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Country People Moving to the Cities: The Migratory Dynamic

Sandra Poncet et Nong Zhu

- 1 The mobility of labour across the region is a key element in China's transition towards becoming a market economy¹. The process of change and modernisation, as China's opening up continues apace, depends upon re-allocating resources between industrial sectors and coping with the inevitable shocks to production and demand. The mobility of labour is the more important because markets in goods and capital are relatively fragmented. Several studies have thus concluded that, in the course of the past twenty years of reform, China has been transformed into "a fragmented internal market with fiefdoms controlled by local officials"².
- 2 This article will examine the dynamic for the migration of rural workers towards the cities, using national data for the two periods 1985-1990 and 1990-1995. The article will look at the restrictions on worker mobility—the main instrument of control is the system requiring each citizen to register for a residency permit, a hukou, for the area where he or she lives. Despite a measure of relaxation in some provinces, restrictions are still tight³. It will set out the available data and analyse the significance and the defining features of interior migratory flows, concentrating on flows from rural areas towards the cities, the areas most subject to restriction. It will also establish that the migrations are taking place in conformity with the hypothesis that migrants are responding to wage variations and job opportunities.
The restrictions imposed upon migration and the economic reforms
- 3 Up until the mid-1980s, the mobility of the population, especially in the countryside, was strictly controlled⁴. The original purpose of the restrictions on rural-urban migration was to limit the size of the urban population, whose consumption of farm products was extensively subsidised. For this reason, urbanisation in China has always been severely curbed. The anti-urban bias of China's communist leaders is also the corollary of their condemnation of capitalism, of Western values and of counter-revolutionary forces. The cities are isolated from the countryside by two complementary measures. Firstly, a high cost in job opportunities is imposed upon

those leaving the rural areas by means of a system of work-points corresponding to the days worked by a person living in the countryside (gongfenzhi). The system bases the workers' income on their participation in the daily work of the collective farm. Then, there is the system for registering residence permits (hukou), which operates like an internal passport system⁵, establishing a direct link between place of residence and access to consumer goods, job opportunities and social security. Thus, a person's citizenship and residence are defined at birth, by the mother's legal place of residence.

- 4 "The system differs in terms of entitlements and details for urban and rural residents. In a city, legal residence entitles one to local access to permanent jobs, regular housing, public schooling and public health care (where almost all health care is public). Until the early 1990s, it also entitled urban people to "grain rations"—rations of essentials such as grain and kerosene. Legal residence in a village or rural township entitles residents to land for farming, township housing, job opportunities in rural industrial enterprises, and access to local health and schooling facilities. Residents also have some degree of "ownership" in local enterprises, although distributed profits all go to the local public budget, which may be used to finance ownership housing and infrastructure. Again, until recent years, legal residence in a township also entitled a 'peasant' to some share in locally produced (or allocated from the outside) grain and other essentials⁶."
- 5 From 1984 onwards, the system changed; migration became legal. People no longer needed a permit to leave, though they did need one to stay in the place where they chose to settle. Yet, leaving one's village is still expensive, since migrants arriving in big cities have no access to health care, education or accommodation, other than at prohibitive prices. So living conditions for migrants and their families are extremely difficult. It is almost impossible for them to find decent accommodation, and their children have no access to education or to the health system other than by paying a surcharge. Other restrictions include the difficulties in obtaining a legal permit for migrating, problems in entering the labour market and various taxes and additional expenses linked to migrant status. The cities bar some jobs to migrants⁷ and impose taxes on immigrant workers, such as levies to pay for the fight against crime, for construction and urban administration, or even for women's family planning advice. The worst problems encountered by immigrants arise from the segmentation of the labour market and the absence of social security. Although these extra costs were officially abolished in 2001, some of them persist to this day. On top of everything, migrants are sometimes still obliged to pay taxes in their village of origin on the land that they have left lying fallow or for benefits they no longer receive. In some cases they have to pay a legal fee for the right to work outside their original place of residence.
- 6 The economic reform process that was embarked upon at the end of the 1970s has radically altered the incentives to migrate. The reforms of the early 1980s impair the efficiency of mechanisms for supervising the public⁸. Agricultural reforms, especially the end of the people's communes and the general introduction of responsibility contracts (chengbao zeren zhi), extend greater freedom to farm workers. Such contracts allow farm workers' households to profit from their fringe activities, thus resolving the recurrent problems of disinvestment in labour arising from the regulations on equal pay in people's communes⁹. Agricultural workers may now freely

dispose of their own time and determine for themselves their tasks and working practices.

