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The Origins and Social Consequences of China's *Hukou* System*

Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden

Throughout the 1950s China implemented a code of laws, regulations and programmes whose effect was formally to differentiate residential groups as a means to control population movement and mobility and to shape state developmental priorities. The *hukou* system, which emerged in the course of a decade, was integral to the collective transformation of the countryside, to a demographic strategy that restricted urbanization, and to the redefinition of city–countryside and state–society relations. This article offers a documentary study tracing the origins and development of the *hukou* system of population registration and control, and scrutinizes its relationship to a host of connected institutions, for clues to understanding distinctive features of China's developmental trajectory and social structure in the era of mobilizational collectivism. It considers the far-reaching social consequences of the *hukou* system with particular attention to its implications for the creation of spatial hierarchies, especially its consequences for defining the position of villagers in the Chinese social system.

China's *hukou* system of population registration has long been, and remains today, the central institutional mechanism defining the city–countryside relationship and shaping important elements of state–society relations in the People's Republic. *Hukou* registration not only provided the principal basis for establishing identity, citizenship and proof of official status, it was essential for every aspect of daily life. "Without registration, one cannot establish eligibility for food, clothing or shelter, obtain employment, go to school, marry or enlist in the army." Moreover, as Judith Banister noted of the bifurcated social order produced by the registration system,[1]

> urban areas are essentially owned and administered by the state, and their residents are the state's direct responsibility. The state budget must supply urban areas with employment, housing, food, water, sewage disposal, transportation, medical facilities, police protection, schools, and other essentials and amenities of life.

The opposite side of the coin is that the state assumes direct responsibility for none of these services for the countryside. Nor does it provide rural people with any of the other vital services and welfare entitlements that are routinely provided to urban residents, particularly to state sector employees, including free or subsidized health care, retirement benefits, and subsidized food and housing. To the extent that any of these services have been available in the countryside, they have relied on the highly

* We thank Marc Blecher, Deborah Davis, Edward Friedman, Elizabeth Perry, Suzanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, Dorothy Solinger and Lynn White for critical suggestions, sources and perspectives on the issues raised in this paper.

1. Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 328.

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differentiated resources allocated by self-reliant rural communities (villages) or their collective sub-units (production teams).

The origins of the *hukou* system lie embedded in the *baojia* system of population registration and mutual surveillance perfected over millennia. But its antecedents also lie in 20th-century techniques of social control that were perfected in areas under Kuomintang and Japanese rule, and in the Communist-led revolutionary base areas.[2] Equally important is the direct influence of the Soviet passbook system and the role of Soviet advisers in creating a social order that could be mobilized in the service of socialist developmental priorities. As Michael Dutton has observed: "The hierarchical systems founded on and built around the family register linked the order of the family to the order of the state."[3] The *hukou* system transformed the nature of both in ways integral to a developmentalist state and a mobilized populace. It emerged as a critical state response to dilemmas inherent in China's development strategy under conditions of high population density, labour surplus and capital shortage in a predominantly agrarian society.

The *hukou* system decisively shaped China's collectivist socialism by creating a spatial hierarchy of urban places and prioritizing the city over the countryside; by controlling population movement up and down the spatially defined status hierarchy, preventing population flow to the largest cities, enforcing the permanent exile of urban residents to the countryside, and binding people to the village or city of their birth; and by transferring the locus of decision-making with respect to population mobility and work from the transformed household to the work unit or *danwei*, specifically, in the countryside, to the lowest unit of the collective. Over more than three decades, the *hukou* system structured the differential opportunities afforded urban and rural people in general, and state employees and the tillers of the soil in particular. This discussion examines the years prior to 1960, when the *hukou* system and related mechanisms, such as grain rationing and forced emigration from the largest cities, emerged full blown simultaneously with state penetration of the countryside, collectivization and market controls. That system in all essentials remained intact into the early 1980s, and its imprint in important respects continues to the present.

The Preparatory Period (1949–52)

In September 1949, on the eve of the establishment of the People's Republic, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference con-

2. Lynn White records the existence in Japanese-occupied Shanghai of a system of citizen's cards (*liangmin zheng*) and in Kuomintang-ruled post-war Shanghai of identity cards (*shenfen zheng*). In the early 1950s the Shanghai government issued residents' cards (*jumin zheng*) on a household basis. *Careers in Shanghai. The Social Guidance of Personal Energies in a Developing Chinese City, 1949–1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 149.

3. Michael Dutton, *Policing and Punishment in China. From Patriarchy to the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 25.

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vened in Beiping. The conference, symbolic of Communist efforts to give institutional expression to the united front in the new order, issued the Common Programme, China's *de facto* constitution until the National People's Congress ratified the first formal constitution in 1954. It guaranteed a plethora of freedoms and rights, among them one rarely specified in other societies and never mentioned in official Chinese documents after 1955: freedom of residence and migration. Article 5 stipulated that: "The people of the People's Republic of China shall have freedom of thought, speech, publication, assembly, association, correspondence, person, *domicile, moving from one place to another*, religious belief and the freedom to hold processions and demonstrations."[4] The Common Programme reiterated historical practice concerning freedom of domicile and movement as codified in the 1911 provisional constitution of the Republic of China.[5]

Article 90 of the 1954 constitution similarly guaranteed people "freedom of residence and freedom to change their residence."[6] No governments of either the Qing dynasty or the Republic under Kuomintang, warlord or Japanese rule had prevented intra-rural migration or migration to urban areas, except in contested zones in time of strife. Intra-rural migration permitted flight from famine as well as population movement to thinly populated regions, particularly the migration of millions throughout the first half of the 20th century to China's north-east as well as overseas. Moreover, rural migrants regularly obtained seasonal and long-term urban jobs through personal introductions by friends, relatives and contractors or through village ties (*tongxiang*).[7] Throughout the early 1950s, in the honeymoon years of the People's Republic, free movement into and out of cities and throughout the countryside facilitated economic recovery, restoration of trade and social healing after a century of political disintegration, protracted foreign invasion and civil war.

From the early years of the People's Republic, however, the state addressed problems of urban unemployment in two ways indicative of its differentiated approach to city and countryside. First, from very early on, it accepted the responsibility to feed the *urban* unemployed. As Mao put it in a June 1950 speech to the CCP Central Committee, "we should set aside two billion catties of grain to solve the problem of feeding the

4. Mark Selden, *The People's Republic of China. A Documentary History of Revolutionary China* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 188 (italics added).

5. See the Government Draft of the Proposed Constitution, chapter II: "Rights and Duties of the Citizens," article 12: "Every citizen shall have the freedom to change his residence; such freedom shall not be restricted except in accordance with law" in Paul Linebarger, *The China of Chiang Kai-shek: A Political Study* (Boston: World Peace Foundation, 1941) p. 284.

6. *Documents of the First Session of the First National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1955), p. 160.

7. Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949–1952* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), p. 13; Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism. Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1969* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 22; Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 19, 25, 111.

