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Internal migration in China: origins, development, and effects on the city of Chongqing

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Table of contents

中文序言 – Chinese preface	1
CHAPTER 1 – The transformation of China and internal migration	4
CHAPTER 2 – Migrant workers in China, focus on regional differences	26
Overview of rural-to-urban migrants in China in a national context.....	26
Basic characteristics of migrant workers.....	34
Overview of migrants’ destinations: Xinjiang, Jiangsu, and Liaoning.....	40
CHAPTER 3 – Study case: migrant workers in the city of Chongqing	52
Conclusions	62
References	65

中文序言 – Chinese preface

在过去的几十年里，中国见证了人类历史上最大的迁徙潮。在后毛泽东时代，随着户籍制度的逐步放宽，大约有 3.4 亿中国人(Chan, 2013a)从其家乡到远在千里之外的其它城市寻求更美好的生活。如此规模的迁徙活动势必会引发争议，而争论的核心是迁徙活动对当地所产生的影响问题：目的地城市的居民是否从迁徙者的涌入中受益？此外，对当地所产生的影响是至关重要的，因为如果接收城市的人民遭受到迁徙活动的严重负面影响的话，那么无论国家层面的潜在收益如何，劳动力流动的进一步改革将在政治上产生分歧，在道德上也存在争议。不幸的是，迁徙对当地的影响往往不清楚。一方面，农民工引入是新的就业理念，增加劳动力供给，给其新家带来客观收入并为当地城市创造繁荣。另一方面，新移居者也与当地争夺工作岗位，造成拥堵，推高房价。

1949 年中华人民共和国成立后，中国近代史可分为两个时期：1977 年以前的社会主义计划经济时期和 1978 年以来走向社会主义市场经济的改革时期。每个时期都有不同的内部迁移模式(J. Shen, 2013)。1950 年代至 80 年代初，实行严格的户口登记制度(Cheng & Selden, 1994)。在此期间，包括从农村向城市地区迁移在内的国内迁移活动受到严格控制，其中主要的迁移流向是从东部地区向中西部地区迁移，通常是由农业工人、城镇居民和士兵参与的有组织的迁移形式(Liang & White, 1996)。这一时期包括 1966 年至 1976 年的“文化大革命”，当时约有 1700 万城市青年在“上山下乡”运动中下乡(Ren, 2003)。这些青年大多在“文革”结束后返回城市和家乡。1985 年以来，严格的户籍制度放宽，允许中国人移居外地成为临时人口组成的一部分，也称为“流动人口”，不改变户口登记地(J. Shen, 2005, 2013)。因此，中国的人口流动显著增加。1982 年至 1990 年间，临时人口从 610 万增加到 3960 万，然后大幅增加到 2000 年的 1.09 亿，并在 2014 年达到峰值 2.53 亿，然后在 2017 年下降到 2.44 亿(Ye & Chen, 2013)。统计包含那些无论何时到达且在他们迁入居住地没有落户的所有个人，其中不包括在目的地已经落户的。

近些年跨省流动人口的增长与临时人口的增长密切相关，其中包括省内流动人口。1985年至1990年间，这五年内改变常住省份的流动人口为1100万人。从1995年到2000年，同比增长了三倍，达到3390万，然后从2005年到2010年几乎翻了一番，达到6060万(J. Shen, 2013)。尽管改革开放期间中国人口增长速度显著放缓，但由于户口政策的放松以及工业化、城市化和经济的快速发展，特别是在中国东部地区，人口流动大幅增加(M. Lu et al., 2019)。最近在中国西部也经历了同样的过程(Vendryes, 2011)。在此背景下，本论文研究了中国内部迁移的强度、特征和空间格局。

中国的行政区划分为国家、省、地、县、乡五级制。省份被划分为四个区域：东部、东北部、中部和西部，但这些都不是正式的行政区划分(National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011)。中国大陆划分为31个省级行政区，包括22个省、5个自治区和4个直辖市（北京、重庆、上海和天津）。

正如后文所示，本文的案例研究是重庆市内的迁移模式，并例证了它们的特征。此外，还将简要分析其它三省的迁移模式和迁移特征，以证明户籍改革的好处。这些省份是：辽宁、江苏和新疆。选择这些省份的原因是因为它们地理位置属性上的差异，并且它们都有大量的农民工流入。

移徙是一个选择性过程，特别是受年龄和受教育程度等因素的影响。本文试图考察中国流动人口的特征，特别关注性别、年龄和教育等因素，最后根据流动的原因解释流动人口的选择性。例如，登记迁移的性别比（男性/100女性）为110.5，高于2010年总人口的104.9，表明中国男性流动人口略多于女性流动人口。然而，在考虑移动距离时会出现变化。女性在县内迁移中的流动性高于男性，而在县际和省际迁移中则相反(J. Shen, 2020)。换句话说，女性更有可能短距离移动，但不太可能长距离移动。男性和女性迁移活动在20岁时达到顶峰，强度分别为33.80%和35.95%。15-46岁男性和15-49岁女性的这一比例超过15%，15-20岁之间急剧增加，这可能与学业完成有关。男性和女性省内迁移强度在17岁时达到峰值，分别为24.33%和26.77%，而省际间迁移强度的峰值男性为25岁，女性为21岁，分别为14.64%和12.37%。虽然男性的跨省迁移强度较高，但女性经常从事婚姻迁移(Fan, 2002)，并且在青年时期表现出比男性更高的省内迁移强度。

迁移的主要原因包括工作及经商（39-50%）、作为家属搬迁（11-17%）以及学习和培训（10-12%）。考虑移动距离时会出现重要的变化。与其他国家一样，长途移民主要与就业有关，超过69%的跨省女性移民和79%的男性因工作和经商而搬家，而作为受抚养人搬家的男性和女性的比例分别为7%和11%。

关于农民工的目的地省份，重要的是要考虑地理上的邻近性。所选的三个省份和案例研究都存在大量农民工从农村向城市化地区的内部流动。然而，它们也吸引了来自其它省份的移民。辽宁省吸引了来自东北其它两省的移民，尤其是黑龙江省的移民(Shi et al., 2020)。江苏境内的迁入者也很丰富，但都是从北向南。像江苏省的省际移民主要来自毗邻的安徽省，其中河南省也有大量流入。新疆和其他省份一样，内部也有大量迁徙者，从南到北。流入新疆的迁入人员主要来自四川、甘肃和河南(Shi et al., 2020)。在重庆市，85%的外来务工人员来自重庆其它地区，流向多由东向西流动，重庆东部多为农村或山区(Y. Su et al., 2017)。

大多数人口迁移多采取以“省内流动”、“农村向城市”、“临时”的迁移方式。“省内迁移方式”特别是指那些沿海省份，其省内欠发达地区的迁出者向其沿海其它城市的迁入方式，不过近些年则发展成为向中国西部地区迁移的趋势。这意味着大多数迁移者在目的地没有当地户口的情况下搬家。为简单起见，户口人口的增加通常被称为正式的城市化过程，而没有户口的临时人口的增加被称为非正式的城市化过程(J. Shen et al., 2002)。总而言之，自1980年代初以来，人口流动显著增加。大多数迁移采取临时的、农村到城市的、省际迁移的形式，特别是沿海城市，以及最近向中国西部的迁移。这意味着大多数迁移者在目的地没有当地户口的情况下搬家。因此，内部迁移与中国近几十年来快速的城市化进程密切相关。这也反映在重庆的动态发展过程上。

CHAPTER 1 – The transformation of China and internal migration

Origin, history, and evolution of rural-urban migration, with a mention to hukou and its relationship with migration

This first chapter will give a general overview and description of the flows of migration inside China¹ since its foundation in 1949. The patterns of urbanization and the policies enacted since 1949, have long been under analysis by many scholars and experts. Even though controlling, directing, or blocking the flow of people has been of great concern for the governments of most developing countries, there is no doubt that China has managed this operation quite successfully, especially under the Maoist regime. This “Chinese Model” has numerous characteristics and has gone through many changes, for instance the employment of large numbers of workers emigrating to large cities to work as cheap laborers, the rigorous management of rural-urban migration with the help of grain rationing through the use of commodity ration coupons (居民计划配给体制 – *jumin jihua peiji tizhi*) and household registration (户籍制度 – *huji zhidu*), simply known as hukou (户口), and the development of employment in the rural areas thanks to the creation of industries in the countryside.

With regards to China’s hukou system, it is thought to be unique in its structure and implementation, and it is definitely complex in its regulation and control over its citizen’s internal movements. However, there are similarities between the existing systems of *hoju*, employed in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, or the *ho khau*, employed in Vietnam. These countries, China included, which are one-party states guided by communist and socialist principles, borrowed the structure of these migration control systems from the *propiska* system used in the former USSR.

¹ Unless specified otherwise, the word China is used to refer to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), excluding Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.

Although the modern hukou system has its origins in communist China, the system of registering populations and households was first implemented by earlier Chinese imperial dynasties. Before the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949, the adapted registration procedure was used for collecting vital statistics, which were then used to calculate taxes and for determining the required military service. Only under particular circumstances was this system utilized to limit and control certain fringes of the population, specifically during periods of turmoil and conflicts (Wang, 2006).

It is important to understand that the hukou system which was in place before 1949 was not thought as an all-embracing economic and social tool for controlling the people. The piecemeal evolution of a new and more inclusive system, which took place during the 1950s, was a direct consequence of the implementation of a planned economic regime. This system was taken and adapted from the neighboring USSR, and it was characterized by a scrupulous control and organization of all aspects of society, a rational, yet unrealistic rush toward industrialization, which further enlarged the gap between the cities and the countryside (Naughton, 2007).

This exaggerated rush for industrialization, which used a “social development strategy” is a common denominator for other communist regimes as well, and is infamously known for the creation of great inequality between the primary sector, typical of the countryside, and the secondary sector, commonly found in urban, industrialized areas. The impact of this differentiation is still visible in contemporary China, as is demonstrated by the outflow of people from the countryside. During the 1950s, when China put forward and accelerated its industrialization policies, vast numbers of peasants migrated to the cities. The temporary “constitution” of the People's Republic of China² of 1949 allowed citizens freedom of residence, movement, and migration. It was then reiterated, and formally recognized in China's first Constitution in 1954. However, between 1955 and 1957 the government took measures to contain the movement of people, such as requiring of travel documents, or similar types of administrative controls in the largest

² The temporary constitution was a set of guidelines to abide by, known as Common Program (共同纲领 – Gongtong Gangling) in place by the National Committee of the Chinese People's Republic of China Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议全国委员会 – Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Quanguo Weiyuanhui).

transportation junctures (Tien, 1973). This category of migrants from the countryside was frowned upon, and often referred to in demeaning terms, and thought of as belonging to the lowest strata of society (Tien, 1973). This was a clear indicator that a more austere and rigorous mechanism was needed to restrain, or at least regulate and filter out certain unwanted groups of people. During this period of time the hukou system became an instrument that the central government used to decide where to allocate people.

In 1955 the system used to record the residence of people in cities was extended to include the population in the rural areas (Cheng & Selden, 1994). Three years later, in 1958, the final codification of the hukou system (户口登记条例 - hukou dengji tiaoli) was approved and implemented. This law, which was promulgated by the National People's Congress still stands to this day, and constitutes the only legislation regarding residence and migration that covers the whole nation. The most impactful additions to the law, imposed that people who wanted to migrate needed to obtain departure permission from local authorities, as well as arrival approval from local authorities in the destination. It imposed that each person would be classified into one of two categories of hukou, either rural or urban; and that children of migrants would inherit the mother's type of hukou (this specific part was amended in 1998 thus allowing men the right to pass on their hukou status to their children) (Han et al., 2015; National People's Congress, 1958).

To understand the nature, the types, and the motives of migration, a brief explanation of the relationship between the hukou system and the strategy for industrialization is needed. Founded on the preexisting state, in order to promote industrialization, the central government consciously established a binomial society and economy. The priority was of course set on the industrial sector, which was predominantly situated in the cities, and the nationalization of China's economy came hand-in-hand with this phenomenon. All the enterprises, industries, and firms were of course State Owned Enterprise (SOEs), meaning that they were under strict and direct control of the government. These were supported, managed, and protected by the State. Furthermore, with this form of State support, these SOEs provided the workers with subsidies for themselves and their

families, social welfare, thus attracting people to work in these SOEs, and creating many different migratory paths inside China. Even though this implemented welfare system covered essential needs, it was still quite costly, and was only provided to a few sectors of primary importance (Chan, 2019). This welfare coverage was held at a constant 15-16% from 1955 throughout 1978 (Chan, 2019). The remaining approximately 85% of the population was kept in the background. It was not prioritized, and was beyond the government's main concerns. This larger part of the population, and the connected means of production, were collectivized, and considered as mere supply of cheap labor, cheap human capital, and goods for the massive socialist state machine.