- 7 At the same time, the restructuring of the pricing system for farm products stimulates a rise in farm productivity, leading to large numbers of surplus workers being laid off. The higher rates paid for non-agricultural labour encourage country people to migrate¹⁰. The reforms have brought about rapid increases in farm production and in the supply of cereals. The growth in purchasing power makes it possible to buy from the free markets in the cities without needing the urban hukou. This development renders obsolete the rationing system.
- 8 In former times, when there was rationing, the market was dominated by the sellers (or producers). Since the reforms, with an abundance of produce, the market has been progressively transformed into a buyers' market, dominated by consumers. Since 1984, the food markets have been liberalised. At the same time, urban accommodation is gradually becoming marketable. Such changes give peasants the opportunity freely to enter the city and live there without changing their hukou. As the state continues its withdrawal from different sectors of the economy, an urban labour market is emerging. Migrants may seek to earn a living in the cities. Furthermore, as urban infrastructure is built up and, with improved living standards, consumption is diversified, the urban demand for labour is rising significantly.
- 9 Lastly, the reforms—and in particular the opening up towards the outside world—have intensified regional disparities and caused further concentration of the population. The authorities have abandoned their former strategy of relatively balanced regional development; now, instead, preference is given to the great coastal cities. This policy has at the same time led to discrepancies between incomes and consumption; in particular, it helps to increase the income gap between rural and urban areas¹¹. In overall terms, inequality of income can be separated into three elements: inequality within urban areas, inequality within country areas and inequality between urban and country areas. In China, the last element overshadows the other two¹². In 1995, inequality between urban and rural communities amounted to more than half the overall equality of income. Its development accounted for 75% of the development of overall inequality over the period 1984-1995. The gap between urban and rural incomes widened until 1978, then narrowed between 1978 and 1984, before increasing again¹³. The ratio of average urban income to average rural income per head fell between 1978 and 1985 from 2.57 to 1.86; it rose by 1994 to 2.86; since then it has fluctuated between 2.50 and 2.90¹⁴.
- 10 In the coastal provinces of the south-east, the success of the policy of openness, the rapid economic development and above all the massive Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) combine to accelerate migration¹⁵. The creation of Special Economic Zones and Economic Zones open to the outside world gives concrete expression to the special treatment accorded to foreign investors. Activity in these zones is dominated by exports in the labour-intensive sectors. This exogenous influence has strongly increased the demand for labour, thus pulling in a growing number of migrants from other provinces.
- 11 Migrations between China's provinces are mainly motivated by socio-economic disparities, these in turn brought about by the strategy for unbalanced development adopted by the authorities¹⁶. Moreover, the divergence of incomes observable since the reforms began in 1978 is caused by the obstacles to trade exchanges between provinces.

Because of strong demographic pressure on arable land, rural incomes are still at a very low level. Farmers have good reason for wishing to leave the land. The significant incomes gap between urban and rural areas, as well as that between coastal and inland regions, encourage migration. According to classical theory on development economics¹⁷, migration is essentially the workers' response to better job prospects, or more exactly to the prospect of higher incomes. The combination of growing freedom for individuals and regional imbalances has led, ever since the 1980s, to vast spontaneous movements of farm workers towards the towns: these have progressively broken down the constraints on migration.

- 12 The state's capacity to control migration into the cities has been lessened. Admittedly, there has been no major change in the hukou system; the adjustments to it during the 1980s and 1990s consisted merely in relaxing the regulations on converting a rural hukou into an urban hukou. This process, called *nongzhuanfei*, is nevertheless still subject to quotas. The rural/urban classification of the registration system is still unchanged; and a person's socio-economic integration remains dependant on his or her hukou.
- 13 Yet, the economic reforms have changed the overall control structure of the economy in which the hukou system operates. They have weakened control over the mobility of the population. The state has withdrawn from the allocation of jobs and from the distribution of consumer goods. Thus, while the nature of the hukou system has never altered, its importance has greatly diminished inasmuch as its restrictive aspect depended on its close link with the rationing system. As rationing collapsed and the economy developed into a market, the system requiring people to register their civic status has progressively been stripped of its connection to jobs or social security. Its application is confined to the registration of citizens. In fact, the impact of this system on migration has become negligible; and fewer and fewer peasants trouble to convert their rural hukou into an urban one.
- 14 Although food shortages are in the past and economic liberalisation is advancing, the government still controls migration towards the cities. It has three main reasons. Firstly, city people do not wish to share their relatively high standard of living with country people. Secondly, urban infrastructure cannot support a massive inflow of people coming in from the countryside. And lastly, because of the reforms to state enterprises, urban areas are also faced with significant unemployment. The restrictions to migration between provinces in China reflect the authorities' preferences as to where migrants should go; they are afraid that the incoming flow of migrants may worsen the employment conditions and pay levels of unskilled workers and endanger the security of urban residents.

Migratory flows

- 15 Our study of the dynamic of migratory flows from rural areas towards the cities is based on data from the population censuses of 1990 and 2000 and from a 1995 survey of one hundredth of the population¹⁸. This is official data and does not take account of illegal migration, on which practically no information is available. These three series of data give us the usual place of residence at the time of the census (July 1st 1990 and 1995 and December 1st 2000) as well as the usual place of residence over the previous five years. The usual place of residence is defined as residence for at least a year in the data from 1990 and 1995, and as residence for at least six months in data from 2000. These figures enable us to compare migratory flows between provinces during the

period 1985-1990 with those of 1990-1995. Specifying the usual place of residence helps us to identify rural people and urban people. Thus, the data distinguishes between: urban district (jiedao), township (zhen) and village (xiang). The urban districts are the constituencies within municipalities or big cities. The townships are the constituencies within small towns. The first two categories correspond to urban areas and the third to rural areas. The migrant is defined as a person whose place of residence five years before the census is different from that on the date of the census, in regard to the county (W, xian) or to the municipality within a prefecture (xianjishi), or in regard to the municipality within a province (dijishi). The migratory flows are broken down into several types, according to whether they take place within a single province or between two separate provinces, and according to whether they are between urban or country areas.

