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**Rural-urban migration in China: a study of
migrant workers in Shunde city**

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RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN CHINA: A STUDY OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN SHUNDE CITY

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Introduction

Since the commencement of the 'open and reform' policy in 1978, China's economic development and relaxation of population controls have facilitated an immense internal labour migration, particularly of rural labourers moving to urban areas in search of non-agricultural employment opportunities. This study analyses the migration process of the labour migrants who move to industrial jobs in the Pearl River delta of South China. A micro-analytic approach is employed to study the individual migrants in the factories in Shunde city, where a complete migration process is reconstructed from the migrants' retrospective accounts as well as current information. The two major stages, the migration decision-making process in the place of origin, and the adjustment process in the place of destination, constitute the core of the analysis of the migration process.

Since the early 1950s, the rate and patterns of China's population movements had long been governed by explicit state policies of migration control (Kim, 1990), which eventually became relaxed in 1978. The economic development during the reform period of the 1980s has created enormous employment opportunities, and attracted a large amount of rural labourers both from the nearby rural areas and from other provinces to the cities and towns in the Pearl River delta. The tremendous transformations under way consolidate the need for empirical migration studies, especially when the migrants become '*mangliu*' (vagrant population) in cities and give rise to various social problems (Wakabayashi, 1990). Very little is known about the processes of Chinese inter-regional labour migration, mainly because of the lack of attention from academics and the speed at which the territorial and economic reforms are proceeding.

Migration research in China

Although the People's Republic of China has the largest population of any country in the world, it is only recently that publications of official population data have become available. In 1958, when a period of extreme and dogmatic 'leftism' commenced, population studies in China became precluded. The study of population was then stagnant for the next two decades (Lavelly *et al.*, 1990). With the adoption of economic pragmatism and empiricism in 1978, a robust growth of research on China's population has occurred (Yeung and Zhou, 1991). However, the existing literature is confined to the recent developments since the 1980s and urbanisation has attracted much more attention than migration. Academic studies focusing on population movements are still scarce and many Chinese publications serve non-academic educational purposes in support of the family policy (Lavelly *et al.*, 1990). Western researchers too have always

concentrated on studies of China's population policies like the 'one-child policy' and so on (Yeung and Zhou, 1991).

Prior to the launching of the reform policy, state controls of population movements had substantially influenced migration to and urbanisation of cities and towns (Ma, 1987). In this respect, Kim (1990) has described the changes in migration flows and patterns, and analysed the underlying forces within different time periods since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Special attention was paid to the influences of governmental policies in the spatial distribution of population. It was concluded that the household registration system, together with the rationing system, has served as an extremely powerful instrument for controlling migration. Another macro-study recorded the volume of rural-urban migration since 1949 and examined the temporal patterns of rural-urban migration as well as urbanisation and its relation to economic development during the period (Chan, 1988). Similarly, many other studies made by social scientists in China concentrated on the impacts of economic development on population movements and urbanisation. The research interests of these authors basically conform to the new economic orientation spreading over the whole country (e.g. Liao and Liao, 1989; Tian, 1988).

With reference to the Pearl River delta, Xu and Hu (1988) examined the impacts of the 'open and reform' policy on the growth of cities and towns, and concluded that economic development since 1978 has led to a large number of agricultural workers residing in urban areas. Furthermore, Xu and Huang (1989) found that rural urbanisation has been accelerated by the rapid development of commodity agriculture, secondary and tertiary industries. Transformations are even greater in the core of the delta, where many industrial towns have emerged and attracted a large amount of rural labour migrants. With the aid of the data released locally, Lo (1989) analysed the population changes and urban development with special reference to the spatial policy implications. He noted that spatial inequity had been increasing while social development was lagging behind the needs of the population.

On the other hand, very few migration field surveys have been conducted by individual academics, mainly because of the complexity of bureaucracy and the constraints of limited research experience and financial sources in China. Most of the migration studies in China rely on published population statistics issued by Chinese government organisations (e.g. Yang and Goldstein, 1990; Goldstein *et al.*, 1991; Yang, 1993). These publications, however, seldom provide detailed information on the migration process.

Instead, migrant characteristics and stated reasons for the move are the main parameters recorded.

A large-scale survey of migration was carried out in 74 cities and towns in 1986.¹ Questionnaires were designed to tap the information on migrant characteristics and migratory paths. The stated causes and consequences of the movements also formed the core of the survey. The samples categorised five classes of people: permanent residents, in-migrants, return migrants, temporary residents and out-migrants. The survey results provided valuable data for the analysis of the features, causes and patterns of migration. Based on the data, Goldstein and Goldstein (1991) drew attention to the socio-demographic differences between the permanent and temporary migrants in cities and towns. Under the migration controls of the Chinese government, temporary migration was found to complement or even substitute for permanent migration in coping with the rural surplus of labourers while satisfying their strong desire for urban amenities.

In 1987, another large-scale migration survey was instituted in nine coastal provinces, where have long been the most developed regions in China.² The aim of the study was to analyse the development of small cities and its relation to migration. Four small cities in each of the nine coastal provinces were selected to conduct about 300 household surveys, the results of which, however, were again confined to the migrants' characteristics and their explicit reasons for movement.

As an individual researcher, Li (1989) conducted a pioneering field survey in the Pearl River delta to elicit some aspects of the process of labour mobility. With the help of a questionnaire, 357 in-migrants were questioned in seven small cities and towns. In addition to the typical migrants' data, the migratory paths were examined and believed to be shaped by the information flows and the existence of intervening opportunities.

Nonetheless, most studies of migration in China rely heavily on secondary data and are always articulated with studies of urbanisation or population policies. There is an urgent need for detailed studies of the labour migration process which is still not yet explored in a serious and systematic way.

¹ Chinese Academy of Social Science, Population Research Institute, ed. 1988. *Sampling Survey on Population Migration of 74 Cities in 1986*. Beijing: Population Research Institute. (in Chinese).

² The Research Committee, ed. 1989. *Development of Small City-Towns and Population Migration Along the Coastal Regions in China*. Beijing: China Financial and Economic Press. (in Chinese).

Research questions and propositions

Based on the two stages of migration identified above - departure and arrival - seven questions can be constructed as follows:

1. How do people in rural areas become aware of opportunities in the city?
2. What are the main reasons for the migrants to leave their villages for the city?
3. Do the migrants have any specific destination to move to when they leave the villages?
4. How do the migrants adapt to the working and living environments when they first get to the city?
5. Are there any differences between the migrants' expectations and actual experience of the working and living environments in the city?
6. How do migrants maintain contact with the people in the villages?
7. Where do the migrants consider for permanent residence in the future?

The migration process, to be more specific, can be divided into two major stages, the decision-making process in the village, and the adjustment process in the city. Grounded on this division, six propositions are stated for the research in Shunde.

1. Since the introduction of the agricultural responsibility system in 1978, a large percentage of the rural labour force has been released from farming activities. The rural surplus of labourers has been partly absorbed by industrial enterprises in towns and cities. Among the labour migrants, young females are predominant, mainly because of the nature of the factory work and the preferences of the factories.

2. Decision-making about migration may not be as simple as a single consideration of economic need. Given the Chinese cultural background, factors like social and kinship ties may affect one's decision to move or not to move. The aspiration of upward social mobility and the perception of opportunities elsewhere are also taken into consideration.

3. Since mass media are not widespread in the remote rural areas of China, village people obtain information mainly from friends and relatives who know about employment opportunities and living conditions in towns or cities. Their decisions to move or not to move principally depend on this limited information.

4. During the migrants' arrival at the destination (in this case Shunde city), many of them may encounter problems like finding accommodation and work. However, most of the problems can be solved with the assistance from acquaintances in Shunde.

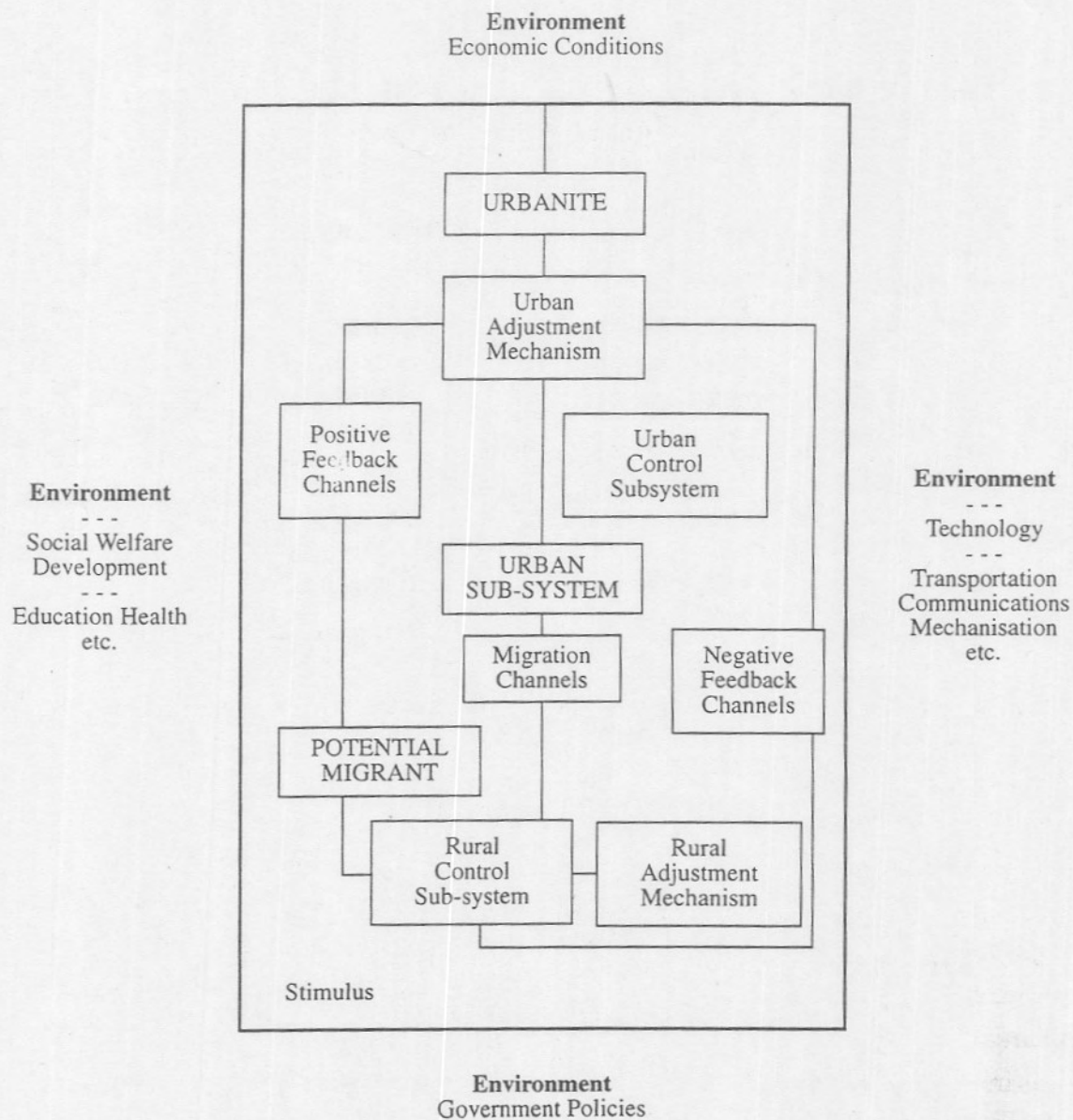
5. The migrants may keep a strong link with the village community, by means of letters, remittances and visits.