To fully understand how the hukou system has defined migration, it is necessary to look at its changes across history, its importance, the various ways to classify hukou, and how the hukou can be converted. Every Chinese citizen was and is assigned a hukou based on two characteristics: the type of hukou, and the residential location. As mentioned above, the most important differentiation is the type (类别 – leibie) or nature (性质 – xingzhi) of hukou into two: agricultural (农业 – nongye) hukou, and non-agricultural (非农业 – feinongye) hukou, or simply known as urban hukou (Zeuthen & Griffiths, 2012). Ever since it was implemented, this classification prescribed how much a person could buy and use of the goods and services provided by the state, such as the minimum rationed amount of grains obtainable through rationed grain coupons (粮票 – liangpiao). As already explained, it was the existing rural-urban economic divide which gave shape of the agricultural hukou and urban hukou distinction, and as the system was adapted over time, the distinction between the two types failed to take into consideration the social position and/or the occupation of the holder. The difference between hukou status set a person's ability to enjoy benefits provided by the state. Urban or non-agricultural hukou holders could enjoy far more benefits than rural or agricultural hukou holders, such as access to medical care, education for their children, better and more remunerative employment, public housing, higher grain rations, and more benefits (Cheng & Selden, 1994).

Given how strict the policies revolving around the hukou were, and still are, it would be reasonable to believe that a person's hukou status would not change with their change of residence. This is true, unless a person decided to formally apply for a hukou conversion, although the process is very long and expensive. To exemplify this, an urban hukou holder, without concern of their location whether in a large or small city, would be entitled to benefit from welfare services provided by the city of residence. This would be yet another factor that exemplifies the difference between the two hukou types, while promoting the idea that urban hukou has higher value.

Another type of hukou categorization, besides the agricultural and non-agricultural distinction, consists in the hukou residential location (户口所在地 – hukou suozaidi). To further explain, this is a person's official and unique residence, which indicated if they held a local hukou (本地户口 – bendi hukou) in regard of where that person was located.

In regard to migration from the rural areas to urban areas, most people desired a change of their hukou classification, from an agricultural hukou to the most desirable non-agricultural hukou. However, in order to obtain this upgrade, a person needs official permission from the government, which converts an agricultural hukou into a non-agricultural hukou thorough a procedure called nonzhuanfei (农转非). This conversion would also allow changing the location of hukou registration in a specific city. The state set forth the reasons and regulations on how to pursue the change of hukou status. A person would be eligible if they fall into one of the following categories: (I) employers of SOEs (招工 – zhaogong); (II) employers in higher education institutions (招生 – zhaosheng), (III) employers in cadre the system (招干 – zhaogan); (IV) people who need resettlement after land expropriation (征地 – zhengdi); (V) people who resettled for family matters; (VI) people who join the army (参军); and (VII) people who belong into special categories (W. Wei, 2012).

Definition of migrant in the context of China

Migration in China is quite a unique phenomenon in its shape and patterns, and greatly differs from what is generally accepted to be known as migration in the West. China is characterized by large internal movements, and does not include international migration across country borders. Internal migration in China most often manifests itself as movements of people from the countryside to the cities³, and most of these people are migrant workers. Regarding Chinese internal migrants, many terms have appeared to describe the variety of migrants, such as liudong renkou (流动人口) floating population, nongmingong (农民工) literally “peasant workers” referring to those migrants who possess a rural hukou, waidiren or wailai renkou (外地人 or 外来人口) outsiders or non-local population, dagongzi (打工仔) literally “young working man”, dagongmei (打工妹) literally “young working lady”, and xinyimin (新移民) new migrants. During the last decade a new term has also been introduced, yidi wugong ren yuan (异地务工人员, literally “staff from another place”), in replacement of nongmingong, which to some extent has a negative connotation, and could cause discrimination. The children of migrant workers, or the second generation of migrants, who inherit hukou status from the parents are known as xinshengdai nongmingong (新生代农民工, literally new generation of migrant workers).

There are three groupings of migrants that are relevant: those who have a permit that lasts more than six months in location different from their hukou; those who possess a temporary residence permit; and the nongmingong, who are further categorized as local migrant workers who are not employed in agriculture inside their community, such as

³ What are small and big cities? For the sake of having a constant unit of measure, the city tier system will be used as a term of reference. Even though it is not officially recognized by the government, the list compiled by Yicai Global (financial news of Shanghai Media Group) it offers a hierarchical classification. Examples of big cities are those categorized in *First Tier*, such as Beijing (21 million), Shanghai (24 million), or Shenzhen (17 million), and *New First Tier*, such as Chengdu (16 million), Chongqing (urban population of 22 million), Tianjin (13 million), or Nanjing (9 million). Small cities are those categorized in *Third Tier*, such as Kunming (6 million), Wenzhou (urban population of 3 million), Urumqi (3.5 million), or Harbin (5 million), and cities belonging to *Fourth Tier*, such as Hohhot (3.4 million), Sanya (3.6 million), or Ma’anshan (2.3 million).

commuters, and those who are employed for periods lasting more than six months in a location different from their hukou, outside the administrative area of their community.

1984 to today: China, the world's factory and its flows of migration

Since its strict imposition in the 1950s and the stern hukou conversion policies, migration started to increase drastically at the beginning of the 1980s, a completely contrasting figure from what characterized China until that time. The flow of migrants that characterized the 80s and 90s is composed of the physical movement of individuals and/or their families to new locations within the inner area of the country. These changes of location are prompted by different motives, such as employment, family related matters like marriage, or simply to improve one's life.

The peculiarity of China's internal migration phenomenon is that the residency permit, or hukou, can be completely separate from a person's movement. This means that an individual is able to move to a new location, for whichever reason, but cannot access services and welfare which are commonly accessible to members of the local community. For instance, if a person from location Y migrated to city X, they would not possess hukou of city X, making them de facto residence of city X, but not de jure residents of city X. This makes up the difference between local population, with local hukou, and non-local population. This rule also applies to the children of the migrants, who are automatically assigned the parent's hukou type and location, regardless of their place of birth, thus making them de facto residents, but not de jure residents. In other words, these people make up that group that has relocated outside of their hukou jurisdiction, and are cut off from accessing local services. In total fairness, this situation is common not only in China, but it is also observable in other contexts of migration, both national and international. A common phenomenon is to consider these migrants as mere objects, as capital to move and allocate where necessary. These momentary workers are labelled under the terms "mobile population" and "floating population" (流动人口 – liudong renkou). The size of this floating population was approximately of just a couple million when the reforms were newly implemented, but then exploded during the following decades, reaching a figure estimated to be to about 492 million in 2020 ([National Bureau](#)

of Statistics of China, 2021). The largest category of floating population is constituted by rural migrants whose reasons for migration are labor related.

When the Chinese era of economic reform and opening up started, one of their set objectives was to improve the system in use, not demolish it. The state, in regards to migration, imposed tougher regulations between 1978 and 1979 for migrants coming from the rural areas and their hiring process (Y. Lu, 2008). Along with the growing and ongoing process of de-collectivization the number of people employed in rural work was in excess, and this surplus required people to be moved to other sectors. A minor scale improvement was obtained when another category of hukou was introduced in 1984 known as the “self-provided-grain” hukou (自理户粮 -zili huliang), which was initially introduced in small cities (Fan, 2008). People who could apply for this hukou were those migrants working in small cities, but that did not possess nongzhianfei. Given the nature of this hukou with its special characteristics, people who obtained it were automatically excluded from state sustenance. The following year, in 1985, the Ministry of Public Security of the PRC (中华人民共和国公安部 – Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Gong’anbu) allowed migrants to temporarily reside after obtaining a temporary residence permit (暂住证 - zanzhuzheng) (Fan, 2008). This regulation authorized people to travel to and reside in a place different where their hukou is registered, but only temporarily; of course, all the benefits that were granted to urban hukou holders were not provided to migrants who only possessed a temporary residence permit. This plan helped to attract poorly educated people from the countryside to work as low skilled laborers, and occupy positions that other people tried to avoid, as well as to fill in numerous jobs that were created when China shifted gears to maximize its exports at the end of the 80s.

As time has gone by, since the years of the reforms, the Chinese government has slowly but steadily loosened its regulations regarding internal migration, and opted for decentralization of power granting administrative and fiscal responsibilities to governments at the local level. This means that local governments gained the power to determine the flows of migration within their jurisdictions. Many other exceptions were

made to the then existing regulations, which authorized people to become permanent residents, and therefore obtain a local urban hukou, if these followed the imposed criteria.

National and local legal and regulatory framework

Migration patterns

During the last two decades, China has undergone intense fluxes of internal migration. In 2000 the floating population amounted to approximately 79 million, in 2010 it grew to 221 million, and again ten years later, in 2020, it was about 492 million (PCO, 2012). This floating population is made up of people, individuals and families, who do not have a permanent residence permit in the location where they reside. This group is mostly composed of laborers from the countryside that moved to the coastal provinces and other large cities. According to the data provided by the Seventh National Population Census of 2020, approximately 902 million people resided in urban areas, accounting for 63.9% of the population, while in the rural areas there were about 501 million, accounting for 36.1% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). The reason for this disparity is to be found in the practices and policies initiated in the past decades, and the fact that internal migration, development, and poverty alleviation are all tightly linked. When looking at trends of migration inside China, two important factors characterize it: the majority of migrants leave the farmlands to move to urban areas to find employment in sectors not related to agriculture. The flows of labor related migration follow a central and west to east direction, and more broadly, from the inner provinces to the coastal provinces. These elements are intertwined with the shape society and the economy have taken, when observed at a macro level. Once the People's Commune System terminated in 1983, the people living in the countryside were given greater autonomy concerning what to produce, and what quantities to produce. This, and the newly introduced reforms caused the growth of household income for those living in the countryside. Furthermore, the gap in urban-rural income started narrowing. Arguably, even though it is understood that urban-rural income disparity was the main driving force, along with the desire to better one's life, it is necessary to consider other elements which allowed this change, such as institutional changes. Again, during the 90' a surge of rural laborers appeared in

the cities of coastal provinces, after Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour of 1992. In 1994, in the whole country, there were about 60 million migrant workers, in 2000 the number rose to about 88 million, in 2010 the number amounted to about 242 million, more than double, while in 2020 it amounted to about 285 million ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2020](#)). With this sizeable number of floating population, it would be reasonable to expect the countryside to be lacking manpower: 490 million people in the late 1990s compared to 380 million in the mid-2010s. It is, however, estimated that there are approximately 150 million people in overabundance in agriculture ([Kwan et al., 2018](#)). For this reason, underemployment and unemployment in the countryside is viewed as an additional factor that pushes unemployed rural residents to migrate to the cities. Simultaneous to this phenomenon, partially because of the outward flows of migration from the countryside, China has undergone a prompt impulse of urbanization since the reforms. In 1977 the urbanization rate was only at 17.6%, increasing to 26.4% in 1990, 35.9% in 2000, 49.2% in 2010, and 61.4% in 2020 ([The World Bank](#)). It is predicted that the urbanization rate will keep increasing at a steady pace, and possibly even faster, for at least another decade ([Sun et al., 2017](#)).

The flows of migration are in part directed by economic factors, such as the considerable differences in wages between rural and urban areas, as well as between Chinese provinces ([Cai, 1999](#); [Fan, 2005](#)). As previously mentioned, during the past fifty years, the largest group of migrants was composed of people from the countryside, who held an agricultural, or rural, hukou. This is because being employed in agriculture was not fruitful enough, and because in most agriculture driven provinces, there was a surplus of labor force. At this point, fully drawing from Lewis' essay ([Lewis, 1954](#)), a person in the countryside has the choice of staying where they are, but with no job, and therefore with no income, or to migrate and accept a job in a city, which, however, offers a low income.

These migrant workers cross county borders, many times moving from one province to another in order to have better possibilities in life, with higher income, and possibly better living conditions. The majority of people seeking employment outside the borders

of their hukou registration move to nearby towns and small cities, while about a third of the total migrant population moves to the big cities in eastern provinces.

Therefore, disparity between provinces is another cause of labor migration from west to east. Regional disparity is defined as a continuous and substantial per-capita income, unemployment, and wage rates, based on geographic location. This can imply that labor, or to be more precise manpower, moves from provinces where labor demand is scarce, to provinces where the demand for labor is high, accompanied with higher wages (Polese, 1981). The disparity between provinces, or more broadly on a regional level, has historical and socioeconomic origins. The strategies utilized starting in the early 1980 also brought an increase in disparity, such as the implementation of Special Economic zones in the coastal provinces, which had profitable land usage, lower taxes, and akin regulations. These Special Economic Zones attracted and absorbed most of the Foreign Direct Investments that took place in China, which triggered the necessity for an ever-growing workforce. The central government in Beijing has always been aware of the great provincial disparity, especially between east and west, therefore it implemented several local policies as well as a nationwide strategy, such as the “Great Western Development Strategy” (西部大开发 – Xibu Dakaifa). This program came into being in the late 1990s, when the guidelines for the development of the west were clarified. A year later, in 2000, the plan officially started, and was heavily publicized. The program was oriented toward the development of all the provinces in the west, with the city of Chongqing serving as main gateway. The focus was put on Chongqing in the late 1990s after the central government decided to create the Municipality of Chongqing in 1997 separating it from Sichuan province, and put under the direct administration of the central government.

