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**INTERNAL LABOUR MIGRATION IN CHINA: TRENDS,  
GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND POLICIES\***

*Kam Wing Chan\*\**

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\*The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

\*\*University of Washington, USA.



## A. INTRODUCTION

Whether you like it or not, products “Made in China” are going to stay in the foreseeable future. China (i.e. mainland China) would not have become the “world’s factory” had it not been for the plentiful supply of low-cost young migrant labour from the countryside to its coastal export-processing industrial cities (Fallows, 2007). Indeed, migrant labour is definitely part of China’s economic success story in the last quarter century (and, as will be explained below, part of its problem too). Internal migration, mainly from rural to urban area, has also driven China’s rapid urbanization (Chan and Hu, 2003). This perhaps irresistible deluge of labour has been the focus of much attention of journalists and scholars for quite some time. Some journalists have even contended this human wave of movements in China the world’s largest, and even the largest in history (Scott, 2006; Xiaokang, 2007).

Despite the importance and the huge attention on this subject (e.g. Davin, 1999), the study of migration in China continues to be plagued by many problems in statistics and, relatedly, interpretations (Goodkind and West, 2004; Liang and Ma, 2004). Understandingly, migration is a more “elusive” component of demographic change than birth and death. The Chinese case is much more complex because of its institutional arrangements and resulting population/migrant management and statistical reporting systems. The difficulties in tackling the Chinese migration statistics can be illustrated by the fact that the United Nations (1999, p. 66) researchers once called the Chinese floating population, the largest migrant group inside China, “statistically invisible.” Others, such as Roberts (2002), term it “invisible residents.” Indeed, in order to get to some consistency and the “truth” of the trends, there is often quite a bit of a “hide-and-seek” game one has to play with Chinese population and economic statistics (Scharping, 2002; Holz, 2002). An assortment of, often seemingly incongruent or even contradictory, migration statistics have been used or reported (see Mallee, 1998; Solinger, 1999, pp.19-21), and they are often misinterpreted.<sup>1</sup> In order to study migration and policies, we will begin our work ground up by sieving through the data and synthesizing them whenever possible. The next two sections of the essay build on the specific works of Mallee (1998), Liu and Chan (2001), and Chan (2001; 2007). We then assess the recent trends and the geographical patterns, taking into account the latest data made available. Finally this essay looks at two broad areas of policy importance to migration: migration and regional disparities, and migration and the reforms of the *hukou* system. This will also be useful in helping us better migration dynamics and complexity, and perhaps also debunk the claim of a paradoxical co-existence of rising migration geographical disparities in the last 15 years.

## B. THE *HUKOU* SYSTEM AND DEFINITIONS OF MIGRANTS

Any meaningful analysis of Chinese migration must begin with an understanding of the *hukou* (household registration) system and its relationship with migration. In China, migration was an area of heavy state control in the past and still active state regulation at present. People wanting to change residence permanently are required to get approvals from one or more authorities (Chan and Zhang, 1999). A change in residence is deemed legal only when it is formally approved and registered with the public security authorities. For urban residents, changing residence *within* the same city or town (i.e. “moving” the *hukou* to a new address) due to housing change (moving to a new apartment) or residential changes caused by marriage is generally permitted. A similar freedom is also given to rural residents moving *within* the rural areas because of marriage or other family reasons. However, formal (or “permanent”) moves crossing city, town and township boundaries are heavily regulated and require the possession of a “migration permit” issued by the public security authorities. The permit is granted only when there are good reasons, especially when the move serves, or at least is not at odds with, the central

or local state interests defined in various policies, such as controlling the growth of large cities (Cheng and Selden, 1994; Mallee, 1995; Chan and Zhang, 1999). Hence, to an ordinary person without official connections, getting a migration permit for moves from rural to urban areas, or from smaller cities to larger cities is still very hard, if not totally impossible. The *hukou* system in the pre-reform era functioned as a *de facto* internal passport mechanism; today, it still serves many similar functions, though peasants can now travel to many places to take up jobs or stay with relatives "temporarily" – i.e. without local *hukou* – meaning that they are ineligible for many benefits and rights ordinary local residents have.

At the administrative operational level, rural-urban migration involves two steps: converting one's status from rural to urban and getting permission to move to a specific urban center. The latter – getting the local *hukou* – is the final substantive outcome (Chan and Buckingham, 2008). Therefore, one can differentiate *hukou* and non-*hukou* migrants based on whether or not local *hukou* is conferred in the move. Two categories of migrants can therefore be differentiated:

- a. Migration with "local" residency rights (*bendi hukou*) (hereafter, *hukou* migration);
- b. Migration without *hukou* residency rights (non-*hukou* migration) (see also Chan et al., 1999).

In China, officially only *hukou* migration is considered as *qianyi* ("migration"). Anything else is merely *renkou liudong* (population movement or "floating"), implying a low degree of expected permanence: the transients are not supposed to (and are legally not entitled to) stay at the destination permanently, and therefore they are often termed "temporary" migrants, despite the fact that many of non-*hukou* migrants may have been at the destination for years. *Hukou* migration, on the other hand, is provided with state resources and falls into the "planned" migration (*jihua qianyi*) category, whereas the floating population is outside of the state plans. From the government's administrative point of view, the *hukou* and non-*hukou* differentiation is the most important. The Chinese *hukou* system basically keeps track only statistics of *hukou* (*de jure*) population and recently, also the registered non-*hukou* population (Chan, 2007). Since the early 1980s, along with reforms, researchers and statistical agencies have also started to collect information on migrants based on a *de facto* basis through its various kinds of surveys.

To many observers, what stands out in China's recent mobility change is not only the vast numbers of migrants reported here and there, but also that a great portion of them are, confusingly, permanent "temporary" population (non-*hukou* population), and enormous circulating labour moving back and forth between urban centers and villages every year (Roberts, 1997; Fan and Taubmann, 1999; Liang and Ma, 2004). Many of these labourers and circulators may not qualify as migrants defined rigidly in the conventional way (e.g. requiring residence at the destination for at least 6 months) because they may stay in one place for only a few months and then move on to another place in search of jobs. The continuing massive waves of "temporary" migrant labourers in the urban areas, however, pose a host of data measurement and policy issues, some similar to but some different from those brought by "permanent" migrant labourers from the countryside.

Table 1 presents the "universe" of migration in China at the national aggregate level by use of several major "migration" series, on *de jure* or *de facto* basis (or both), from a variety of sources. Some of these data were collected at the destinations; others at the origins (mainly villages). Despite the variety and the varying quality of each data set and the complaints of China

watchers about the difficulties of using them, these data, when analyzed side by side, have shown some surprising consistency and usability, as will be illustrated below.

**Table 1 Major Aggregate Migration Figures, 1982-2006 (in millions)**

	<b>Hukou Migrants</b> (Yearly flow figures)	<b>Non-hukou Population</b> (Stock figures) or "Floating Population"					
		Accepted general estimates	"Temporary Population"			"Rural Migrant Labor"	
			Registered with MPS	National Censuses/ NBS Population Surveys		Data compiled by Lu et al (2002)	Estimates based on MOA Surveys
Geographic boundary (to cross)	City, Town, or Township			Township, Town, or Street	County, or City	Generally, township	Township
Minimum length of stay	No minimum	Usually overnight	3 days	6 months	6 months or one year	Regularly engaged in work outside townships	
Series	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1982	17.30	30			6.6 (1 yr)		
1985	19.69	40					
1987	19.73				15.2 (6 mths)*		
1988	19.92	70				26.0	
1989	16.87					30.0	
1990	19.24				21.6 (1 yr)		
1991							
1992	18.70	60-70					52.8
1993	18.19	70				62.0	
1994	19.49	80				70.0	
1995	18.46			49.7	29.1**(6 mths)	75.0	69.0
1996	17.51			60.0			
1997	17.85	100	37.3	61.8			
1998	17.13		40.5	62.4			79.8
1999	16.87	100	40.4	63.7			
2000	19.08		44.8	144.4			
2001	17.01		55.1	NA			
2002	17.22		59.8	108.0			
2003	17.26	140	69.9	105.9			98.2
2004	19.49		78.0	103.0			102.6
2005	19.33		86.7	153.1			108.2
2006			95.3	121.6			114.9

Notes: \* the geographic boundary is based on city, county or town.

\*\* the geographic boundary is based on county- level units.

MPS = Ministry of Public Security. NBS = National Bureau of Statistics. MOA = Ministry of Agriculture

Sources: A: MPS (1988-2006a); NBS and MPS (1988)

B: compiled from various newspapers (see Chan, 2006).

C: MPS (1997-2006b)

D and E: NBS (1988), SC and NBS (1985; 1993; 2002; 2007), NPSSO (1997).

F: Lu et al (2002)

E: *Renmin ribao* (2003), MOA (2006a; 2006b).

The Hukou Migrant Series (A): This series refers to *hukou* migrants and is the only "flow" data series in Table 1. This is the number of in-migrants who are formally granted *hukou* status in new destination (city, town and township) each year. The *hukou* migration figures are drawn directly from statistics published by the Ministry of Public Security (MPS). They represent the total number of 3 officially approved *hukou* (residence) changes within a particular year of all types (from townships to cities; from cities to cities, etc.) but excluding those occurring *within* cities, towns and *within* townships.<sup>2</sup> From our understanding of the logistics of data collection in this area, it is very likely that these numbers are tabulated from the numbers of migration certificates issued each year. Though these numbers are not totally problem-free (Mallee, 1998; Liu and Chan, 2001), observers generally consider these problems to be small and the numbers are reasonable indicators of the *hukou* migration (Yang, 2003).