6. Under the migration controls of the Chinese government, most migrant workers expect to return to the villages after a period of time, although they may prefer to stay in Shunde or move to other cities.

Conceptual framework

In this study, Wolpert's behavioural theory (1965) is adopted as an initial conceptual base to analyse the migrants' decision to move. In his concept of migration behaviour, migration is defined as 'a form of individual or group adaptation to perceived changes

Figure 1 A system schema for a theory of rural-urban migration (after Mabogunje, 1970)



in environment, a recognition of marginality with respect to a stationary position'. Migration is thus considered as one of the population's reactions to the net utilities they have in a certain place. People will satisfy their needs and desires by moving to a place of higher utilities. Wolpert further defines the concept of place utility as 'the net composite of utilities which are derived from the individual's integration at some position in space...place utility may be expressed as a positive and negative quantity, expressing respectively the individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with respect to that place'.

Apart from actual experience of places, information on potential destinations has to be obtained from various sources. Information, however, may be imperfect or incomplete. After evaluating the differences in the place utility among different places, people may choose to stay and adjust to the present environment, or move to a place of higher place utility.

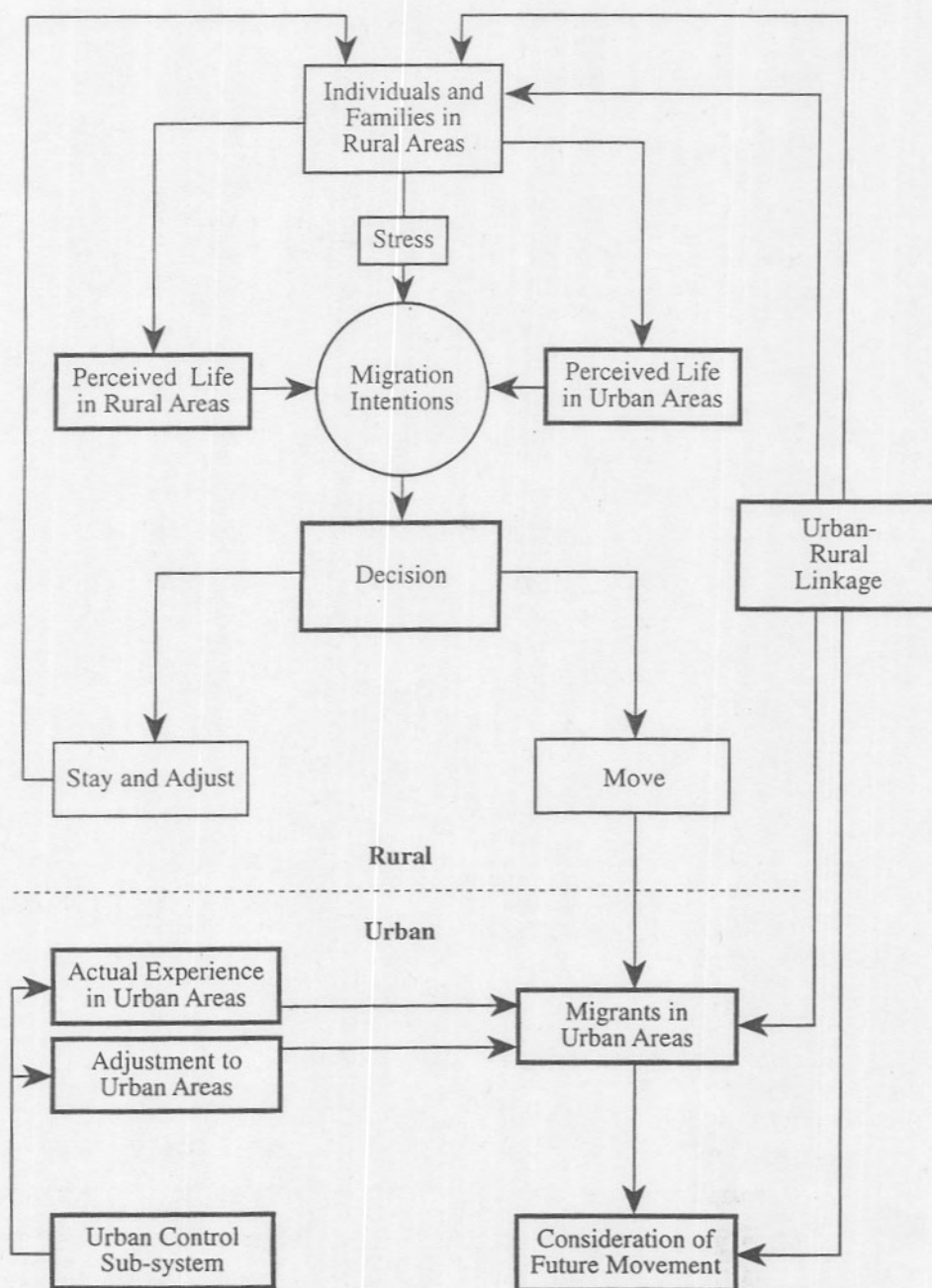
In the second part of this study, Mabogunje's 'systems approach to a theory of rural-urban migration' (1970) is employed as the conceptual framework to examine the labour migrants in Shunde city. The rural and urban control sub-systems are the two important sub-systems which govern the operation of the general system and the flows of migration in the system (Figure 1). In this study, the urban control sub-system is used to scrutinise the labour migrants in the urban area, Shunde city. It encourages or discourages the migrants to be absorbed into the urban environment, mainly through the operation of residential and occupational factors. The presence of acquaintances may be beneficial to the migrants' adjustment process in the city.

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of the labour migrants' migration process to Shunde. The upper half of the figure shows how a migrant concludes a decision to move or to stay. In the field surveys in Shunde, there were some specific questions concerning the retrospective information on the process of migration decision making. The process of migrants' adaptation to the urban area is outlined in the lower half of the figure.

People may frequently evaluate the positive and negative factors of the place they are living in, and respond to the resulting stress when their needs are not being satisfied. The migration decision, together with the migration intentions, is one of the outcomes from the stress they are facing (Wolpert, 1965; Hugo, 1978). A potential migrant in the rural area may perceive the advantages and disadvantages of life in his or her village as well as in the city. After obtaining information on the potential destinations from various

sources, s/he may evaluate whether s/he should move to the city, or stay where s/he is and make some adjustments. If s/he decides to move to a city, s/he will actually experience urban life and adjust to the new environment as necessary. The situation of a migrant in the city forms another important stage of the migration process for this study. Through various forms of contact, linkages between the migrant and the people

Figure 2 A simplified schematic representation of a labour migrant's migration process to Shunde in the Pearl River Delta



in the village develop and serve to maintain the migrant's position in the village on the one hand and act as a cushion for him or her to adjust to the new environment on the other. Eventually, the migrant may reconsider the factors in the new context for a decision to move or to stay, taking new constraints into consideration. Under the migration controls system in China, the migrant may eventually have to return to the village.

A final conceptual point to consider is the definition and measurement of migration within the context of this study. Numerous terms have been used to describe various types of population movements observed in human history. Geographers and other social scientists have been trying to accomplish a more comprehensive overview of various types of mobility, of which commuting, circulation, and migration have received most attention (cf. Skeldon, 1990). Circulation, according to Zelinsky (1971: 226), is 'a great variety of movements, usually short-term, repetitive or cyclic in nature, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long-lasting change in residence'. Hugo (1978), in his study in West Java, set a discrete time frame to define the types of movement. While commuting referred to the daily movement to a city to work or attend an educational institution, circulation was considered to involve the mover's absence for continuous periods up to six months and migration was the movement away from the village for longer than half a year. Similarly, Mantra (1978), in his study in Central Java, considered all types of daily mobility as commuting. Circulation referred to movements from one night to one year and migration involved intentional movements for at least a year. In this study, the movement of labourers from Chinese rural areas to Shunde city is regarded as migration, based on the definition that there involves a change in residence for three months or more.