Despite the fact that developed provinces offer numerous employment openings, and most likely higher salaries, a large number of migrant workers have remained in their counties of residence, prefecture, and province to find employment. In comparison, most of those workers who migrated did not actually move to large cities, but rather to middle or small sized cities. Thus, it becomes apparent that a person’s decision to migrate to

another province is guided by many different aspects, and is therefore a conscious decision, based on distance from location of residence, and advantages and disadvantages of making that choice.

Even though there is ample literature regarding China's urbanization and migration paths already in existence, along with more and more precise statistical information accessible in recent years, the analysis of the migratory phenomenon and urbanization still remains a murky subject. This is the case particularly during the 1980s when the quantitative aspects of China's urban growth were inconsistent. For instance, the reports from the State Statistical Bureau (SSB) at the beginning of the 80s reported contradictory data regarding the total urban population in China (Chan & Xu, 1985).

However, it is not possible to have a clear or detailed image of the urban population of China and its composition for the years after 1960, as the first fairly comprehensive set of data was published in 1981 in the Chinese Journal of Social Sciences (Aird, 1982), and later again in other publications like the China Statistical Yearbook of 1981 (Chan & Xu, 1985). Another reason for this inconsistent set of records is to be found in China's Cultural Revolution, a great time of turmoil and social unrest, where the collection of data was impossible.

Although China has relaxed the control of the internal migration hukou registration system since the reforms, there are still different levels of the hukou registration system between large cities and small cities, and even larger differences among provinces (Colas & Ge, 2019). This is because the degrees of availability and accessibility to welfare services such as education, healthcare, and urban infrastructures provided by the state are highly related to the administrative hierarchy of Chinese cities (Colas & Ge, 2019), and generally, the larger the city, the higher the quantity and quality of services are provided. When comparing small cities to larger cities, the hukou policies in small cities are often more relaxed than those in large cities, and in the large cities tended to be stricter with local hukou requirements (Colas & Ge, 2019). Arguably, the levels of welfare a city can provide to their migrant workers, has heavy influence on the flow of migration to that specific city. Based on the above, the obvious conclusion is that China's

hukou registration system, which is still enforced to this day even if it has been changed over the years, still restricts people free migration, thus impeding social mobility, especially in large cities. But at the same time, the hukou registration system plays an important role in China's internal migration. Furthermore, in the process of migration, the income gap between regions is the main reason for the wave of migration. As long as there is a potential difference in economic development between provinces, this will certainly lead to flows of migration, until the level of economic development between provinces is balanced (Wen, 2004; X. Yang, 2010). It is not difficult to perceive this as a paradoxical phenomenon, where provinces that need to develop lose potential workforce and human capital to already well-developed provinces or cities. Due to the income gap between regions, most migrants leave their hometowns for the cities to seek more profitable employment opportunities in developing, or already developed cities (Colas & Ge, 2019).

In China, the only legally recognized form of migration (迁移 – qianyi) is of those who have local residency rights (本地户口 – bendi hukou), and generally available to a limited number of wealthy and highly educated people (Chan & Buckingham, 2008). Only migrants who belong in this category are entitled to benefit from the same rights as actual local residents. Any other form of movement that is not included in that category, is designated as the floating population (人口流动 – renku liudong). As previously mentioned, the latter category of migrants is considered to be in the process of temporarily relocating to their destination of employment, and therefore are not legally eligible to permanently reside. In a province (省级行政区), county (县级行政区), township (乡级行政区), or village (村级行政区) the floating population is not the de jure population, and the size varies from place to place. There are cases in which the local urban population is greater than the hosted floating population, like in the city of Shenzhen (Chan, 2009). When analyzing the data gathered over the years on the floating population, it is necessary to highlight how the numbers can vary, because of the different criteria used for data gathering, purposes, coverage and definition of geographical boundaries, as well as the length of the stay. Based on these details is

possible to further subdivide into several categories the group of migrants that constitute the floating population.

As explained in his research, Chan was able to distinguish at least five groups of migrants, all of which present different characteristics (Chan, 2013b). The **first group** is the largest, and contains anyone who does not possess a local hukou, and it not related to the amount of time spent in their target location. The length of the period can span from one day to many years. Given its broad coverage, this groups incudes many types of people, employed and unemployed, people on business trips, and traders, as well as tourists. This first group, however, being so ample and broad, will not be further analyzed. The **second group** is the systematic and proper floating population, and has a specific legal definition set by the Ministry of Public Security in 1997 (Ministry of Public Security, 1997). The law defines that people who remain in a location which different of that of their registered hukou, must register their presence with the local authorities in order to obtain a temporary residence permit (暂住证 – zanzhuzheng). This means that this category can also be identified as a floating population, even though many people do not abide by the rules and, consciously or unconsciously, fail to register. The **third** and **fourth groups** are derived from the data made available by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and the criteria that has been used during the years to elaborate data was subject to modifications. They are grouped together because they do not present significant differences, apart from their length of stay and their itinerary based on geographic provenance and target location. The third group contains migrants who have an expected maximum stay of six months, while the fourth group contains migrants whose length of stay is between six months and one year. The third group is made up of migrants who have covered short distances, crossing village or township borders. The fourth group, on the other hand, is made up of migrants who have crossed city, or county borders. For these groups, the migrant population count is based on the reality of facts, or the de facto population, and also based on practices that are recognized by law, or de jure, without considering the actual situation in reality. The regulations impose a minimum period of stay (six months to one year) which is greater than those in the first and second group,

which means that in proportion, the third and fourth groups will be substantially smaller. According to the NBS these groups, the third and fourth, both constitute floating population (Liang & Ma, 2004). Although the NBS identifies these groups as temporary residents, in its recently published statistical data it has defined these groups as regular residents (常住人口 – changzhu renkou). The third group, however, is larger compared to the fourth group, and this can be logically explained on the basis that migrants in the third group have to cross shorter distances, administrative entities, and borders. It is necessary to point out that it is not uncommon for migrant workers to prolong their period, overextending their stay. The **fifth group** encompasses those people who do not possess a local urban hukou in relation to their location of employment, but possess a rural hukou. These people are rural migrant laborers (农民工 – nongmingong), and constitute the largest group within the so-called floating population. According to the NBS statistics of 2020, in 2019 the number of people who fall into this group amounts to 290 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020), while only ten years prior, in 2009, the number was approximately of 80 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Again, according to information provided by the NBS, the data that was collected from surveys carried out in rural areas highlighted that most migrant laborers were low-skilled, or unskilled workers. Another salient factor is that various migrant workers belonging to this category, were temporary workers, working per season or per month, and subject to possible frequent movements between the location of their employment, and their homes in the countryside. Consequently, having a precise number is rather difficult, if not impossible.

A separate mention about the children of the early migrants who moved in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, and known as xinchengdai nongmingong (新生代农民工), is also needed to have a complete view of the situation regarding migrants, since these second-generation migrants inherit their hukou status from their parents. Usually, the children of migrants do not have strong ties to their parent's place of origin, whether because they were born in the city, or because they grew up in the city. In addition to this, there is the fact that they do not have the financial means, and lack other ways of support, because they do not possess a local urban hukou, which would allow them to enjoy the

benefits of local social security and so on. Even though these people might be able to find employment in the cities, they are faced with problems like lower income based on discrimination, high housing costs, and more (Gransow, 2012). This second generation is threatened by the trap that rural to urban migration can create, because it does not offer them the possibility of settling permanently in the city with a long term integration process, nor does it offer the option of returning to the countryside, where their hukou is registered. Numerous villages across China, especially the smallest and most remote ones, are inhabited by elderly people, or by children (children whose parents migrated to urban areas for employment, also known as the left-behind children). The remaining inhabitants of these villages are not capable of earning a living and most often are supported by their family members, who send money back from where they are working. A common denominator for all migrant workers in the cities, but especially for the children of first generation migrant workers, there is no feasible alternative to living in the cities, even though more often than expected they are seen and treated as a commodity, as cheap labor (Gransow, 2012).

Migration trends

From the above section it is possible to distinguish the main trends of migration. Even though there has been an enormous increase of migrants in the last fifty years, the Ministry of Public Security has recorded a stable number of yearly hukou migrants (those who possess local residency permits), amounting to between 17 million and 21 million people. As a matter of fact, the number of migrating people with a local residence permit has diminished, when compared to the size of China's population. These two phenomena, the stable rate of migrants with a local residence permit and their proportion in cities, might be caused by the strict government presence, and its imposition and control of migration quotas. In contrast, the migrant population that does not possess a local residence permit (the first to fifth groups) has been continuously growing ever since Deng Xiaoping's reforms.

During the 90s the growth in the number of migrants slowed down due to a combination of factors: the protectionist regulations enacted by the government at a local level, which

made it difficult to employ migrants; the improved work conditions in the countryside; the slackening economy on the second half of the 1990s; and the high competition for jobs in the cities (Cai & Chan, 2000). However, at the start of the new millennium the need for migrant workers, who provided cheap labor, was revamped, concurrently with China's adhesion to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. For instance, in 2004, Guangdong province recorded a lack of labor force, meaning that they needed more people working in their factories than the inflow of migrants was able to provide at that time.

Social welfare system and its accessibility: social insurance, pension scheme, healthcare, housing

China's welfare system for China's migrant population

Social welfare in the People's Republic of China has become a hot topic of discussion, at least since the 2000s, as well as a major cause for discontent among migrant workers. This is why the development of some kind of social security for migrant workers has become of primary importance for the Chinese government. The first half of the early 2000s saw the government taking action to resolve the problem, and in 2003 the first set of policies was implemented. These then ended in 2006 when the State Council Document No. 5 was issued. It concerned employment of migrant workers, their training, education, and welfare, and it offered a thorough assessment of other issues regarding migrant workers (State Council, 2006). This document served to recognize migrant's enormous role in the development of China's economic, as well as social changes. It reiterated the necessity of protecting migrant worker's rights, improving their overall working and social conditions, and ending discrimination. It is clear how Document No. 5 was a major effort made by the government, to change the general view of migrant workers, from a group of people almost excluded by society, to a group that was necessary for society and worthy of support. This seemed to be the best solution to help improve the social conditions of migrant workers, although, social and institutional obstacles, residuals of the planned economy era, make it difficult to actualize them. The main barrier is constituted by the household registration system, which prevents the

creation of suitable policies and regulations that are suitable for the patterns of mobility, and the characteristics of migrants. The largest group of people who are not employed in agriculture related activities are these migrant workers who reside in the cities. Their rural hukou registration prevents them from fitting in to urban social security programs, and in most cases it does not allow them to participate and contribute to local social insurance pools (统筹 – tongchou) (Qian & Wen, 2020). Except for a small number of cities with special laws, migrant workers in cities cannot use the cities' welfare systems, thus implying that the only services they can rely on are in their native location.

The introduction of regulations covering migrants social insurance and security is the duty of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国人力资源和社会保障部 – Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Renli Ziyuan He Shehui Baozhangbu). In the 90s the local level branches of the Ministry were responsible of supplying a set of services, like health insurance and work related injury insurance, but this experiment was only tried to a selected number of cities (Watson, 2009).

It is important remember that hukou status is inherited from parents, and cannot easily be changed. It is possible, however, to convert hukou type, but only through a long and expensive procedure. Unfortunately, the people who can afford this procedure are very few, wealthy, and highly educated. This means that the majority of migrant workers in cities, who are poor and uneducated, maintain their rural hukou type (Song, 2016). This indeed increases the levels of discrimination toward people who live in cities but who do not hold an urban hukou, and decreases the levels of participation in social welfare (whether it be healthcare, child education, or pension schemes) of the people in this category. Migrants who do not hold urban hukou do not enjoy the same benefits that urban hukou holders have. As an example of this phenomenon, migrant workers in cities who wish to send their children to school, are charged higher fees compared to their urban counterparts (G. Chen & Yang, 2010).

With regards to the labor market in China, it is highly segmented between rural and urban labor markets, and this is a just another consequence of the hukou system. This means

that every province, and municipality, at local level, has its own set of rules and regulations regarding the provision of social benefits, from healthcare, pensions schemes, and housing services, etc. Typically, the richer coastal provinces offer greater welfare provisions, at times even higher than what has been imposed by the central government, compared to provinces in the central and western provinces (Carrillo, 2017). Regarding this segmentation, an important consideration must be given to the age of rural migrant workers in the cities, which characterizes the labor market as being constituted of young, most often unmarried people, with no children. Oppositely, people that tend to remain in the rural areas are usually older people and those who have family obligations (Golley & Meng, 2011). A logical deduction would be that the younger people who migrate to the cities, who are usually healthy and without children, would not put as much pressure on the welfare system.