- 16 The data is limited in three respects. Firstly, it registers migrations over a period of five years without indicating the date. It is possible that some people migrated several times, but we know only the place from which they first set off and their final destination. Secondly, neither the 1990 census nor the 1995 survey take account of migrations within the counties (xian)¹⁹. In China, the xian is, from an administrative point of view, relatively independent and autonomous, with a complete administrative system. Migrations where the migrant leaves the xian are frequently more formal and permanent moves. The fifth population census, in 2000, altered the definition of migration. Instead of defining it at the xian level, the migrant is defined as one who has changed his or her place of residence at the lowest level, townships or villages, during the period 1995-2000. So the definition of migration has been widened. This explains in large part the 50% increase in the figure for migrations within provinces, which rose from 22 million people over the periods 1985-1990 and 1990-1995 to 33 million between 1995 and 2000. On the other hand, this change should not affect the figures for migrations between provinces. Thirdly, the 2000 census, when referring to the rural or urban dimension of migration, notes only the migrant's starting-point—and ignores the destination. So it is no longer possible to examine migratory flows between countryside and cities. Furthermore, Tibet was not covered by the 1990 census thus no information is available to us on migrations into or out of that province for the period 1985-1990.
- 17 The migratory flows measured by the censuses are very significant, and they increase sharply over the most recent period. Table 1 gives the total number of migrations as well as the figure for those between provinces, which rose to 32% between 1985 and 1995, falling back to 27% over the period 1995-2000.

1. Migratory Flows

(in millions of people)

	Total number of migrations	Migrations between provinces	Inter-provincial migrations from rural areas	Inter-provincial migrations from rural to urban
1985-1990	33.8	10.8	6.6	4.8
1990-1995	33.2	10.7	7.8	4.2
1995-2000	122.5	32.8	25.6	-

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics of China (NBSC), 10 Percent Sampling Tabulation in 1990. Population China Statistical Publishing House, 1991. NBSC, Figure of 1% Population Sample Survey in 1995, Peking, China

- 18 While the total number of migrations (rising from 33 million to 122 million people between 1990-1995 and 1995-2000) is directly linked to the change in definition, the increase observed for migrations between provinces is mainly explained by the

relaxation of restrictions to rural workers' mobility. Migratory flows between provinces thus tripled over the five most recent years compared with the earlier periods. This increase owes more to migrations originating in the countryside (which went up from 7.8 to 25.6 million, that is, they increased by 3.3 times) than to those originating in urban areas (up by 2.5 times).

19 Our examination of migratory flows from rural areas to urban areas is confined to the periods 1985-1995, inasmuch as the last census provides a breakdown only according to the place of origin. For the period 1995-2000, the only migratory definition we know is in terms of the starting-point. Table 2 brings out the growing importance of migratory flows between rural areas. This phenomenon is linked to the industrialisation of the countryside and to increasing strength of township and village enterprises (TVEs, *xiangzhen qiye*). Thus, over the period 1985-1990, whereas three million people changed their place of residence in the countryside while staying in the same province, nearly 4.3 million made that choice over the following period. The increase in migrations between country areas and between provinces is even more striking, going up from 1.8 to 4.3 million people. Economic dynamism in the countryside thus acted as a brake on the rural exodus.

20 2. Migrations within and between provinces

(in millions of people)

	Total number of migrations	Starting in countryside	Starting in the cities	Urban-urban migrations	Urban-rural migrations	Rural-urban migrations	Rural-rural migration
Within provinces							
1985-1990	23.0	14.6	8.4	7.5	0.9	11.6	3.0
Between provinces							
1985-1990	10.8	6.6	4.2	3.7	0.5	4.8	1.8
Within provinces							
1990-1995	22.6	12.0	10.5	9.6	0.9	7.7	4.3
Between provinces							
1990-1995	10.7	7.8	2.9	2.2	0.7	4.2	3.6
Within provinces							
1995-2000	89.7	46.3	43.4				
Between provinces							
1995-2000	32.8	25.6	7.2				

Sources: NBSC, 1991; NBSC, 1997.

3. Breakdown of migrations by rural people between the coast and the interior

Rural-urban migrations 1985-1990 (in millions)

	Coastal city destination	Inland city destination
Origin coastal countryside	5.6	0.7
Origin inland countryside	1.5	8.2

Rural-urban migrations 1990-1995

	Coastal destination	Inland destination
Origin coastal countryside	4.7	0.3
Origin inland countryside	2.7	4.7

Sources: NBSC, 1991; NBSC, 1997.

- 21 The regional breakdown of migratory flows, making a distinction between the interior and the coast, is based on the classic hypothesis that inland provinces are being marginalised. Indeed, they have for a long time experienced more difficult conditions for economic development and have frequently been neglected and even discriminated against by the central government²⁰. With the aim of putting the 1995-2000 data into perspective, Table 4 gives details about migrations between provinces; it specifies the location, inland or coastal, of rural migrants' village of origin; but it does not specify whether their destinations were rural or urban.