Research methodology

Being one of the fastest developing cities in the Pearl River delta, Shunde city is selected as the study site for its representativeness as a typical place of destination of labour migrants, who may conveniently travel along the Beijing-Guangdong Railway. As Bilsborrow (1984: 92) has suggested, for a migration survey 'judgement selection' can be 'used for selecting first and second stage area sampling units (such as cities and villages) intended to be representative of an area'.

In the absence of up-to-date secondary data to construct a proper demographically-based sampling frame, factories were selected as the area frame for sampling the migrants, mainly because it has been noted that most labour migrants are employed by factories and are usually living in the quarters provided by the factories (Xu and Huang,

1989). Furthermore, conducting interviews within factories minimised the time and cost of the fieldwork.

Labour migrants were defined in the survey as industrial workers whose residence had been changed to Shunde city for at least three months and for at most five years. This is a simple but concrete definition for the identification of suitable migrant workers. To be more specific, all the migrant workers of age 16 or above in the selected factories were the target population. The minimum time span of residence change was set at three months because a substantial part of the migration transition related to the adjustment process in the urban environment. On the other hand, five years was fixed as the maximum time span to avoid confusions and unreliability of the retrospective data collected from those who had migrated too many years ago.

The survey was carried out with the aid of a questionnaire which consisted of six sections: 1) characteristics of the migrants, 2) the migration decision-making process, 3) information on the opportunities in the destination, 4) the adjustment process in the new environment, 5) urban-rural linkages, and 6) the consideration of future movement for permanent residence. There were altogether 74 questions. Except three questions about the migrants' attitudes, all of them were set in a close-ended form to avoid migrants' inability to comprehend and answer.

Prior to the field survey, several visits to Shunde had been made to contact the managerial staff of the selected factories. In the meetings, interview procedures and matters related to the research were discussed.

During these visits to Shunde, the working life of the labour migrants was also observed. It was found that migrant workers usually lived in dormitories provided by the factories. However, the living conditions were generally poor and migrant workers had to share congested rooms with others. Those who lived in privately rented apartments tended to stay within walking distance of the factories in order to minimise the time and money spent in travelling.

The life was a routine one. The migrant workers usually had to work for ten to twelve hours a day and six or even seven days a week. Some of them preferred to work harder in order to gain maximum financial return during their stay in Shunde. Besides, when the factories were rushing to meet the deadlines of the orders, they had to work overtime as requested for fear that they may be condemned and lose their jobs. From Monday to Saturday or even Sunday, they got up early in the mornings and started working until

With the exception...

did not provide the workers with leisure facilities. However, going out was not much for them. Some migrant workers stated that they would only go shopping in the market on Sundays and holidays.

Apart from these direct observations on migrants' working and living conditions, talking with the migrants, managerial staff and local people gave a more complete picture about the labour migrants' life in Shunde. The information not only helped to avoid bias in the selection of factories to conduct the interviews, but also justified the reliability of the data collected in the field surveys.

The fieldwork started in July 1992 and lasted for six months. The period between July and December was chosen deliberately to avoid some important holidays. Among the festivals of China, most labour migrants make a return visit during the holiday of the Chinese New Year and usually stay up to a month. After the new year period, migrant workers return to work and more importantly thousands of new migrants follow their counterparts to seek employment away from home. It was thus equally critical to conduct the survey well after the new year period so that the probability that unqualified new migrants might be encountered could be reduced.

In the field survey, 589 industrial labour migrants were interviewed with the questionnaire mentioned above. Of these, 521 interviews were considered valid and analysed in the study. There were 167 male and 422 female respondents.

Apart from the data acquired from the interviews and direct observations in the field in Shunde city, secondary data were gathered from the analysis of existing literature, censuses and statistical publications. For instance, the census of 1982 yielded valuable demographic data on China's population, although the census did not include any direct question on migration. Use was also made of the data on population movements in the one-percent inter-census of 1987 and the census in 1990. These census data provide basic information concerning the trends and patterns of the recent population movements in China.

In addition, some specific migration data were obtained from the migration surveys conducted by the governmental organisations in the 1980s. As mentioned, the two

migration surveys conducted in 1986 and 1987 provide important information on migrant characteristics, the magnitude, the stated reasons and effects of population movements in China. The findings of these surveys helped to corroborate the field survey data collected in the study.

Other specific data on the Pearl River delta and Shunde city are available from the local authorities and universities. For instance, the Geography Department of the Zhongshan University has completed a systematic research of the economic and urban development of Shunde.³ This report furnishes useful background information on Shunde city, some of which was acquired directly from the governmental and university departments concerned and has never been published.

Rural-urban migration in China

Before moving on to the presentation of the results from the interview survey in Shunde city, it will be useful to examine in a little more detail the changing rural-urban migration contexts in China, with special reference to the Pearl River delta.

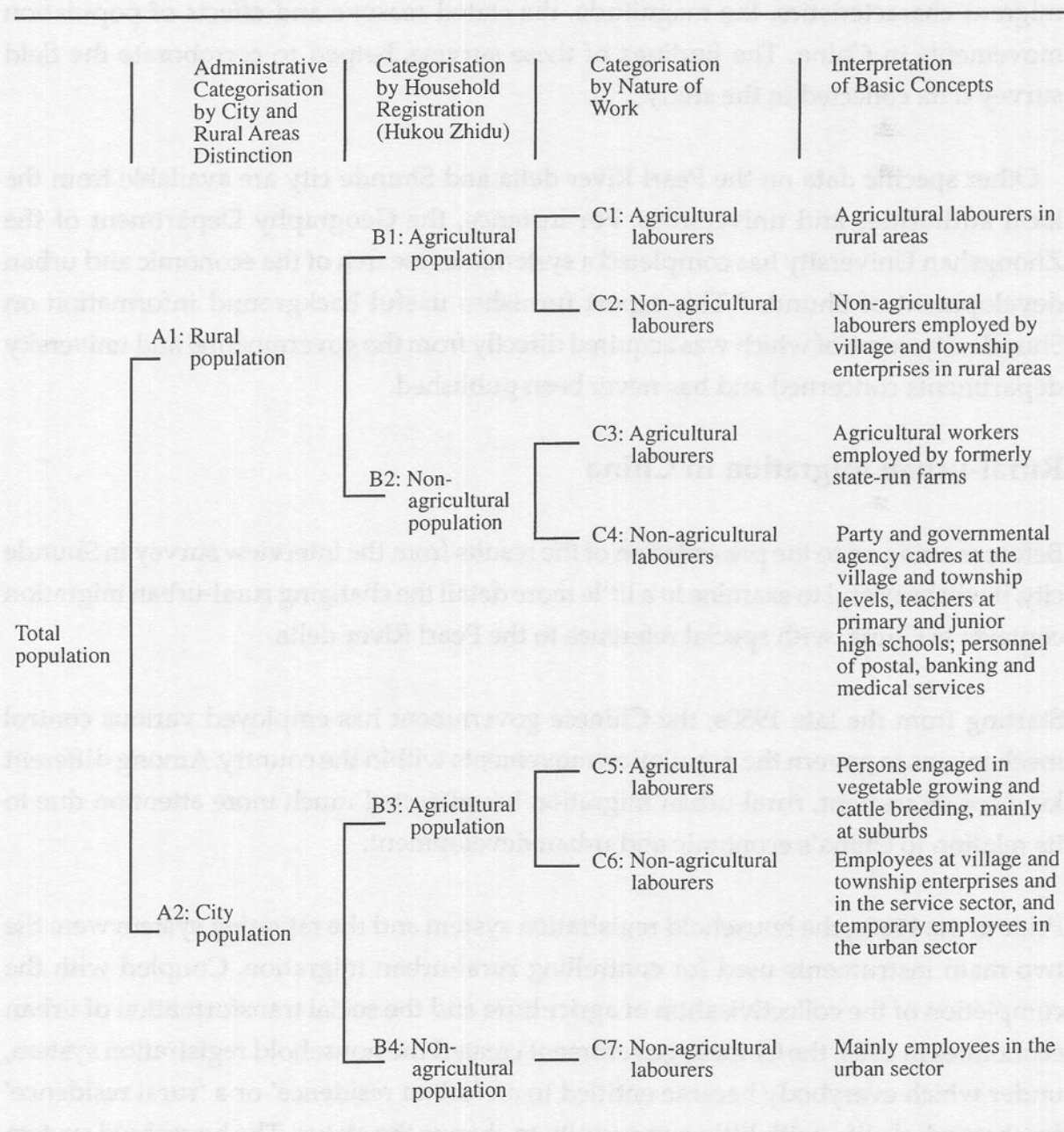
Starting from the late 1950s, the Chinese government has employed various control mechanisms to govern the population movements within the country. Among different kinds of movement, rural-urban migration has attracted much more attention due to its relation to China's economic and urban development.

Prior to the 1980s, the household registration system and the rationing system were the two main instruments used for controlling rural-urban migration. Coupled with the completion of the collectivisation of agriculture and the social transformation of urban economies in 1958, the Chinese government created the household registration system, under which everybody became entitled to an 'urban residence' or a 'rural residence' for their whole life, with little opportunity to change the status. The household system is further supplemented by the rationing system as well as the employment registration system. The three systems are closely related to a common intention of strictly preventing rural-urban migration. Indeed, it is a social system which not only registers the population, but also governs population movements (Yan, 1990).