A person in a *small* city with a local urban hukou would have few benefits, compared to a person with a local urban hukou in a *large* city. This is because the best educational and healthcare facilities are located in the big cities. A person in a small city without a local hukou, for example, would still be able to send their child to school, bearing small additional fees. Additionally, in small cities the social welfare programs are exiguous and inadequate, and there are fewer subsidies, making local hukous in these small cities not as desirable. On the other hand, having a hukou in a large city is linked with greater benefits, which the majority of migrants cannot benefit from as the urban residents do.

Regarding housing provisions, in recent times, the prices for houses have been increasing steadily in big cities. People with low income with local hukou are able to afford mostly two types of housing through subsidies, “lian zufang” (廉租房) or low rent public housing, and “jingji shiyong fang” (经济适用房) or low price public housing (Logan et al., 2009). However, because of limitations caused by low income, skills and abilities, as well as other external reasons, quality of life for many migrant workers with low income, is below standard. The situation they are faced with is a deterrent for social stability, and a demotivation factor that can weigh on the migrants’ inclination to stay in the city. The implementation of policies which allow migrant workers, as well as other

low income groups, to be offered affordable accommodation has been a salient matter in China's agenda, most importantly in areas plagued with high housing costs that have a high influx of migrants (Paris, 2007).

Furthermore, migrant workers who do not hold a local hukou but who do have a high income are still faced with limitations when it comes to finding a place to live. This is because in January of 2011, the local governments of more than thirty large cities in China applied a new regulation which hinders people who do not hold local hukou in these cities to buy houses there, unless they belong to specific categories of people, such as city cadres. At the same time, these people cannot apply for housing subsidies because of their higher income.

Regarding education for the children of migrant workers, these are covered by a Chinese law issued in 2001 by the State Council. This policy states that it is duty of the local government to take care of and provide compulsory education for the children of migrant workers through the local public school system (Chan & Buckingham, 2008). It is possible to say that thanks to this policy there has been some progress in the last few years in terms of educating these children. However, since this policy only covers the typical nine year compulsory education, children of migrant workers are confronted with complicated and elaborate admissions procedures. The school attendance rate of migrant children during the compulsory education age group (six years of primary education and three years of secondary education) was 99.4% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020). Regarding these children in compulsory education, 47.5% of the parents reported that they face several problems in urban schools. Difficulties in being admitted to schools, high costs, and having no one to take care of the children after school are the three main problems that parents of migrant workers cite the most often (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020).

Another element to take into consideration while analyzing the welfare regime in China and its accessibility for migrant workers, are social security programs, which are characterized by three aspects: social insurance, social welfare, and social relief or "di bao" (低保) in Chinese. Social welfare refers to services provided to elderly people, or

people with disabilities, and includes free access to libraries, sports facilities, parks, cultural infrastructure, etc. (L. Zhang, 2012). Social relief refers to programs that assist those who are economically vulnerable, by providing a minimum living allowance, which, however, cannot be requested by people who do not hold a local hukou (M. Li & Walker, 2018).

As stated above, the central government sets out the general laws and regulations that cover the whole nation, however, the implementation of social policies greatly depends on the institutions at the local level. Under this decentralized system, the provincial governments have the power and duty to create pension policies that are advantageous for the local community. The localized structure which administrates pension programs limits the profitability of pensions between one province and another, or across other administrative units. Migrant workers usually have temporary jobs, and frequently need to move in order to work where they are needed, thus becoming victims to their own mobility (Bairoliya & Miller, 2020). Except for a few strict instances, migrant workers are not allowed to contribute to their pension in one location and accumulate their contributions after relocating. This has caused migrant workers to lose their pension contributions, and have them become a local asset for provinces which have a high inflow of migrants. From the perspective of growth and development, this phenomenon is one of the many that results in the increase of welfare inequality between provinces, and links back to each province having its own pension scheme because of the large gap. In 1997 the State Council issued Document No. 26, which described the transition from the previous defined-benefit pension scheme typical of the planned economy, into a hybrid scheme based on individual account and defined contributions. In 2000 the pension scheme was revised, and it became an obligatory scheme, aimed at establishing a nationwide cohesive program covering all employers (Bairoliya & Miller, 2020; Lin, 2015).

In 2010, a Social Insurance Law ([Social Insurance Law of the People's Republic of China, 2010](#)) was passed establishing two main genres of social security programs: hukou based social insurance in rural and urban areas, and employment based social insurance

programs in urban areas. The latter is meant for workers employed in cities, and the former intends to protect those who are unemployed, those who are not in the labor force in urban areas, and all those who reside in rural areas. Workers can apply for coverage from the social insurance system in cities if their employers take the responsibility to pay social insurance programs, with no regards to the employee's hukou status. According to the Social Insurance Law of 2010, employees should be covered by social security contributions paid by their employers. Unfortunately, the implementation of this regulation is still not very widespread because most migrant workers take jobs with low pay in the cities. Only about 10% of rural migrants are covered by social security, as not many employers contribute to social security payments for their employees (Chan, 2019).

Besides the social insurance programs based on employment, different jurisdictions provide people with different insurance programs, and most of the time people who do not hold a local hukou are not covered. A representative case is how health insurance works: besides the employment-based *Urban Employee Basic Medical Insurance*, cities offer the *Urban Residents Basic Medical Insurance* program to cover people in those cities with a local hukou, while in rural areas *New Rural Medical Co-operative Insurance* program is in force (M. Su et al., 2018). These programs are different from one another in terms of contributions, costs, and distributed benefits, which are all dependent on local governments' choices and are not convertible. This means that migrant workers that are not covered by employment-based programs, are only allowed to enjoy the benefits of social welfare where their hukou is located, but not in the location where they have migrated. This has given rise to tensions because the majority of migrant workers do not possess the means to bear the expenses of medical treatments outside of where their hukou is registered, nor they can apply for reimbursements, as generally they are not provided by the system (M. Su et al., 2018).

CHAPTER 2 – Migrant workers in China, focus on regional differences

Overview of rural-to-urban migrants in China in a national context

The process of urbanization in the People Republic of China has been rampant for at least the past forty years. In 1982, the urban population in China was reported to be a mere 29.9% of the total population, while thirty years later, in 2012, it constituted 52.6% of the total population, and in 2020 it was up to 63.9% of the total population. Respectively, in 1982 the population living in cities was of 206 million, in 2012 it grew to 642 million, and in 2021 it amounted to approximately 509 million ([National Bureau of Statistics, 2001](#); [The State Council of the People's Republic of China](#)). The millions of people who live in urban areas who do not possess local hukou, are migrants from the countryside. Regardless of the fact that economic growth in the cities has attracted migrant workers, there are various institutional constraints that do not allow these people to become stable residents.

There have been experiments in various Chinese cities which implemented a new unified hukou system that could breakdown the limitations faced by rural hukou holders, eliminate discrimination against rural hukou holders, as well as promoting and facilitating labor migration from rural to urban areas ([Luo & Wang, 2020](#)). This is true for the municipality of Chongqing, as will be explained in the case study in the third chapter, however, not all locations that receive high numbers of migrants serve them the same treatment. Further in this chapter, the effects of the absence or presence of such policies will be brought to light by comparing the conditions in two Chinese provinces and one autonomous region.

In China, as in any other part of the world, labor migration is the outcome of rational choices made by people, and the consequences, whether positive or negative, that this choice might have. This process is of fundamental importance when analyzing the phenomenon of migration because it can help shed light on the characteristics of the people who migrate, the reasons that drive them to migrate, and so on.

Prior the introduction of the reforms, China had a system of checks and balances, which lowered the relative price of agricultural products to boost the price of industrial goods.

This permitted amassing capital in the industrial sector, whilst developing an ever-growing industrialization. Contemporarily, the wages of workers employed in the urban industrial sector were artificially depressed in order to boost profit and the buildup of capital in the industry sector. The welfare program was specific to each city, and presented characteristics that best suited the type of activities that were conducted in relation to which industrial sector. The welfare programs were, and mostly are to this day, sponsored by the state and cover health care, education, pensions, as well as housing programs.

During this period, the average income for a person living in the city was greater than that of a person living in the countryside. This situation produced a significant pull factor towards the cities, which attracted large numbers of migrants. The industry sector in urban areas was converted to heavy industry. However, given the complexity of the tasks in these new positions, employment in the new workforce was low, since it required new skills to be developed. The urban areas struggled to reach a high percentage of employment of their local urban residents, and the fact that migrants were reaching the cities to find a job, only worsened the overall situation. As explained in the previous chapter, the hukou system prevented the overflow of migration to the cities, and the institution of policies like the *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement* (上山下乡运动 – Shang shan xia Xiang Yundong) were meant to relieve some of the pressure on urban employment (Ren, 2003).

With the implementation of the reforms, the Chinese economy gradually started to integrate into the global economy, acquiring more and more relevance internationally. This is when China began using, to its advantage, low-cost labor, and entered the labor-intensive global supply chain oriented towards manufacturing and exportation of goods. Initially, the manufacturing factories were located in the coastal provinces of China, in proximity of the Special Economic Zones. This started the migration pattern from the inner, central provinces, to the cities on the coast (Duan et al., 2008). Migration from the countryside provided much of the labor power for manufacturing, driving economic growth, as well as reducing the gap between rural and urban income levels.

At this stage, rules on migration were more relaxed, but there were still restraints on freedom of movement imposed by the hukou registration system. Not only the hukou, but also the grain coupons system. If a rural hukou holder managed to find employment in the city, they would necessarily need to independently provide for themselves without being able to rely on the grain supply provided by the state. This was of course not a viable option for many poor migrants from the countryside, as the costs of labor migration were already elevated. In 1993, given the large reserves of grain that had been accumulated, the government increased the amounts of grains, cooking oil, and other goods that rural residents could buy with the liangpiao (Wang et al., 2018). In May of the same year the liangpiao system was officially dismantled, when in Beijing, the prices of goods that could be acquired good through the liangpiao were lowered, while the quantities were increased. However, some parts of China had already gone through stable transitions after relaxing liangpiao restrictions and lowering prices, such as in Guangdong province one year earlier. As soon as the liangshi guanxi (粮食关系 – lit. foodstuffs relations; meaning the food provision registration) was abolished, it was no longer a limitation to migration and labor mobility, and for this reason migration rapidly increased (Ge et al., 2017).

Even though migrant labor has had an effect on local urban employment, the segmentation of the labor market is indeed caused by the hukou system, which establishes different regulations from province to province, and from city to city. Discrimination based on hukou status is still a widespread phenomenon in China, and the barriers for rural hukou holders to obtain rural residence permit vary depending on location. According to previous comparative studies conducted in the four municipalities, in twenty-seven provincial capital cities, and fifteen other cities of other levels, most migrants settle in cities in coastal provinces. However, although fewer, there are instances where migrants decided settle in major cities in central regions (Wu et al., 2010). One way to interpret this data may be that China's existing labor mobility is unrestricted, and in conjunction with extra provincial labor mobility particularly unconstrained.

Employment of rural-to-urban migrants

At the beginning of the 1980s, the governments in diverse cities enacted new, but short-lived regulations, that discouraged enterprises from hiring migrant workers, establishing higher taxes per migrant worker, or imposing limitations on the number of people allowed to enter a particular industry. Nowadays, even though these kinds of discriminatory regulations have been eliminated, it is unrealistic to think that a person holding an agricultural hukou could obtain a job as a civil servant, or employment in a highly remunerative monopolistic sector. According to data collected through the China Health and Nutrition Survey, high income jobs are almost completely taken by local residents, or more broadly speaking, people with an urban hukou (Qiao et al., 2009).

Sample research collected nationwide confirmed that in urban areas, the yearly net income of local urban residents was 1.3 higher than their counterparts with rural hukou in the same cities (Frijters & Parkashi, 2017). It was also shown that migrant workers were generally employed in the private sector, rather than in the public sector. It is necessary to acknowledge that the population factor has a great impact in defining wage differences and discrimination between the local urban hukou holders in the city and the rural hukou holders in the city. Nevertheless, there are also many additional elements that influence the wage disparity, such as age, gender, and education. These elements are independent from, and/or determined before entering the labor market, and differences are not produced by the labor market itself. The discrimination generated by the hukou system are reflected in wage disparities, but also in employment opportunities. Data collected from a survey conducted in three cities, in Zhuhai in the southern province of Guangdong, in Wuxi in the eastern province of Jiangsu, and in Beijing, showed how hukou status discrimination lowers job opportunities for incoming migrants, and raises the costs these migrants need to sustain (H. Zhang, 2010). Even though most of the migrant workers find temporary jobs that generally the local urbanites tend to avoid, tendentially they change jobs at the end of the season, when their employment is not needed anymore, or after accumulating sufficient assets (experience, status, etc.).

Social security accessibility of rural-to-urban migrants

The existing social security structure is independently organized and managed on local tax revenue, meaning that each city has responsibility for local urban residents. There are cities that offer services that cover residents who hold a rural hukou, but these services are usually meagre, and participation by this category is fairly low (Z. Zhang et al., 2007). For this reason, the government has implemented new regulations to make endowment insurance, along with other types of insurance like health insurance transferrable from province to province, and from city to city (S. Chen et al., 2020). The previous organizational system expected rural hukou holders working in urban areas to pay their contributions to social security for 15 consecutive years in their location of employment to be able to take advantage of the benefits. However, in 2014, the government updated its policy which permitted migrant workers, or other workers with frequent mobility, to contribute to pension schemes in different parts of the county.