The Non-*hukou* Population series (Series B-G): This refers to the common term "floating population" (*liudong renkou*) used in many sources, from public media to more serious statistical tabulations. It refers to the population staying in an administrative unit (usually city, town, street, or township) other than the place of their *hukou* registration. This group does not belong to the *de jure* population; there are some huge discrepancies in the *de facto* and *de jure* population for some migrant cities, such as Shenzhen.<sup>3</sup> Different from the *hukou* migration data, the non-*hukou* population series presented in Table 1 are all "migrant stock" figures, which represent the cumulative numbers (or the balance) of non-*hukou* migrants who still exist in a certain locale at different points in time. Owing to the different purposes, coverage and criteria used in defining the geographic boundary and the minimum duration of stay, the numbers in each series may not be quite different even for the same year.

Series B: This is broadest, also most popularly used, definition of floating population, which covers usually anyone staying overnight in the destination without the local *hukou*.<sup>4</sup> As such, this version of the floating population that covers a diverse bundle of people such as tourists, people on business trips, traders, sojourners, and peasant migrants, both employed and unemployed. This definition is based on a *de jure* consideration, and not a *de facto* one, in the sense that someone without a local *hukou* can stay in a place for several years and is still considered as a floater. The numbers in circulation includes broad guesstimates of the stock of floating population at certain times. Some are educated guesses; many more are extrapolations, presumably, from other more reliable series and sample surveys (such as Series C-E and rail passenger volume figures and city surveys) (see Solinger, 1999). Presented in Table 1 are some "accepted" numbers compiled from a variety of sources. The neatly rounded numbers used indicate the imprecision of this series.

Series C: Another series of floating population, beginning in 1997, is supplied by the MPS (1997-2006b). By law, anyone staying in places other than his/her place of household registration for 3 days or more should register with the police and apply for a *zanzhu zheng* ("temporary resident permit"). Therefore, this number is also called "temporary population" (*zanzhu renkou*). Obviously, a large number of the floaters fail to comply (*Renmin Ribao*, 1995), contributing to the large discrepancies between Series B and C. Probably because of the floaters' lack of legitimate residence status in the destination and the logistical difficulties in tracking them down, there was no attempt made to count the floaters for the whole nation until the 2000 Census. The experience in 2000 shows that the task was extremely challenging, fraught with problems (see e.g. Yu, 2000; Chan, 2003).

Series D and E: These two are basically one series put out by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) with some definitional and coverage changes over time. The population are defined first on a *de jure* criterion (those without a local *hukou*) and then on a *de facto* criterion.

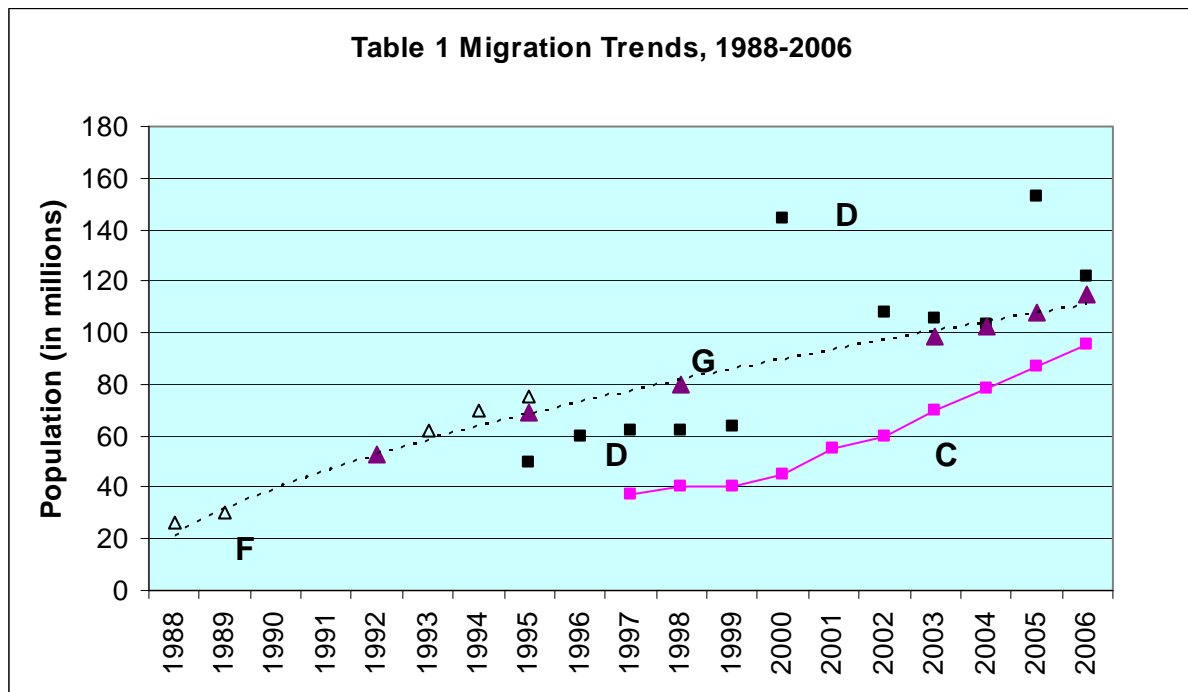
This *de facto* definition stipulates a far longer residence requirement (6 months or one year) than in B and C. Therefore, Series D and E, expectedly, count a smaller population than Series B. The NBS still calls it “floating population;” elsewhere, it is known as “temporary population” or “temporary residents” by some researchers (e.g. Yang, 1996). Though, again, this group is not necessarily “temporary.” In fact, by this definition, it is less temporary because most visitors, tourists, and shorter-term migrant workers are excluded. The NBS actually rightly treats this group as part of the *changzhu* population (“residents”) in its various statistical counts. And more recently, NBS has also stipulated that this group be counted as part of the resident population in calculating per capita GDP at the local levels (Chan, 2007). Data for Series D and E are drawn from on national censuses (1982, 1990 and 2000), the “mini-censuses” (One Per Cent National Population Sample Surveys) in 1987, 1995 and 2005, and annual surveys (from 1996 on) conducted by the NBS at the place of destination. The numbers in Series D are naturally larger than those in E even for the same year (such as in 1995) because D is based on smaller geographic units.

Series F and G: These are the “rural migrant labour” (*mingong*) series. Massive rural labour outflows in search for work is the most important aspect of China’s geographic mobility in the last twenty years. “Rural migrant labour” is a definition that counts only the working population without local *hukou* in the destination and from the countryside. By inference, it is a subset of the floating population. Different from B, C, D and E, derived from the destinations, those of the rural migrant labour figures are collected from sample surveys conducted in the rural areas. Most of the rural migrant labour is unskilled labour; only a small percentage are skilled craftsmen and traders, often self-employed (Li and Hu, 1991). A portion of the *mingong* is seasonal, operating in synchronization with farm work schedules (more outflows in winter when there is not much work on the farm). Numerous large-scale national surveys of rural migrant labour have been conducted, especially since the early 1990s as this group started to grow quite rapidly (Mallee, 1996). Many surveys of this kind are one-time studies and are not strictly comparable; the two series selected for inclusion in for Table 1 are one compiled from an established authority on this subject and one annual national sample surveys based on relatively consistent definitions over time conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). The national rural migrant labour estimates are usually derived from the percentages of outside workers generated from these sample surveys. The sample used by the MOA covers about 300 villages and 7,000 households and the definition used is very close to what is generally understood as “*mingong*.” By this definition (Series G), there were about 100-115 million rural migrant labourers in the country in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This series covers a longer time span (1992-2006) with presumed internal consistency.

### C. MIGRATION TRENDS SINCE THE EARLY 1980s

Based on the figures in Table 1, some general migration trends are identified. Despite the general surge in migration, the annual volume of MPS *hukou* migrants remained quite stable, between 17 and 20 million, throughout the 25 years under study. The rate has actually declined slightly, relative to the size of the Chinese population. An analysis of the detailed MPS (1993-2005a) figures shows that between 80 and 90 per cent of all *hukou* migrants were recorded in urban areas since 1993. The stability reflects strong government intervention in this area of *hukou* migration crossing city, town and township boundaries, through mechanisms such as a quota system (Chan and Zhang, 1999). The *hukou* migration data have not been much studied, and this is an area that should deserve more attention. On the other hand, there is a clear rising trend in the size of the non-*hukou* migrant population since the early 1980s. The various figures about the sizes of the non-*hukou* migrants assembled in that table show a general upward trend in the last quarter century. For instance, the floating population started to grow rapidly in the mid-1980s to

about 70 million in 1988, then dropped somewhat in 1989-1991 due to an economic austerity programme, but regained momentum around 1992 through probably 1997, reaching 100 million then. The current figure is probably very close to 200 million. Similarly, over the period between 1992 and 2006, the size of the rural migrant labour also more than doubled from 53 million to 115 million. Upward trends alike are also seen from other indicators of non-*hukou* population which have a substantial time span; these data points are plotted in Figure 1. The numbers and trends identified in the 1990s are also broadly consistent with Yang (1996; 2004), Zhao (1998), Chan (2001), and Rozelle *et al.* (1999). Based on the 1 Per Cent National Population Survey in 2005, there was 153 million “floating population,” slightly half of whom was registered with the police.