As shown in Figure 3, the household registration is divided into two categories, non-agricultural and agricultural. The actual place of living does not necessarily relate to

³ Chen, L., Y.Q. Ni and S.J. Situ, eds. 1990. *Research in the Planning of Shunde County*. Zhongshan University Press. (in Chinese).

Figure 3 Concepts of population and labour force in China (after Yan, 1990)



the household registration. In fact, the registration system involves status division rather than the division of rural and urban population. Privileges are given to the non-agricultural population in terms of foodstuffs, insurance, employment and welfare in urban areas. However, people cannot change their agricultural registration unless they (1) enter a college in the city, (2) are a child of a repatriated soldier, (3) are a member of a farming household whose land has been requisitioned, or (4) are a child having the right to replace their retired and repatriated non-agricultural parents (Yan, 1990). Without

the non-agricultural status, people are institutionally prohibited from migrating from rural to urban areas.

Together with the household registration system, the rationing system was implemented in the 1950s to regulate the distribution of almost all foodstuffs in cities and towns (Kim, 1990). Peasants were not permitted to sell their produce to the urban population even if they had an abundant surplus. In urban areas, only the non-agricultural population was furnished with coupons for low-cost foodstuffs. Without access to the basic necessities, the agricultural population found it almost impossible to migrate from villages to cities.

Tremendous changes have occurred in the Pearl River delta since 1978 when the Chinese government introduced the Agricultural Responsibility System, which resulted in greater efficiency in the agricultural sector and also in the release of a large amount of surplus rural labour. In order to stabilise the unemployed labourers and cope with the high speed of industrial development, the Chinese government in the early 1980s promoted rural industrial enterprises in small towns to absorb the labour surplus. The form of commuting to work near the villages was typical of the initial cautious alteration in the migration policy. '*Litubulixiang*' (Leaving the land without leaving the village) is a common Chinese term to describe this peculiar type of labour mobility (Hui, 1988). Through contracts with their rural collectives, rural labourers were hired by county or state sector industrial enterprises as temporary or contract workers. In fact, they were employed by the rural collectives and assigned to urban employment on a temporary basis (Blecher, 1990).

The State Council's decree issued in 1984 further permitted rural labourers to move to designated towns to seek employment in the industrial or service sectors, provided that they managed to arrange their own accommodation and foodstuffs. In 1985, peasants were permitted to be temporary urban residents in cities and towns. Notwithstanding the insecure nature of their residence, they are statistically regarded as urban population. This kind of labour migration is called in Chinese '*Lituyoulixiang*' (Leaving the homeland and the rural area at the same time).

As shown in Table 1, the percentages of population registered outside the respective cities and counties were generally very low in 1982 as compared with the figures in 1990. For instance, Dongguan city recorded nearly a hundred-fold increase in the population registered outside (4,600 in 1982 and 453,202 in 1990). Regarding the whole

Table 1 Population registered outside by cities and counties 1982 and 1990

Cities/ Counties	Population 1982			Population 1990		
	Total	Reg. Outside	%	Total	Reg. Outside	%
Guangzhou	3,148,281	71,151	2.3	3,935,195	1,878,330	47.7
Shenzhen	113,599	2,851	2.5	875,115	507,048	57.9
Zhuhai	133,208	1,505	1.1	334,297	134,566	40.3
Foshan	285,540	4,911	1.7	427,397	79,565	18.6
Jiangmen	216,097	3,328	1.5	294,713	22,999	7.8
Dongguan	1,022,246	4,600	0.5	1,741,724	453,202	26.0
Zhongshan	1,156,775	7,172	0.6	1,237,429	109,023	8.8
Nanhai	820,157	4,921	0.6	1,024,288	123,227	12.0
Bacan	238,272	2,359	1.0	792,245	529,204	66.8
Doumen	240,929	6,224	2.6	301,193	36,625	12.2
Enping	376,733	3,202	0.9	430,123	15,983	3.7
Gaoming	214,184	493	0.2	237,599	5,115	2.8
Heshan	308,364	836	0.3	324,482	5,432	1.7
Kaiping	587,080	3,288	0.6	605,565	21,850	3.6
Panyu	670,333	2,882	0.4	785,527	44,971	5.7
Shunde	807,860	5,251	0.7	965,397	76,436	7.9
Taishan	934,068	5,231	0.6	943,851	23,177	2.6
Xinhui	803,831	3,802	0.5	863,008	16,027	1.9
Zengchen	568,488	2,444	0.4	645,471	15,808	2.5
Sub-total	12,646,045	136,451	1.1	16,766,619	3,669,159	28.6
Guangdong	53,510,930	493,220	0.9	62,829,236	3,809,678	6.1

Source: Population Census Department of State Statistical Bureau. ed. 1992. *China Population Statistical Yearbook 1991*. Beijing: China Statistical Publishing House. (In Chinese).

Pearl River delta, the figure also increased tremendously from 0.13 to 3.66 million, which constitutes nearly 30 percent of the total population.

While enjoying economic benefits, many cities and towns encounter social problems created by the 'vagrant' migrants who were originally rural labourers seeking jobs in urban areas. When the economic activities ebb, they lose their jobs or they cannot find a job and thus become vagrant in urban areas. For example, in 1989, around 2.5 million people came to Guangzhou city and more than 2,000 squatters were sleeping nightly in front of the train station (Wakabayashi, 1990).

In this regard, many special decrees have been issued to regulate the recruitment and employment of migrant workers since the late 1980s.⁴ Employers, for example, have to prove that they are unable to find adequate suitable labour locally before they are permitted to employ workers from other places. In addition, they have to pay the local government many kinds of tax as subsidies for the provisions of extra social services and facilities to the migrants. As a result, many factory employers prefer not to have their labour migrants registered at the local Public Security offices⁵ and thus the figures of the official registration of labour migrants in cities and towns should generally be regarded as underestimates in the Pearl River delta and in other regions as well.

With this legislative and bureaucratic background in mind, we can now move on to the presentation of the main findings from the migrants' survey. These will be presented under two main headings, each subdivided: the decision to move, and the adaptation to city life.

The decision to move

Characteristics of the labour migrants

Age and Sex

In the field survey in Shunde, the labour migrants tended to belong to the same sex and age groups. A large proportion of them were females working in factories. As shown in Table 2, 375 out of 521 migrants (72 per cent) were females while only 146 were males (28 per cent). The predominance of female migrants may be due to the repetitive nature of factory production line, which men may find very boring while working for a prolonged period. The factory employers generally prefer female workers who are believed to be more patient and obedient (Goldstein and Goldstein, 1991).

A good proportion of migrants interviewed were young: 24 or below (67 per cent for males and 79 per cent for females). Males were thus generally a bit older. Although more than half of the males were between the age of 20 and 24, there were nearly a quarter (33 out of 146) aged 30 or above. The females had a slightly younger age profile: more than half of the them (203 out of 375) were between the age of 20 and 24. The adjacent two age groups (15-19 and 25-29) contributed most of the remainder (40 per

⁴ Editorial Committee of Guangdong Labour, ed. 1990. *Guangdong Labour*. Guangzhou: Editorial Committee of Guangdong Labour. (in Chinese).

⁵ They are actually police stations.

Table 2 Age and sex structure of labour migrants in Shunde

Age (in years)	Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
15-19	16	11.0	92	24.5
20-24	82	56.2	203	54.1
25-29	15	10.3	57	15.2
30-34	21	14.4	6	1.6
35-39	7	4.8	2	0.5
40-44	1	0.7	3	0.8
45-49	2	1.4	2	0.5
50-54	0	0.0	3	0.8
55-59	1	0.7	5	1.3
60 and over	1	0.7	2	0.5
Total	146		375	

Source: Shunde Survey

The finding that young adults (15-29) predominate amongst rural-urban migrants is per cent of the female migrants (352 out of 375) were aged 29 or below.

The finding that young adults (15-29) predominate amongst rural-urban migrants is common in many migration studies in developing countries (cf. Oberai, 1984). It is generally believed that older adults find it more difficult to adapt to a new environment and start a new life. In addition, older adults may get used to farm work and be content with life in the village, in contrast to the youngsters who prefer different lifestyles and want to gain personal advancement in the city (Caldwell, 1969).

Besides these personal characteristics, young adults can find jobs easier than the middle-aged or the old-aged because they can work much faster and adapt easily to new working procedures. These abilities particularly suit the basic requirements of the labour intensive industries, like most factories in the Pearl River delta. As labour is one of the principal factors of production, the productivity of migrant workers becomes the main concern of the factory employers.

Table 3 Marital status of migrants

Marital status	Number of migrants	Percentage
Single	385	73.9
Married	129	24.8
Divorced	5	1.0
Widowed	2	0.4
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 4 Number of children of married migrants

Children	Number of migrants	Percentage
Zero	67	51.9
One	36	27.9
Two	19	14.7
Three	3	2.3
Three and more	4	3.1
Total	129	

Source: Shunde Survey

Marital status and number of children of migrants

As discussed in the previous section, most labour migrants were between 15 and 24. Table 3 shows that about three quarters (385 out of 521) of the migrants were unmarried and a quarter were married. The number of migrants who were divorced (5) and widowed (2) was relatively small with regard to the total sampled. The low proportion of married migrants may be due to the family ties which would prevent them from moving away from the family in the place of origin (cf. Feng *et al.*, 1989). It is almost impossible for labour migrants to move with their families, because renting an apartment to house the whole family may cost more than what a factory worker can earn.