4. Breakdown of migrations between provinces originating in the countryside

(in millions of people)

	1985-1990		1990-1995		1995-2000	
	Coastal destination	Inland destination	Coastal destination	Inland destination	Coastal destination	Inland destination
Origin coastal countryside	4.6	0.9	1.6	0.6	4.4	1.3
Origin inland countryside	2.0	2.0	3.6	1.9	16.1	4.1

Sources: NBSC, 1991; NBSC, 1997; NBSC, Figures on 2000 Population Census of China, Peking, China Statistics

- 22 Whereas, over the period 1985-1990, migrations from inland provinces towards the coast amounted to 31% of migrations from the countryside, the proportion increased subsequently: it reached 47% over the period 1990-1995, and 62% over the period 1995-2000 (in numbers of people, 16.1 million out of 25.6 million). During the full 15 years (1985-2000), migrations between inland provinces estimated as a proportion of all rural departures fell back from 31% to 16%, whereas that for migrations between coastal provinces dropped from 25% to 17% of the total. So it is evident that, in the context of migrations between provinces and of rural origin, the trend is for migrants to move from inland provinces towards the coast.
- 23 The availability of data for the provinces as a whole makes possible a finer analysis, going beyond a simple distinction between the interior and the coast. Table 5 sets out the main demographic and economic features of the Chinese provinces in 1990 and

2000. More than two-thirds of the population live in the countryside. The most populous regions lie along the plains of the Yangtze (Sichuan, Hubei and Anhui) and the Yellow River (Henan and Shaanxi). Henan, the second most populous province, is also a predominantly rural province. The inhabitants of Sichuan and Henan are, on the face of it, logical candidates for migration towards the cities.

- 24 In the extreme west of China, neither the landscape, with its mountains and high plateaux, nor the climate are propitious to agriculture. The province of Xinjiang is slightly more populous because the presence of mineral resources in the subsoil dictates a supply of manpower to extract them. This wealth explains the relatively high rate of urbanisation and the inflow of migrants.

5. Features of the Chinese provinces

	Total population (in millions of people)		Density of population (people per hectare of cultivated land)		Rate of urbanisation (%)		Gross domestic product per hectare (yuan)	
	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000	1990	2000
	1,133.1	1,265.1	7.6	8.3	26.2	36.1	1,634	7,078
Peking	10.9	13.8	18.5	44.7	73.2	77.5	4,878	22,460
Tianjin	8.8	10.0	15.3	19.9	68.2	72.0	3,621	17,993
Hebei	60.3	67.4	6.9	7.8	17.9	26.1	1,465	7,663
Shanxi	28.2	33.0	7.0	8.9	26.7	34.9	1,528	5,137
Inner Mongolia	21.1	23.8	4.5	4.1	35.5	42.7	1,478	5,072
Liaoning	40.0	42.4	11.0	11.4	51.4	54.2	2,698	11,226
Jilin	25.2	27.3	6.2	5.8	42.8	49.7	1,746	6,847
Heilongjiang	34.8	36.9	4.1	3.8	49.3	51.5	2,028	8,562
Shanghai	13.5	16.7	21.4	39.8	66.1	88.3	5,910	34,547
Jiangsu	68.2	74.4	8.3	9.7	22.6	41.5	2,103	11,773
Zhejiang	40.8	46.8	9.3	16.5	30.6	48.7	2,122	13,461
Anhui	56.3	59.9	6.8	6.6	17.7	27.8	1,182	4,867
Fujian	30.6	34.7	11.1	13.8	22.7	41.6	1,788	11,601
Jiangxi	38.3	41.4	6.6	8.3	20.9	27.7	1,128	4,851
Shandong	83.4	90.8	7.7	8.3	26.8	38.0	1,815	9,555
Henan	86.1	92.6	7.2	6.8	15.2	23.2	1,091	5,444
Hubei	54.8	60.3	7.4	8.4	29.6	40.2	1,556	7,188
Hunan	60.6	64.4	7.6	8.3	17.4	29.8	1,228	5,639
Guangdong	63.2	86.4	11.5	17.7	38.9	55.0	2,395	12,885
Guangxi	42.5	44.9	8.3	7.2	15.4	28.2	1,066	4,319
Hainan	6.4	7.9	6.3	8.7	20.6	40.1	1,589	6,894
Chongqing (1)	-	30.9	-	9.2	-	33.1	-	5,157
Sichuan	106.4	83.3	11.6	8.9	19.7	26.7	1,105	4,784
Guizhou	32.7	35.3	9.1	7.6	20.1	23.9	810	2,662
Yunnan	36.8	42.9	8.2	7.5	14.7	23.4	1,224	4,637
Tibet	2.2	2.6	10.3	11.1	18.1	18.9	1,276	4,559
Shaanxi	32.5	36.1	6.7	8.9	20.7	32.3	1,244	4,549
Gansu	22.9	25.6	6.3	7.1	20.8	24.0	1,099	3,838
Qinghai	4.4	5.2	8.1	11.1	25.3	34.8	1,558	5,087
Ningxia	4.7	5.6	5.3	5.0	28.5	32.4	1,393	4,839
Xinjiang	15.4	19.3	5.2	5.5	33.0	33.8	1,799	7,470

(1) Chongqing, the fourth of China's directly controlled municipalities, was established in 1997. In 1990, Sources: NSBC, 1991; NSBC, 2002.