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unemployed workers. ..."[8] Secondly, in 1949 and after, it both pressed and assisted hundreds of thousands of wartime refugees and jobless urban residents in Beijing, Shanghai and other large cities to resettle in the countryside. Shanghai's population had swollen with refugees during the resistance and the civil wars and Chiang Kai-shek's May 1949 naval blockade fuelled unemployment in the city.[9] The new government not only set about creating jobs and providing relief, it also sent 350,000 people back to Anhui and northern Jiangsu between July 1949 and March 1950.[10] Echoing Shanghai Party secretary Rao Shushi's August 1949 call for decentralization to the interior, a *Dagong bao* editorial of 11 August 1949 asserted that "Shanghai as a producing city can maintain only a population of three million." It called on the other three million people to leave.[11] In 1950 Rao Shushi outlined the Party's dominant approach to resettlement of Shanghai's urban unemployed[12]:

> No more than three million of Shanghai's six million people actually take part, directly and indirectly, in productive work. ... We should, first of all, mobilize a great number of refugees and unemployed masses to return to the countryside to areas flooded by the Yellow River in northern Anhui and salt-producing areas in northern Jiangsu. And we should persuade (*shuofu*) all refugee landlords, as well as those landlords and rich peasants deceived by the enemy to come to Shanghai, as well as peasants and youths forced by the enemy to migrate to Shanghai, to return to their respective places of origin to participate in production ... We should encourage, whenever possible and necessary, certain schools and factories to move inland so as to have convenient access to food, coal and raw materials.

In the early 1950s administrators in Shanghai and other major cities urged millions of refugees and unemployed urban workers and family members to go (or return) to the countryside.[13] Rao's particular targeting of landlords and rich peasants for repatriation to the countryside, from where many had fled land reform, is one of the earliest indications of the intertwining of issues of population control and class struggle. His report also called for the transfer of major Shanghai industry to inland locations in smaller cities and rural areas, a strategy that would be pursued over subsequent decades.

Rao made explicit several important principles and perspectives that would eventually be incorporated in the *hukou* system. First was the distinction between producers and consumers, that is between productive and unproductive persons. Not only were homemakers and dependents denied recognition as productive persons, but even employees in the

8. Michael Kau and John Leung (eds.), *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949–1976*, Vol. 1 (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 104.
9. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, p. 103.
10. *Jiefang ribao* (*Liberation Daily*), 2 May 1950.
11. Cited in Richard Gaulton, "Political mobilization in Shanghai, 1949–1951," in Christopher Howe (ed.), *Shanghai. Revolution and Development in an Asian Metropolis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 46.
12. Rao Shushi, "Wei fensui diren fengsuo he fazhan xin Shanghai er douzheng" ("Smash the enemy's blockade and struggle for the development of new Shanghai") in *Jiefang ribao* (ed.), *Shanghai: One Year After Liberation* (Shanghai, 1950), pp. 7–11.
13. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, pp. 103–105.

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service, commercial and financial sectors were frequently classified as unproductive. Secondly, he made clear the state's intention to transfer industry and personnel to conform with planning criteria, including the transfer of industry and schools away from major metropolitan areas. Thirdly, it was the state's prerogative to return migrants to their native places. And finally, there was the view that Shanghai was overpopulated. At this time, state policies emphasized voluntary programmes, persuasion and the provision of positive incentives to achieve population relocation. But the intention to restrict the population of major cities and conduct large-scale repatriation to the countryside as a solution to problems of unemployment and hunger was already clear.

Other major cities adopted similar approaches to population transfer. Government provided material and administrative support for migrants to the rural areas. The Beijing municipal government and the Suiyuan and Chahaer provincial governments established resettlement offices, reserved land and housing for migrants, and arranged credit in kind for settlers in frontier areas. By spring ploughing in 1950, *People's Daily* reported that 4,700 people (1,200 households) had left Beijing for Suiyuan, and 2,400 (620 households) had moved to Chahaer. In addition, 340 workers and their families went from Beijing to Benxi, an industrial city in Liaoning province. Tianjin provided passage for 1,741 people to go to Chahaer,[14] and returned to their homes 22,000 students and landlords who had fled the north-east.[15] Shenyang relocated over 3,300 people in Liaoning and elsewhere in the north-east.[16] These were undoubtedly a small part of those sent out or assisted in resettling in smaller cities and villages.

There were two basic reasons why many people accepted relocation and why resettlement processes were accomplished smoothly in the early years of the People's Republic. First, relocation was basically voluntary with the important exception of criminals and class enemies. In most cases, it was accomplished without coercion and frequently state financial support facilitated the process. Compulsory relocation was reserved for cases of "ideological re-education" and "questionable elements," especially former Kuomintang officials and landlords who had fled to the cities during the civil war or land reform. General Yao Ziyu, secretary of the Kuomintang commander Fu Zuoyi, who led the uprising and peaceful liberation of Beijing, subsequently recalled that during the "campaign to suppress counter-revolutionaries" (1949–52), which coincided with the relocation project, hundreds of thousands of Kuomintang party members and soldiers were gaoled and some were executed. Others felt relief at having escaped punishment. There was little resistance to government directives sending such people out of Beijing.[17] Similar relocations originated in Tianjin, Guangzhou and other urban centres.[18]

14. *Renmin ribao* (*RMRB*), 3 March and 7 May 1950.
15. Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, p. 32.
16. *RMRB*, 19 June 1950.
17. All interviews cited in this article were conducted in the early 1980s by Tiejun Cheng.
18. Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin*, pp. 53–60; Vogel, *Canton Under Communism*, pp. 63–64.

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The second factor conducive to relocation was its association with land distribution and state subsidies. The state provided each migrant from Beijing and Tianjin to Suiyuan and Chahaer five to six *mu* of land and a loan of 560 catties of millet.[19] Jilin province guaranteed each migrant a seven-month grain and vegetable allowance.[20] This support, plus free transport, attracted many unemployed and poor urban residents, particularly recent migrants from the countryside. Most important, there were no barriers to re-entry to the cities.

On 16 July 1951, the Ministry of Public Security, with State Council Approval, issued "Regulations Governing the Urban Population."[21] "The present regulations," it began, "were formulated with a view to maintaining social peace and order, safeguarding the people's security and protecting their freedom of residence and of movement." This document may in fact be said to have formally initiated the process which, in the course of a decade, effectively denied the Chinese people freedom of residence and movement, placing decisions in this realm in the hands of the state. It divided urban households into six categories with regulations governing each: residential households, industrial and commercial households, public residents (living in hotels, inns etc.), floating households (living in boats and ships), temple households, and aliens (foreign residents). Article 5 stipulated that "all those who move should first notify the local public security organ of change of residence, cancel the census record of the former abode, and apply for a change-of-residence permit." Similarly, after any move, people were required to "report to the local public security organ to enter their names in the census record within three days of arrival. When available, a change-of-residence permit should be submitted; if not, other relevant documents should be submitted instead."[22]

For the first time, a nation-wide mechanism was established to monitor urban population movement and residence, both long and short-term. For example, visitors of three days or longer were required to register with a public security sub-station (article 6), and hospital and hotel residents were similarly registered (article 7). Significantly, responsibility for registration and control were vested in the public security bureau. Nevertheless, with the exception of those under police investigation, almost anyone who applied for a permit to move could obtain it and then register anywhere, including Beijing and Shanghai.

For most people, the new system simply recorded changes from one residence to another. Like contemporary Japan's *koseki* system of neighbourhood registration, and like comparable systems in Taiwan, South Korea and a number of other countries, it provided the police with

19. *RMRB*, 7 May 1950.

20. *RMRB*, 19 June 1950.

21. This and the other principal documents defining the formation of the *hukou* system are translated and assessed in Tiejun Cheng, "The dialectics of control: the household registration [hukou] system in contemporary China" (State University of New York at Binghamton, Ph.D. dissertation, 1991).

22. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, pp. 149–150 notes the existence of May 1951 Shanghai regulations that similarly distinguished legal and illegal entry and established registration procedures.

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information that could be used for social control but did not normally impinge on freedom of migration, work or residence. The 1951 regulations established a national system of urban population registration.

The State Council's 3 August 1952 "Decision on Labour Employment Problems" was among the first to address systematically the problem of "blind" rural influx into the cities.