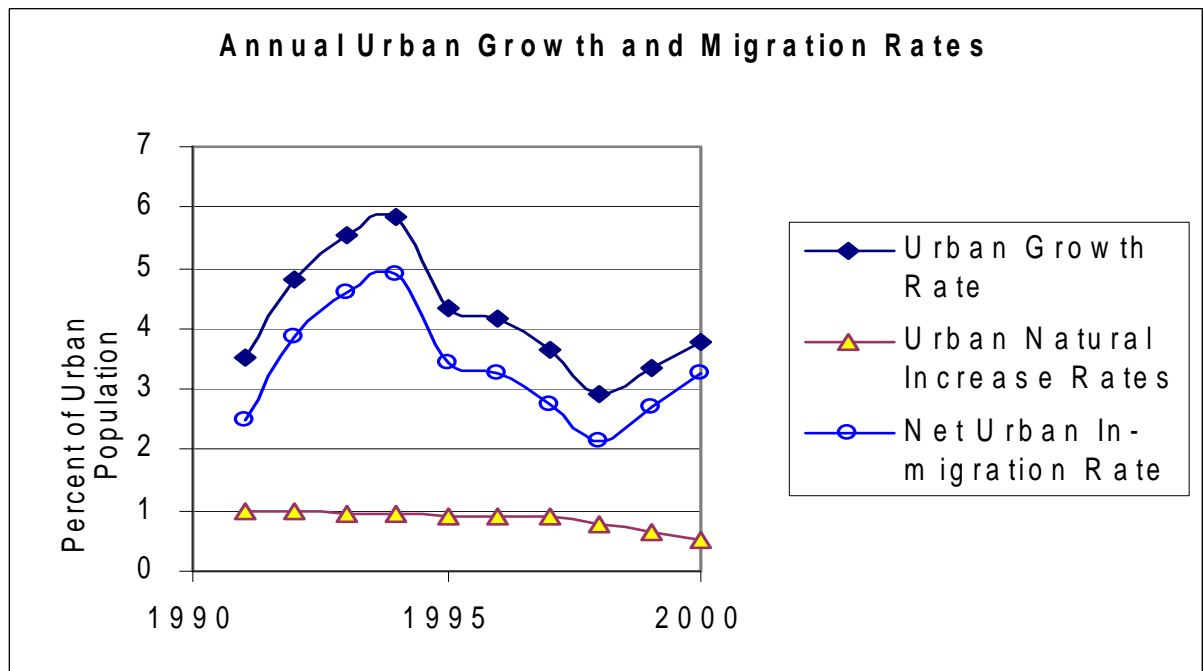
Notes: Letters refer to the data series in Table 1.  
Source: Table 1

However, the trend depicted by Series D is much less consistent: two data points, 2000 and 2005, are clearly “out of the line,” far larger than the other years’ figures. We know that accuracy of 2000 and 2005 are greater than the rest of the series because they are from either a full census (2000) or a 1 per cent sample (2005) while the rest is from a 1 per 1000 sample. From the research by Chan (2003; 2006) on the 2000 Census data, it appears that the 2000 figure is likely to be overcounted while the 1 per 1000 samples may have undercounted the migrant population. If this same logic can be applied to the figures in 2005 and 2006 in D, then it is reasonable to believe that the “temporary population,” defined as such, was between 120 and 150 million in 2005-2006. Another careful examination of the data will show that there was a slowing down of migration in 1996-99. For example, D between 1996 and 1999 only inched up slightly; the average growth rate of G also dwindled to 4.8 per cent per year in 1995-1998, compared to 7.3 per cent per year in 1992-95. It is believed that this slowdown in rural outflows was related to the sluggish performance of the urban economy, job competition from laid-off workers of urban state-owned enterprises (SOEs), increasingly protectionist policies used by local governments



against recruitment of outsiders, and improvement in the rural economy, at least between 1996 and 1999 (Zhao, 1998; Cai and Chan, 2000). The above trends corroborate also generally quite well with the rural-urban migration trend identified by Chan and Hu (2003), as shown in Figure 2, and those in Cai (2002, p. 70). The net rural-urban migration in Figure 2 includes urban reclassification, which was much more significant in the first half of the 1990s than in the second half of the decade. Therefore, the net migration trend, especially for the period 1990-1995, depicted in Figure 2, will overstate the true net (physical) rural-urban migration.

Figure 2



Source: Chan and Hu (2003)

#### D. THE GEOGRAPHY OF MIGRATION

Significant disparities in wages between the urban and rural sectors and among regions underlie a great portion of labour migratory flows in China (Chan, 1994; Cai, 1999; 2000; Fan, 2005a). As pointed out earlier, the bulk of migratory flows in the last 25 years involves predominantly those without any *hukou* change (non-*hukou* migration), mainly the rural migrant labour. The root cause relates to the lack of sufficient gainful employment in the countryside in many agricultural provinces. Because of the serious institutional barriers, mainly the *hukou* system, the rural and urban population segments and the labour markets (as defined by the *hukou* system) operate as two largely separate “circuits” or 6 strata (Chan et al., 1999; Li, 2004). The choice for rural migrant labour is mainly between a farm job (or no job) at home and a low-end jobs in the cities. Rural migrant labour moves across different geographic scales to make monetary gains, which can broadly considered in terms of the balance of the wage differentials and living cost differentials between the origin and the destination. Most of them go to nearby towns outside the villages; others cross thousands of miles to big cities on the coast. Two major sources of available data of a different nature allow us to examine the national geographic patterns of migration in the 1990s and beyond.

The first set of data is from the full censuses (1990 and 2000) and the 1 Per Cent National Population Surveys in the between (1987, 1995, and 2005). In the data covering “migration flow,” “migrant” is defined as a “resident” (staying more than six months or one year in an administrative unit) who lived in a different administrative unit five years earlier. A summary of the aggregate figures are in Table 2. The above data, plus those from the 1982 Census, also provide information on the size of the non-*hukou* population (migrant stock), based on roughly similar but not exactly the same criteria, as shown in Series D and E in Table 1 and examined before. It is important to point out that the 2000 and 2005 data define migrants as those crossing township-level units while the 1990 and 1995 data define migration only when a move crossed county-level unit boundaries, as explained in Table 2. The 1995 survey reports a total of 33.23 million migrants crossing county-level units in the preceding 5-year period. 72 per cent of the inter-county migration was within provinces; the remaining 28 per cent (9.2 million) was inter-provincial migration (IPM).

**Table 2** Migration Flow Figures from Census and Mini-censuses, 1982-2000 (in millions)

Year of Census or Survey	Five-year period	Minimum length of stay for non- <i>hukou</i> migrants	Geographic boundary	Total volume	<i>Hukou</i> Migrants	Non- <i>hukou</i> Migrants
1987	1982-87	6 months	County- and town-levels	30.44	20.5*	10.0*
1990	1985-90	1 year	County-level	33.84	18.3*	15.8*
1995	1990-95	6 months	County-level	33.23	NA	NA
2000	1995-2000	6 months	Township-level	124.7	43.0*	80.3*
			Of which:			
			Rural to urban	50.32*	NA	NA
			Urban to urban	45.70*		
Rural to rural	22.52*					
Urban to rural	4.69*					
		6 months	County-level	69.30*	NA	NA
2005	2000-2005	6 months	Province-level	38.0	NA	NA

Note: \* Tabulated from 1% microdata.

Sources: NBS (1988), SC and NBS (1993; 2002; 2007), NPSSO (1997), and Yan (1998).

In 1995-2000, the volume of migration increased substantially. Based on the same definition of inter-county migration, the volume had doubled in 1995-2000 – bearing in mind the caveat about the likely over-counting of migrants in the 2000 Census. Using information from a 1 per cent microdata, one can also classify and estimate the flows by rural/urban origin and destination. The predominant flow was from rural to urban areas (50.32 million), followed by urban to urban flows (45.70 million) (Table 2). The intra-urban flows include a large portion of “residential mobility” within cities.<sup>6</sup> Tables 3 and 4, and Figures 3-6 focus on IPM in three consecutive five-year periods from 1990 in detail. The total IPM volume has increased significantly since 1990, from only 9.2 million in 1990-1995 to 38 million in 2000-2005 (Table 4). The different definitions and procedures used for collecting the data between 1990 and the rest obviously account for a small part of the increase; the remaining growth can be considered to be real. Of all inter-county migration, IPM also accounts an increasing greater share in the 1990s (Table 3), for example, from only 28 per cent in 1990-1995 to about 44 per cent in 1995-2000. It is very likely that is also true in the first few years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century too.

Table 3 Interprovincial Migration in China, 1990-2005 (in 1000s)