- 25 On the coast, where much of the population is concentrated, the urban fabric is very dense. Shanghai is China's most densely populated city with 2,179 inhabitants to the square kilometre in 1990. The many coastal metropolises of Shandong, Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces act as magnets upon the inhabitants of the countryside nearby.
- 26 The data on migrant inflows and outflows for each of the provinces over the periods 1985-1990 and 1990-1995 are reported in Tables 6 and 7. The first three columns deal with all migrations, while distinguishing between flows coming in and going out, within or between provinces. Columns 4 to 6 provide comparable data, but only for rural-urban migrations. The last two columns define rural-urban migrations between provinces as a proportion of all migrations between provinces: percentages are given for migrants coming in and migrants going out.

6. Migratory flows from the countryside into the cities between 1985 and 1990

(in thousands of people)

	Total migrations			Rural-urban migrations					
	Within provinces	Between provinces		Within provinces	Between provinces		Rural-urban % of total	Inflowing	Outflowing
		outflows	inflows		outflows	inflows			
Peking	60.0	123.3	663.1	31.5	7.9	381.8	373.9	6	58
Tianjin	25.6	86.2	311.7	15.2	14.5	141.7	127.3	17	45
Hebei	827.9	665.2	469.0	431.4	380.1	137.2	-242.8	57	29
Shanxi	559.6	226.8	269.2	302.4	58.8	152.1	93.3	26	57
Inner Mong	11403.8	277.9	239.5	275.7	90.1	119.0	28.9	32	50
Liaoning	845.5	272.3	516.7	396.9	79.9	254.8	174.9	29	49
Jilin	555.2	345.8	253.7	260.0	125.5	130.1	4.6	36	51
Heilongjiang	988.5	594.3	332.3	437.8	199.6	184.1	-15.6	34	55
Shanghai	152.7	150.5	655.8	63.4	7.9	263.8	255.9	5	40
Jiangsu	1,303.5	588.5	838.1	808.1	307.0	295.4	-11.7	52	35
Zhejiang	838.7	626.3	321.5	446.9	370.6	112.2	-258.4	59	35
Anhui	835.0	538.2	343.9	433.8	272.6	90.3	-182.2	51	26
Fujian	832.9	227.6	294.6	419.3	103.5	124.0	20.5	45	42
Jiangxi	686.5	277.0	225.8	288.7	122.5	82.3	-40.2	44	36
Shandong	1,135.4	523.3	610.4	510.0	295.9	182.9	-113.0	57	30
Henan	1,263.5	577.6	494.9	655.7	338.7	135.2	-203.5	59	27
Hubei	1,121.1	348.5	411.8	587.2	114.3	224.5	110.2	33	55
Hunan	1,211.9	503.5	248.2	658.2	289.9	87.7	-202.2	58	35
Guangdong	2,523.0	250.3	1,161.8	1,631.2	78.5	782.9	704.5	31	67
Guangxi	1,047.3	548.8	157.4	475.3	357.0	70.4	-286.6	65	45
Hainan	117.7	111.7	133.5	57.9	43.1	55.1	12.0	39	41
Sichuan	2,435.8	1,287.4	440.5	1,125.0	719.3	86.5	-632.8	56	20
Guizhou	552.7	309.3	198.8	285.5	109.8	123.1	13.3	35	62
Yunnan	762.7	272.1	232.5	276.2	83.5	120.4	36.9	31	52
Shaanxi	692.0	332.3	314.0	298.8	108.3	130.8	22.5	33	42
Gansu	416.0	268.6	163.8	224.7	79.8	80.6	0.9	30	49
Qinghai	144.9	98.2	106.5	34.7	13.1	53.1	40.0	13	50
Ningxia	109.1	55.7	79.5	43.5	12.0	46.4	34.4	22	58
Xinjiang	356.0	273.2	347.0	117.5	43.3	197.4	154.2	16	57
Total	23,004.4	10,760.2	835.6	11,592.3	4,826.8	4,845.8	19.0	45	45

Source: NBSC, 1991.