> Urban and industrial development and the progress of national construction will absorb the necessary rural labour, but this must be done gradually, and cannot be accomplished all at once. It is therefore necessary to prevail upon the peasants and check their blind desire to flow into the cities (*quanzu nongmin buyao mangmu jincheng*).

Like many other contemporary documents, it presented registration and control as short-term measures required to address imbalances whose long-term solution lay in industrialization and national construction. This document made distinctions that would soon become absolute between urban and rural residence and between those entitled to urban and rural employment. But it did not establish mechanisms to control or halt the "blind flow" of population.

In the early 1950s the state took vigorous steps to address problems of urban unemployment, including welfare for urban citizens and repatriation of unemployed rural migrants. Throughout the People's Republic, however, policy-makers have consistently assumed both that the countryside could absorb virtually unlimited supplies of labour, and that feeding the rural population was the responsibility of each locality. The administrative and welfare responsibilities of the state would in essence be confined to the small minority of the population living in urban areas. One reason for this hypersensitivity to urban problems is the fact that the new state accepted more or less axiomatically from the start (presumably derived from Soviet practice) a responsibility that no previous Chinese state had ever assumed: to provide jobs and subsidized food and housing for all urban residents.

For three decades from the early 1950s, China's cities were largely free of the telltale signs of urban poverty characteristic of cities in both core and peripheral regions from Calcutta to Rio to Los Angeles, including squatter settlements, armies of beggars and the chronic unemployed. China had by no means solved the poverty problem, though many foreign visitors mistakenly concluded this from the absence of squatter housing and beggars in the 1960s and 1970s. It had, however, eliminated the most visible manifestations of poverty in urban areas by a combination of employment and welfare measures for urban residents and controls that restricted the size of the urban population and even sought to reverse the flow from countryside to city. By contrast, the countryside was repeatedly forced to absorb virtually unlimited supplies of labour and even to accept and feed urban emigrants in time of famine. This policy of discarding the surplus or unemployable urban population in the rural periphery, in the absence of unemployment insurance or any national welfare programme extending to the countryside, reduced the financial responsibilities of the

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state and shifted the burden of feeding and employing repatriated people from the state to rural society. The result was the creation of a dual society with state resources channelled primarily to the cities at the same time that substantial portions of the rural surplus were transferred to urban industry, the military and other state priority projects.

Throughout the early 1950s, despite benefits to the countryside associated with land reform, state resettlement of refugees and the unemployed, and state efforts to reverse the flow, the number of migrants to the cities grew rapidly. According to a *People's Daily* report of 26 November 1952: "Rural surplus labour in not a few areas has recently been moving blindly towards the cities. Most of these peasants have credentials or moving permits from local people's governments, and some bring their families with them." Viewed from the perspective of the authorities, this migration constituted either a serious problem or an opportunity, depending on rapidly changing labour supply conditions in the cities. As Christopher Howe has well documented for Shanghai, the Party's major campaigns – from the *san fan* and *wu fan* (Three Anti and Five Anti) movements in the cities to the acceleration and relaxation of mutual aid and co-operative movements in the countryside throughout the early 1950s – profoundly influenced the ebb and flow of labour to and from the largest cities.[23] The result was a series of cycles tightening and loosening controls on the flow of population throughout the decade.

The Party's perspective on urban population problems in the early years of the People's Republic embodied two contradictory, even schizophrenic, dimensions. On the one hand, the authorities held an urban-centred perspective on China's development stressing the critical role of workers and the cities in the industrialization process. This was consistent with the urban and proletarian orientation of the Marxist tradition, and above all with the thinking of Soviet planners and advisers who shaped China's First Five-Year Plan with its emphasis on heavy industry. On the other hand, the cities were associated with capitalism, imperialism and the Kuomintang. "Cities owed their existence basically to class antagonisms and contradictions. Such antagonisms and contradictions manifested themselves most visibly in the age of capitalism."[24] Some even went so far as to quote the Qing dynasty official Guo Tinglin: "When the masses dwell in villages, order prevails; when the masses flock to the cities, disorder ensues."[25] The first issue of the *Jiefang ribao* (28 May 1949), the Shanghai Party organ, summed up the Party's ambivalence toward China's greatest city:

> Shanghai is the economic and industrial centre of China, the entrepôt for China's foreign trade, the lair of imperialism, bureaucracy and feudalism, the centre of China's working class; the meeting place of China's revolutionary youth and

23. Christopher Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China, 1949–1957* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 96–101, 113–15.
24. *Dagongbao* (*DGB*) (Tianjin), 18 October 1949.
25. *DGB*, 10 May 1953.

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progressive cultural movement; and the cradle of China's revolutionary movement of the past few decades.

As the 1950s advanced, Mao and others highlighted the positions of the working class and the cities as the future of China, a view enshrined in the priorities of the First Five-Year Plan. In early 1957, pondering the future of the working class and the peasantry, Mao noted that China had only 12 million industrial workers out of a population of 600 million[26]:

> The number is so small, but only they have a future. All other classes are transitional classes. ... The peasants in the future will become mechanized and will be transformed into agricultural workers. ... Right now there is the system of ownership by peasant co-operatives. In the future, in a few decades, they will be changed to be like factories; they will become agricultural factories. In this factory, you plant maize, millet, rice, sweet potatoes, peanuts and soybeans. As for the bourgeoisie ... they too will become workers. The several hundred million peasants and handicraft workers have now already become collective farmers; in the future they will become state farmers, agricultural workers using machinery.

For Mao, the congruence of ownership changes together with mechanization and industrialization would produce the merging of social classes, including the working class, the peasantry and the bourgeoise, into a single industrial working class. In fact state policies, of which the *hukou* system was the keystone, deepened the divide between city and countryside and between worker and farmer, and in numerous ways prevented or slowed the anticipated homogenization above all by freezing rural residents in their villages and denying them access to urban and industrial employment.

Initiation of the Hukou *System (1953–57)*

By 1953 China had basically completed land revolution and economic recovery from the century of disintegration, invasion and war. The promulgation that year of the General Line for the Transitional Period, heralding the start of the First Five-Year Plan, was emblematic of the leadership's intention to move ahead simultaneously with social transformation and accelerated industrialization.

By the end of 1956, 97 per cent of rural households had joined co-operatives, including 88 per cent in large collectives of the Soviet type. At the same time, over 74,000 handicraft co-operatives were set up including six million craft workers, 92 per cent of the total number of such workers.[27] By 1956, 68 per cent of factories had been nationalized and the remainder were classified as joint state–private enterprises. This

26. Kau and Leung, *The Writings of Mao Zedong*, p. 425. Translation modified slightly.
27. Mark Selden, *The Political Economy of Chinese Development* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 79–80; Zhou Taihe *et al.* (eds.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de jingji tizhi gaige* (*Economic Restructuring in Contemporary China*) (Beijing: Chinese Social Sciences Press, 1984), p. 29.

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effectively brought all industry and virtually all commerce within the orbit of state control.[28]

In short, the transformation from private and capitalist ownership to state and collective ownership of agriculture, industry, handicrafts and commerce was basically completed in the years 1953–56. Parallel with and integral to ownership transformation and the extension of the planned economy, the state established mechanisms to control population movement, particularly to bind peasants to their collective-village, and to regulate and restrict entry to the cities. These population control mechanisms, whose importance has largely been overlooked in the literatures focusing on collectivization, nationalization and development, shaped China's countryside from the mid-1950s forward. They defined important parameters of an urban–rural divide that has controlled opportunity and mobility to the detriment of villagers ever since.