Table 5 Educational level attained by migrants

Education level	Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Illiterate/ Semi-illiterate	5	2.6	11	2.9
Primary	21	14.4	115	30.7
Junior secondary	84	57.5	234	62.4
Senior secondary	34	23.3	15	4.0
Post secondary	2	1.4	0	0.0
Total	146		375	

Source: Shunde Survey

Among the 129 married migrants, more than a half had no child and about a quarter (28 per cent) had only one (Table 4). Relatively less married migrants had two (15 per cent) and only 5 per cent had three or more children. The 'One Child Policy' in China, which governs the number of births in a nuclear family, may limit the number of children that the married migrants have (Jowett, 1990).⁶

Education level attained

Table 5 shows the level of education attained by the labour migrants. The average education level was low. The factory work in the industrial towns may not be attractive enough to those with a higher education level, who may be able to move to the larger cities and seek better jobs and a higher income.

However, the majority of the migrants had at least a primary education, and the percentage of illiterates was rather low (3 per cent for both males and females). The general education level of the males was higher than that of the females and about a quarter of male migrants had studied senior secondary education or higher. The largest proportion (58 per cent) had junior secondary education and about 15 per cent only attained a primary education. Of the females, a large proportion had only studied primary (31 per cent) and junior secondary education (62 per cent). Surprisingly, only 4 per cent of the females had senior secondary education and no female had studied post-secondary education. In China, significant differences in educational attainments between males and females prevail and males are traditionally encouraged to study more than females. In rural areas, girls start to help with the family and farm work at an

⁶ The National People's Congress of China put forward the policy of 'one couple, one child' in 1979.

Table 6 Occupation before moving

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Farmer	294	56.4
Factory worker	68	13.1
Government official	16	3.1
Technician	12	2.3
Managerial staff	7	1.3
Housewife and student	63	12.1
Unemployed	61	11.7
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

early age. Many parents believe that girls will stop helping the family and leave the household when they get married (Stacey, 1983; Li, 1989).

Occupation in the place of origin

As shown in Table 6, more than a half of the labour migrants (294 out of 521) had been engaged in farm work before they moved to Shunde. A smaller proportion (13 per cent) reported that they had been employed as workers. Housewives and students made up 12 per cent and unemployed people also shared the same proportion. Comparatively few of them were previously employed as governmental (16), technical (12) and managerial (7) staff.

Places of origin

About half of the labour migrants came from other areas within Guangdong Province (254 out of 521), while the other half came from other provinces (267 out of 521). Table 7 shows the details of their places of origin. Of the Guangdong migrants, a large proportion (43 per cent) came from the rural areas of the poorer cities and counties outside the Pearl River delta, compared with 6 per cent of migrants from the rural areas in Shunde. Outside of Guangdong, Guangxi (19 per cent), Hunan (15 per cent), Sichuan (6 per cent) and Jiangxi (5 per cent) were the provinces from which most migrants moved. These provinces are all less developed but close to Guangdong. Owing to the factor of proximity, the employment opportunities and higher incomes have attracted many rural peasants from these provinces, previously employed or unemployed, to seek much higher-paid employment in the Pearl River delta.

Table 7 Places of origin

Place of origin	Number	Percentage
Guangdon	224	43.0
Shunde	30	5.8
Guangxi	97	18.6
Hunan	76	14.6
Sichuan	31	5.9
Jiangxi	28	5.3
Others	35	6.7
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 8 Dialect in the place of origin

Dialect	Number	Percentage
Cantonese	274	52.6
<i>Putonghua</i> (Mandarin)	235	45.1
Others	12	2.3
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Dialects used in the place of origin

While 'Cantonese' is used by most people of Guangdong, '*Putonghua*' (Mandarin) is the most common dialect in China, although minor deviations from the standard pronunciation are always found among different provinces. In the study, respondents were asked to state the one they used most frequently in the place of origin (Table 8). It was found that slightly more migrants spoke Cantonese (274 out of 521) than *Putonghua* (235 out of 521). People in Guangdong and Guangxi usually can understand and speak some *Putonghua*, whereas most people speaking *Putonghua* find Cantonese very difficult to understand and learn. The use of different dialects gives rise to communication problems between the migrants and the local people. Conflicts may sometimes be fomented by misunderstandings in conversation.

Length of residence in Shunde

Table 9 shows the labour migrants' length of residence in Shunde⁷. Most of the migrants had stayed in Shunde for one (25 per cent) or two years (40 per cent). A smaller proportion had been there for three years (15 per cent) or less than one year (15 per cent). Even fewer had stayed for four years or longer (5 per cent). The tendency towards a shorter length of residence was due to the late industrial development in the 1980s. Many migrants came in the most recent years when the factory work became available. In addition, some migrants may have returned to the villages after they had saved up enough money for their expected use.

Table 9 Length of residence in Shunde

Length	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 year	79	15.2
1 year	128	24.6
2 years	209	40.1
3 years	77	14.8
4 years or more	28	5.4
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Perceived life in the village and in the city

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of life in the village

The migrants were asked questions concerning the perceived advantages and disadvantages of life in the village and city respectively. The advantages and disadvantages were regarded as the 'push' and 'pull' factors in the place of origin and destination, following Lee's (1969) conception of positive and negative factors in different places. Negative factors push people to move away, while positive factors pull them to a certain place. In addition to the intervening obstacles and personal factors, the differences of positive and negative factors in places influence one's choice of destination.

⁷ The results are presented in full years. For example, migrants having stayed for 1 year and a half were grouped into the category of 1 year length of residence.

of living in the village is low. People can grow food on their own farms and a basic standard of living does not cost much. The village people can also enjoy a relaxed way of life, which is much less tense than that of the city. Even during the daytime, people can play games or chat with each other in a leisurely way.⁸

Table 10 Advantages and disadvantages of life in the village

Life in the village	Agree		Disagree	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<u>Advantages</u>				
Staying with family and friends	493	94.6	28	5.4
Easier to get help	411	78.9	110	21.1
Low cost of living	329	63.1	192	36.9
Comfortable way of life	384	73.7	137	26.3
Total	1617		467	
<u>Disadvantages</u>				
Lack of job	358	68.7	163	31.3
Low income	300	57.6	221	42.4
Lack of upward social mobility	466	89.4	55	10.6
Lack of entertainments	301	57.8	220	42.2
Hardship of farm work	317	60.8	204	39.2
Total	1742		863	

Source: Shunde Survey

As shown in Table 10, almost all the migrants agreed that staying with family and friends was an advantage of living in the village (95 per cent).⁹ Getting help easily (79 per cent) and enjoying a comfortable way of life (74 per cent) also stood high in the

⁸ In the Chinese society, 'Mahjong' and some Chinese card games like 'Shiwuhu' are very popular. People may gamble in these games and play for a prolonged period each time.

⁹ As in the following tables, migrants were allowed to choose more than one answer in some questions, which resulted in a total number of responses larger than 521.

proportion of agreement by the labour migrants. However, a smaller percentage of migrants considered the low cost of living as an advantage of life in the village (63 per cent).

Regarding the disadvantages, most migrants thought that upward social mobility (89 per cent) was limited in the village. When youngsters get to know the changing world outside the village, many of them may not be content with the traditional way of living. Lack of employment was a 'push' factor for 69 per cent of the migrants while low income was a contributory element for 58 per cent of them. These two factors may not be considered as important as the lack of upward social mobility since the migrants could still participate in the family's farm work and make a living in the village. Many migrants agreed with the view that the farm work was strenuous (61 per cent) and more than a half (58 per cent) thought there was a lack of entertainment in the village. People may go to work on the farm or just work at home for a prolonged period every day. Some may enjoy the slow pace of life, but it can be quite boring for the young adults, especially when urban lifestyles have been introduced to the village. As found in the field survey, the majority of the migrants were young adults aged between 15 and 29.

Perceived advantages and disadvantages of life in the city

When asked about the perceived life in the city, only three out of 521 respondents reported that they had no knowledge at all when they left the village (Table 11). For the rest of them, upward social mobility and employment opportunities were generally regarded as the main attractions of the city. A large proportion of migrants (84 per cent) considered the chance for upward social mobility as the most favourable factor in the city. Factors related to the availability of more employment opportunities (389 out of 518) and higher income (354 out of 518) were also regarded as the advantages of life in the city. Besides, the 'bright city lights' played a significant role in attracting the migrants from the village. Sixty-one per cent of the respondents reported that the availability of more entertainments was an advantage of life in the city. This figure was consistent with findings from rural-urban migration studies in other developing countries (e.g. Caldwell, 1969; Hugo, 1978)

Regarding the disadvantages of the city, more than a half of the labour migrants did not consider the cost of living was prohibitively high (58 per cent). Similarly, many did not think that the separation from the family would cause a problem (53 per cent). However, many labour migrants worried about the difficulty in getting a job in the city (47 per cent). As many migrants were formerly farmers and unskilled workers in the village, they may fear that they would not be employed by the industrial factories. From the

Table 11 Advantages and disadvantages of life in the city

Life in the city	Agree		Disagree	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<u>Advantages</u>				
More employment opportunities	389	75.1	129	24.9
Higher wage income	354	68.3	164	31.7
Chance for personal advancement	433	83.6	85	16.4
More entertainments	316	61.0	202	39.0
Total	1492		580	
<u>Disadvantages</u>				
Difficult in getting work	277	53.5	241	46.5
High cost of living	219	42.2	299	57.7
Distance from family	246	47.5	272	52.5
Many social problems	329	63.5	189	36.5
Total	1071		1001	
No knowledge of urban life	3			

Source: Shunde Survey

migrants' point of view, the large amount of social problems was regarded as the most unfavourable factor of urban residence (64 per cent of agreement). Overall, the migrants' perceptions of life in rural and urban areas can complement their reasons for the movement which were explicitly stated in the other questions.