7. Migratory Flows from the countryside into the cities between 1990 and 1985

(in thousands of people)

	Total migrations			Rural-urban migrations						
	Within provinces	Between provinces		Within provinces	Between provinces		Rural-urban % of total			
	outflows	inflows	outflows	inflows	net migration	inflowing	outflowing			
Peking	645.8	117.0	692.9	49.3	6.3	360.2	353.9	5	52	
Tianjin	266.7	61.2	223.9	21.1	14.1	111.0	96.9	23	50	
Hebei	836.0	416.6	501.7	335.0	199.3	122.4	-76.9	48	24	
Shanxi	319.4	140.6	158.6	115.1	38.9	56.9	18.0	28	36	
Inner Mongolia	11456.8	248.8	275.5	201.2	54.9	85.3	30.4	22	31	
Liaoning	1,165.3	196.0	436.6	338.6	46.6	230.9	184.3	24	53	
Jilin	620.5	295.2	150.2	144.4	96.1	48.4	-47.7	33	32	
Heilongjiang	1,064.1	613.7	225.3	323.3	172.7	96.4	-76.3	28	43	
Shanghai	962.3	121.6	725.1	48.0	8.2	434.2	426.0	7	60	
Jiangsu	2,069.1	449.8	968.6	881.4	240.1	293.3	53.2	53	30	
Zhejiang	752.3	514.3	467.5	257.5	313.2	127.1	-186.1	61	27	
Anhui	561.2	743.6	155.1	207.0	396.2	23.9	-372.3	53	15	
Fujian	651.6	219.4	347.2	235.2	113.9	68.0	-45.9	52	20	
Jiangxi	481.5	513.3	125.0	125.7	221.9	20.3	-201.6	43	16	
Shandong	1,414.0	381.5	521.9	736.9	185.0	151.9	-33.1	48	29	
Henan	760.1	739.4	272.4	227.7	363.6	47.6	-316.0	49	17	
Hubei	799.3	382.2	269.8	288.1	135.7	89.6	-46.1	36	33	
Hunan	997.5	704.3	212.7	455.1	386.9	58.8	-328.1	55	28	
Guangdong	2,142.7	220.9	1,946.1	880.0	33.1	1,115.7	1,082.6	15	57	
Guangxi	804.7	554.2	118.7	352.3	220.6	42.5	-178.1	40	36	
Hainan	127.9	101.2	103.6	45.8	21.4	22.9	1.5	21	22	
Sichuan	1,972.6	1,457.3	396.3	688.1	672.0	68.6	-603.4	46	17	
Guizhou	411.7	401.2	152.1	145.5	81.7	72.4	-9.3	20	48	
Yunnan	629.3	241.4	207.6	155.3	31.1	84.4	53.3	13	41	
Tibet	34.1	28.3	34.8	17.2	1.8	20.3	18.5	6	58	
Shaanxi	530.7	264.2	164.6	212.1	75.1	94.7	19.6	28	58	
Gansu	407.8	250.1	138.9	137.2	55.1	63.2	8.1	22	46	
Qinghai	137.0	77.0	51.0	21.3	4.2	17.0	12.8	5	33	
Ningxia	69.0	55.4	47.8	15.5	7.7	25.1	17.4	14	53	
Xinjiang	279.3	149.6	567.8	64.5	26.2	170.6	144.4	18	30	
Total	22,578.3	10,659.3	659.3	7,725.4	4,223.6	4,223.6	0.0	40	40	

Source: NBSC, 1997.

- 27 The areas of Guangdong, Peking and Shanghai may be clearly identified as attractive for rural-urban migration. Conversely, the provinces of Zhejiang, Guangxi and Sichuan

stand out as the main departure points. While the net migration from them was lower over the 1990-1995 period than over the previous five years (a sign that departures were on the rise in other provinces), the attractiveness of Guangdong, Peking and Shanghai seems to have been growing. The cumulative net migration of these provinces rose from 1.3 to 1.9 million people.

- 28 It is interesting to concentrate more specifically on the thirty most significant rural-urban migratory flows between provinces during these two periods reported in Table 8.

8. Principal Migratory Flows from the Countryside to the Cities and between Provinces

(in thousands of people)

1985-1990			1990-1995		
Province of origin	Province of destination	Number of migrants	Province of origin	Province of destination	Number of migrants
Guangxi	Guangdong	298.6	Hunan	Guangxi	295.5
Hebei	Peking	164.2	Sichuan	Guangxi	243.5
Hunan	Guangxi	150.4	Guangxi	Guangxi	206.6
Jiangsu	Shanghai	103.8	Anhui	Jiangsu	134.5
Sichuan	Guangxi	95.9	Jiangxi	Guangxi	121.5
Anhui	Jiangsu	82.4	Jiangsu	Shanghai	111.5
Sichuan	Guizhou	77.5	Anhui	Shanghai	106.9
Sichuan	Yunnan	73.1	Hebei	Peking	95.8
Sichuan	Xinjiang	69.5	Henan	Guangxi	78.6
Sichuan	Hubei	67.8	Zhejiang	Shanghai	63.8
Hebei	Tianjin	66.0	Henan	Peking	51.0
Heilongjiang	Liaoning	63.4	Sichuan	Xinjiang	50.6
Zhejiang	Shanghai	51.8	Heilongjiang	Liaoning	48.1
Shandong	Heilongjiang	46.8	Sichuan	Yunnan	46.4
Henan	Hubei	44.8	Sichuan	Guizhou	45.2
Jilin	Heilongjiang	42.9	Shandong	Liaoning	38.9
Sichuan	Jiangsu	42.0	Jilin	Liaoning	38.3
Heilongjiang	Shandong	41.2	Guizhou	Guangxi	37.6
Jiangxi	Guangxi	39.4	Sichuan	Shanghai	37.3
Anhui	Shanghai	39.0	Hubei	Guangxi	36.0
Henan	Peking	38.8	Henan	Xinjiang	35.4
Shandong	Liaoning	38.3	Fujian	Guangxi	34.6
Hainan	Guangxi	37.1	Heilongjiang	Shandong	32.9
Sichuan	Fujian	36.3	Anhui	Peking	31.6
Zhejiang	Jiangsu	35.0	Zhejiang	Liaoning	31.2
Fujian	Guangxi	33.9	Zhejiang	Jiangsu	29.5
Jilin	Liaoning	33.2	Heilongjiang	Inner Mongolia	29.1
Sichuan	Peking	32.2	Jiangsu	Peking	28.2
Shandong	Jilin	32.1	Hebei	Tianjin	27.9
Zhejiang	Guangxi	32.1	Sichuan	Jiangsu	27.5