This structure which focuses on accessibility, where anybody, regardless of hukou status, can contribute and access social security, is also adopted for the healthcare system. Universal healthcare coverage is a system that would allow anyone to have access to healthcare services, regardless of location and moment of necessity (WHO, 2017). The view of a universal healthcare is congruent with China's government health reform promoted in 2009, setting a goal for 2020 to allow an equitable and affordable provision for everybody, but especially for those who would not be able to otherwise afford it (Tan et al., 2017). In 2016, the *Healthy China 2030* plan was advanced to supplement the previous plan in offering extensive and efficient coverage (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, 2016).

According to official statistics, by the year 2010, nine out of ten people were covered by at least one of the three basic social health insurance policies provided by the state: the *Urban Employee Basic Medical Insurance*, the *Urban Residents Basic Medical Insurance*, and the *New Rural Medical Co-operative Insurance*, mentioned in the previous chapter. The main role of these is to make healthcare services available for as many people as possible at a bearable cost (Yu, 2015). Even though this universal healthcare service is

provided, migrant workers that move from the rural areas to the cities, still appear to be in difficult position, as their degree of coverage is low (W. Chen et al., 2017; Zhong et al., 2018). Employees can also be covered by insurance policies offered by their employers, however more often than expected it is not sufficient, or not even present. It is not unusual for those rural to urban migrant workers to find alternatives when they cannot rely on health insurance: some may turn to informal and non-professional health services, relying on themselves and self-treatment (Y. Li, 2013).

The scale, distribution, and flow of migrant workers

In 2019, the total number of migrant workers nationwide amounted to 290.77 million, increasing by 2.41 million, or 0.9% from the previous year. Among the migrant workers, there were 75.08 million migrant workers who crossed provincial borders to find employment, about 86 million fewer people than the previous year, and 99.17 million migrant workers that found employment within the province, about 245 million more than the previous year. Regarding the proportion of migrants in each region, in the north-eastern region⁴ (东北部 – dongbeibu), migrant workers decreased by 3.4% from the previous year, while the proportion of employed migrant workers in the eastern region¹ (东部 – dongbu) increased by 0.1%, in the central region¹ (中部 – zhongbu) increased by 1.4%, and in the western region¹ (西部 – xibu) it increased by 1.2%.

The number of migrating workers (within the region and going out) in the western region increased the most, an increase that accounted for more than half of the new increase. Regarding the flows of migration from and in regions, the proportion of employed migrant workers in the eastern region was of 104.16 million. In the central region was

⁴The subdivision in four regions has only been recently adopted by the government, by National Bureau of Statistics and other official institutions. The eastern region includes: the municipality of Beijing, the municipality of Tianjin, the municipality of Shanghai, the provinces of Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, and Hainan. The central region includes the provinces of Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei, and Hunan. The western region includes provinces of Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, the municipality of Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Tibet, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. The north-eastern region includes Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011).

of 96.19 million, in the western region was of 80.51 million, while in the north-eastern region it was of 9.91 million ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)).

Regional distribution of migrant workers

The most visible changes in the regional distribution of migrant workers regards the eastern region, the western region, and the central region. The number of migrant workers in the eastern region had decreased the most, while the number of migrant workers in the western and central region has continued to increase ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)). This is valuable information, as it is possible to presume that the eastern region is losing its attractiveness. This might be caused by the improving situation in the western region, and possibly by the overly dense areas in the eastern region perceived as lacking good opportunities.

In terms of receiving migrant workers from other regions, 157 million migrant workers were employed in the eastern regions, presenting a reduction of 1.08 million from the previous year, and the total migrant population in the eastern region amounted to 54% of the total population nationwide. Among them, 22.08 million migrant workers were employed in the JJJ Metropolitan Region (京津冀城市群 – Jing Jin Ji Chengshiqun), made up of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei. The Yangtze River Delta area, comprising of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shanghai had 51.79 million employed migrant workers, with a decrease of 610 hundred people from the previous year. In the Pearl River Delta area there were 44.18 million migrant workers, which presented a decrease of 1.18 million migrant workers. In the central region, there were 62.23 million employed migrant workers, with an increase of 1.72 million, amounting to 21.4% of the total employed migrant workers nationwide. The western region had 61.73 million employed migrant workers, with an increase of 1.8 million, amounting to 21.2% of the whole employed migrant workers nationwide. In the north-eastern region there were 8.95 million migrant workers employed, which presented a decrease of 100 thousand from the previous year, making up 3.1% of the total number of migrant workers nationwide ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)).

Region of origin	Number of migrant workers			Percentage		
	Total	Extra-provincial migrants	Intra-provincial migrants	Total	Extra-provincial migrants	Intra-provincial migrants
	174.250 mln	75.08 mln	99.17 mln	100.00 %	43.1 %	56.9 %
East	47.92 mln	8.21 mln	39.71 mln	100.00 %	17.1 %	82.9 %
Center	64.27 mln	38.02 mln	26.25 mln	100.00 %	59.2 %	40.8 %
West	55.55 mln	26.91 mln	28.64 mln	100.00 %	48.4 %	51.6 %
North-east	65.1 mln	1.94 mln	4.57 mln	100.00 %	29.8 %	70.2 %

Table 1: Region of origin of extra-provincial and intra-provincial migrants workers

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020

Region of Origin	2016	2017	2018	2019
East	104.0 mln	104.30 mln	104.1 mln	104.16 mln
Center	92.79 mln	94.50 mln	95.38 mln	96.19 mln
West	75.63 mln	78.14 mln	79.18 mln	80.51 mln
North-east	9.29 mln	9.58 mln	9.70 mln	9.91 mln
Region of destination				
East	159.60 mln	159.93 mln	158.08 mln	157.0 mln
Center	57.46 mln	59.12 mln	60.51 mln	62.23 mln
West	54.84 mln	57.54 mln	59.93 mln	61.73 mln
North-east	9.04 mln	9.14 mln	9.05 mln	8.95 mln

Table 2: Numbers of migrants for region of origin and chosen destination region

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2020; 2019; 2018; 2017

Basic characteristics of migrant workers

Age of migrant workers

The average age of migrant workers in 2019 was 40.8 years, with a slight increase in the average from the previous year. In terms of age structure, the proportion of migrant workers of 40 and younger, amounted to 50.6%, presenting a slight decrease of 1.5% from the previous year. The proportion of migrant workers over 50 years of age equaled 24.6%, presenting an increase of 2.2% from the previous year ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)).

Age	2016	2017	2018	2019
16 – 20 years old	3.3 %	2.7 %	2.4 %	2.0 %
21 – 30 years old	27.6 %	27.3 %	25.2 %	23.1 %
31 – 40 years old	22 %	22.5 %	24.5 %	25.5 %
41 – 50 years old	27 %	26.3 %	25.5 %	24.8 %
Over 50 years old	19.1 %	21.3 %	22.4 %	24.6 %

Table 3: Percentage of migrants shown in age ranges

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020; 2019; 2018; 2017

Gender composition

The proportion of women and migrant workers with spouses have both increased. Among all migrant workers nationwide, men accounted for 64.9%, while women accounted for 35.1%. The proportion of women increased by 0.3% from the previous year ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)).

Employment status of migrant workers

The proportion of migrant workers engaged in the tertiary sector amounted to 51%, presenting an increase of 0.5% from the previous year ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)). Among these, the proportion of migrant workers engaged in transportation, storage, and postal services, and the accommodation and food industries were both 6.9%. The proportion of migrant workers engaged in the secondary sector was 48.6%, presenting a decrease of 0.5% from the previous year. Among them, the proportion of migrant workers engaged in manufacturing accounted for 27.4%, which decreased by 0.5% from the previous year. The proportion of migrant workers dedicated to construction work was of 18.7%, which shows an increase of 0.1% from the previous year ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)). The number of migrant workers who dedicated their service to the first sector did not present any variation from the previous year, remaining stable at 0.4%

Social integration of migrant workers in cities

From the data collected by the National Bureau of Statistics it is possible to detect an increased sense of belonging and higher social integration for migrant workers in the cities. Rural to urban migrant workers in cities were surveyed, and the results showed that 40% believed that they perceived themselves as “locals” in the city where they reside ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)). From the perspective of adaptation of migrant workers to local life, 80.6% said they had easily adapted and were relatively comfortable with their social life. Moreover, 20.8% declared that they somewhat adapted, and only 1.1% said that they were had not easily adapted, or that they had not adapted at all, and were very uncomfortable ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)). The sense of belonging and identity of migrant workers living in different sized cities had increased compared to the previous year. However, the larger the city, the weaker the sense of belonging of migrant workers had to the city where they are located, and the more difficult it was for them to adapt to urban life ([National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020](#)).

Migration flows from rural areas to urban areas have been extensively analyzed from numerous perspectives, as this phenomenon is tightly linked to China's constant urbanization and deep implications. The leading idea is that most of the migrant workers who find employment in the cities are compelled to live in precarious conditions, or at least not as comfortable as their local urban counterpart, as they do not have much access to urban benefits. Previous studies have also pointed out how the health and the wellbeing of a person are heavily influenced by migration itself (Song & Sun, 2016).

Other important factors to take into consideration when analyzing migration flows and its patterns, are the factors that motivate a person to migrate, which are also known as push and pull factors. Knowing the provenience of migrant workers, whether intra provincial and extra provincial migrants present any differences, knowing if a city is able to appeal to migrant workers, or knowing what factors attract a migrant from the countryside is important from several points of view.

As it has been said many times, rural to urban migration has been the motor of China's economic growth, supplying the manufacturing sectors with cheap labor. Nonetheless, for the past fifteen years, the growing concern of exhausting the inexpensive labor provided by migrant workers, has been casting its shadow on the country's economic growth. The problem is a consequence of a situation where the surplus of cheap labor is completely assimilated by the manufacturing or industrial sectors, largely increasing both migrant workers' wages, and that of industrial workers (Das & N'Diaye, 2013). In this type of situation, pondering and deciding on which city would be the most viable, advantageous, and with fewer shortcomings, is of primary importance for a possible migrant. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, migrant workers appear to choose different places to migrate to, compared to previous years. It appears that the migrants who want to migrate "locally", within provincial borders, are increasing by year. By 2011, there were fewer migrant workers who stayed in their province, compared to extra-provincial migrants. Another considerable setback was found in the migration patterns that brought migrants to the eastern coastal provinces of China.

One reason that explains this is the shrinking income gap between rural hukou holders and local urban hukou holders working in these provinces. Knowing that migrating to these provinces would only slightly improve their current condition, they therefore decide to find employment closer to their hometown. Yet another important element to consider, is that migrant workers are willing to take positions that are not typically highly remunerative, that are spurned by the local population. According to studies of data collected through the Rural Urban Migration in China, a larger share of extra-provincial migrants was employed in the tertiary sector, occupied with service jobs, in beauty parlors, and in food service (Y. Su et al., 2017).

Knowing the provenience of a migrant, understanding where they are going, and what places are more desirable for them is not information that can be disregarded. When looking for the push elements that influence the choices of migrants, concerning their decision on crossing provincial borders or on staying in their native province, it is revealed that personal characteristics and traits, these have a significant role. There are significant differences among migrant workers who came from other provinces and those who are from the same province. Generally speaking, non-local migrant workers are usually young males, in good health. However they are not as educated as their local counterparts (Y. Su et al., 2017). Furthermore, crossing provincial borders acts as a disincentive for people who are willing to migrate to find employment, as they usually take in consideration distance from their hometown, and what the outside province destination has to offer. This also has substantial effects on the policies and regulations of different cities if they want to be appealing to migrants, as it would be less problematic to draw local provincial migrants.

According to both intra-provincial and extra-provincial migrant workers' opinions and needs, the cities that are most attractive are those which have high employment rates, a higher GDP per capita, and a sizeable urban population (Y. Su et al., 2017). Simultaneously to this, distance between the migrants' hometown and destination city is not a negligible factor, as the farther the destination city, the greater the unwillingness to leave, which constitutes a pull factor.

Migration across provincial borders, however, only delivers one perspective of whole phenomenon of migration. Interestingly, the phenomenon of intra-provincial migration is bigger than believed, and according to several sources, it is even larger than extra-provincial migration in relation to its scale and size. This is the case for most provinces in China, especially the Municipality of Chongqing, which sees 84% of the migrant population from within the municipality itself (Y. Su et al., 2017). Also, migration within provinces determines spatial allocation of migrant workers, even more so than outbound provincial migration. As declared by national censuses of the National Bureau of Statistics, within floating population, the percentages of extra-provincial migrants accounted to 29.4% in 2000, 25.5% in 2005, 38.9% in 2010, 91.39 million or 45.9% in 2015, and 99.17 million or 56.9% in 2019⁵ (Liang et al., 2014; National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020, 2016).