China's urban population increased from 10.6 per cent of total population in 1949 to 14.6 per cent in 1956, with a net gain of 34.6 million. Rural migrants accounted for 19.8 million of the total increase.[29] In the first half of the 1950s, the most powerful stimulus for migration lay in the "pull" of the cities, above all the attraction of urban employment that offered workers security, a range of benefits and prestige. Yet there were also "push" factors. These included flight from poorer regions, discontent with co-operatives, and the loss of income-earning opportunities associated with the market as the state curtailed private commerce, set low purchasing prices for agricultural commodities, restricted and then largely eliminated opportunities for rural people to obtain seasonal or long-term work in the cities, and centralized agricultural processing in metropolitan areas.

State policies governing the cities and urbanization were an essential part of the First Five-Year Plan's approach to industrialization. The key was 18 cities designated as focal points for China's heavy industrial drive. China's leaders sought to decentralize the existing economic and population concentration in a handful of large coastal cities. As the state, partly for security reasons, limited growth in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin and other large coastal cities, inland key-point cities, many of them of small and medium size, became the focus for rapid growth through building complete sets of industry. Each such city was to receive 11 or more above-norm industrial projects, with Xian in the north-west designated to receive 42 projects.[30] On 17 April 1953, the State Council promulgated a "Directive on Dissuading Peasants from Blind Influx into Cities," referring above all to the largest cities. The directive, using persuasive language, urged the hundreds of thousands of peasants who had entered the cities in search of work to return to their villages, exempting those who had already obtained employment and had govern-

28. State Statistical Bureau, *Ten Great Years* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1960), p. 38.

29. R. J. R. Kirkby, *Urbanization in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy, 1949–2000A.D.* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 107.

30. Ka-iu Fung, "The spatial development of Shanghai," in Howe, *Shanghai*, pp. 274–75, 278.

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ment or factory papers to prove it. China's 1953 census was a landmark event in implementing registration procedures. In Shanghai and other major cities the census was accompanied by the issuance of new and far more detailed household registration books (*huji bu*) that recorded the birth, death, residence, education and occupation of every household member.[31]

When measures prompted by these state guidelines failed to stem the population flow to major cities, one year later, on 12 March 1954, the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Labour promulgated a "Joint Directive to Control Blind Influx of Peasants into Cities." The term *mangliu* (blind migrant) was widely used to describe rural migrants. *Mangliu*, a reverse homophone for *liumang*, meaning hooligan, established a negative association with rural migrants. The state proclaimed that all subsequent population and labour flows from the countryside to the cities would be determined by fiat. "If in the future additional workers are needed for urban construction, the district and township government will be officially directed to recruit rural labour in a planned and organized manner." That is, rural recruits would presumably return to the countryside at the conclusion of their employment.

Villagers customarily obtained critical supplements to agricultural income by going to the city in slack seasons or for longer periods to find factory or construction work or to peddle. Survival strategies, moreover, dictated that some family members leave home to find work for years at a time in cities or other localities with superior job opportunities. In Raoyang county in southern Hebei, for instance, in the early 1950s roughly one fourth of rural adult males worked in the cities during the winter months and many more left the locality for years at a time. In 1954, as the state moved toward control of labour, private markets and grain, rural cadres were directed to keep farmers in the village and to use locally available corvée labour to promote soil improvement, water conservancy and other capital construction projects to occupy villagers during the slack season.

The 1954 population directive curbed rural–urban movement through three different channels: it prohibited urban units from making private arrangements to recruit rural workers; it directed local governments to halt unco-ordinated recruitment in the villages; and it ordered managers and union leaders to instruct workers not to invite people from their villages to come to the cities in search of work. Off-farm slack season job opportunities grew scarce, as did full-time industrial jobs in most cities.

The state subsequently attempted to cut off all non-official recruitment channels. Urban labour departments allocated jobs to relevant county and township governments according to state plan. Local governments in turn allocated recruitment quotas to (predominantly suburban) villages where local cadres made the selection. Opportunities for urban and state sector employment for residents of more distant villages disappeared.

Finally, the 1954 directive called for returning unemployed migrants in

31. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, pp. 151–52.

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major cities to their villages. This was to "be handled by the civil affairs and labour administrations in conjunction with other relevant organs," the latter referring to the police. The state provided subsidies to repatriate those who lacked travel funds. Nevertheless, during periods of economic boom when labour was in short supply, attempts to prevent immigration from the countryside proved ephemeral as factories used direct contacts to hire workers. The ability of the authorities to enforce the new regulations hinged as heavily on rural as on urban income and employment conditions. In 1955, for example, Shanghai authorities successfully returned half a million rural immigrants to the countryside with minimal frictions following a bumper harvest when food in the countryside was plentiful.[32]

Between 1954 and 1956, three important measures tightened administrative control over population flows within and between urban and rural areas. On 31 December 1954, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated "Regulations for Public Security Substations." It mandated municipal and county public security bureaus to set up substations in areas under their jurisdiction. In urban areas, substations typically covered several neighbourhoods, or an entire district in small cities, embracing 30,000 to 50,000 people. In rural areas, substations were set up at the district (*qu*) or central township (*zhongxin xiang*) level, covering populations ranging from 50,000 to 70,000. Step by step, public security organs took control over population registration and guarding China's cities against an influx of rural people.

On the same day, the National People's Congress promulgated "Organic Regulations of Urban Street Offices." Street offices had their own staff and budget allocated by the provincial or municipal government. Although article 5 limited full-time cadres to between three and seven, after 1960 most offices actually increased staff to between ten and 15. In Beijing, the total number of officials often exceeded 30 per office by the late 1970s.[33]

Having consolidated institutions for police-administrative control over population movement, on 22 June 1955 the State Council passed, and Premier Zhou Enlai signed, "The Directive Concerning Establishment of a Permanent System of Household Registration." This directive formally initiated a full-blown *hukou* system on the eve of China's imposed collectivization.

There are several differences between the 1951 and 1955 regulations. First, while the former pertained exclusively to the cities, the latter defined a comprehensive nation-wide *hukou* system embracing city and

32. Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China*, p. 69.

33. Information provided by two informants who worked in Beijing's Baiwanzhuang and Xinjiekou offices. For details on the use of secret directives and central documents for control and administrative purposes, see Kenneth Lieberthal, "Central documents and politburo politics in China," *Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies*, No. 33 (1978), pp. 75–82, and Kenneth Lieberthal and Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China. Leaders, Structures, and Processes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 152–53. We assume that the declining rate of urban growth was the product both of state restrictions on moving to cities and greater efforts by migrants to conceal their presence in urban areas.

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countryside. Secondly, administration at the highest levels was taken out of the hands of public security and placed in the hands of the Ministry of the Interior and civil affairs departments of the government at county and higher levels. Nevertheless, the public security station retained local administrative control and in 1958 it would regain complete control. Thirdly, the 1955 regulations specified detailed procedures for individuals changing residence to apply for migration certificates (section 2(c)):

> For movement out of a township or town area, but not outside the county, it is necessary to have a migration certificate from the township or town People's Committee and departure must be recorded in the register by the township or town People's Committee. For movement outside the county, it is necessary to report to the local township or town People's Committee in order to obtain an introduction to a higher level household management unit from whom a migration certificate must be obtained.

These procedures not only established formal administrative control over the rural influx to the cities, but monitored and regulated all intra-rural and intra-urban movement. Official permission was henceforth required *prior* to any change of residence, even within one's own township. Movement of those classified as landlords or class enemies required approval (rarely requested, still more rarely granted) by the district or county government.