Reasons for migration

In the questionnaire, there were questions concerning migrants' reasons for leaving the village and moving to Shunde (Table 12). It was found that the reasons were primarily related to the economic motivations and consistent with the migrants' perceptions of life in the village and city. The lack of upward social mobility in the village was a significant factor for the movement (86 per cent). The economic prosperity in cities and towns in the delta may have altered the village people's traditional commitment to the farm. Young adults become aware of the opportunities in the urban areas and desire experience and a higher standard of living. As seen in the table below, nearly 40 per cent of the respondents reported that they wanted to further education or to gain experience in the city. Besides, many migrants left the village because of low income

Table 12 Major reasons for leaving the place of origin

Reason	Number	Percentage
Lack of personal advancement	447	85.8
Lack of employment opportunity	248	47.6
Low income	219	42.0
To further education/ To extend experience	197	37.8
Job transfer	39	7.5
As a dependent	33	6.3
Want to change to urban household	21	4.0
Others	58	11.1
Total	1262	

Source: Shunde Survey

(42 per cent) and limited employment opportunities (48 per cent). The introduction of Agricultural Responsibility System in 1979 released much rural labour from the land (cf. Chossudovsky, 1986; Leeming and Powell, 1990). With the fulfilment of a quota set by the government, the farmers can participate in activities other than the farm work. Many farm households thus let some of their members go to work in towns and cities. In Guangdong, labour migrants from the other poor rural areas are hired to substitute for the local people who have moved away in search of higher-paid employment.

A few migrants moved for reasons other than economic motives. Some followed others as dependents (6 per cent) - mainly the wives or children of an active migrant. Perhaps most people already knew the fact that it is still impossible to change one's household registration only by working and living in the cities. Only a low percentage of migrants moved with the hope of changing to permanent urban households (4 per cent). An even smaller percentage of migrants left the village with a job transfer (2 per cent).

Table 13 shows the migrants' reasons for choosing Shunde city as the place of destination. A large proportion of migrants (50 per cent) moved to Shunde city because they had acquaintances there. Similar situations can be found in many studies of rural-urban migration where families, relatives or friends usually provided the information about the destinations to the potential migrants in the place of origin, and gave assistance to the migrants during their arrival (e.g. Hugo, 1978; Mantra, 1978).

Table 13 Major reasons for moving to Shunde

Reason	Number	Percentage
Having acquaintance in Shunde	259	49.7
Work found there	165	31.7
Higher income work found there	129	24.8
Satisfactory work found there	58	11.1
Better living environment	63	12.1
Close to the place of origin	29	5.9
Others	42	8.1
Total	745	

Source: Shunde Survey

Economic motivations also significantly influenced the migrants' choice of Shunde as the place of destination. Some of the migrants came because work was found there (32 per cent), or they got a job with a higher salary (25 per cent). Fewer moved to Shunde for satisfactory work (11 per cent). As many of them had formerly worked in farming and were unskilled or inexperienced in factory work, they could not be fussy about their jobs. Indeed, in the light of the low incomes in farm work, they would be better off in any job they could get in a factory.

Apart from the employment and income motives, a few of them (12 per cent) enjoyed the better living environment in Shunde, where comparatively more facilities and entertainments can be found in the daytime as well as at night. The proximity to the place of origin, where the migrants' families were, seemed not to have a significant influence on the choice of Shunde as the place of destination. Only 29 migrants considered it as one of the reasons why they moved to Shunde city.

Decision-making mechanisms

Besides the reasons for the movement, it is equally important to know who made the migrants' decision to leave the village and to move to Shunde. The decision-making process could be very complicated and the decision could be made by more than one person. The results of this question are presented in Table 14. The responses between the male and female migrants were quite different. Among the males, an overwhelming proportion (74 per cent) made the decision by themselves. Few of the males reported that their relatives (7 per cent) and friends (12 per cent) made the decision and only two

out of 146 migrants' decisions were made by their parents. The information about opportunities was always provided by the earlier migrants who thus had more chances to participate in the migrants' decision-making process or actually made the decision for the migrants in some cases. Most of the earlier migrants would be their relatives and friends rather than their parents, who would be less likely to move for wage employment.

While more than a half of the female migrants (207 out of 375) made the decision to move by themselves, nearly one-third of the migrants had their decision made by their parents. In Chinese society, the status of the females is still low, particularly for young unmarried females in rural areas (Stacey, 1983). Girls have always been considered a burden to the family and are thought not to be able to contribute much to the farm work for the family (Kelkar, 1990). Their parents may want them to work in cities and towns, seeing that they can receive a much higher income from factory work. Compared with that of the males, the influences from the relatives (5 per cent) and friends (8 per cent) were less significant in the case of female migrants.

More than a half of the migrants (59 per cent) stated that they had decided to move to Shunde before they moved away from the villages (Table 15). Some of them will have had friends and relatives in Shunde so that they were quite certain they would obtain assistance in finding jobs and accommodation there. With the limited information available, their possible destinations may be confined to places they had more information about.

Table 14 Person making the decision to move

Person	Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Migrant himself/herself	108	74.0	207	55.2
Parents	2	1.4	109	29.1
Relatives	10	6.8	18	4.8
Friends	17	11.6	29	7.7
Others	9	6.2	12	3.2
Total	146		375	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 15 Response to the question: "Had you already decided to move to Shunde when you left the place of origin?"

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	305	58.5
No	208	39.9
Unknown/Uncertain	8	1.5
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

On the other hand, 40 per cent of the migrants did not initially decide to move to Shunde. They may only have heard about the employment opportunities in the Pearl River delta from rumours or mass media like newspapers (cf. Guldin, 1992). As they did not have a specific destination to move to, they merely ended up where they could get work and earn a living. Overall, the results complement the notion of the importance of social networks in the migration process, particularly in the developing countries.

Information about opportunities

As stated in the previous sections, the availability of information about urban life and employment opportunities is important in determining whether to move and where to go. However, migrants' preceding knowledge of the urban areas in the Pearl River delta tended to be limited (cf. Luo and Mu *et al.*, 1989). Since the migrants mainly came from the poor rural areas, the costs and difficulties of obtaining information on cities might be much higher (cf. Connell *et al.*, 1976). As a result, most of the village people were inclined to rely on the information obtained from friends and relatives who had moved away and stayed in an urban area.

In the field survey, a large proportion of migrants (55 per cent) obtained information about Shunde city from their acquaintances who had stayed or were staying there (Table 16). This finding is consistent with many migration studies in the developing countries where friends and relatives are usually the main sources of information (e.g. Connell *et al.*, 1976; Hugo, 1978; Chiang, 1983). The other migrants acquired the information from the mass media (8 per cent) or recruitment news (7 per cent), which usually provided the general ideas about the opportunities in Shunde or impressions of the prosperity of the Pearl River delta. Few of them (2 per cent) got the knowledge by previous visits to Shunde. About a quarter of respondents had no information about Shunde when they left the villages.

Table 16 Main sources of information on opportunities in Shunde

Source	Number	Percentage
Acquaintances	285	54.7
Mass media	44	8.4
Recruitment	37	7.1
Visit	11	2.1
Others	23	4.4
No information	121	23.2
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Summary

The majority of the labour migrants surveyed were young, female, unmarried adults. Their average educational level was low and most of them had been previously engaged in farm work. Checking back to the list of research propositions at the beginning of this paper, the first proposition, that females predominated in the factories in Shunde, is confirmed.

A high proportion of the migrants left the village because of the lack of upward social mobility. Comparatively speaking, fewer migrants moved for employment opportunities and higher income. Most of the migrants selected Shunde as the place of destination because they had acquaintances or found work there.

Information about the city was mainly obtained from earlier migrants. Based upon this information, the migrants tended to move where they had acquaintances so that the risks of the move could be minimized. The second and the third propositions are thus confirmed from the findings.

The migrants in the city

Adjustment to the urban environment

The acquaintances in the place of destination not only provide information on employment opportunities, but also offer help to the new migrants upon their arrival. In the study, two thirds of the migrants had some acquaintances in Shunde (Table 17). The presence of family members, friends or relatives is believed to be important in providing information on life and employment opportunities, reducing the uncertainty of movement as well as providing initial help (Hugo, 1978; Chiang, 1983). Of the types of acquaintances, most were the migrants' friends (27 per cent), although family members also formed a significant proportion. Brothers and sisters comprised 17 per cent, spouses 4 per cent and parents 2 per cent. As most of the acquaintances were earlier labour migrants, they were typically young and thus influenced the types of acquaintances that new arrivals might find in Shunde. A small proportion of acquaintances (13 per cent) were relatives of the migrants. A third of the migrants stated that they had no acquaintances in Shunde before they moved. Moving upon limited information, many of them had only vague impressions of the Pearl River delta.

Table 17 Acquaintances in Shunde

Acquaintance	Number	Percentage
No acquaintance	181	34.7
Spouse	22	4.2
Parents	8	1.5
Siblings	88	16.9
Relatives	69	13.2
Friends	140	26.9
Others	13	2.5
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

The migrants' acquaintances should have a better understanding about work and accommodation in Shunde, because they had already lived there for a certain period and experienced more or less the same kinds of problems as the new arrivals did. Hugo (1978), in his study in West Java, also found that more than half of the migrants acquired

their first job with the help of their families and friends in the destination. The situation is similar in China, because the information transmitted through the mass media to the rural areas is relatively limited (Luo and Mu *et al.*, 1989).

Although the Chinese government has relaxed the migration controls and rural peasants can move into towns and cities to look for employment opportunities, they are considered as 'zilikoulianghu'¹⁰ and will not be provided with any institutional help in the place of destination since they are not registered as permanent non-agricultural residents (Kim, 1990; Wakabayashi, 1990).