Ever since 1990, the extra-provincial migrants have been far more numerous than intra-provincial migrants (Y. Su et al., 2017). To sustain this, it is possible to compare 1987 with 1995, which saw a growth of 68% of the migrants who crossed provincial borders, and only a thin increase of intra-provincial migrants during the course of the same period. This trend might have contributed to expanding regional and provincial disparity. This increase of inequality brought migrants to reconsider their destination, and at the end of the 2000s the number of migrants who found employment within their province, surpassed that of migrants who crossed provincial borders, thus becoming the major component of rural work force in the cities (Y. Su et al., 2017). Considering macro-regions, the portion of people migrating to the eastern region, to the Pearl River Delta and to the Yangtze River Delta have all been declining relatively slowly. On the other hand, the flows to the western and central regions have gotten more and more consistent.

With regards to the possible reasons that could convince a person to migrate, these are generally referred to as “push factors”. Push factors are, for instance, could be

⁵ Regarding these statistics, it is necessary to remember that the criteria utilized to calculate these numbers have changed with time, and in some instances from national census to census, especially in defining the geographical boundaries. This means that keeping a precise record of migrant movements within a province over time is not as easy, since the parameters shifted. For instance, for the 1990 and 1995 census data collection, a person crossing the administrative county subdivision (县 – xian) was considered for all legal intents and purposes a migrant.

represented by absence of opportunities to be employed where a person resides, or poverty, while “pull factors” are the opposite of push factors (Lee, 1966). These attract people to migrate to a certain city. For example, job opportunities and job security greatly influence pull factors, as well as better living conditions, easy accessibility to land for settling and agricultural activities, higher standards of welfare system, better infrastructures, and communication systems. All these factors constitute the pull factors for migrants to the city, and more broadly larger urban settlements, which typically offer migrants relatively high living standards and the possibility to participate in the local welfare system. For migrants who cross provincial borders traveling over a long distance, the pull factors may be outweighed by the push factors when the economic gap between the province of origin and the destination province are narrowed, leading them to stay in one place only temporarily. For migrants who cross provincial borders traveling over a short distance, the push factors are constantly weak, thus causing them to choose to continue migrating even if the pull factors are weakened. With decreasing interregional economic differences, it is possible to predict that distance, which was neglected in previous studies focusing on return migration (National Bureau of Statistics of China¹, 2016), may play a more significant role in future migration.

For people in the most remote areas of the nation, the inability to obtain plots of land to use for farming, and lack of job opportunities are the most common reasons for migrating. Nonetheless, people native to rural areas seem to be strongly attached to their hometowns, and generally prefer to remain in those rural areas (Y. Su et al., 2017).

Here, another push factor is constituted by unavailability of modern, proper tools for large scale agricultural activities, which would allow for self-sustenance. This pushes people away from the countryside, to the cities in search for jobs not related to farming (Chang & Brada, 2006). At least since the beginning of the 2000s, the major pull factor has been the opportunity to earn more money in the cities, therefore the wide income gap between rural and urban areas. Even though the income gap has narrowed during the years, this is still the largest component. Furthermore, it is possible to assume that a

large excess of idle rural inhabitants in the countryside, aligned with the necessity of workforce for industrialized city areas, together drive, and attract migrants to the cities.

Overview of migrants' destinations: Xinjiang, Jiangsu, and Liaoning

In the following section two provinces, Jiangsu and Liaoning, and one autonomous region, Xinjiang, were chosen to briefly examine. This selection was not made randomly, as each province, or autonomous region, each belongs to the previously explain regional subdivision. Jiangsu is in the eastern region (东部), Liaoning in the northeastern region (东北部), and Xinjiang in the west region (西部). All of these regions, and more specifically provinces and autonomous region, have different characteristics, thus attracting different people. All of these areas present various resemblances with each other, from the migration patterns, the policies that were implemented by local governments regarding accessibility to social welfare by migrant workers. The main argument that arises from this is how despite being similar, these areas have achieved different outcomes, both economically and socially.

The autonomous region of Xinjiang was chosen because despite being one of the poorest regions in China, it still attracts plenty of migrants. As will be later explained, the central government has introduced various reforms and projects to develop the westernmost Chinese region, and one of these is the “Great Western Development Strategy”.

The Great Western Development Strategy, along with the latest modifications of the Law on Regional National Autonomy of 2001⁶, and the many economic inducements are China's way to develop Xinjiang.

It should be evident by now that the massive inflow of migrants to Xinjiang was propelled by the desire to bridge the economic disparity between the richer eastern provinces and the lagging western provinces. It was in 1999, when former president Jian

⁶ The Law on Regional National Autonomy (中华人民共和国民族区域自治法 – Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minzu Quyu Zizhi Fa) was adopted during the Second Session of the Sixth National People's Congress in 1984. It was then promulgated in 1984 by the President of the People's Republic of China. It was amended in in 2001, at the 20th Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress.

Zemin stated the importance of “taking advantage of the opportunity at the start of a new century to boost the growth of western China” ([The Economist, 2000](#)). This would allow to attract state investments, foreign and local expertise, foreign investment, as well as private capital to western China. Obviously, the movement of capital and resources to Xinjiang had to be put to use, and therefore migration to the region has grown exponentially ever since the implementation this policy.

The southern part of Jiangsu was China’s industrial heart already at the end of the nineteenth century, with a well-developed manufacturing structure ([Y. D. Wei, 2010](#)). It is a densely populated area, with fertile lands. It is agriculturally developed, although this potential was idle during the Maoist period. This allowed for the development of a strong local network, and strong socialist institutions while maintaining the local structures of small handicraft production outside of the cities, which laid the foundation for the formation of collective enterprises during the 1950s, known as *Township and Village Enterprises* (TVEs) ([Jianjun Zhang, 2007](#)). With the help of loans from the government, this model became established and known as *Sunan Model*. These TVEs grew in number and expanded, while leaving the private sector lagging behind. This fast development of township enterprises caused the employment of local farmers into these enterprises, creating a pattern of industrialization in the countryside, but with shallow urbanization. However, with the growing economy and the enlargement of the industries, the local supply of workforce was not enough. With all the foreign investments in the region during the late 1900s and early 2000s, the need for migrant workers has been growing ever since, especially in Suzhou urban area ([D. Y.-R. Yang & Hsia, 2007](#)).

Liaoning province was chosen because it is the only province of the Dongbei region that attracts migrants, and therefore it is a logical area to compare with other net positive-inflow-migration provinces, such Xinjiang, Jiangsu, and later on Chongqing.

When the reforms of 1978 were implemented, it brought China into a new phase of economic globalization and development, however the development of Liaoning, remained slow and actually retroceded ([Y. Zhang & Lu, 2019](#)). At the turn of the century the situation was stable, when in 2003 the State Council launched the plan known as

“Revitalize the Old Northeast Industrial Bases” (振兴东北老工业基地 – Zhenxing Dongbei Lao Gongye Jidi) which was aimed at rejuvenating the old industrial bases in Dongbei. This strategy is parallel to the “Great Western Development Strategy” which involves both Xinjiang and Chongqing. With this strategy, Liaoning entered a slow re-emerging process. From about 1998 to 2012, the institutional mechanisms made significant progress, and Liaoning’s local state-owned enterprises started to make a profit. Since the reforms, it was the first time that the GDP growth rate of Liaoning was higher than the national average. To obtain these outcomes Liaoning had implemented regulations to attract human capital to it, under the form of migrant workers (Bi, 2007).

As recently as 2017, the Liaoning Free Trade Zone became one of the free trade zones in China (Y. Zhang & Lu, 2019). This infused the province, and to a greater extent the whole Dongbei region, with vitality and boosted economic development, thus attracting investments, and creating employment that attracted migrants from within Liaoning, Dongbei, and other provinces as well (Y. Zhang & Lu, 2019).

China has been implementing various reforms to ameliorate the wellbeing of its people, as well as to improve its economy. One region of interest, which has been the subject of economic reforms is China’s westernmost province, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (新疆维吾尔自治区 – Xinjiang Weiwuer Zizhiqu). These changes have had an impact on the people, and the effects are most visible on characteristics defined by hukou status and migration. As already explained, the various economic reforms enacted by China’s central government, by provincial governments, and by local city level governments, have shaped and boosted labor mobility, putting a great deal of pressure on local labor markets, causing them to expand (Xu et al., 2006). With regards to China, the formation of new labor markets, is linked to two phenomena, respectively labor market segmentation⁷, and increasing number of migrant workers. The relation between

⁷ Labor market segmentation indicates the many, and usually great differences between industry in which one is working, gender, educational background, social belonging, and ethnicity. These groups of people can be employed in different labor markets, have different opportunities, different levels of income. This means that workers are not evaluated based on their abilities and individual qualities, but rather on their provenience (and therefore hukou status), gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, etc. (Reich et al., 1973).

these two have restructured the economic, social, and spatial interactions in this province, as well as in the whole of China.

Regarding the newly reformed economic structures in China, the various economic reforms brought to a reduced presence of the state in the labor market, by not directly providing jobs, or for example by not providing a job to freshly graduated students. The role of the state overall was significantly reduced, and the management and flow of labor do not depend on it anymore. Sectors which are not under the direct control of state, like private enterprises, or joint ventures, have been gaining more liberty, and occupy an influential position within society (Xu et al., 2006).

The reforms of the 1980s brought a neoliberal interpretation market economy with socialism, the so-called *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics*, which had impactful changes on the fabric of society. For instance, the layered labor market caused by the income gap of migrant workers in cities and locals all over China; these are related to the residency registration system, the hukou.

It seems obvious that geographical location, and proximity are factors to take into consideration when analyzing migration. The provinces of Gansu and Sichuan both border Xinjiang, and both being relatively, they send out numerous migrant workers. Similarly to this, Liaoning too attracts migrants from provinces of the Dongbei, Jiangsu attracts migrants from neighboring Anhui and Henan, and Chongqing from Sichuan (Shi et al., 2020). There is also presence of great numbers of migrants from Henan in Xinjiang (Fan, 2008). This is result of a social phenomenon typical of the Chinese culture and the maintaining of strong relations between relatives and friends, even when moving great distances. Nevertheless, nowadays, migration is not pushed as much by the state, but rather migration from Henan is spontaneous. This can be explained by the social networks, connection, and the so called *guanxi* (关系 – lit. connection, relation) that have been built by the previous generations of Henanese migrants in that region, as these have kept active relationships with their hometowns (Ma & Xiang, 1998). This situation very much resembles the situation in Chongqing where relatives and friends pass on

information through word of mouth, and migrate in the same area as their informants, and are employed in the same industry too (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Scholars who conducted previous research came to the conclusion that the formation of native labor markets in the region of Xinjiang has expanded wage disparity, furthered the local market segmentation, and exaggerated the stream of migrants (Pannell & Philipp, 2006; S. Zhang et al., 2018). With regards to the internal flow of migrants, it is from the south of the region to the north. It is mainly Uyghurs, and other minorities as well, who migrate to the more prosperous and industrially developed northern counties, and to the regional capital city of Urumqi (乌鲁木齐). The city of Urumqi is the economic heart of Xinjiang, and it attracts migrants from all over the region, where it offers them employment in the service sector with low pay, such as vendors, or in other parts of the informal, non-regulated market (Pannell & Philipp, 2006). This again is proof that, as will be later explained and in the third chapter too, migrants are simply attracted to the possibilities the cities have to offer.

Urumqi, the largest city, along with other large-developed cities located in the north, such as Shihezi (石河子市), Karamay (克拉玛依市), all attract numerous migrants who make up a heterogenous category, with different origin (from within and outside the region), age, and gender. The northern part of Xinjiang, historically known as Dzungaria, is an appealing destination for migrants. This is due to various reasons: first of all, the climate is not as arid as the southern part of Xinjiang, being mostly dry steppes and grasslands, which allowed the largest urban settlements to be developed in this area; secondly, because the many state interventions, and implementation of policies have set up the conditions for economic and social growth (Pannell & Philipp, 2006). The “Great Western Development Strategy” (西部大开发 – Xibu Dakaifa) endorsed in 2001 is the main national policy that enhanced the growth of the west region of China, including Xinjiang, helping to attract migrant labors from inside Xinjiang, and from the rest of China (Pannell & Philipp, 2006). According to the most recently available census data, the abovementioned cities of Urumqi, Shihezi, and Karamay, in 2014, had a population of 2.67 million, 637 thousand, and 295 thousand people respectively (Xinjiang Bureau

of Statistics of 2015, 2015). Focusing on the regional capital, the city of Urumqi attracts many migrants, Uyghurs, and Han as well. The central government pushed to have it become the lively city it is today, with a lively active labor market. Its population reached an estimated 3.2 million people in 2017 (Demographia, 2021).