The new regulations made it more difficult to obtain migration certificates. The press reported the inconvenience experienced by people who applied to move. Some were unable to obtain permits even months after they had changed their residence.[34] With tighter restrictions, the rate of increase of the urban population dropped sharply. H. Yuan Tien found that China's urban population increased as a result of migration by 6 million in 1952–53, by 3.9 million in 1953–54, but only by 1.3 million in 1954–55.[35] The 1955 regulations inaugurated the shift in emphasis from the use of *hukou* for registration purposes to state policies that prevented or slowed short-term and long-term migration. Indeed, in 1955 efforts were made to reduce by one million the population of Shanghai, China's largest city, in which migrants accounted for more than half the substantial population growth in the years 1953–55.[36] In the face of high unemployment, Shanghai not only restricted migration but dispatched 640,000 workers to cities and industrial sites elsewhere.[37] Shanghai's ambitious "sending down" campaign not only targeted unemployed migrants but sent middle school graduates to the north-west and technical specialists and skilled workers to projects elsewhere.[38] The state was

34. *Guangming ribao*, 7 December 1955; *Qinghai ribao*, 6 December 1956; *Henan ribao*, 9 December 1956; *Jiangxi ribao*, 16 February 1957.

35. H. Yuan Tien, *China's Population Struggle: Demographic Decisions of the People's Republic 1949–1969* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), p. 43.

36. Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China*, p. 169; Fung, "The spatial development of Shanghai," p. 278.

37. Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China*, p. 37.

38. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, pp. 59–60.

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particularly concerned about the influx of "non-productive" dependents to the cities. A 1956 State Council analysis of Shanghai and 16 other cities, for example, bemoaned the fact that while the basic labour force of these cities had increased by 1,010,000 (28 per cent) since 1953, the dependent population had risen by at least 2,480,000 or 70 per cent.[39]

Logistical and survival factors affecting migration include transport, housing and food supply. In the mid-1950s, the state tightened control over each of these, though it had not yet restricted purchase of bus or train tickets.[40] In the years 1953–56, private home ownership was largely eliminated in urban areas. The state exercised a virtual monopoly on urban housing. Without official approval, migrants could not obtain housing. By the mid-1950s, as the state moved to control commerce, even lodging in hotels or inns required travel documents issued by a work unit or local government.[41]

Between 1953 and 1955, the state took control over urban food rations. In December 1953, "unified purchase and marketing of grain" had established compulsory sales to the state of specified amounts of grain at low state prices. The dual purpose was to assure ample low-priced food for urban residents and to channel the agricultural surplus from the countryside towards industry and the cities. "Unified purchase and marketing" was quickly extended from grain to cotton and oil crops, and within two to three years to all major foodstuffs and agricultural raw materials.

In August 1955, two months after establishing the *hukou* system, the State Council's "Provisional Measures Governing Grain-Rationing in Cities and Towns" established "provisional" rationing. The ration system, soon extended from grain to most other foods as well as to cotton and cloth, would continue basically unchanged for more than three decades. One result was to increase the difficulty that illegal migrants faced in obtaining food. Rationing was an integral part of the institutional order of which *hukou* was the centrepiece, together with transport controls, rural collectives and programmes to transfer people from city to countryside.

The complexity of China's rationing system after 1955 illustrates the minute gradations established by the *hukou* order. Persons registered in each household were classified according to categories by resident committees, resident teams, schools and work units. Name lists, together with *hukou* cards, were sent to the local government to verify and issue

39. *Worker's Daily*, 4 January 1958.

40. There was no unified policy regarding ticket purchase for public transport (train, bus and boat) prior to 1960. Subsequently, ticket purchasers were required to show official travel certificates before purchasing tickets, especially if the destination was Beijing and the time was politically sensitive.

41. With completion of the nationalization of private industry and commerce in 1956, most privately owned real estate, including rented housing, was also placed under joint state–private management. Under this arrangement, all rented housing was handed over to state housing offices which took charge of rent collecting as well as repairs and maintenance. Although there was no pass system at that time, staying temporarily with relatives in a city required applying to the police for a permit, and staying in hotels required an official certificate.

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grain-supply cards (article 5). Seven categories of cards differentiated residence, occupation and grade: city and town resident grain-supply card; industrial and commercial trade grain-supply card; city and town animal feed-supply card; city and town resident grain-transfer card; grain ticket for nation-wide use; local area grain card; and local area animal-feed card (article 4).[42]

Urban residents were entitled to present grain-supply cards to their local grain store to draw local or nation-wide grain tickets as appropriate within the limits of their specified ration. Villages who planned to travel had to bring their own grain to state grain stations where they could exchange it for grain tickets. Purchase of cooked rice, noodles, vermicelli and other grain-based foods in restaurants required presentation of grain tickets plus payment (article 7).[43] Any change in family membership as a result of marriage, birth, death, separation, school, job change, migration etc., required presentation of *hukou* cards to arrange for additions, reductions or transfers in grain supply (article 8). In this way, registration was intimately tied to food access through rationing.

From 1955 food rationing in both city and countryside was an important corollary of the *hukou* system in state efforts to control population movement and to assure the supply of grain and other crops to priority sectors, specifically to the growing ranks of the industrial working class, the cities and the military. In that year rationing was used as a means to reduce grain consumption while assuring equity among units and individuals.[44] Nevertheless, until 1959 rationing was implemented rather flexibly. In most areas one could still purchase grain in free markets at prices slightly higher than those in state stores.

Rationing sharply differentiated urban and rural residents. While the subsistence of urban residents was guaranteed by the state, rural residents were responsible for feeding themselves, except in time of especially severe famine when the state provided emergency relief. In this, as in many other ways, ranging from retirement to health care to education to subsidized housing, the state assumed responsibility for the livelihood of urban workers, particularly state sector employees, while enjoining rural people to practise collective self reliance.[45]

42. Cf. Tien, *China's Population Struggle*, p. 87.

43. Initially, grain ticket requirements for restaurants were not rigorously implemented in many places. For example, in 1957 in Taiyuan, Shanxi people could buy cooked food in restaurants and stores without grain tickets. Christopher Howe and Kenneth Walker (eds.), *The Foundations of the Chinese Planned Economy. A Documentary Survey, 1953–1965* (New York: St Martin's, 1989, p. 354. But after 1960, this requirement, like many others, was vigorously implemented.

44. White, *Careers in Shanghai*, pp. 159–163.

45. Among the most rankling of the Hundred Flowers criticisms for Mao personally was the charge that the Party neglected the interests of the rural population. Mao chose to respond to critics who (rightly) noted a growing urban–rural gap with the following arguments: "... generally speaking, the income of the workers is larger than that of the peasants, but the value of what they produce is also greater than that of what the peasants produce, and their necessary living expenses are also higher than those of the peasants. The improvement in the standards of living of the peasants mainly depends on the peasants' own efforts in developing production. The government, also, is giving the peasants a lot of help, such as constructing water conservation projects and issuing loans to the peasants, etc." Leung and Kau, *The*

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In November 1955, three months after implementing grain rationing, the State Council promulgated "Criteria for the Demarcation Between Urban and Rural Areas." The directive divided the country into three spatial categories: urban areas including cities and towns (*chengzhen qu*); urban residential enclaves (*chengzhen jumin qu*), that is localities outside urban areas where significant numbers of state employees and their families live, such as oil fields and research institutes; and villages. All county or banner (*xian* or *qi*) level and higher governmental seats, as well as other centres with resident populations of 20,000 or more, were classified as urban areas (*cheng* or *zhen*).[46] Localities with a permanent residential population of 2,000 or more of whom more than 50 per cent were non-agricultural producers were also classified as urban areas, as were centres of commerce, industry or mining, transport or research centres with populations of 1,000 or more of whom 75 per cent were non-agricultural. Viewed from the perspective of the rural population, the critical division was, and has remained ever since, between on the one hand urban areas and enclaves, whose residents enjoyed varying access to state benefits, and on the other all other areas, residually defined as rural, and, at least until the mid-1980s, comprising the vast majority of the Chinese people.[47]