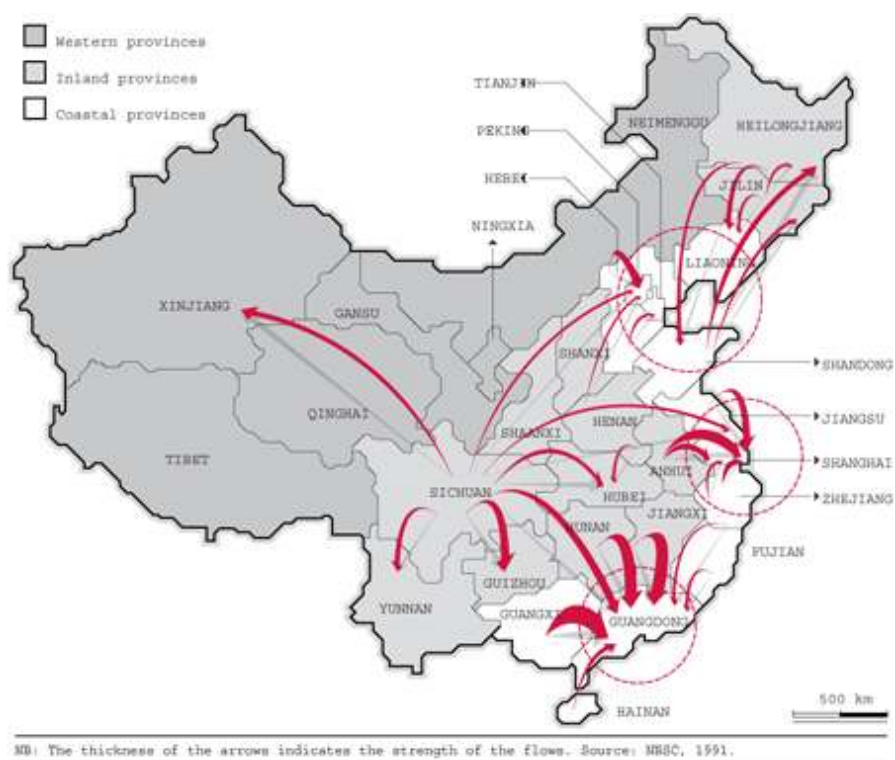
Sources: NBSC, 1991; NBSC, 1997.

- 29 The first distinguishing characteristic is the existence of a proximity effect. Migrations between neighbouring provinces are far more usual than more distant migrations. This characteristic supports the hypothesis that the greater the distance, the higher the costs of migration will be and the less information will be available. Migrations between Chinese regions, just like international migrations, are attended by costs both psychological (separation) and financial (travelling expenses, phone charges, and the additional accommodation, health or education costs described earlier).
- 30 Empirical study of the costs of migration has established that they increase with distance, and are accompanied by a deterioration in the migrants' contacts and support networks²¹. The explanation for this is that the networks are often defined by earlier migration flows. Costs are lower for individuals who follow in the steps of previous migrants and settle in communities—built up by former migrations of friends or family members—in which they have connections.
- 31 The second distinction is that migrations within provinces are far more common than those between provinces. This seems to confirm that there are additional costs attached to migrations between provinces; and it confirms the hypothesis that the networks, institutions and common values that facilitate the passage of people (or the