Table 18 shows the types of assistance received by the labour migrants when they arrived at Shunde. Some 207 out of the 521 migrants received no assistance from any source. However, many large factories in the Pearl River delta provide dormitories for the labour migrants, and the smaller ones may give a housing allowance to subsidise the migrants' stay in private apartments. This may help to solve one of the main problems migrants encounter while staying in Shunde city. In the field surveys, 15 per cent of the migrants stated that they received help related to accommodation. In addition, nearly a half of

Table 18 Help by acquaintance in Shunde

Types	Number	Percentage
No assistance	207	39.8
Providing accommodation	27	5.2
Introducing accommodation	49	9.4
Introducing work	246	47.2
Money	89	17.1
Others	9	1.7
Total	627	

Source: Shunde Survey

¹⁰ The Chinese phrase means the worker who supports his own living in the place concerned. The local government and organisations do not offer any kind of services to those who do not have a local household registration.

It was known from the pilot study visits that many factories in Shunde recruited the workers through social networks. First, they tended to depend on introductions by workers and the other staff who were working well in the factory. This made the presence of friends or relatives within factories important in the migrants' job-seeking. Second, as some of the owners themselves came from somewhere outside of Shunde, they could return to their own places of origin to recruit workers. It is not uncommon that close relatives became the managerial staff in factories although they may not possess the relevant qualifications and experience. Accordingly, workers of a factory may come from the same areas and know each other.

Giving or lending money to the labour migrants was also an important type of assistance. Seventeen per cent of the surveyed migrants reported that they had received or borrowed money from their acquaintances in Shunde. Other than travelling expenses, many of them did not bring much money and had to borrow before they received their first wages, even if they successfully got a job immediately after their arrival. As transportation costs in China are relatively high for rural people, some migrants brought an amount of money just enough for a single trip to the Pearl River delta, intending, or hoping, to find a job immediately to support their living and return. If they are unable to get a job and do not have assistance from home or acquaintances in the place of destination, they probably become vagrant population. As reported frequently in the mass media, many rural peasants could not find a job in urban areas or pay the transportation cost to return home. They try to find jobs in the daytime and sleep in the street or some other public place at night. Many of them do not return until they have earned a certain quantity of money in order that they do not 'lose face' in front of their counterparts in the village.

Although the migrants may have had some kind of assistance upon their arrival, many of them still encountered problems in adjusting to the new environment. Ninety per cent of migrants found the way of life unfamiliar and difficult to adapt to (Table 19). For example, the rhythm of life is much faster in the city. The accepted modes of interaction are also different from that of the village where people are more friendly and are usually familiar with each other. In addition, more than a half of the migrants (60 per cent) found it difficult to communicate with the local people who usually speak Cantonese instead of many migrants' dialect, *Putonghua*. Poor communication may hinder the acceptance of labour migrants by local people. Even from their appearances the labour

Table 19 Problems encountered when arriving at Shunde

Type	Number	Percentage
Unfamiliar with the way of life	469	90.0
Finding accommodation	356	68.3
Finding work	241	46.3
Financial problem	314	60.3
Language problem	224	43.0
Not accepted by local people	109	20.9
Others	24	4.6
Total	1824	

Source: Shunde Survey

migrants are easily differentiated from the local people. Nevertheless, only about one-fifth of them (21 per cent) complained that they were not accepted by the local people.

In addition, many labour migrants encountered problems related to getting accommodation and employment in Shunde. Although many factories provide dormitories, labour migrants still have to look for temporary accommodation when they arrive and have not been employed.¹¹ The situation would be even worse for those without assistance from acquaintances in the place of destination. Two thirds of the migrants had this problem when they arrived. Since most of their acquaintances were also labour migrants and staying in dormitories, they may not be able to offer accommodation to the new-comers. This situation is different from other studies in developing countries which find that migrants may usually first stay with their friends or relatives during their arrival (e.g. Chiang, 1983; Brydon, 1992). Moreover, 43 per cent of the migrants to Shunde had difficulties in finding work. They may not have acquaintances in Shunde and thus had not secured a job in advance before they moved.

¹¹ See also Population Research Institute of the Huadong Normal University. 1989. Development of Small Cities and Towns in Zhejiang. In *Development of Small City-Towns and Population Migration along the Coastal Regions in China*. ed. Research Committee, 287-300. China Financial and Economic Press.

In addition, some were dissatisfied with the jobs recommended by the acquaintances and had to find better jobs by themselves afterwards.

If the problems encountered had been known before the move, three quarters of the migrants stated that they would still leave the village and move to Shunde (Table 20). Apparently, there were net gains in terms of cash income, although they may not be totally satisfied with the working and living conditions in Shunde.

Table 20 Response to the question: "If you would have known the problems in advance, would you still leave the village?"

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	392	75.2
No	129	24.8
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 21 Comparison between life in Shunde and life in the village

	Better		Same		Worse		Unknown	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Income	421	80.8	73	14.0	5	1.0	22	4.2
Job	298	57.2	126	24.2	60	11.5	37	7.1
Living environment	125	24.0	196	37.6	193	37.0	7	1.3
Family life	63	12.1	199	38.2	253	48.6	6	1.2
Friendship	108	20.7	254	48.8	131	25.1	28	5.4
Education	190	36.5	89	17.1	132	25.3	110	21.1
Medical service	148	28.4	135	25.9	84	16.1	154	29.6
Shopping	279	53.6	162	31.1	39	7.5	41	7.9
Cultural life	231	44.3	118	22.6	66	12.7	106	20.3
Social status	186	35.7	122	23.4	68	13.1	145	27.8

Source: Shunde Survey

Experiences in Shunde

In fact, most migrants were satisfied with the salary in Shunde (Table 21). A good proportion of the migrants (81 per cent) received a higher income than previously. Rather less (57 per cent) considered the nature of the factory work better than that of the village.

On the other hand, the migrants held different views towards the life in Shunde. About a third of the migrants (37 per cent) found the living conditions worse than those of the village. Similarly, family life (for 49 per cent) and friendship (for 25 per cent) got worse after they moved away from the village.

Regarding other urban facilities, most of the migrants found the education, medical and shopping facilities better in Shunde than in the villages. Many migrants (36 per cent) thought they possessed a higher social status in Shunde.

Table 22 shows the migrants' expectations and the reality of life in Shunde. The migrants were asked to compare their expectation of life before they moved with the reality of life in Shunde. Two thirds of the migrants found the life they had experienced satisfactory. Similarly, with regard to income, only a small proportion of migrants (17 per cent) stated that they received lower than what they expected before they left the village (Table 23). Generally speaking, a great majority of the migrants felt satisfied with the life and work in Shunde, although the proportions were lower amongst migrants originating from Guangdong Province.

Table 22 Comparison between expectation and reality of urban life

	Guangdong migrants		Other provinces' migrants		All migrants	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Better	44	17.3	147	55.1	191	36.7
Same	125	49.2	58	21.7	183	35.1
Worse	80	31.5	60	22.5	140	26.9
Unknown	5	2.0	2	0.7	7	1.3
Total	254		267		521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 23 Comparison between expectation and actual income earned by migrants in Shunde

	Guangdong migrants		Other provinces' migrants		All migrants	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Better	116	45.7	171	64.0	287	55.1
Same	77	30.3	36	13.5	113	21.7
Worse	38	15.0	41	15.4	79	15.2
Unknown	23	9.1	19	7.1	42	8.1
Total	254		267		521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Urban-rural linkages

While the labour migrants stayed temporarily in Shunde for employment, they tended to keep contact with the people in the village where they came from and where they may eventually return. Of the various forms of urban-rural links, writing home was most popular (Table 24). Far fewer migrants considered telephoning home as the most frequent means to keep in contact with their families. The contrast is due to the disparity of cost between them. The cost of postage is lower than that of the telephone, which is still a luxury item and fairly rare in rural areas.

Table 24 Urban-rural linkage by migrants

Way	Number	Percentage
No linkage	16	3.1
By visit	63	12.1
By post	372	71.4
By telephone	46	8.8
Others	24	4.6
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Nevertheless, letter writing is in no way as important as return visits as a kind of urban and rural link (cf. Hugo, 1978). Due to the cost and time involved, only 12 per cent of the migrants regarded return visits as the most frequent form of linkage. However, the impacts are believed to be most important and thus worth investigation. When the migrants returned home, they brought back money and gifts from the city. Return visits showed the commitment to kinship and friendship ties in the village. Information about the opportunities in the city was also brought back by the migrants. Furthermore, those who encountered problems in adjustment to the urban environment could have the pressure relieved by visiting their families.

More than a half of the migrants had visited the village one (30 per cent) or two times (22 per cent). A third of the migrants had several or regular visits to the village. However, 15 per cent of the migrants (75 out of 521) had never returned to the village in the previous year (Table 25). They may be the recent migrants who had not earned enough money or had not had a holiday to return. In fact, transportation costs in China always hindered the migrants from visiting their villages.

Table 25 Frequency of return visits by migrants since last year

	Number	Percentage
No visit	75	14.4
One	158	30.3
Two	113	21.7
Several	109	20.9
Frequent and regular	66	12.7
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

With regard to the reasons for return visits, nearly 90 per cent of the migrants returned to the village to visit their families or to spend their holidays during the festivals (Table 26). For instance, the Chinese New Year, the most important and longest vacation starting well before the New Year Eve, is when most migrants returned home and gathered with their families.

Table 26 Reasons for return visits by migrants

	Number	Percentage
Visit and rest	216	48.4
Festivals	172	38.7
Work	40	9.0
Others	18	4.0
Total	446	

Source: Shunde Survey

As most of the migrants returned one or two times in a year, they tended to stay longer to be cost efficient: 44 per cent of the migrants stayed in the village for more than ten days (Table 27). A third of them stayed for six to ten days, while the smallest proportion (22 per cent) returned for only five days or less.