In 1956, the state simplified eligibility criteria for urban grain rations. All who lived in the countryside and were not state employees were classified as agricultural households (*nongye hu*) and were ineligible for state grain rations. Urban residents and all state employees were classified as urban or non-agricultural households and guaranteed grain rations, regardless of where they lived and worked. Thus government teachers in rural state schools, doctors and nurses in commune hospitals and township government employees all enjoyed rationing benefits on the basis of classification as non-agricultural population, despite the fact that they lived and worked in the countryside.[48] If a state employee was female, her children enjoyed the same classification, a remarkable fact, at first glance,

footnote continued

Writings of Mao Zedong, Vol II, p. 232. Not only was the productivity of urban labour higher than that of peasants, Mao held, ignoring the fact that this was a direct function of the state's decision to transfer substantial portions of the rural surplus to urban industry, but rural living costs were lower. Mao proceeded to compare China favourably to the Soviet Union, claiming that China had no system of compulsory crop sales and that China was reducing the scissors gap. Both claims were false. In fact the Soviet Union had done better than China in reducing urban–rural income and welfare gaps, and particularly after the 1960s it would do even better as collective farmers shifted to a system of regular cash wages and benefits and the worker–peasant income gap narrowed.

46. Reiitsu Kojima, *Urbanization and Urban Problems in China* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1987), pp. 3–4.

47. Compare the somewhat different criteria for defining urban discussed in the 1954 constitution and other 1955 legislation as discussed by Banister, *China's Changing Population*, p. 328. Cf. p. 326 where Banister stresses the differential benefit structures of residents in cities, town and villages.

48. Some agonizing exceptions took place during the Great Leap famine. In addition to millions of workers who lost their jobs and were sent to the countryside, state rations were cut off for many other state employees living in the countryside, forcing them to rely on collective rations at a time when many localities confronted famine.

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for a patriarchal society in which children were routinely awarded to the custody of fathers in case of divorce.[49]

By state reckoning, farmers produced grain for self-consumption and hence had little need for access to state grain supplies. But in fact many farmers led a precarious existence. Rural residents for whom the fixed ration (*kouliang*) was not enough went hungry or bought extra amounts at higher prices when available on the free market. After 1954 the state tightened controls over grain trade and periodically banned free markets, cracking down on grain buyers and sellers. In forcing farmers to produce their own grain regardless of local conditions, the state compelled areas that had a comparative advantage in valuable commercial crops or were suitable for animal husbandry or forestry to shift to grain or face starvation.

Beginning in 1954, the compulsory sale system required that each household sell a substantial part of its harvest to the state at low fixed prices, leaving only a small amount for personal consumption, usually 154 to 200 kg. per person, roughly equal to 143–186 kg. of flour. This was less than the quota provided to urban residents (184–212 kg. of flour, rice or other husked grain), despite the fact that farmers needed more substantial grain diets than officials and most factory workers given the rigour of their work and general lack of other non-staple foodstuffs such as oil, sugar, eggs and meat.[50] In contrast to urban grain rations, which constituted a socially accepted form of entitlement, receipt of welfare grain in the countryside carried a stigma that may be compared to that experienced by American welfare recipients. Viewed from the perspective of the producers of food, the guaranteed, subsidized rations supplied to urban residents were a distant dream and a reminder of the gulf that separated city and countryside. Rural people called it "guaranteed harvest regardless of drought or flood" (*hanlao baoshou*), something of which they could only dream.

By 1956, a many-faceted *hukou* system, complemented by grain-rationing, compulsory grain sales and restrictions on migrant labour, produced a deep but not impermeable divide between urban and rural

49. For *hukou* purposes, children have always been classified on the basis of maternal classification. If a state employee is male and his wife has a rural *hukou*, their children have rural *hukou*. At first glance, this is surprising, particularly in light of the fact that class status follows the male line, just as lineage position was and is determined exclusively through the male line. There were, however, practical reasons of state for this classfication. By applying this "matriarchal" definition of the position of children the state substantially reduced the number and burden of the urban population since the great majority of state employees were male. The effect of this rule was to force children and wives of families in which only the father had an urban *hukou* and urban job to remain in the countryside. Not only were they ineligible for state rations and housing, but children were also ineligible to attend urban schools. For a suggestive analysis of the Chinese social structure in terms of caste-like divisions between city and countryside pivoting on the household registration system, see Sulamith Potter and Jack Potter, *China's Peasants. The Anthropology of a Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) especially ch. 15; cf. Friedman, Pickowicz and Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

50. Selden, *The Political Economy of Chinese Development*, pp. 19–20; Elisabeth Croll, *The Family Rice Bowl, Food and the Domestic Economy in China* (London: Zed, 1983), pp. 66–71.

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areas, between workers and collective farmers, between the state sector and the collective sector.

Full-scale Implementation, Collapse and Reimposition of the Hukou *System (1957–60)*

As in the case of a partially erected wall, people on each side experienced different situations, but several holes remained open. If life was hard on one side, with ingenuity and effort some could cross to the other side. That situation continued throughout the 1950s. For all the new restrictions and regulations, the *hukou* system was permeable. It did not unequivocally prohibit population movement from countryside to city.

In the early and mid-1950s, the biggest attraction for rural out-migration was the rapid expansion of state-centred industry and a range of urban employment opportunities in state, private and semi-private enterprises. While state enterprises periodically sought rural labour for expanding enterprises throughout the 1950s, planners expressed mounting concern over the cost of urbanization. For example, the 27 November 1957 *People's Daily* bemoaned the practice of workers bringing their families to the cities, thus driving up costs to the state in the form of housing, health care, food subsidies and urban infrastructure. The article noted that from 1950 to the end of 1956, about 150,000 rural people came to Beijing to look for employment and the original workers and residents brought another 200,000 dependents to the city. Zhang Qingwu estimated the cost of constructing urban housing required for the 2.5 million workers and their 5.5 million family members who migrated to the cities between 1953 and 1957 at 4.5 to 5.6 billion *yuan* or 450–700 *yuan* per person. This was 70–80 per cent of China's total industrial investment in 1956.[51] And these sums exclude the cost of feeding, educating and providing health care and other benefits for these urban migrants.

To encourage urban state sector workers to keep their families in the countryside, on 16 November 1957 the state inaugurated a system of annual leave for workers and cadres. "Provisional Regulations Governing Home Leaves and Wages of Workers and Employees" guaranteed every worker or staff member living apart from his or her father, mother or spouse an annual two to three week leave at state expense to return home to visit his or her family, the length depending on the time required for the journey. Where both spouses worked and lived apart from the native place, one was eligible to take home leave each year. Minister of Labour Ma Wenrui estimated that six million of China's 24 million state sector workers and employees lived at a distance from parents, spouse or both.[52] The promulgation of home leave regulations preceded a campaign to pressure family members who had come to the city to return to the countryside. However, the heart of the problem – the large and growing gap between urban income and benefits and rural deprivation – remained

51. Howe and Walker, *The Foundations of the Chinese Planned Economy* p. 347; cf. Banister, *China's Changing Population*, p. 328.

52. New China News Agency, 16 November 1957.

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unaddressed in terms of the state's budgetary priorities and official discussion. The Chinese welfare state concentrated ever more resources on urban people while enjoining the countryside to practise self-reliance.