Rank	1990-1995	Migration			NET %	Rank	1995-2000	Migration			NET%	Rank	2000-2005	Migration			NET%
		In	Out	Net				In	Out	Net				In	Out	Net	
1	Guangdong	1,886	87	1,799	19.6	1	Guangdong	11,501	438	11,063	34.3	1	Guangdong	11,996	1,715	10,281	27.0
2	Shanghai	666	56	610	6.6	2	Shanghai	2,168	163	2,005	6.2	2	Zhejiang	5,062	1,041	4,021	10.6
3	Beijing	658	53	606	6.6	3	Zhejiang	2,715	970	1,745	5.4	3	Shanghai	3,025	375	2,650	7.0
4	Xinjiang	498	61	437	4.8	4	Beijing	1,890	174	1,715	5.3	4	Jiangsu	3,290	1,328	1,963	5.2
5	Jiangsu	748	430	319	3.5	5	Xinjiang	1,142	217	925	2.9	5	Beijing	2,246	330	1,916	5.0
6	Liaoning	371	122	248	2.7	6	Fujian	1,346	625	722	2.2	6	Fujian	1,934	802	1,132	3.0
7	Tianjin	206	35	171	1.9	7	Jiangsu	1,908	1,241	667	2.1	7	Tianjin	908	107	802	2.1
8	Nei Mongol	324	165	159	1.7	8	Tianjin	492	104	388	1.2	8	Xinjiang	577	182	395	1.0
9	Yunnan	231	127	104	1.1	9	Liaoning	755	380	375	1.2	9	Liaoning	674	416	257	0.7
10	Fujian	297	194	104	1.1	10	Yunnan	733	398	335	1.0	10	Hainan	191	158	33	0.1
11	Shanxi	165	79	87	0.9	11	Hainan	218	130	88	0.3	11	Ningxia	74	68	7	0.0
12	Hainan	91	54	38	0.4	12	Shanxi	383	334	49	0.2	12	Tibet	26	31	-6	0.0
13	Tibet	34	6	27	0.3	13	Ningxia	129	87	41	0.1	13	Qinghai	74	85	-12	0.0
14	Qinghai	64	47	17	0.2	14	Tibet	71	35	35	0.1	14	Nei Mongol	394	417	-23	-0.1
15	Ningxia	44	40	4	0.0	15	Shandong	904	878	26	0.1	15	Yunnan	469	601	-132	-0.3
16	Shandong	347	357	-9	-0.1	16	Qinghai	77	123	-46	-0.1	16	Shanxi	210	345	-135	-0.4
17	Shanxi	147	172	-25	-0.3	17	Hebei	770	872	-102	-0.3	17	Shandong	924	1,123	-199	-0.5
18	Hubei	246	291	-44	-0.5	18	Nei Mongol	325	441	-116	-0.4	18	Jilin	218	532	-315	-0.8
19	Hebei	354	427	-74	-0.8	19	Jilin	254	529	-275	-0.9	19	Gansu	118	494	-376	-1.0
20	Gansu	102	178	-77	-0.8	20	Shanxi	423	719	-296	-0.9	20	Hebei	612	990	-378	-1.0
21	Guizhou	181	288	-107	-1.2	21	Gansu	204	561	-357	-1.1	21	Shanxi	255	827	-572	-1.5
22	Jilin	126	260	-134	-1.5	22	Heilongjiang	301	940	-639	-2.0	22	Heilongjiang	195	1,020	-825	-2.2
23	Heilongjiang	307	495	-188	-2.0	23	Chongqing	448	1,103	-655	-2.0	23	Chongqing	427	1,437	-1,010	-2.7
24	Zhejiang	345	618	-273	-3.0	24	Guizhou	261	1,232	-970	-3.0	24	Guizhou	531	1,766	-1,235	-3.2
25	Jiangxi	96	443	-347	-3.8	25	Guangxi	287	1,838	-1,551	-4.8	25	Guangxi	397	2,123	-1,726	-4.5
26	Guangxi	82	532	-450	-4.9	26	Hubei	606	2,210	-1,604	-5.0	26	Jiangxi	499	2,476	-1,977	-5.2
27	Henan	166	680	-514	-5.6	27	Henan	470	2,309	-1,839	-5.7	27	Hubei	501	2,715	-2,214	-5.8
28	Hunan	134	666	-532	-5.8	28	Jiangxi	236	2,681	-2,445	-7.6	28	Hunan	501	3,328	-2,827	-7.4
29	Anhui	101	762	-662	-7.2	29	Anhui	313	2,893	-2,579	-8.0	29	Henan	280	3,433	-3,154	-8.3
30	Sichuan*	171	1,465	-1,294	-14.1	30	Hunan	363	3,261	-2,899	-9.0	30	Anhui	671	3,836	-3,165	-8.3
						31	Sichuan	590	4,396	-3,806	-11.8	31	Sichuan	763	3,941	-3,178	-8.4
Total		9,189	9,189	0				32,282	32,282	0				38,042	38,042	0	
IPM as % of all inter-county migration		27.6						44.2						NA			
Top 5 coastal provinces		4,329	748	3,582	39.1			19,412	1,962	17,454	54.1			25,619	4,789	20,830	54.8

Note: \* including Chongqing. Sources: NPSSO (1997), SC and NBS (2002, 2007)

**Table 4 Interprovincial Migration, 1990-2005**

(a) Migration from another province (Migration flow)			
Period	Total (in millions)	As % of nation's population at the beginning of the period	Increase over the previous 5 years (in millions)
1990-1995	9.2	0.81	
1995-2000	32.3	2.61	23.1
2000-2005	38.0	3.00	5.7

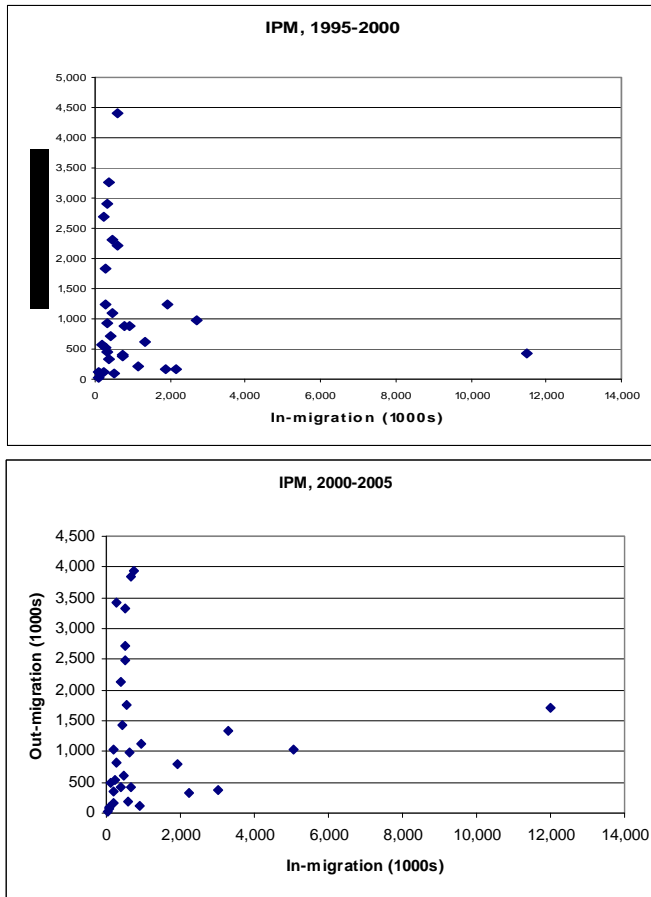
  

(b) Population with <i>hukou</i> in another province (Migrant stock)			
Year	Total (in millions)	As % of nation's population	Increase over the previous 5 years (in millions)
1995	9.3	0.75	
2000	42.4	3.35	33.1
2005	47.7	3.65	5.3

Sources: NPSSO (1997); SC and NBS (2002; 2007).

Figures 3-5 show the largest 30 IPM flows in each period. They are overwhelmingly towards the coastal provinces, with Guangdong being the prime destination of the flows and the lower Changjiang delta as the secondary one. More precise breakdowns of IPM based on in-migration, outmigration and net migration by province, ranked by net migration volume are given in Table 3. Plots of the in-migration figures against the out-migration figures show that flows involving major IPM players (provinces) are basically unidirectional. The pattern shows largely an “L” curve in Figure 6. In other words, these provinces have overwhelming either in-migration (such as Guangdong) or out-migration (such as Sichuan) with relatively very small flows in the opposite direction. As such, NET%, which measures the net IPM as a percentage of the total in-migration (the same as out-migration) is a useful gauge of the relative share of the individual provinces in IPM (Table 3).

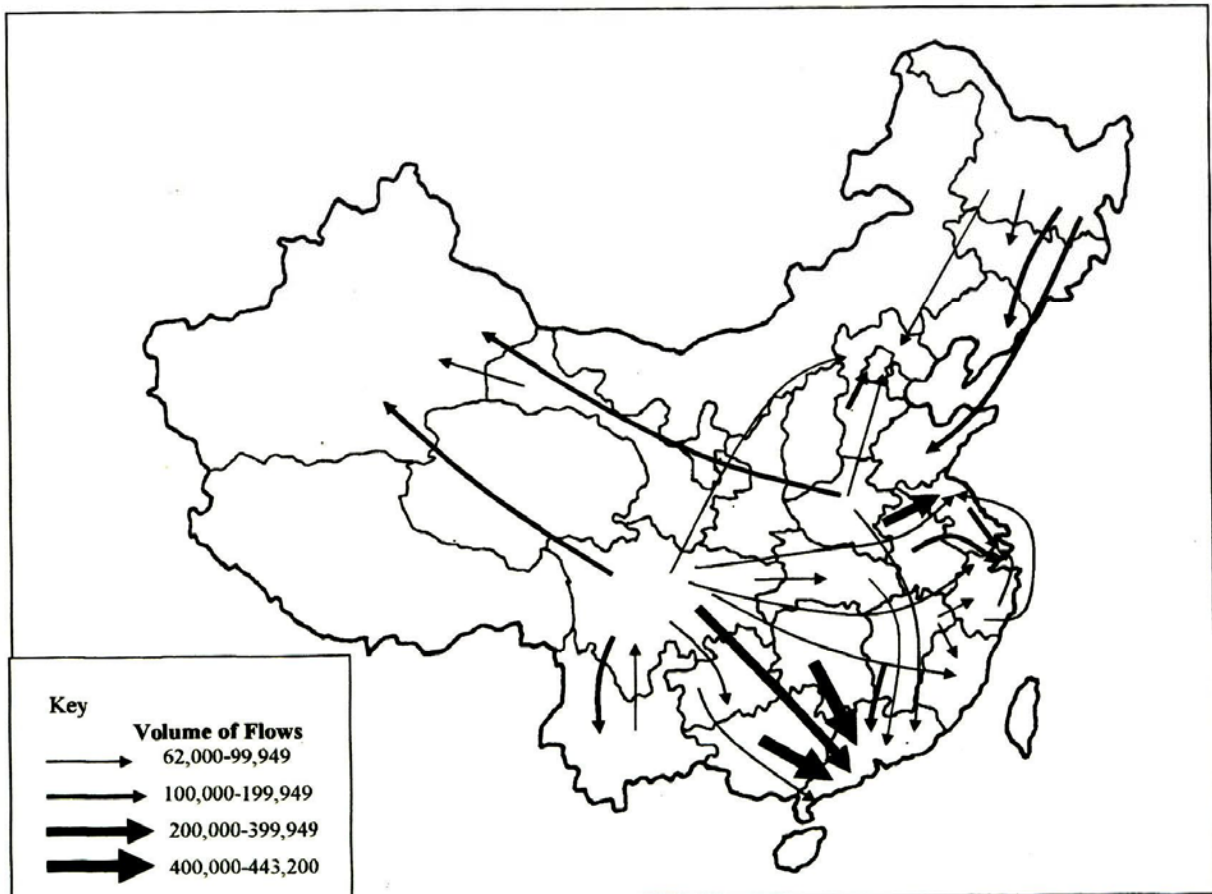
Figure 6 In-migration and Out-migration by Province, 1995-2005