In the context of regional development, it has been explained before how the eastern region is the most developed in China (Long et al., 2009). The eastern region is mostly made of coastal provinces, which, for historical reasons have always been wealthier than the hinterland provinces, as they had direct access to the sea, and thus to commerce and trade. One of these provinces, located in the eastern region, south of Shandong province and north of the Municipality of Shanghai, is Jiangsu province (江苏省). Jiangsu is one of the most populous provinces in China, with cities like Nanjing (南京市), Suzhou (苏州市), and Xuzhou (徐州市), that have respectively 8.50 million, 10.75 million, and 8.82 million permanent inhabitants (Nanjing Municipal Bureau of Industry and Information Technology, 2020; Suzhou Municipal People's Government, 2020; Xuzhou Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Migration to Jiangsu presents the same basic characteristics of nationwide rural to urban migration, which sees richer and more prosperous areas attracting more people, as the social security, stability and income gaps between richer urban areas and rural areas is quite wide.

When an individual, or a family makes the decision to migrate it is usually a voluntary decision. There are however exceptions, such as people who obtained degrees in specific areas, or key sectors, that are needed in certain cities. These migrants are quickly given local residency in their destination city allowing them to integrate in the local fabric of society. Most of the rural to urban migrants who opt for Jiangsu, however, are not bound by these circumstances, as they are typically employed for seasonal, or yearly work, and are therefore short-term migrants. This specific aspect would not encourage dynamic and quickly moving migrants to settle in the city, and certainly not to convert their hukou registration.

The province of Jiangsu is on the east coast of China, in the delta of the Yangtze River, which cuts in half the province. The area of the Yangtze River Delta per se is one of the most densely populated in China, as well as being highly developed. Jiangsu is among the richest provinces in China, and has one of the highest GDP per capita in the whole nation. Nonetheless, within Jiangsu there is a divide that cuts the province almost perfectly following the path of the Yangtze River, slicing the province in two: the rich and thriving south, or Sunan (苏南), and the developing north, or Subei (苏北) (Jun Zhang & Peck, 2016). As will be later explained in the third chapter, this is a recurrent phenomenon, for the Municipality of Chongqing as well, where the province has a clear division between richer urban areas and less developed rural areas. This, of course, set

After the reforms were enacted, the southern part of Jiangsu benefitted immediately from the initial process of privatization and decentralization, with the various cities and industrialized parts to take advantage and use greater portions money to be reinvested (Jun Zhang & Peck, 2016). In the period immediately after the implementation of the reforms, and with the accelerated development process that the southern part of Jiangsu experienced, all administrative entities, such as cities (市 – shi), villages (村 – cun) had an important role in defining Jiangsu's current status. This is due to the creation of small private firms at city, village, and township level. This of course brought development that was never seen before in the province. This model would henceforth be known as Sunan Model (苏南模式 – Sunan Moshi) (Jun Zhang & Peck, 2016). Opposite this, the area north of the Yangtze River maintained a vast amount of people employed in the primary sector, the State imposed stricter control in the SOEs, and therefore directly managing the local economy (Y. D. Wei & Fan, 2000). For this reason, the gap between North and South Jiangsu has been widening with time, and increased intra-provincial migration from the north to the south.

Typically, when a person has to consider migrating or not, and especially if they come from a rural area, they first need to consult with their families, and weigh the advantages and disadvantage of such decision. Considering intra-provincial migration, distance is also a factor that influences the choice. Furthermore, social and economic factors greatly

impact the choice of the city to migrate to, like their current living conditions, and income. The characteristics generally considered are gender, education level, marital and family circumstances, and occupation, as well as the agricultural land area under their responsibility. The latter of these presents differences across the province, as their provincial subdivisions have their own rules and legislative framework when it comes to land distribution among farmers, and compensation for rural land in case one were to leave. For the reasons explained above, generally land has a greater value in southern Jiangsu, than northern Jiangsu. Also, the urban and industrialized areas in the Sunan area offer better opportunities to possible migrants, in terms of better jobs, better living conditions, and higher salaries.

Knowing this, it is not surprising to learn that intra-provincial migration is almost totally constituted by people from northern Jiangsu who move to the south, standing at 91% (Hao & Tang, 2018). This proves the fact that the less developed rural areas of Subei are the origin of migration within Jiangsu. In Jiangsu the rural migrants are quite homogeneous, and share the same characteristics. Men constitute the majority, seven out of ten, who generally are married and below the age of 30. With regard to the chosen place of migration, one third of migrants decide to cross the North-South Jiangsu border, while the remaining two thirds remain in their area of origin (either northern Jiangsu or southern Jiangsu). It would be reasonable to believe that every migrant would be drawn to the richer Sunan, however this is not the case. An explanation of this phenomenon can be found in the geographical, and possibly cultural barriers, between southern and northern Jiangsu, which in some ways limits the movements of rural-urban migrant workers. However, both categories of migrants, those from the south and from the north are uniformly spread throughout local administrative divisions within the province, whether it be townships, small cities, medium cities, or large cities (Hao & Tang, 2018).

It is possible to divide migrants into different categories, similarly to what was done with the previous section regarding Xinjiang, based on the type of employment. The first type consists of people who migrate to wherever they find a job opening, and are available for any type of employment. The second category is made up of people who

migrate medium or small sized cities to start their business. The latter group is composed of vendors and people with small shops, such as restaurants, markets, etc., and free lancers, like taxi drivers, street sellers, etc. Because of the status and social position of these migrants, their services cater to the lower end of society that is composed of other migrants, and lower class locals. (Hao & Tang, 2018). The main difference between the two categories is that the “regular migrants” and the “entrepreneurs” is that the former decide on possible destination based on their knowledge and experience, while the latter decide on possible destination based on the various local policies, size of market, and possible risks.

Provincial development, as stated before, is disproportionate between Sunan and Subei. Sunan has larger areas where urbanization proceeded almost without any interference. This phenomenon helped increase the dimensions of cities, and thus attracting and taking in more and more rural migrants, not only from Jiangsu itself, but from other provinces as well. On the other hand, Subei is not as developed, and most of the eight county-level cities, the economy is fueled by activities tied to agriculture.

Within Jiangsu, women are found to prefer big cities, rather than townships or small cities. This is because of the fact that women face worse conditions in townships and smaller cities, especially in the work environment. Generally speaking, small cities and townships are still ruled by conservative ways, which are not necessarily welcoming toward women. Also, these places have relatively small labor-intensive firms, where men employees are favored. Another factor that contributes to the increasing flows of migrants to big cities is the level of education a person has obtained. An educated migrant is definitely more likely to prefer a big city to a small one, or a township. As already stated, the urban environment is more competitive, and jobs can require specific knowledge and skills that only a person with a certain level of education may possess. The more educated a person is, the greater the chance there is for them find employment in a big city.

The literature regarding rural land and its inhabitants usually depicts rural lands as a push factor. On the other hand, having some sort of employment in the cities is a pull

effect that is felt by inhabitants in rural areas. It is generally understood that one of the main propulsors for rural to urban migration is the prospect for many migrants to climb up society, or at least better their conditions. Apart from the push and pull theory point of view through which looks at this situation, it would be reasonable to say that the countryside has an impact on migration, as well as on the livelihood of rural inhabitants. Rural residents possess different types (quality), and different amounts of land (quantity), which are located in different geographic areas, thus influencing in different ways the decisions of migrating. This means that for residents of Jiangsu's rural areas, having the possibility to enjoy and take what the cities have to offer is not the only way to improve their lives (Hao, 2020).

Specifically, about Liaoning province (辽宁省), it is the receiving province of the flows from the whole region of the Northeast. Migrants move south, from Jilin province (吉林省) and Heilongjiang province (黑龙江省), and only in rare cases these move north, out of Liaoning. One of the reasons for Liaoning having a net inflow migration, is because of its more favorable position, on the coast, and the more abundant opportunities.

Population mobility is one of the main factors that affect the trend of permanent regional population, and it has an important impact on regional economic development. The most recent sample survey, conducted by the Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, showed that Liaoning, like the rest of the country, is facing a trend of shrinking population mobility, with a backward flow of migrants to their hometowns. This new trend of population mobility changes brings about a series of new situations and new problems (Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Regarding the characteristics of population flow to Liaoning, generally speaking, it is not highly educated (Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019). However, in recent years there have been signs of increasing inflow of highly educated migrants. For example, the return of white-collar workers has increased, and the inflow of middle-aged migrants has also increased. In terms of education level, the interprovincial migrant population structure is characterized by low-educated inflows. The main body of the

population inflows are migrant workers. These are common characteristics for the analyzed provinces, for Chongqing, and are generally true for China as a whole.

From the perspective of migrant's occupation, Liaoning's interprovincial net inflow of employees was 360,600. Among them, the net inflow of migrants employed in the tertiary sector, such as service personnel, clerks, professional and technical personnel was 249,500. The primary sector, which includes agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishery, has a net inflow of 116,200 migrant workers. The education level of the rural migrants who settle in Liaoning was found not to be very high: mainly junior high school, consisting of 56.40% of the total migrants, while the proportion of population with a college education and above is relatively small, at 7.44%. This means that the employment of rural migrants concentrates in manual and semi manual labor occupations ([Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019](#)).

Based on the monitoring data of the health and family planning of the floating population in Liaoning Province, it is possible to describe the problems in the urbanization process. Specifically, floating population refers to those migrants from the countryside who flowed into cities in Liaoning Province. According to the data survey, 73.72% of migrants who have entered Liaoning province to settle in urban areas possessed an agricultural hukou ([Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019](#)). The low levels of education of these migrants affects their employment, restricting the type of jobs they can access, and qualify for. Thus, it is difficult for them to enter the mainstream, formal labor market. This, in turn, has caused, to a certain extent, difficulty in creating a healthy urbanization.

The traditional industries have a high proportion of employment, low-income levels and slow growth. The rural migrant population is more restricted to traditional labor-intensive industries, accounting for approximately 85%. The jobs in these industries are dangerous, and tiring. The level of labor expertise and wages are low, and there is a lack of promotion opportunities ([Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019](#)). These rural migrants are at the bottom of the urban social class, and it is difficult for them to integrate into society.

Another cause for the lack of integration of the rural migrants into the fabric of urban society is the housing system. However, the housing of migrants has been showing a stable long-term trend, but it is outside the security system. This societal problem, of where the floating population is settled, is a common problem of cities that harbor large number of migrant workers. In comparison Chongqing has alleviated and resolved the problem by launching reforms aimed at strengthening the integration of urban and rural areas, and the migrants these areas host. For instance some of these are the land reform, the land coupon system (地票), the public housing schemes, the hukou reforms, and the overall development oriented to alleviation of poverty (Liu et al., 2016a; Yuen, 2014). However, with regards to the various policies and reforms implemented in Chongqing, they will be seen in greater detail in the third chapter.

The proportion of rural floating population living in the same residence for two or more years is of 59.87%, and the proportion of people who intend to live in the same residency, or in the same city, for a prolonged period of time (five or more years), is 58.81% (Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The majority of rural floating population in Liaoning living in a stable and long-term period is very large. This shows that migrants in Liaoning typically migrate there to settle, and do not follow the first opportunity and change location again. However, in terms of housing security systems, such as low-rent housing (廉租房 – lianzu fang) and affordable housing (经济适用房 – jingji shiyong fang), most of the migrant population is excluded. The vast majority of rural migrant workers in Liaoning, about 80% of them, solve the housing problems themselves (Liaoning Province Bureau of Statistics, 2019). These people have low salaries, and the economic burden of having to sustain themselves is not conducive to stable living, thus further effecting healthy development of urbanization. Compared to Chongqing, this is totally opposite to the various policies adopted by the municipality. In Chongqing, migrants are encouraged by local authorities to take advantage of public housing provided by the city (Zhou & Ronald, 2016).

CHAPTER 3 – Study case: migrant workers in the city of Chongqing

Chongqing is the largest of the four municipalities under the direct administration of the central government, the others being Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin. The Municipality of Chongqing, officially in Mandarin Chinese 重庆直辖市 (Chongqing Zhixia Shi), despite being designated as a western province, is located in the geographic center of China, along the middle reaches of the Yangtze River. On its borders are Shaanxi province to the northeast, Hubei to the east, Hunan to the southeast, Guizhou to the south, and Sichuan to the west and northwest. It is important to note that until 1997, Chongqing was an area administered by Sichuan province.

The city of Chongqing is the biggest and most populous city in western China, and as of 2019 its population amounted to 31.24 million, of which 20.86 million were urban residents, while 10.73 million were rural residents (Chongqing Bureau of Statistics, 2020). It has a total area of 82,403 square kilometers, and is divided into 38 subdivisions: 4 autonomous counties (自治县 – Zizhi xian), 8 counties (县 – xian), and 26 districts (区 – qu). Generally speaking, the northeast and the southeast are mountainous areas distinguished by high altitudes, difficult terrain, and a rather backward economy. The autonomous counties are mostly clustered in the southeastern area of the municipality, where most of the population belongs to ethnic minorities. The western part of the municipality is relatively flat, and this is where the new urban development is located, with the new industries that fuel the growth of Chongqing. This area, despite being urbanized, is still technically in the countryside. The city of Chongqing itself is approximately in the middle area, where the Jialing River flows into the Yangtze River.

