12–17 per cent.
(2) Culturally oriented travel, such as tourism and short study courses: 5–10 per cent.
(3) Socially motivated mobility, consisting of people visiting, or living with family and relatives, receiving medical care, and children being brought up by relatives. This group comprised almost two-thirds of the floating population in the early reform period,1 but has dwindled to about 10 per cent.
(4) Labour migrants, which account for slightly under half of the total.
(5) People in transit, spending from a few hours to a few days in a place: about 20 per cent.2
(6) Vagrants: only an estimated 0.1–1 per cent. This group is almost negligible in number, yet it dominates the image that migrants have in the public discussion.

Of these six categories, only groups (3) and (4) would normally be regarded as migrants, which means that the estimates of China’s temporary migrant population should be cut back by about half. The other groups are not unimportant

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1. This predominance is confirmed in Goldstein, Goldstein and Gu 1991.
2. This type of mobility or population flow is actually better expressed as person/times rather than persons. See Table 3.2 for an insight into some of the confusion that this category can cause.
to urban planners of course, when it comes to planning public transportation, hotel accommodation, water supply, etc.

The CASS Survey of 74 Cities and Towns

In late 1986, the Population Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), with partial assistance from the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, undertook a survey of population migration in 43 cities and 31 towns in 16 provinces. This survey (usually referred to as the 74 Cities and Towns Survey) is no doubt the most wide-ranging and specific source of information on urban population mobility in the PRC to date. In comparison with the intercensal surveys and the 1990 census, it has the advantage of being concerned specifically with migration, and of measuring over a much longer period. It covered a much wider part of the Chinese urban population than local floating population surveys.¹

The basic sampling unit of the CASS survey was the household. In a fairly ambitious attempt to include different kinds of population mobility rather than just permanent migration, the investigation was designed to collect information on a variety of situations: permanent in-migrants (including those who transferred their household registration and those who did not but had lived in the household for more than one year); return migrants (people who had been away for more than one year and then returned to the household, as well as those who had been away for shorter periods during 1986); temporary migrants (people who stayed in the

¹. The total sample included 23,895 households and 1,643 collective households, which was 0.2 per cent of the total number of urban households in the places surveyed, and covered 100,267 people. The sample of each place was large enough to draw conclusion about the place in question, but not about all urban places in the province or in the entire country (Ma and Wang 1988).
household without official registration for less than one year); out-migrants (those who had completely left the household); and permanent (non-migrant) residents. Data on the basic socio-demographic characteristics of all household members were collected, plus information relevant to the mobility category to which the individual members were assigned. For in-migrants, for example, information on place of birth, type of origin, age at move, education and occupation at time of move, reason for move, and evaluation of the change of situation before and after the move.

The survey found that 38 per cent of the population surveyed had migrated to the place of survey since 1949; 3.6 per cent were temporary migrants who had arrived during the first ten months of 1986; 7.6 per cent had been away for periods over one year and returned; 24 per cent had been away for short periods during 1986; and 6.1 per cent had migrated out since 1949 (Population Research Institute 1988: 5).

Almost all of the analysis that has been published concentrates on (permanent and temporary) in-migration, and perhaps the setup covering these many types of mobility has been too ambitious, as the information on out- and return-migration goes virtually unexplored. Yet the data on these two well-analysed groups alone offer valuable information on two of the most important aspects of population mobility in China: the post-1949 history of migration, and the situation of temporary migration to urban areas in the mid-1980s. Where the sources of historical migration data discussed above at best offer estimates of only one variable (such as net-migration to urban areas, or overall migration rates), the CASS Survey makes analysis of a wide range of aspects of migration possible. When using the survey as a source of information of the floating population in 1986, one limitation of the data set must be kept in mind. This limitation follows from the adoption of the household as the sampling unit. A considerable part of the temporary migrant
population of China’s cities does not stay in households, but in hotels and dormitories, at building sites, stations, harbours, in the booming rented accommodation areas on the outskirts of the cities, or just out on the streets. The survey therefore over-sampled an atypical subset of the total urban migrant population, namely the part that was labelled ‘socially motivated’ in the discussion of the floating population above. This is evident in the predominance of women and of elderly people and of non-working people among the temporary migrants in the survey. These features suggest that the temporary migrants found in the survey contain a sizable group of elderly people who live with their urban relatives, and wives who live with their husbands but who in both cases have been prevented by the rigid *hukou* system to obtain a local registration.

Kam-wing Chan has pointed out that the changes in urban boundaries had led to serious overbounding of urban places by the time of the CASS survey, and concludes that the information generated in the survey ‘is of little value for any analytical work’ (Chan 1994: 255). However, while it is true that analysis that uses the urban population figures of the time – such as migration rates or urban size categories – is problematic, this does not invalidate most of the other data collected in the survey.