Data in Table 3 indicate that there was a greater concentration of the IPM to the coastal provinces over time, especially between the first and second halves of the 1990s. In the second half of that decade, the sum of NET% of the top 5 coastal provinces having the largest net IPM is 54.1 per cent, compared with only 39.0 per cent in the first half (see also Ding et al., 2005). The high concentration in the coastal provinces continued to be maintained in 2000-2005 (54.8 per cent). Significant convergence into one single province – the largest net population importer – Guangdong, in the 1990s is also clear from Table 3. Based on NET%, Guangdong reached 34.3 per cent in 1995-2000, compared to only 19.6 per cent in the earlier period (see also Fan, 2005b). The pattern was slightly altered in 2000-2005 with Zhejiang’s rapid rise to become the second net importer, with a NET% of 10.6 per cent. Guangdong dropped slightly to 27 per cent in the most recent period.

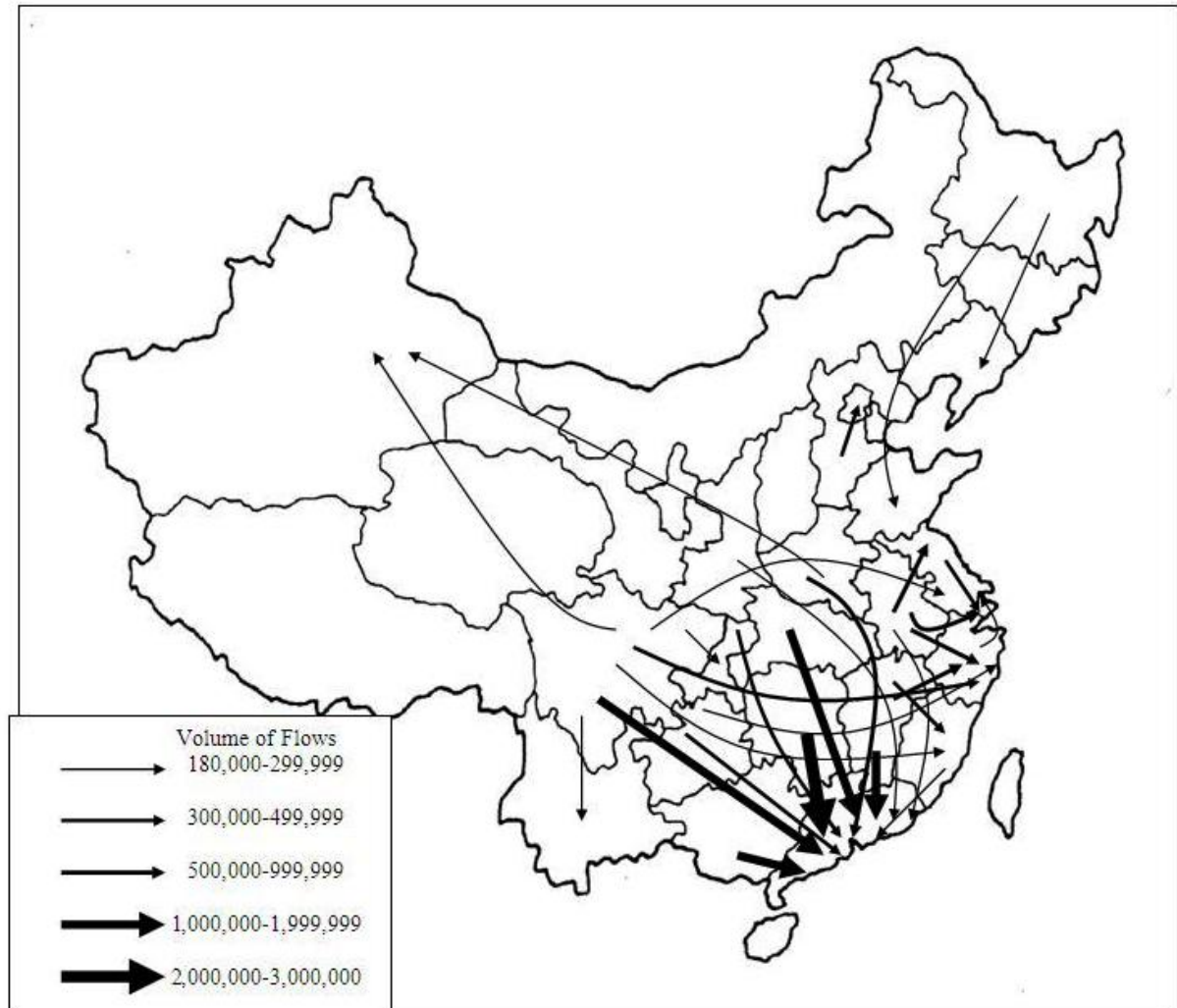
On the net exporter side, the opposite trend is true. Sichuan, the largest exporter province, was the single dominant net exporter in 1990-1995 (NET% was -14.1 per cent), far exceeding the second place net exporter (Anhui, -7.2 per cent) by a significant margin. Sichuan's dominance (NET% -11.8) was slightly eroded in 1995-2000, partly because of the split of Chongqing from the province. More importantly, the second, third and fourth largest net exporters (Hunan, Anhui, and Jiangxi) all had NET% values (-7.6 to -9.0 per cent) much closer to Sichuan's in 1995-2000. This has become very clear in the latest data, in 2000-2005: the four largest net exporters have essentially about the same NET% (-7.4 to -8.4 per cent). In other words, in those 15 years, while there was a convergence of the IPM flows into one (or two) province, origins became more diverse. This is consistent with the patterns depicted in the migration flow maps in Figures 3-5. These changes seem to be related to the intensification of the regional industrial restructuring beginning in the late 1980s, whereby inland provinces lost proportionally more manufacturing jobs to the coastal provinces in the second half of the 1990s (Yang , 2004), giving rise, in particular, to the emergence of Guangdong as the "world's factory." The pattern also speaks to the spread of out-migration to a greater number of provinces in the non-coastal provinces.

Figure 3 The 30 Largest Inter-provincial Migration Flows, 1990-1995



Source: NPSSO (1997)

Figure 4 The 30 Largest Inter-provincial Migration Flows, 1995-2000

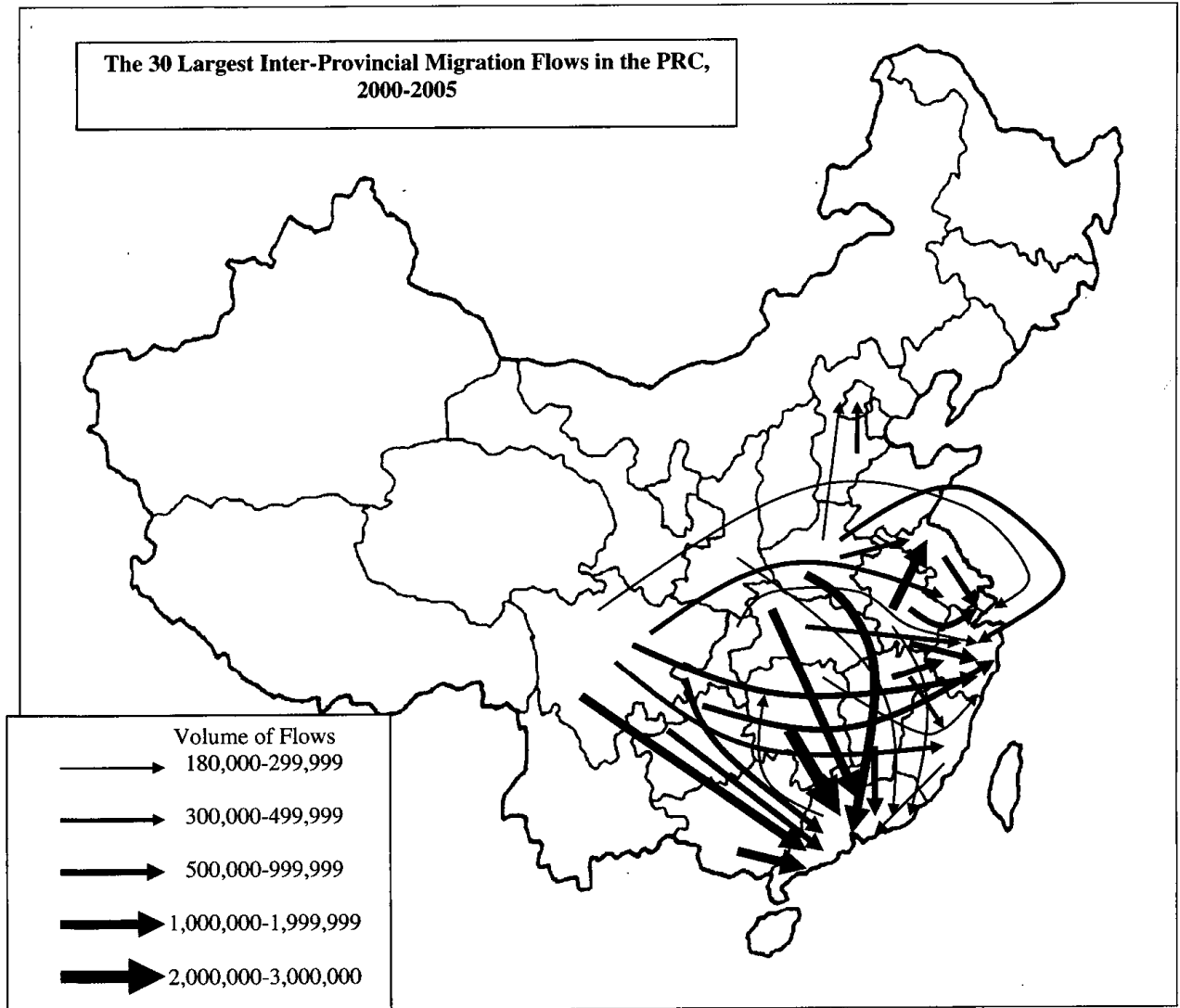


Source: SC and NBS (2002).