The restricted migration flows to China's cities in the 1950s reflect the success of several complementary state efforts to control family movement and suppress urban population growth. These include the progressive tightening of *hukou* regulations in conjunction with controls associated with the new collectives, emigration programmes centred on population transfers from Shanghai and other large cities to smaller cities and towns or to the countryside, food rationing and control of travel. A December 1957 directive, for example, authorized the Ministry of Public Security to establish checkpoints at key places in the railway network and to send unauthorized migrants back to their villages of origin.[53] The great majority of migrants were unaccompanied men in their teens and twenties. This produced highly distorted gender ratios as revealed in population surveys conducted in Sichuan, Hunan and Anhui.[54]

One of the most important factors that restricted urban population growth throughout the 1950s was the reverse flow set in motion by state policies designed to reduce population growth in the largest cities. The most ambitious of these programmes centred on Shanghai, which not only was not designated a key-point city targeted for high growth in the First Five-Year Plan, but was assigned the role of contributing to industrial growth elsewhere through transfer of skilled technical personnel, managers and workers, and subsequently educated youth, to industrial and other sites throughout the country. Between 1949 and 1957, Shanghai alone dispatched more than one million people to live and work elsewhere. Given an estimated 1,820,000 immigrants into Shanghai in the same years, net immigration was thus reduced to 740,000,[55] or 34 per cent of the total population increase, compared with 43 per cent in Guangzhou, 70 per cent in Beijing, and still higher percentages in some key-point cities.[56]

The purpose of the *hukou* system as initially stipulated in 1951 was "to maintain social peace and order, safeguard the people's security, and protect their freedom of residence and movement." On 9 January 1958, the Standing Committee of the NPC promulgated "Regulations on Household Registration in the People's Republic of China," just as the Great Leap Forward began. The 1958 regulations, which offered the rationale of "maintaining social order, protecting citizens' rights and interests and serving socialist construction," remain in effect to this day. Freedom of residence and movement had long since disappeared from the list of state-guaranteed rights, nor would they be restored in the decades of mobilizational collectivism that lay ahead. The 1958 regulations extended registration provisions to the People's Liberation Army (article 3). Every Chinese citizen was now included in the *hukou* system.

53. Tien, *China's Population Struggle*, p. 95.
54. Banister, *China's Changing Population*, pp. 339–340.
55. Howe, *Employment and Economic Growth in Urban China*, pp. 35–38, 65, 116.
56. *Ibid.* pp. 65, 132.

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The *hukou* system from its inception not only sharply distinguished urban and rural position and status but also differentiated the very basis for recording residence in city and countryside. In both instances, the unit of record shifted from that of the family (*jia*) to a unit defined by the workplace and by spatial factors rather than by kinship relations as in the former *baojia*. The 1958 regulations specify that in cities, public security organs will keep a register of each household, whereas in the countryside, the co-operative (collective, usually the brigade) maintains a single register with the names of all households and individuals. In other words, a separate record is kept for each urban household, while rural households were simply recorded as part of the larger village collective. The regulations explicitly linked *hukou* status with collective membership for rural residents. Article 4 stated that "in the countryside, a household (registration) book shall be issued to each collective," constituting the basis for a proof of "the identity of citizens." Collective membership became the basis for rural registration. To refuse to join the collective was to place oneself beyond the boundaries of state recognition since the law specified that non-member households could not register.

But what is a household? The case of a husband and wife living and working in two different cities, in a city and a village, or in two different villages illustrates the fact that it is the *danwei* or work unit and not the family that defines the household. In such cases, separate *hukou* is required, with children normally registered with their mother, the partner overwhelmingly more likely to occupy a lower rank in the *hukou* scale. The system normally allowed people to move down the status ladder, for example from Shanghai to a smaller city or the countryside, but not up. In the case of rural families who live or work in a single production team, their records are part of the larger production unit, and the household, not the individual, is the relevant income pooling unit with income paid to the household head.

The 1958 law changed the procedure for rural–urban migration. In the absence of a certificate of urban employment or school admission, it was necessary to obtain a moving-in certificate (*zhun qian zhen*) issued by the police in the city of destination before moving. With this, one could apply for a permit to move out (*qian yi zhen*) from the police station in one's original residence and complete *hukou* transfer (article 10). Most people had previously experienced no difficulty in obtaining a permit to leave, but subsequently, local authorities would not permit rural residents to leave without a certificate from the urban authorities approving the move. The change increased the difficulty for villagers seeking to move to the city.

Many who succeeded in entering cities also found their positions increasingly precarious. A Shanxi provincial official described the expulsion of tens of thousands of villagers who had "irrationally" entered the provincial capital Taiyuan, whose 1957 population had risen from 270,000 to 1.1 million in just seven years. Many workers' family members had no need to come to the cities, he explained, because they had work and housing in the villages, whereas in the cities they became

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non-productive dependents. Neither employment hopes nor the desire to unite families constituted acceptable reasons for migration. The state would "wipe out this 'family chaos'," not only by reducing the rate of population increase in Taiyuan, but by reducing the population by 100,000 through ejecting "non-productive elements" who lacked proper registration.[57]

Did not the policies of expulsion violate basic rights of freedom of residence and migration guaranteed by the 1954 constitution? In 1958 Luo Ruiqing, the Minister of Public Security, provided the official explanation of freedom in general and residential freedom in particular. Grasping the nettle of constitutional guarantees, Luo juxtaposed guided freedom for the masses versus the selfishness of a minority.[58]

> Naturally ... there are some restrictions affecting the minority of people who think only of themselves and who blindly migrate without the slightest consideration for what is beneficial to both state and collective interests. For such people there is indeed a contradiction, but this type of contradiction definitely limits neither the citizen's freedom of residence nor movement. This is because the freedom regulated by the constitution is a guided freedom and is not anarchistic. It is a freedom for the broad masses, not an absolute freedom for a small number of "individuals." If one permits this small number of individuals absolute freedom, allowing them the freedom to migrate blindly without due consideration for the good of the state and the collective, this will naturally mean that the policy of arranging things according to an overall plan and implementing a plan for socialist construction cannot be smoothly implemented.

Such an alternative, Luo concluded, could only mean that "the regular order of work, of study and of daily life of the broad masses would be disrupted, and this could do nothing but affect the freedom of the masses and hinder their freedom of residence and movement." Stated simply, Luo held that in conflicts between the individual and the state, and between anarchy and planning, the individual must bow to the logic of the overall plan.

Ironically, from 1958, as the state tried to enforce rigorous measures to bind cultivators to the land and particularly to block urban immigration and reduce the population of large cities, the numbers of urban migrants increased dramatically. Population movement reached a peak at the height of the Great Leap Forward. In contrast to the utopian production figures touted at the time, *this* was no case of fabricated numbers. The twin explanations for this paradoxical outcome lie, first, in the fact that the state's top priority at this time was not population control but accelerated development. The tough new restrictions were simply swept aside as enterprises, including many urban factories, stepped up recruitment of workers. Morevover, at the very moment when new laws expanded the reach of the state, the decentralization and chaos of the leap

57. *Shanxi ribao*, 1 September 1957 in *ibid.* pp. 352–56.

58. Luo Ruiqing, "An explanation of the draft resolution on the regulations concerning household registration in the People's Republic of China by Luo Ruiqing, Minister of the People's Republic of China Public Security Department," in Zhang Qingwu (ed.), *Hukou dengji changshi* (*Basic Facts on the Household Registration System*) (Beijing: Legal Publishing House, 1983), pp. 86–87.