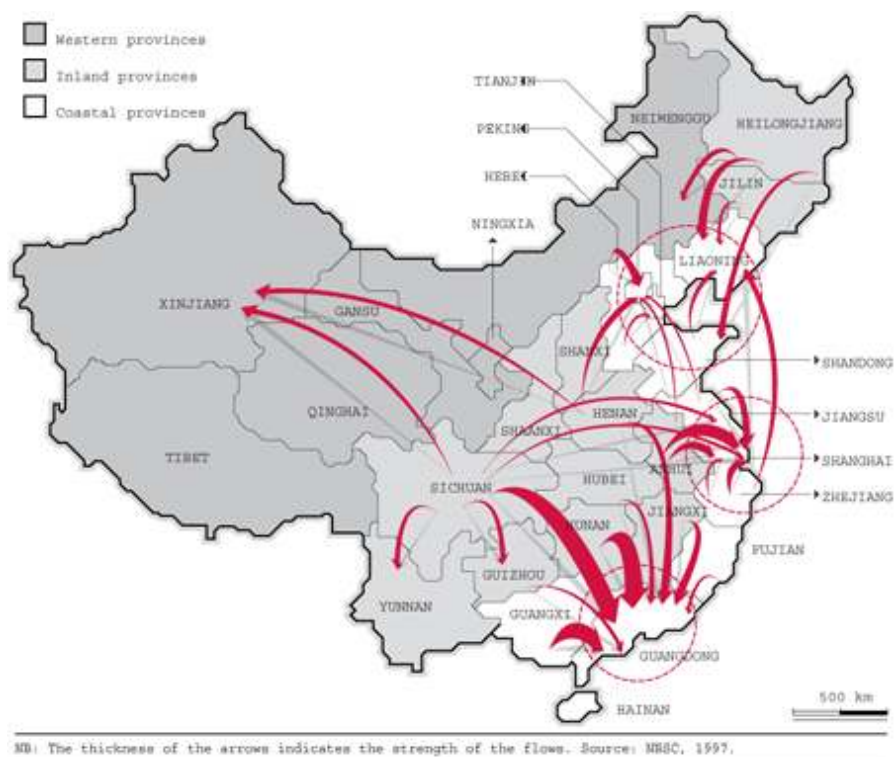
passage of goods) are determined, at least partly, by frontiers²². It was in Guangdong, where the incidence of internal migration is remarkably high, that the opening up of China to the outside world began. That province also benefited from a range of preferential policies. Its orientation towards exports, backed by massive injections of foreign capital, lent strong stimulus to the development of small towns and to intensive industrial activity. Such dynamism led to the creation of large numbers of jobs, which in turn contributed to the mobility of labour within the province. Migratory flows from the countryside to the cities in the interior of Sichuan, Jiangsu and Henan provinces were also very high, in conformity with the size of their populations. The attraction exerted by the provinces of the south-east was intensified during the period 1990-1995, thanks to the implementation of the reforms and to the impetus given by Deng Xiaoping's tour of the region in 1992. When it comes to the starting point for rural-urban migrants, the greatest source is Sichuan, the most populous province with 106.4 million inhabitants in 1990. According to some unofficial estimates, more than 5 million worker-peasants leave that province every year as seasonal migrants. Henan, Guangxi and Hebei are also significant starting points for long-distance migration. We should note that farm workers flock not only into the coastal provinces but also into remote provinces, such as Xinjiang, Yunnan and Heilongjiang, drawn by the lure of labour shortages. The main migratory flows, as illustrated in the previous table, are sourced in provinces coterminous with a centre of attraction and flow towards that centre. Flows from Guangxi towards Guangdong, from Jiangsu towards Shanghai and from Hebei towards Peking demonstrate this pattern.

- 32 The main rural-urban migrant flows between provinces over the periods 1985-1990 and 1990-1995 are shown in charts 9 and 10. Most migratory flows start out from inland regions towards coastal regions. Whether one looks at the first period or at the second, two-thirds of migrations are directed towards coastal provinces. Migrants tend to favour destinations where they hope to find jobs more easily and to earn higher gross wages. So access to the market seems to play an important role in migrants' choices of where to settle, which demonstrates that the migratory process in China is a response to centripetal forces.
- 33 The charts show clearly the forces of attraction exerted by the three municipalities of provincial rank (Peking, Tianjin and Shanghai) and by Jiangsu and Shandong provinces. The Pearl River Delta (Guangdong), the Yangtze Delta centred on Shanghai (Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang) and the region surrounding the Gulf of Bohai centred on Peking: these are the three destinations that most migrants favour²³.

9. Migratory Flows between Provinces, from the Countryside towards the Cities, 1985-1990



10. Migratory Flows between Provinces, from the Countryside towards the cities, 1990-1995



- 34 The economic reforms have introduced market mechanisms into the working of the mobility of labour; this in turn has weakened the hukou system and encouraged migration.
- 35 Descriptive analysis of migratory flows confirms that economic dynamism and geographical position are two significant factors influencing the spatial distribution of migrants in China. Being close to the market centre, and having access to the national and international consumers in the market: this appears to exert a basic force of attraction. For enterprises, it also determines demand and thus their labour requirements. The central position of a market determines the job opportunities and pay prospects that it offers to migrants. We may conclude that, despite persistent restrictions to the mobility of labour, the migratory process is consistent with the deepening integration of the Chinese domestic market in which poles of concentration are taking shape. The migrants need to be able to move to the areas where there is higher pay and better job prospects so that they can take advantage of them. The figures show that migrants are making themselves available by moving to these areas. Above all, this phenomenon is a necessary condition for a fragmented market to develop into an integrated one.
- 36 Translated by Philip Liddell

NOTES

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RÉSUMÉS

This article examines the migration of rural workers towards the cities in the light of national data on the two periods 1985-1990 and 1990-1995. It briefly considers the restrictions on workers' mobility, focusing particularly on the main instrument of control, the hukou. The article highlights the finding that despite such continuing obstacles to mobility, the migratory dynamic is consistent with the deepening integration of the Chinese domestic market.