Further examination of Table 3 also reveals some interesting ups and downs of a few provinces though the lineups of the provinces are broadly stable in the three periods. Most striking is Zhejiang. Migrants from this province are almost everywhere in the country (and many parts of Europe too) and have been well studied. The province has now changed from a previous major net exporter of migrants (the 7<sup>th</sup> largest net exporter in 1990-1995) to a top net importer of migrants (the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest in 1995-2000 and 2<sup>nd</sup> in 2000-2005), likely related to the success of the job growth of the province. With also large net migrations to Shanghai and Jiangsu, the total net migration to this lower Changjiang region was about 23 per cent of the total IPM; this is consistent with the observation that this region has now rivaled Guangdong as the prime destination of rural migrant workers. On the other hand, Xinjiang has

successively slipped its position in the ranking in those 15 years. Indeed, the flows to Xinjiang are among the largest 30 in the three five-year periods in prior to 2000 (Chan et al., 1999; Figure 3 and 4), this is no longer the case in 2000-2005 (Figure 5).

Figure 5



Source: SC and NBS (2007)

One also notes that the poorest provinces like Guizhou and Tibet are not among the lowest in rank, reflecting the fact that it is not simply abject poverty that drives long-distance migration (Chan, 2001). While most provinces are predominantly as either importers or exporters, indicating the macro regional division of labour in China, there are some notable exceptions, such as Jiangsu, Fujian, Shandong, Hubei, Hebei, and Zhejiang in 1990-1995; Jiangsu in 1995-2000, and Shandong, and Hebei in both 1995-2000 and 2000-2005. The fewer number of provinces in the more balanced in- and out-



migration category seems to be consistent with the greater regional economic specialization or polarization that took place in the 1990s. It is also interesting to note that Guangdong also registered a significant out-migration (1.7 million) in the latest period (2000-2005). A detailed examination of the 2005 data in SC and NBS (2007, Table 12-8) suggests that the out-migration was largely to provinces where in-migrants originated (such as Hunan and Jiangxi). This out-migration is most likely a return migration than a diversion of migrant labour from Guangdong to other coastal provinces.<sup>7</sup> The second major set of migration labour data draws from national surveys of rural household/labour done by the NBS and rural migrant labour surveys undertaken by other agencies or research institutions. The data provide some direct and useful information about this special group (see Mallee, 1998). Because rural migrant labour, defined on the basis of the *hukou* status of migrants, is more a unique Chinese phenomenon, some of the “migration” statistics compiled are less “standard.” The national estimates are all derived from large sample surveys which were conducted in different times and often using not exactly the same definition of “rural migrant labour.” As mentioned above, this kind of rural labour migration study covers only labour migration from the countryside *regardless* of a migrant's length of stay at the destination. Therefore, these surveys capture more comprehensively all labour migrants, as contrast to the census data which exclude migrants staying in the destination less than six months or a year. These survey data are stock data, different from the census and mini-census migration flow data examined earlier.

Available geographic data from three separate major national sample surveys undertaken in late 1993/early 1994, 1998 and 2004 are particularly useful. According to the 1993 study, the size of the stock of rural migrant labour (those who participated in work “outside” the village, including seasonal labour) at the end of 1993 and early 1994 reached 51 million, accounting for about one eighth (12.5 per cent) of the country's rural labour force (Table 5). The flows were predominantly toward the urban areas (77.9 per cent). Using the common 3-region division,<sup>8</sup> the Central region was the largest source of rural migrant labour, having the highest labour outmigration rate (15.9 per cent) and volume (22.8 million), followed by the West region (13.5 per cent and 15.4 million). The East region had the lowest rate (8.5 per cent) and the smallest volume. This pattern is broadly consistent with the findings of other studies of the early and mid-1990s (such as Rozelle et al., 1997). Because of the large size of the labour force (population) in Central provinces, this region accounted for 44 per cent of the estimated total outflows. The low rate of outmigration in the East region is attributed to the high level of development of rural enterprises in many villages and townships, which absorbed local and nearby rural labour. This is not the case for the Central or West regions. A great portion of the *mingong* movement was within counties (36 per cent) and even more within migrants' own provinces (71 per cent). A decade later, the overall labour outmigration rate almost doubled the one in 1994 (23.8 per cent). The 3-region distribution of the rural migrant labour is about the same as before, with the East now gaining significantly more share. Rural migrant labour was essentially found in cities in towns (94.3 per cent), with a large percentage in mainly large cities (62.4 per cent).

Table 5 Composition of Rural Migrant Labor, 1993

Region	Total Rural labor	Out-migration rate	No. of Migrants		Geographic Distribution (%)				
	Size (in millions)	%	Size (in millions)	%	Within Counties	Within Provinces	Toward Urban Centers		
<b>1993/94</b>									
East	154.5	8.5	13.1	25.6	28.4	66.3	82.0		
Central	143.3	15.9	22.8	44.4	40.6	70.4	83.3		
West	113.8	13.5	15.3	30.0	37.0	76.4	66.5		
TOTAL	411.6	12.5	51.2	100	36.4	71.1	77.9		
<b>2004</b>									
East	198.7	19.8	39.3	33.3	Province-level Cities and Provincial Capitals	Prefecture-level Cities	County-level Cities	Designated Towns	Others
Central	173.8	27.2	47.3	40.0					
West	124.4	25.4	31.6	26.7					
TOTAL	496.8	23.8	118.2	100	28.1	34.3	20.5	11.4	5.7

Notes:

Rural migrant labor refers to rural labor who had been outside the townships for work in that year.

Classification of Regions:

East = Liaoning, Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi and Hainan.

Central = Heilongjiang, Jinin, Nei Mongol, Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi.

West = Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan and Tibet.

Source: Li (1994) and NBS Survey Group (2006).

A comparison of the 1993 data with another, and broadly similar, national rural migrant labour survey of 1998<sup>9</sup> yields some interesting trends. Both of them report a stock of rural migrant labour of about 50 million (Table 6(a)). While the size and percentage of within-county migration remains quite stable (17-18 million, or 34-36 per cent), there is a significant increase in the migration to other provinces, mostly to another region, between 1993 and 1998. This means that rural migrants are moving to farther destinations. This is consistent with what has been shown earlier based on 2000 Census and 2005 mini-census data. Drastic increases in the number of migrants crossing both provincial and regional boundaries are obvious. In 1998, this group accounted for 31 per cent of the migrant stock, compared to only 18 per cent in 1993.

Another regional comparison of the IPM between 1993 and 1998 in Table 6(b) shows that the Central region has further consolidated its role as the largest generator of rural migrant labour crossing provincial boundaries (55 per cent in 1998 compared to 46 per cent in 1993), and the East region is the destination of a vast majority of inter-provincial rural migrant labour (increased from 70 per cent to 83 per cent). Inter-provincial rural migrant labour generated in and from the West region has witnessed the most rapid growth, with its share rising from about one-quarter to one-third in those five years. The share

of out-of-provinces rural migrant labour in the East region, however, dwindled from about 30 per cent to only about 11 per cent of the total inter-provincial rural migrant labour in the same period.

The regional flow matrix in Table 6(b) also shows that most of the inter-provincial rural migrant labour in the East region stayed within the region (71-72 per cent) throughout the 1990s. In the Central and West regions, a huge, and increasing, majority of the inter-provincial rural migrant labour has moved to the East region (87 per cent from the Central region and 79 per cent from the West region). In fact, in terms of the regional outflow pattern, migrants from the West region followed the footsteps of migrants from the Central region. Five years earlier, a large portion of out-of-province rural migrant labour (38 per cent) from the West region moved within the same region. In the late 1990s, a much smaller percentage still did (14 per cent), while almost three-quarters of them moved to the East region. It has been argued that such moves would place migrants in the best position to benefit from the largest geographic wage disparities possible (Cai, 1999), and one would also expect that migration would narrow the spatial disparities (see discussion in the next section).

Another comparison between 1998 and 2004 is shown in Table 6(c) based on both rural migrant labour within and out-of-provinces. The table shows that the East region has further concentrated the rural migrant labour, accounting for 70 per cent of the all the migrants, as compared to only 38 per cent in 1998. The two net exporting regions (Central and West) show a similar trend; in terms of the destination distribution of all rural migrant labour, the Central region still had a much higher percentage in the East region than the West region did (because the Central had a higher rate of migrating out of provinces).