The most important data from the CASS survey were published in tabulated form in a Chinese–English bilingual book in 1988 (Population Research Institute 1988). A number of general papers, based on the survey data, appeared in Chinese demographic journals (Ma Xia 1987; Ma Xia and Wang Weizhi 1988), as well as analyses of more specific topics (Wang Xiangming 1988; Sha Jicai and Chen Guangbi 1988; Chen Yuguang 1988; Wang Weizhi 1988; Xiong Yu 1988). Some of the provincial academies that participated in the project published their own provincial collections of papers (o.a. Zhang Kaimin 1989a). In English, the characteristics of permanent and temporary migrants have been
exhaustively analysed by Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein (1991). Recently, a collection of papers, including English versions of some of the papers just mentioned, has been published by Lincoln Day and Ma Xia (1994).

**Rural surveys**

The last source of data on population mobility discussed here, rural surveys, is complementary to the urban ‘floating population’ surveys, in the sense that it addresses the other end of the rural–urban migration process. The strong point of such surveys is that their rural focus usually facilitates inclusion of circulatory mobility. Here, three examples of such studies are described briefly.¹

On New Year’s Eve 1989, the Population Department of the University of Beijing, in cooperation with 21 other demographic institutes, and with assistance of the UNFPA started a survey of 23 poor counties. Although not exclusively concerned with migration, it provides some interesting insights in rural population mobility (see Zhang Chunyuan 1991). The results of the survey show that the level of mobility of rural households is associated with their level of economic well-being: in poor regions, well-off households had more mobility than modal households, which in turn were more mobile than the poorest households. Even the more well-off households in poor areas, however, were significantly less mobile than households in areas of average economic development. Most of the mobility found consisted of temporary labour migration, in which the construction sector formed the main source of employment. Trade and service work was found more among the relatively well-off (presumably because

¹. In addition, a few foreign researchers have been able to do fieldwork concerned with population in rural China (Woon 1993; Oshima 1989).
this requires a certain investment to start), while agricultural work was more important among the poorest households.

Two other studies were undertaken by the Rural Development Institute of CASS. The first, called the ‘Hundred Villages’ survey (in spite of the fact that it sampled 222 villages) took place in 1987 in 59 counties in ten provinces (see Yu Dechang 1989; 1992b). The sampling procedure first divided the country into three zones (east, middle, west) and in each zone a number of ‘representative’ provinces were chosen. Within these, counties and villages were selected according to a low–middle–high economic development stratification. Information was collected on both the village and household levels for the period 1978–86. The central theme of the survey was sectoral transfer (zhuyani) of labour, which primarily refers to the shift of workers from agriculture to other sectors but which has definite spatial implications, as not all non-agricultural employment is generated locally. The results indicated that 37 per cent of the agricultural workforce had transferred out of agriculture, of which 62 per cent had remained inside the same township. Permanent transfer out of agriculture, as opposed to tempor-

| Table 3.3: Spatial composition of non-local labour transfer (%) |
|------------------|---------|-----------|-----------|----------|---------|------|
|                  | Other rural | Rural towns | County seats and designated towns | Middle and small cities | Large cities | Abroad |
| East             | 21.7      | 6.1       | 9.8      | 53.9     | 7.0      | 1.5   |
| Middle           | 38.6      | 12.4      | 34.2     | 11.0     | 3.8      | —     |
| West             | 74.5      | 3.6       | 11.2     | 9.8      | 0.9      | —     |
| All              | 48.8      | 5.3       | 12.1     | 29.4     | 3.8      | 0.6   |

Source: Yu Dechang 1989: 298
ary and seasonal supplements to agriculture, accounted for 43 per cent. There was considerable variation in mobility across the three regions, as Table 3.3 makes clear.

The ‘Hundred Villages’ study was followed up with a year-long investigation of 480 households in five counties in different parts of the country (again selected for their ‘representativeness’) (Yu Dechang 1992a). The central aim of the survey was to provide micro-level information on rural underemployment (labour ‘surplus’), a topic that is most often discussed in terms of macro-level data. The survey entailed the creation of a daily register of household labour use and cash income and expenses, as well as seasonal assessments of the household population and its characteristics, and of household fixed assets.

The survey provided a confirmation of the fact that multiple occupations are very common in the Chinese countryside, not only within households, but even with individuals in the course of a single day. Of the 480 households in the sample, only ten engaged exclusively in agricultural pursuits, and only two in just non-agricultural activities. Part of the data was tabulated by season, which gives insight in the changes in the configuration of household activities over the course of the year. Mobility rates (‘labour export’) tended to vary widely across the sampled counties, which points to the fact that household level information alone may not be sufficient to explain mobility levels. As an example, the use of labour time by the households of Guiping County, in Guangxi, which is located close to Guangdong and which as a result had the highest mobility levels, is plotted in Figure 3.2. It illustrates the fluctuations of time invested in different types of work

1. This in itself is not a problem, as long as findings in individual counties are not interpreted as representing, for example, all relatively developed villages in North China. This tendency is sometimes present in the analysis of the data.
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Figure 3.2: Labour time use in Guiping Country, Guanxi

Labour hours in four seasons

Source: Yu Dechang 1992a
over the seasons and the predominance of the agricultural cycle. Partly because of the availability of outside employment opportunities, this county had an average of 28 working days per month (assuming 8 hours of work per day), which was much more than some of the other counties investigated.

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