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produced a general breakdown of administrative control. The rush of millions of people into the cities in the years 1958–60, in response to the veritable explosion of urban industrial and construction jobs, constituted the most rapid burst of urbanization in the first three decades of the People's Republic, perhaps in any comparable period in human history. In pursuit of unprecedented industrial growth rates, the central authorities transferred most enterprises and undertakings from various ministries to the management of provincial and local authorities in a vast decentralization that made implementation of tightened *hukou* regulations impossible.[59]

In 1958 China's leaders called on provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions to issue construction bonds and to recruit whatever labour they required to promote industry in the service of accelerated growth. With the collapse of fiscal and administrative controls, and with all enterprises facing intense pressure to boost output, the industrial labour force increased at unprecedented rates. Accelerated capital construction everywhere produced acute shortages of labour in urban industry. Rural people who had recently experienced the loss of access to urban jobs responded to new job opportunities and mobilization campaigns that promised boundless prosperity. In autumn 1958, 38 million people were reportedly mobilized to leave their villages, taking with them tools and draught animals to join the campaign for indigenous iron and steel production. The number of workers and staff members on the state payroll also dramatically increased at this time. In 1958 alone the state sector employed 21 million more people, including many middle school graduates and educated youth from rural areas, large numbers of women among them. This represented an increase in state sector employees of 67.5 per cent over 1957.[60]

Between 1957 and 1960, the total number of workers and staff members increased by 19 million while urban residents rose from 99 to 130 million. This represented an increase in the urban population from 15 to 20 per cent of the national population in just three years.[61] This extraordinary increase was one factor that contributed to the economic collapse and subsequent famine that would send both the urban population and industrial growth rates plummeting.

This time, it was not villagers who broke through the structure imposed by the *hukou* system and "blindly" migrated to urban areas, but the state and its enterprises that shredded the newly established *hukou* restrictions and blindly promoted massive urban migration and super industrialization. As the General Manager of the Huhhot Iron and Steel Mill recalled, it was a period of "jobs scrambling for people. As long as you could read

59. Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* Vol. II, *The Great Leap Forward 1958–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 36–40; Robert Bowie and John Fairbank (eds.), *Communist China 1955–1959. Policy Documents With Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 426.

60. Liu Suinian and Wu Qungan, *China's Socialist Economy. An Outline History (1949–1984)* (Beijing: Beijing Review Press, 1986), p. 231.

61. Zhou Taihe *et al.*, *Dangdai Zhongguo de jingji tizhi gaige*, p. 75; Banister, *China's Changing Population*, p. 330.

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and write and had good health, you qualified for employment in any factory. *Mangliu* were also welcome. No migration certificate was required." This situation was duplicated throughout the nation. In this as in so many ways 1958 was a year free from the constraints of nature, necessity and the law, or so it appeared to many at the time.

Fine weather produced bumper crops and expectations of a rich harvest. But the mass steel campaign and expanded industrial enterprises absorbed so much rural labour that in many areas the autumn harvest was threatened. In 1958 large amounts of grain and cotton were left to rot in the fields because of the lack of hands.[62] Given both vastly inflated forecasts and the loss of crops in the fields, the actual increase in the harvest was far below what local and regional officials reported, and far less than leaders at the Centre anticipated. Moreover, the huge increase in the urban population assured that grain supplies quickly fell short of demand.

It would be two more years before China's leaders effectively reined in the worst excesses of the Great Leap, two years in which tens of millions died of famine-related causes. As early as 1959, however, in response to signs of famine and economic collapse, the state moved to reduce the urban population and the number of state employees. The 1959 state plan called for reduction of workers and staff members at the county and higher levels by 8–10 million. The State Planning Commission estimated that if the urban population could be reduced by 10 million, the supply of grain to the cities and towns could be cut by 1.5 to million tons, and the supply of coal and vegetables could be cut by 2–3 million tons and 0.75 million tons respectively. At the same time, appropriations for wages would be reduced by 2 billion *yuan*. In fact, by the end of 1959, five million workers had actually been laid off.[63] This paled in comparison with some 20 million workers who would be laid off and sent back to the countryside in the years 1960–62.[64]

Beginning in 1960, with the Great Leap in shambles and the nation plunging into famine, the state began full-scale implementation of the *hukou* system in an effort to regain control of economy and society. That effort combined the erection of strong walls between city and countryside and the rural exile of 20 million workers with a (momentary) loosening of the collective regimen that quickly injected new life into the rural economy. Whereas the situation in 1958–59 had been such that tens of millions of people were able to break through the regulations to find urban jobs, over the next two decades the *hukou* system brought urban migration virtually to a halt and exercised iron control over residential and work patterns throughout city and countryside.

Since the *hukou* system had only recently been put into full effect, workers and staff who were laid off and sent to the countryside in 1960–62 were unaware of the long-term consequences of their

62. Selden, *The Political Economy of Chinese Development*, pp. 18–20, 107–108; MacFarquhar, *The Great Leap Forward*, p. 200.
63. Zhou Taihe *et al.*, *Dangdai de jingji tizhi gaige*, p. 86.
64. Selden, *The Political Economy of Chinese Development*, p. 174.

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"downward transfer." Most accepted promises that they would be rehired as soon as the economy improved. The vast majority of those who lost industrial jobs and the privileges associated with urban residence found it impossible ever again to return to urban jobs and homes. The *hukou* system provided the institutional core of the system of permanent rural exile that left people no alternative to living out their lives in the villages to which they were transferred in the early 1960s and barred villagers from migrating to the cities.

Conclusion

The three interdependent and interrelated functions of the *hukou* system that took full effect in 1960 constituted something quite new in China's history and in the annals of state socialist societies. The system fixed people permanently in place on the basis of their birthplace or, in the case of women, their husband's residence. In the years following the administrative collapse of the years 1958–60, the state exercised tight control over the urban–rural divide and within the hierarchy of urban places, barring all but rare officially-sanctioned transfers from countryside to cities, especially to large cities.

After 1960 formal state approval, rarely granted, was also required for intra-urban migration involving movement up the scale in the urban hierarchy. Residence became associated with sharply differentiated structures of socio-economic benefits, separating city from countryside. The Chinese state established two hierarchies for income, housing, grain rations, education, medical and other services, education, employment and retirement. In every sphere the city was privileged over the countryside, and state sector workers over collective farmers. The state reserved its resources disproportionately for those classified as urban residents.[65] Moreover, within both urban and rural spheres there was further differentiation. For example, in the case of the cities, official regulations differentiated down to the percentage of fine grain (rice or wheat) in the diet, to the advantage of residents in large central cities over smaller cities and the countryside. In this system the rural collective population, fixed firmly at the bottom of the *hukou* hierarchy, bore the brunt of state policies. The distinction was reinforced by the systematic transfer of the rural surplus to industry and the cities, and the fact that state welfare benefits were reserved exclusively for urban dwellers and state sector workers.

The *hukou* system, implemented by stages in the course of the 1950s, and vigorously enforced with the full power of the state in the wake of the Great Leap famine in the decades after 1960, was and remains the institutional guardian of the deep urban–rural divide that has characterized China since the mid-1950s. With growing urban–rural inequality of

65. We distinguish here the collective from the state proper. We see the collective (at brigade and team levels) as a servant of the state, but the collective and its officials stand outside the system of state-ranked and salaried officialdom. Collective officials occupy, in short, a position between villagers and state officials, occupying positions of power and authority, but rarely rising beyond their native villages and depending for their income on village resources.

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income, subsidies and welfare benefits throughout the first three decades of the People's Republic, population registration and control mechanisms and the attendant food rationing and housing and school controls, the state was able to prevent the rapid urban migration found in many industrializing countries in recent decades. Throughout the collective era, the *hukou* system made it possible to bind China's rural population in a subaltern position on land it did not own and could not leave. Following the death of Mao Zedong, the great wall between city and countryside could no longer be maintained in its previous form. Since the 1980s, population movement between countryside and city has accelerated and a more flexible *hukou* policy has been adopted. The system nevertheless continues to differentiate opportunity structures for the entire population on the basis of position within a clearly defined, if once again partially permeable, spatial hierarchy.

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