

Types of Migration in China

Donald J. Treiman, UCLA
Yao Lu, Columbia University

Extended abstract
(last revised 9/21/08)

Using data from a just completed 2007-2008 national probability sample of approximately 3,000 Chinese adults that includes an oversample of internal migrants, and also information from recent Chinese censuses, this paper will develop a typology of types of internal migration in China.

China has an internal registration (*hukou*) system that distinguishes those with urban status from those with rural status and, in a cross-cutting classification, those with local registration from those lacking local registration. The urban-rural distinction in effect creates a two-class system, with the benefits of a welfare state (encompassing education, health care, housing, access to jobs, and unemployment and retirement security) available to those with urban registration but not to those with rural registration. In addition, access to many services is available only to those with local registration. Except when villages are incorporated into towns or cities, conversion of rural to urban status is difficult and rare, as is acquisition of local registration by migrants, particularly for those with rural status.

Despite migrants' lack of benefits and access to social services, there has been massive internal migration in China, beginning in the early 1980s and continuing at an ever quickening pace, driven in part by new opportunities for work in urban areas and in part by the decline in agricultural jobs. The result is that some 150 million people—about 12% of the population—currently live in locales other than where they are registered. While much of this has been the

result of rural-to-urban migration, a non-trivial fraction reflects rural-to-rural and, especially, urban-to-urban migration. In addition, a non-trivial fraction of the *de jure* urban population consists of people from rural origins, who have successfully converted their registration, either by virtue of their own efforts (mainly educational attainment) or because their villages were incorporated into expanding cities (note that while *hukou* converters constitute a relatively small fraction of the rural-origin population, they make up a rather larger fraction of the urban population because even today most of China remains rural). For both types of *hukou* converters, but particularly for the latter, it is possible to change registration status without changing residence.

The just-completed 2007-2008 Chinese Migration and Health Survey, designed by the authors and other colleagues, addresses the determinants, dynamics, and consequences of internal migration in China. Using information on place of birth, complete migration histories (which include detail on size of place, whether locally registered, and the reason for moving), complete registration histories (basically urban vs. rural but including information on other registration types), and specific information on the first and most recent labor migration experience, the proposed paper will develop a typology of types of migration and will estimate the prevalence and, where possible, the incidence of various types of migration. These estimates will be supplemented by information from recent Chinese censuses (for 1990 and 2000) and 1% sample censuses (for 1995 and 2005).

We also will summarize the demographic and social characteristics of each category, e.g., the sex and age composition, level of education, type of employment, family circumstances (living with family members or apart), etc.

If we were to dichotomize

- *hukou* status (rural vs. urban)
- local registration (yes vs. no)
- residential mobility (living in place where born—yes vs. no)
- ever went out for work? (yes vs. no)

and were to trichotomize rural-to-urban *hukou* change (no; yes due to personal effort; yes due to collective change, e.g, incorporation of village into a town or city)

the complete cross-tabulation would consist of 48 categories. Clearly, a 48 category typology is not very useful, particularly since a large number of the cells in such a multi-way distribution would be empty or nearly so. The main task of our paper will be to identify the configurations that characterize the bulk of the population and that represent distinctive life circumstances. There is no viable mechanical way to do this. Rather, it will require exploring the data and thinking hard about how social mobility is linked to geographic mobility.

Here is a preliminary list of likely categories in a migration typology, recognizing that some of these categories may require further subdivision:

Migration type	Ever changed residence since birth?	Changed from rural to urban registration? ^a	Have local registration?
<u>Rural registration (<i>hukou</i>)</u>			
Sedentary rural population	No	No	Yes
Permanent urban residents, rural registration ^b	No	No	Yes
Marriage migrants (nearly all female) ^c	Yes	No	Yes
“Floating” rural population ^d	Yes	No	No
Returned rural migrants	Yes	No	Yes
<u>Urban registration (<i>hukou</i>)</u>			
Sedentary urban residents	No	No	Yes
Urban-to-urban formal migrants	Yes	No	Yes
Rural-to-urban <i>hukou</i> changers: individual mob ^e	?	Yes	Yes
Rural-to-urban <i>hukou</i> changers: collective mob ^f	No	Yes	Yes
“Floating” urban population ^d	Yes	No	No
Returned urban migrants	Yes	No	Yes

^aVirtually no one changes from urban to rural registration. “No” in this column thus includes all those with initial urban registration, as well as rural-origin people who retain their rural registration.

^bIn many towns and some cities, some residents have urban registration and others have rural registration.

^cRural China has a patrilocal residential pattern, in which women move to their husband’s village when they marry.

^dThe term “floating population” refers to those living other than where they are registered. Although this specification includes urban-to-urban migrants, in common usage the term connotes rural-to-urban labor migrants.

^eThe main way people are able to convert their *hukou* from rural to urban through their own achievements is to obtain either technical secondary education or tertiary education (see Wu and Treiman 2004).

^fThis category mainly includes residents of urban-fringe villages that are incorporated into towns or cities.

Reference

Wu, Xiaogang, and Donald J. Treiman. 2004. “The Household Registration System and Social Stratification in China: 1955-1996.” *Demography* 41:363-384.