**Table 6 Distribution of Rural Migrant Labor, 1993, 1998 and 2004**  
(a) Within-province Migration and Inter-provincial Migration

	1993		1998	
<b>Volume (in millions)</b>				
WPM Within Counties	18.66		17.18	
WPM Outside Counties	17.82		13.46	
WPM Subtotal		36.48		30.64
IPM Within Region	5.83		3.24	
IPM Outside Region	8.97		15.38	
IPM Subtotal		14.80		18.62
All	51.28	51.28	49.26	49.26
<b>Percentage</b>				
WPM Within Counties	36.4		34.9	
WPM Outside Counties	34.8		27.3	
WPM Subtotal		71.1		62.2
IPM Within Region	11.4		6.6	
IPM Outside Region	17.5		31.2	
IPM Subtotal		28.9		37.8
All	100	100	100	100

**(b) Regional Distribution of Inter-provincial Migrants**

Destinations	Origins			
	East	Central	West	All
<b>1993</b> % of IPM	29.9	45.6	24.5	100
East	71.4	79.2	52.2	70.3
Central	21.8	18.9	9.4	17.4
West	6.8	1.9	38.4	12.3
All IPM (=14.8 million)	100	100	100	100
<b>1998</b> % of IPM	11.0	55.0	34.0	100
East	72.7	87.3	79.4	83.0
Central	18.2	9.1	5.9	9.0
West	9.1	3.6	14.7	8.0
All IPM (= 18.6 million)	100	100	100	100

**(c) Regional Distribution of Migrants 1998 and 2004 (%)**

Destinations	Origins			
	East	Central	West	All
<b>1998</b>				
East	89.9	32.3	29.4	37.7
Central	6.7	66.3	2.2	37.9
West	3.4	1.3	68.4	24.4
All Migration (= 49.3 million)	100	100	100	100
<b>2004</b>				
East	96.6	65.2	41.0	70.0
Central	2.1	32.8	2.9	14.2
West	0.8	1.8	55.8	15.6
All Migration (=118.2 million)	100	100	100	100

Notes: WPM = Within-province migration; IPM = Inter-provincial Migration

See notes in Table 5 for classification of regions.

Sources: Li (1994), Liu (2000), Sheng and Pang (2006).

It is no coincidence that our data show that the two provinces, Guangdong and Sichuan, having the largest net migration change (in-migration and out-migration, respectively)<sup>10</sup> in 1995-2000 are also the same provinces with the lowest and highest per capita GDP growth rates in the same period, respectively (see Chan and Wang, 2008). If we add the remittances migrants sent back to their home towns to our calculus, the calculated economic gains of migration to the sending provinces would be even greater. This postulate is consistent with the general pattern of higher rural income growth rates in locales associated with higher rates of outmigration (after controlling for other factors) in China, as has been quite amply documented in the literature (e.g. Ma et al., 2004).

## E. RECENT POLICIES

Migration affects and is also affected by so many things in China. This can be seen in the centrality of the *hukou* system, which is essentially a migration regulatory system, in the Chinese society and economy through the last half a century. I could look at many policies that are relevant, but the limited space here can only allow me focus on two important aspects, which, I believe, are central to migration in China, and are closely related to the government's recent major concern about the large

income gaps between the rich and the poor (mainly the migrants) in the country.<sup>11</sup> I would like to draw on some of my recent research to examine them.

The first one is about migration and regional disparities. A major current concern is the wide economic gaps between the coastal and the inland regions. Most of the existing studies on long-distance (interprovincial) migration focus on the response of migration to the regional economic disparities (such as Chan et al., 1999; Cai et al., 2001; Lin et al., 2004; Fan 2005a; 2005b). Many of them have contended the surge in long-distance migration as driven by the widening regional inequality in the 1990s. Chan and Wang (2008) have recently shown that previous wisdom of widening regional disparities observed for the period 1995-2000 was constructed on a faulty ground of a misunderstood *de jure* provincial population series. The mis-application results in significantly overstating the interprovincial inequality in 2000. Their analysis shows that it is most probable that China's regional economic disparities as measured by the chosen inequality index, after a significant rise in the first half of the 1990s, began to level off in the mid-1990s and have maintained about the same since then (see also Tsui, 2007). A major explanatory factor for the stable regional disparities from 1995 was the surge in the long-distance migration, as has been shown in the paper. The story told in Chan and Wang (2005) is that migration and regional development in China are closely related in the past twenty years; it is consistent with the arguments made by Wang and Hui (2004). Of course, one should be very careful in interpreting this kind of "average" regional inequality data as rural and urban populations, as defined by the *hukou* system, operate in two largely separate strata (Chan et al, 1999; Li, 2005).

The central government's concern over the regional inequalities in the 1990s also led to a number of programs and efforts, such as introduction of the new tax assignment reforms in 1994, which recentralized fiscal power of the central government and expanded hugely its redistributive capacity (Wong, 1997). More prominently, since 1998, a number of new policies and program "tilting" toward the poor regions have been introduced. The major ones included the fiscal stimulus program in 1998 to counter the effects of the Asian financial crisis and the massive "Western Development Program" in 1999. One of the major achievements in this was the rapid spread of the basic education in many poor provinces (hence the leveling of basic education among provinces), as shown in the provincial education index data for 1990 and 1995 (UNDP, 1999; Chan and Wang, 2008). Most observers agree the new administration under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao has paid more attention and channeled more resources to the rural areas and poor provinces.

Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesize that the rapid spread of the basic education in many poor provinces had paved the way for faster development in those provinces later, partly through the mechanism of long-distance migration, as shown earlier. The trajectory of development ordered in this sequence – getting a basic education, then (for some) engaging in migration, and finally achieving higher incomes – is not an unfamiliar one at the personal or regional level in many parts of China and perhaps, in the world too. This tale of economic development is also consistent with the emphasis on the human capital in development. The enhancement of human capital includes not only education but also equally importantly, migration – which provide opportunities of employment and accumulation of job skills), as has been increasingly recognized by Third World development experts (UNDP, 2005). While China has made great strides in spreading basic education to the poor provinces in the last two decades, the new front of fighting against inequality is now at the higher ladder of education. Wang and Chan (2005) and Wang (2005a), for example, have shown that the exam-score based college admission system for recruiting students into China's top universities in 1999 and 2000 were still seriously biased in favor of big cities and many coastal provinces.

The second aspect is about migration related to *hukou*. This comprises two parts: one deals with migration involving conversions of *hukou*, and the other one is about policies that improve conditions of migrants without local *hukou* (non-*hukou* migrants). The first one is the focus of much attention in the last fifty years, *hukou* is the core of China's system of institutional exclusion and discrimination (Chan, 1994; Wang, 2005a). There has been a good deal of rhetoric in the press about the recent reforms aiming at abolishing the *hukou* institution (see Reuters, 2005; Kahn, 2005). The issue is quite complicated, as with many things in China today. Chan and Buckingham's (2008) research into this issue shows that many new initiatives been grossly misunderstood. Almost all the changes in the *hukou* system and various initiatives since the late 1990s have had only marginal impact on weakening the foundation of the system – i.e. the separation of two segments of population (loosely, rural and urban) and discrimination based on that. The *hukou* system, directly and indirectly, continues to be a major wall in preventing China's rural population from settling in the city and in maintaining the rural-urban “apartheid.” Wang's (2005b) earlier evaluation of the system as “adapted and adjusted” but “alive and well” remains true today.

The only major substantive change is in the administration of the system. Recent various initiatives aim at devolution of the decision-making power of granting *hukou* from the central government to local governments, thereby also abolishing the quota control, used to be held by the central government.<sup>12</sup> City governments have used these new powers mostly to attract the very rich and the highly educated (by granting local permanent *hukou* mostly to those who are mostly millionaires and are able to purchase a high-end apartment in the market or make large investments to open a company, or those who have a degree or professional qualifications), and to those who are immediate family members (usually spouses and children) of existing urban residents. Therefore, there is now some easing in the *hukou* migration system for mostly the above three groups. A handful of cities did experiment with schemes to allow a limited number of lower-skilled migrant workers to acquire city *hukou* in the early 2000s (Shijiazhuang in Hebei being the most famous example). But these schemes were very limited in scope and all withdrawn after briefly implemented. For the 100 million-plus mostly poor rural migrant labour, the chance of getting a city *hukou* has not been improved under these new initiatives. The admission criteria set by local government are clearly beyond the possible reach of ordinary peasant migrants. Chan and Buckingham (2008) have documented that these new entry conditions under the more “entrepreneurial” approach of local (city) governments have actually reduced the chance of poor migrants getting a *hukou* in cities.

The policies (and practices) affecting the livelihood and rights of those without local *hukou* (mostly rural migrant labour) are broad and cannot be fully covered here. Below are some highlights drawn from Chan and Buckingham (2008).

1. In 2003 in Guangzhou, a college student migrant from Wuhan died as a result of police brutality, sparked by the student's failure to produce a temporary resident ID because he did not have a local *hukou*. While this case illustrates the continued vulnerability of even the well-educated “undocumented” migrants, the event also led to a welcome and almost immediate change of Chinese law two months later to curb the abuse of police powers (detention and fines for those failing to produce a valid ID) and better protect migrants.

2. Later that year Premier Wen Jiabao triggered a national campaign to help migrant workers get back their wage arrears, a serious problem for many migrant workers throughout the country, when he provided assistance to one peasant family in recovering the breadwinner's (a migrant) wage arrears during an impromptu detour to a village in his visit to Chongqing. This campaign has since become perennial, indicating the tenacity of the problem.

3. A major policy document issued by the State Council in May 2001 stipulated that local governments take up the responsibility of providing nine-year compulsory education for migrants' children through the public school system at the destination. It appears that there has been progress in a few cities like Beijing. According to one report, in 2006 62 per cent of the city's 370,000 migrant children were enrolled in public schools and 25 per cent in unauthorized migrants' schools.<sup>13</sup> But many serious problems remain: migrant children often have to pay a school fee several times more than what local residents pay in public schools; a significant portion of them are in sub-standard schools or are not in school at all.<sup>14</sup> In fact, few local governments have actually implemented this policy of accommodating migrant children in public schools, at least until the end of 2006 (Liang, 2006).