Table 27 Duration of visits by migrants

Duration	Number	Percentage
5 days or less	100	22.4
6-9 days	152	34.1
10 days or more	194	43.5
Total	446	

Source: Shunde Survey

A majority of respondents (61 per cent) reported that they were noticed by the village people during their returns to the village (Table 28). Some migrants (58 per cent) stated that they were much respected when they returned (Table 29). Their experiences in the city were admired by the village people who may not have lived and worked in the city. Some may even express their wishes to follow the migrants to move to the city.

Table 28 Response to the question: "Did you find that the people in the village particularly noticed you when you returned?"

	Number	Percentage
Yes	271	60.8
No	175	39.2
Total	446	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 29 Response to the question: "Did you find that the people in the village particularly respected you when you returned?"

	Number	Percentage
Yes	259	58.1
No	187	41.9
Total	446	

Source: Shunde Survey

Table 30 shows whether the migrants had sent money back to their family in the previous year. Seventy per cent of them reported that they had done so. The remittances not only improved their families' living conditions but also showed respect to the family members in the village. Connell *et al.* (1976), in a study in Africa, concluded that remittances served to demonstrate how successful the migrants had been in the place of destination; only those who secured employment sent back remittances.

Table 30 Response to the question: "Have you sent money back to your family in the village?"

Response	Number	Percentage
Yes	366	70.2
No	155	29.8
Total	521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Among the migrants who had remitted home, 90 per cent sent back 200 dollars or less each time (Table 31). The frequency of remittance may depend on the income of the migrants and some may not manage to remit home every month.

Table 31 Amount of remittances

Amount (dollars)	Number	Percentage
Less than 100	148	40.4
101-200	181	49.5
More than 200	37	41.1
Total	366	

Source: Shunde Survey

Finally, the migrants were asked about their preference for, and expectation of, permanent residence in the future. Because of the migration controls in China and the migrants' commitment to the place of origin, most migrants may have to return home after earning enough money.

More than two thirds of the migrants preferred to stay in the towns of Shunde (25 per cent) or in other cities (44 per cent), but only very few expected that they could do so (8 per cent). Under the government controls, rural peasants still cannot become permanent residents in cities or towns although they are permitted to be temporary residents for work. As a result, 92 per cent of them expected to be permanent residents in the place of origin, although only a third of them preferred to do so.

Table 32 Preference and expectation of permanent residence

Destination	Preference		Expectation	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
Place of origin	162	31.1	478	91.7
Shunde (towns)	128	24.6	20	3.8
Other cities	31	6.0	6	1.2
Big cities	200	38.4	17	3.3
Total	521		521	

Source: Shunde Survey

Summary

Most of the migrants interviewed had some sort of acquaintances in Shunde. Although there may be problems in getting work and accommodation, adapting to the new environment and so on, many of the problems could be solved with the help of the migrants' acquaintances. Hence, the fourth proposition, that most of the problems can be solved by the friends or relatives, has been confirmed.

Three quarters of the migrants stated that they would still have moved to Shunde, even if they had known the problems in advance. Indeed, most of them were satisfied with the life in Shunde, they enjoyed higher incomes and better facilities.

Most of the migrants maintained links with the villages while working in Shunde. Letter writing was common. Almost all of them had made return visits to the village. Information about Shunde was also brought back by the returning migrants. Most of them had also sent remittances back to family members in the village. These findings have confirmed the proposition that the migrants keep a strong link with their villages.

Finally, it is found that most of the migrants expected to return to the villages for permanent residence, although many of them would have preferred to stay in Shunde or move to other cities. Thus, the last proposition that the migrants expect to return to the village is confirmed.

Conclusion and policy implications

Since 1978, the implementation of the Chinese economic reform policies has dramatically transformed the industrial and economic structures in both rural and urban areas. The Agricultural Responsibility System was first introduced in 1978 and the people's communes were later dissolved. These changes resulted in a greater efficiency in the utilisation of the rural labour force and led to an abundant labour surplus in rural areas. At the same time, the reform of the enterprise system created a large number of jobs, first for urban residents and then rural labourers. During the early 1980s, the rural industrial enterprises in small towns absorbed many peasants who commuted to towns for factory work. *Litubulixiang* is a common Chinese term to describe the situation in which peasants move from the farm to work in the factory without permanently leaving the village. The control was further relaxed to allow peasants to work in more distant towns and cities except that they had to support their living by themselves. As a result, the relaxation of migration control has significantly increased the number of rural-urban

migrants, especially compared to the planned migrations in the previous decades. In view of the scarcity of migration research on this new trend, this study has concerned itself with the labour migrants' migration process. This paper is an attempt to significantly contribute to the knowledge of new population movements in China.

The labour migrants moving from rural areas to Shunde were found to be predominately young and female. A large proportion were aged 24 or below, and the average age of the men was higher than that of the women. Most migrants were unmarried and had no children or only one. The general education level among the migrants was low, but higher for the male migrants. Coming from rural areas, most of them were previously engaged in farm work. A half of the migrants came from provinces outside Guangdong and used *Putonghua* as their primary spoken language. The long-distance migrants came mainly from provinces like Guangxi, Hunan and Sichuan.

Leaving the village was largely motivated by economic reasons. Most migrants were dissatisfied with the low income as well as the lack of upward social mobility, employment and education opportunities in the village, although they generally enjoyed the more relaxed living environment. The 'rural push' was further accelerated by the 'urban pull' to Shunde, which again was confined to economic motivations. In addition to the availability of jobs, the presence of acquaintances was one of the main reasons for selecting Shunde as the destination to move to. The uncertainty of the move was much reduced by the provision of information and assistance from acquaintances.

Regarding the decision to move, females, as compared to males, were more inclined to rely on their parents. The status of females in the family is still lower than that of males in China, especially in rural areas. Hence their movements may have to be approved and even decided by their parents.

Information on opportunities outside the village was largely transmitted by those acquaintances who were earlier migrants to the city. Information about job availability and accommodation was considered most important in the migrants' decision to move. Furnished with this information, many migrants had already decided to move to Shunde before they left the village.

A good proportion of the migrant respondents' acquaintances in Shunde were siblings, friends and relatives from the same village. A few were their spouses and parents. But a third of the migrants had no acquaintances in Shunde.

After their arrival, the migrants had to secure jobs and accommodation. About two thirds of the migrants obtained help from acquaintances in Shunde. Migrants usually stayed in dormitories provided by the factories. Others received some allowance to live in private apartments near the workplace.

Apart from the difficulties in securing work and accommodation, many migrants encountered problems in adapting to the urban environment. Nevertheless, the life in Shunde was considered to be satisfactory by most migrants, who found the work (higher income, job nature) and the facilities (education, medical service, shopping, cultural life) better in Shunde than in the village. Indeed, only a quarter of the migrants stated that the life in Shunde was worse than their expectation before they moved.

Most migrants maintained some kind of link with family members and friends in the village. Letter writing was the most popular and frequent way to keep them in contact. However, the migrants' return visits more significantly affected the migrants themselves and the people in the village. For the migrants, visiting family members and friends in the village helped to relieve the stress from the working life in Shunde. These visits also maintained their status in the village for their future, permanent return. The village people were better off by receiving the migrants' gifts and remittances. Information on opportunities was also transmitted by the returnees to future potential migrants.

Most of the migrants returned to the village to spend holidays attached to certain festivals. Because of the high travel cost and the lack of other long holidays, they usually returned during the Chinese New Year period.

Following this brief resume of the research's main findings, the paper is concluded by a consideration of some policy implications.

Under the new policies of migration introduced in 1984 and 1985, rural peasants are allowed to move to towns or cities to seek jobs and become temporary residents, so long as they are employed and manage to support their living. This transfer of labour can be beneficial to both rural and urban development and reduce the economic disparity among less developed and more developed regions. Rural-urban migration prompts the transmission of information, ideas and money to rural areas, particularly when most out-migrants have to return sometime after their urban work. This process helps to induce social and economic transformations in rural areas before urbanisation takes place. Nevertheless, as most of the migrants are not eligible for social services in urban areas, they are inclined to maintain economic ties in the village for fear that they cannot

secure the job and household registration in the city. This probably results in an inefficient utilisation of resources like labour and land in rural areas.

On the other hand, further relaxation of the constraints on migrants' permanent residence in the urban area may induce overurbanisation and its consequent social and economic problems, which in turn puts heavy burdens on the government to provide extra social services and facilities. As a result, careful planning should be carried out to control the inflow of migrants and the corresponding development of cities and towns to cope with the changes. Publicity and education can be given to rural peasants to offer them a better understanding of working and living conditions in towns and cities in order to eliminate the 'blind' population movement, which is regarded as a source of social disruption in urban areas.

In addition, the emergence of large numbers of temporary residents creates a dual class structure in urban areas. Although labour migrants are allowed to stay temporarily in cities, they are not provided with housing, foodstuffs and other subsidies and have to support themselves completely. For a better management of the labour migrants, more care should be given to govern the working and living conditions in the workplace. Institutional help may alleviate the migrants' problems in adapting to the urban environment.

In attempting to further contribute to knowledge about population movements in China, there should be further comparative studies of specific groups of labour migrants. Studies of male and female migrants or studies among migrants from different provinces would be particularly worth further investigation. This paper has uncovered, at a rather elementary level, some interesting gender and geographic origin differences. A more thorough investigation of these and other cultural differences would contribute to a more complete understanding of what is probably currently the greatest labour migration the world has ever known.

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