4. In the early 2000s, several provinces and cities such as Guangdong, Beijing, Shanghai, and Xiamen started to set up limited social security schemes to cover rural migrant labour. By the end of 2005, about 14 million, out of more than 100 million rural migrant workers, had joined some form of pension schemes.<sup>15</sup> In a large survey done by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2006, about one third of rural migrant labour had some injury accident insurance coverage.<sup>16</sup> In general, the participation rate of these schemes is low, and the coverage is still very partial, far less than similar schemes for urban workers (Du and Gao, 2005). There are also serious questions about the usefulness of some of these schemes to migrants: for example, all the pension schemes are not portable, and given the high mobility and turnover of migrants in work, one wonders if any migrant will ever be eligible to collect the benefits when they get old.<sup>17</sup>

5. Beginning in 2006, the central government has also abolished the *hukou* requirement in its hiring of new civil servants; new positions are now open to all citizens, including rural residents, regardless of *hukou* status. The new move will benefit the educated. Potentially more important for long-term policy change affecting rural migrants' rights, the State Council in late January 2006 issued a 40-point document entitled "Several opinions of the State Council on the question of rural migrant labour."<sup>18</sup> The directive asks local governments, among other things, to make entry conditions easier for *mingong* (rural migrant workers) to settle in towns and cities, including giving priority to "model workers" and highly skilled workers in the rural migrant labour pool. On the other hand, the document also acknowledges that *mingong* is a phenomenon set to last in Chinese cities, further suggesting that the *hukou* system which created this special social group in the first place will be very likely to remain in place for many more years, if not decades. Nonetheless, the generally pro-*mingong* rhetoric of the document is a welcome move in setting a more positive tone for creating a better work and living environment for migrant labour.

6. In June 2007, the National People's Congress passed a law that called for a host of protections for workers (including a greater role for the state-sponsored union to negotiate wages and the guarantee of written contracts) has the potential to increase workers' ability to obtain long-term, stable employment. The law, set to go in effect in 2008, was passed allegedly in response to growing unrest among China's migrant labour force amid countless cases of unpaid wages and unsafe working conditions.<sup>19</sup> The law also requires that employers treat migrant workers as they do other employees.

The overall record in the last six or seven years has been quite mixed. The above cases highlight various efforts across the country and at the national level to address the most flagrant abuses associated with the existing *hukou* system, which left unreformed, could seriously jeopardize the lives or livelihoods of migrant labour, and perhaps disrupt "social harmony." But these local cases also illustrate the contradictions of the new localized *hukou* management system that can – and often does – counteract

the central government's rhetoric. In one expert's analysis, these contradictions result from a conflict of interests between the central government's goals of alleviating rural-urban inequality and streamlining a national labour market and local governments' (to which power in these matters has been given) aims to attract only the "best and the brightest" and wealthy investors to the city in order to exploit the cheapest labour possible in the more globalised world (Wang, 2005b). Maintaining a competitive edge in labour costs is crucial to China's strategy of being the "world's factory."

## F. CONCLUSION

This essay began by studying the migration trends in the 1990s through a synthesis and triangulation of different sources of migration data. The data are complicated with many different definitions but are broadly quite consistent and as expected. It is quite clear from this essay that the *hukou* system is an inseparable part of the Chinese broader migration and rural-urban systems, whether one is concerned with the migration statistics, the patterns of migratory flows or the welfare of the rural and urban populations. This study has highlighted the peculiarities of the Chinese migration and its management system. Migration has steadily increased since the early 1980s, with a rapid rise in the first half of the 1990s. It is estimated that there were about 150 million of population without local *hukou* in 2005. This number also includes a large portion of the 110 million rural migrant labour.

The second part of the essay studied the geography of the migration, focusing especially on interprovincial migration flows. IPM was on the rapid rise, especially since the mid-1990s. Our analysis is consistent with the thesis that more migrants moved to distant provinces to reap benefit of the large spatial differentials of wages in China as they had acquired more information and built their networks. At the same time, long-distance migrants were increasingly concentrated and converged into one single province, Guangdong, in the 1990s, which has since become the core of the "world's factory." The supply side of migration, however, has become more diverse: more peasants in the different low-income provinces have taken part in long-distance migration, primarily to improve their livelihood through taking up employment in coastal provinces. The notion of migrating to and working in the coastal provinces has become more widespread, even in the distant provinces in the Western region.

The last part of the essay examined two major set of issues related to migration policies. I have argued that migration helped to narrow regional economic disparities. This is different from the existing wisdom of rising migration and simultaneous increase in disparities in China. From a human capital perspective, it is important for the Chinese government to continue promoting education and migration as a way to narrow the gaps between the coastal and inland provinces. More importantly, migration is also closely tied with the reforms of the *hukou* system. Despite a good deal of official rhetoric about abolishing the *hukou* institution, the reality is not quite different. Almost all the changes to the *hukou* system and new initiatives have had only marginal impact on weakening the foundation of the system – i.e. the separation of two segments of population and discrimination based on that. The *hukou* system, directly and indirectly, continues to be a major barrier in preventing China's rural population from settling in the city and in maintaining the rural-urban "apartheid." This problem has become more acute as rural migrant labour has turned more and more permanent (vis-a-vis seasonal) with an increasing proportion of women and children, as a comparative study of Chinese labour migration and Mexican migration to the USA has demonstrated (Roberts, 2007). The problem lies not just in employment, but also in education, health and many aspects of social security (Hansen, 2001; Lu, 2004). Despite the good intentions of the central government, it is questionable that local governments are ready to implement any sweeping change to the *hukou* system. China cannot abolish the system without a significant change of the rural-urban politics and economics.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, migration figures cited in Knight and Song (1995), p.114. Another common mistake in the literature is the confusion over migration *flow* and *stock*. See discussion later.

<sup>2</sup> One footnote in SBS (2006, Table 3.5) states that its *hukou* migration data after 1990 exclude migration within the city, suggesting that the data before that may have included migration within the city.

<sup>3</sup> The 2000 year-end *hukou* or *de jure* population total for that city was 1.25 million, whereas the 2000 Census, based on exactly the same geographic boundary, reported a *de facto* resident population of 7.0 million (including 6 million without local *hukou*) on November 1, 2000 (see Chan, 2003, p. 3). A discrepancy between the two definitions is common and understandable, as in some other places (see Chen and Liu, 2002), but some huge differences in mainland China are truly phenomenal.

<sup>4</sup> Li and Hu (1991) estimate that about half of the floating population in large cities stayed longer than six months and another one-third, longer than one year.

<sup>5</sup> According to Chan (2003, pp. 6-7), for example, the official per capita GDP of Guangdong, as published in NBS (2001), is calculated from a population figure that excluding largely this group (about 9 million in size), thereby effectively exaggerating Guangdong's per capita GDP of that year by 13 per cent.

<sup>6</sup> For a study specifically on urbanization and rural-urban migration in the 1990s, see Chan and Hu (2003).

<sup>7</sup> This is confirmed by a report that many rural migrant workers have returned to Jiangxi (Jiangxi yu, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> For definitions of these (macro) regions, see notes in Table 5.

<sup>9</sup> The definitions and coverage used in the two surveys are not exactly the same, but the findings are broadly comparable.

<sup>10</sup> Guangdong increased its net in-migration from 1.8 million in 1990-1995 to a whopping 11.1 million in 1995-2000 while Sichuan raised its net out-migration from 1.3 million in 1990-1995 to 3.8 million in 1995-2000 (NPSSO, 1997; SC and NBS, 2002). The two provinces were also the largest net importer and exporter of internal migrants in that period, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> Economic inequality has been a major policy issue on the agenda of the last two Party Congresses in China (2003 and 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Many journalists, most recently Zheng (2005), Reuters (2005), and Kahn (2005), have (mis)interpreted this change as China abolishing its *hukou* system.

<sup>13</sup> The figures cited are reported by an organisation of migrants' schools in Beijing, see "Beijing daguimo quid zhenggai mingong zidi xuexiao" (Beijing launches large-scale campaign to close down migrants' schools), *Xinjing Bao* (New Beijing News), 28 August 2006, at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2006-08/28/content\\_5015898.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2006-08/28/content_5015898.htm), accessed 18 August, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> "Beijing Closes Schools for Migrant Children in pre-Olympic Clean-Up," 26 September 2006,

<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/09/26/china14263.htm>, Accessed 26 January, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> “2006 niandu laodong he shehui baozhang shiye fazhan tongji gongbao” (“The 2006 Report of Development and Statistics of Labour and Social Security”), at [http://www.molss.gov.cn/gb/news/2007-05/18/content\\_178167.htm](http://www.molss.gov.cn/gb/news/2007-05/18/content_178167.htm), accessed 14 August, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> NBS, “Nongmingong shenghuo zhiliang diaocha zhiyi: laodong jiuye he shehui baozhang” (Quality of life survey of rural migrant labour 1: Employment and social security), [http://www.cpirc.org.cn/tjsj/tjsj\\_cy\\_detail.asp?id=7485](http://www.cpirc.org.cn/tjsj/tjsj_cy_detail.asp?id=7485), accessed 21 August, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> All the schemes require migrant workers to have worked for 15 years in a specific city to be eligible for pension (Lu, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.china.com/cn/chinese/news/1167155.htm>, accessed 9 January 2007.

<sup>19</sup> See Joseph Kahn and David Barboza, “As Unrest Rises, China Broadens Workers’ Rights,” *New York Times*, 30 June, 2007.