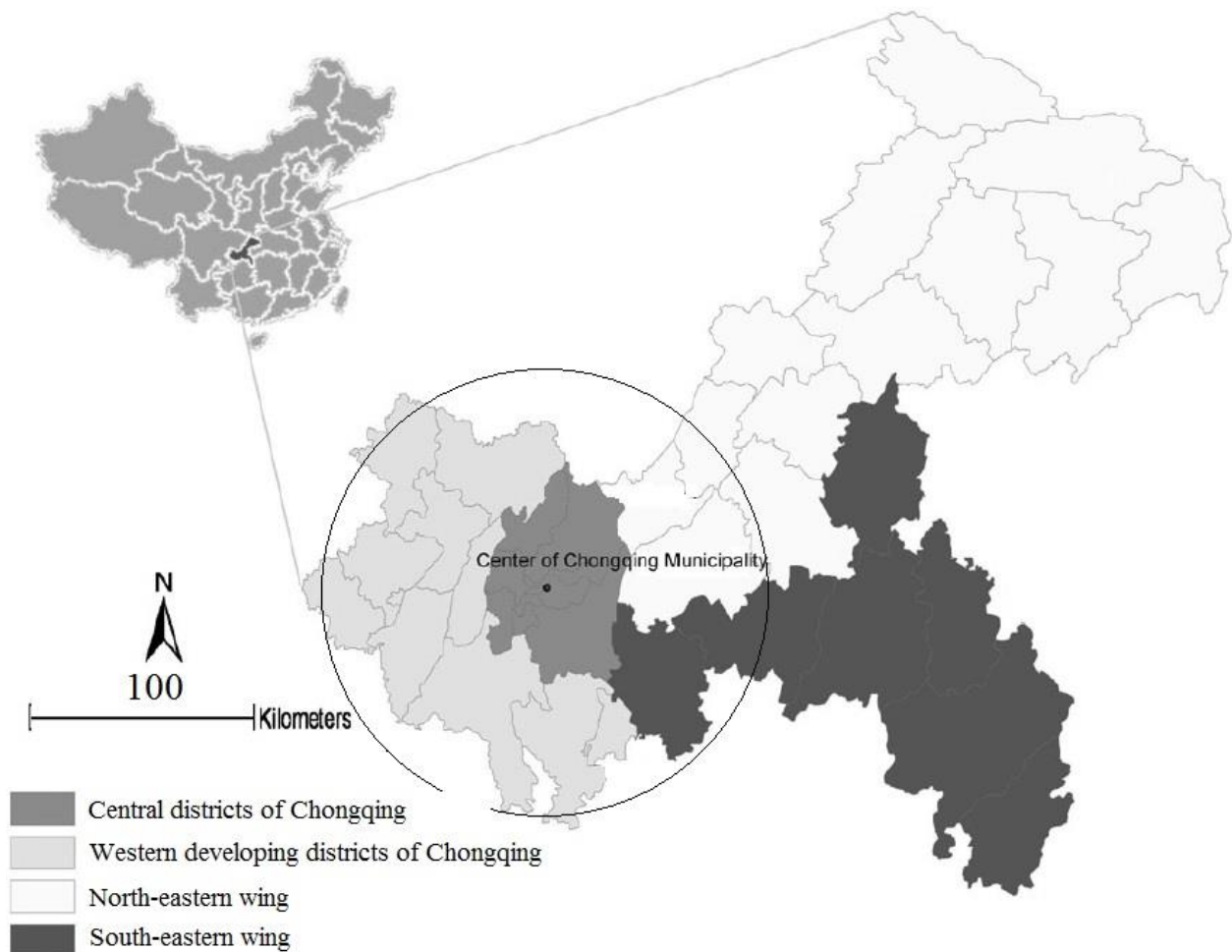


Image 1: Map of the Municipality of Chongqing

Because of its enormous proportions, it was chosen as the spearhead for development into western China which would help elevate the standards of life, bring economic and industrial development to the area and the municipality itself. It is easily understandable that for these reasons, that Chongqing has been attracting more and more migrants to work in the city, as well as in the rest of the municipality. Regarding migration and the subsequent matter of urbanization, for example, Chongqing implemented a set of rules and policies to better the quality of urbanization. Some of these local reforms are related to the hukou policy, to the creation of a new system of land coupons (地票 – dipiao), and state funded housing programs. The revised household registration program, or hukou, that was used in the municipality progressively changed the status of migrants' hukou from a rural hukou type to an urban hukou type, thus allowing these people to be integrated, if they desired. This meant

that those migrants who effectively changed their hukou, were considered as local urbanites, and were able to enjoy the same rights, services, social security provisions and so on, as the “native” inhabitants of the city. Even though it was not the first instance, this kind of measure is uncommon in China, as the hukou registration system is a way local governments can preclude non-locals from the local services, in order to keep expenditures under control. The public housing program, which has received large amounts of state funding, aims at offering affordable homes to those who otherwise would not be able to afford housing, such as migrant workers. With regards to the land coupon policy introduced in Chongqing, in Chinese 地票 (dipiao) and translatable as “land transaction certificate”, it is a marketization variant of China’s 2004 central government law regarding the use of land⁸. The dipiao was set in place in order to protect and increase the area of arable land, while at the same time provide land for urban development. The main objective was to obtain a balance between the supply of land, which has been eroded by extreme and rapid urbanization, and the decline in rural development and agricultural activities, which has been driven by migration (Long et al., 2012). In other words, this internal migration is fueled and encouraged by the possibility of converting unoccupied land designated for construction to land set aside for agricultural purposes, and transferring the development rights which can then be exchanged for an equal amount in the urban areas.

Chongqing was chosen as the case to be examined because it is the most recently defined municipality in China, and also because it is an attractive destination for rural to urban migrants. As reported by Chongqing’s statistical yearbooks (重庆市统计年鉴 – Chongqingshi tongji nianjian), ever since 1997, when it officially became the fourth municipality, the city’s urbanization process has been driven by the inflow of migrants (both inter-provincial as well as intra-provincial migrants). In 1997 the percentage of urbanization within the municipality stood at 31%, while by 2016 it had doubled, standing at 62.6% (Chongqing Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In addition, the Municipality

⁸ Land Administration Law of the People's Republic of China (Second Amendment) – 中华人民共和国土地管理法 (第二次修正) http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/gongbao/2004-10/21/content_5334569.htm (In Chinese)

of Chongqing as a whole is subject to heavy flows of rural migrant workers who are not employed in the city, but find work in the countryside. Furthermore, the city of Chongqing has an almost balanced inflow and outflow of migrants, who come and go from within the municipality. Since 2015, it was estimated that every year there is a balance of about 5 million migrants coming in, and going out (Xiong et al., 2020). In many ways this is a problem, as there has been an increasing number of migrant workers in the rural areas of the municipality, thus creating a surplus of labor.

Chongqing is also one of the locations that has been chosen for experimenting the simultaneous development of urban and rural areas. Among these experiments are a set of regulations such as “measures for protecting the rights and interests of migrant workers and peasants, and service management” (进城务工农民权益保护和服务管理办法 – Jin cheng wugong nongmin quanyi baohu he fuwu guanli banfa), the “establishing the social security system” (建立社会保障制度 – jianli shehui baozhang zhidu), or the aforementioned “household registration system reform” (户籍制度改革 – huji zhidu gaige) (National Development and Reform Commission, 2021). Another plan launched by the local government in 2010 was expected to encourage rural to urban migration, where three million rural migrants were expected to move into urban areas in two years, with ten million more over the next ten years. This plan sought to promote sustainable rural to urban migration, as well as set an example for other regions in China (Xiong et al., 2020). As already mentioned, the municipality is extremely large and it includes different types of countryside, and different peoples and ethnicities. Therefore, in order to understand migration patterns within the municipality it is necessary to take these aspects into consideration as well.

The megalopolis of Chongqing is often labeled as a super city, as the largest city in the world. While this is true to a certain extent, it is also misleading information, being derived from an incorrect interpretation of the administrative structure of the municipality (Chan, 2007). The whole metropolitan area of the Municipality of Chongqing extends over an area of more than 80,000 square kilometers. Although the municipality is made up of several distinct urban conglomerates, it is mostly rural. The

main urban area (composed of nine districts, or 区 – qu) of the city of Chongqing has an official registered population of approximately twenty million residents, and a large fluctuating number of *liudong renkou* (流动人口 – floating population) composed of migrant workers. Chongqing's rise as one of the outposts for development in western China was expected to bring about the imposition of a new model for Chinese society covering urban planning, urban development, hukou management, and steering of migration policies. To many, this seemed like a new path that China could have followed, an alternative path towards social and economic growth, with positive impacts (Fang et al., 2018). This seemed obvious, especially when compared to the shortsighted plans that had been adopted by the local governments of the megacities on China's eastern coast. Indeed, these cities propelled China's economy and increased national GDP, but at the expense of people in the lower levels of society, such as migrant workers (Fang et al., 2018). Regarding Chongqing, however, there were strong positions defending the rise of a new “Chongqing Model” (重庆模式 – Chongqing Moshi), and its capacity to accommodate migrant workers, as well as its ability to integrate migrants in general into the city's urban and economic planning (Cui, 2011; Zhang & Peck, 2016).

Driving forces: policies and a new path for development

As previously mentioned, the development of Chongqing is, to a large extent, the outcome of several national and local decisions. Chongqing became a municipality in 1997 when the government decided it would be the most suitable place for the resettlement of the 1.7 million people following their evacuation of the Three Gorges area, after that project started in 1993 (Bao et al., 2019). Being a municipality under the direct control of the government meant that the city's highest authorities had a provincial level administrative role, thus granting them more autonomy, and the ability to obtain more from the central government in Beijing (P. C. C. Huang, 2011). The city received another boost to its growth when it was chosen as the spearhead to bring development in the West of China, thus becoming the economic center of the upper Yangtze River. The “Great Western Development Strategy” (西部大开发 – Xibu

Dakaifa) was established by the 1999/2000 Central People’s Government meeting (Bao et al., 2019). After this, Chongqing was chosen again as an experimental area for new policies starting in 2007 (Ye et al., 2013). Thus the city received the status of “National Pilot Zone for Overall Urban and Rural Comprehensive Supporting Reform” (全国统筹城乡综合配套改革试验区 – Quanguo tongchou chengxian zonghe peitao gaige shiyan qu), and approval for the city’s plan for parallel rural and urban development which came to be known as “one circle” and “two wings”⁹ (Y. Huang et al., 2020; The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2007). Three years later, in 2010 the Liangjiang New Area was formed, which served as the third national development and open zone in China, the first in Western China (after Shanghai Pudong New Area and Tianjin Binhai New Area). These strategic and carefully planned instruments were expected to allow Chongqing to reform the Chinese development model, with particular attention to the development of social welfare, and its accessibility for everybody (Ye et al., 2013).

The last decade saw an increase of the urban hukou holders in the city, the result of reforms set by the municipality’s government in 2010 to change hukou policy. The main underlying elements of this reform focused on the rights of those with rural hukou and the dislocation of these, and the avoiding the creation of urban slums. Obviously those with rural hukou were not forced to convert their hukou registration into an urban one, as it was a free choice, and they were not forced to immediately give up their rights over land usage in the countryside (Liu et al., 2016). These regulations also granted rural-to-urban migrants the same privileges as their urban counterparts. This shift had many benefits, like removing the surplus labor available in the countryside and putting it to use where needed.

With the newly enacted rules, migrants workers with a non-local hukou who had been working in Chongqing for at least five years, were able change the hukou type for

⁹ “One circle” refers to the imaginary, visible in image 1, circle of which radius represents the maximum distance that can be covered in one hour from the center of Chongqing. Inside this circle are the most developed and most densely populated districts. “Two wings” refers to the districts that are left out of the circle, the southeast, and the northeast (Yang Huang et al., 2020).

themselves and their families' (Liu et al., 2016). Then these new urban hukou holders could also enjoy the so-called “five guarantees” (五保户 – wu baohu), a support system that provides employment in the city, public housing, access to healthcare and insurance, pension schemes, and possibility of enrolling their children in school in the city (Liu et al., 2016).

As previously explained, the first enacted reforms of the early 1980s allowed millions of people to migrate where labor force was needed, thanks to the constraints imposed by the hukou being loosened. Some of these migrating people decided not to move far, and found employment in local TVEs, while many others migrated to the cities, thus becoming part of the floating population.

With regards to the rural-urban conversion system (地票 – dipiao), there were two objectives: the first was to make up the difference between the attributed value of rural land compared to urban land, and between the need of land for construction and the sparse land conversion quotas (Chen et al., 2020). The government of Chongqing encouraged people from the countryside to repossess land. This meant that a person from the countryside who requested a dipiao certificate would receive a large compensation, in correlation to the value, disregarding the position and the characteristics of the land. Land quotas can be described as certificates for having the “right to build”, and can be sold on the market (Ding & Lichtenberg, 2011).

The public rental housing (公租房 – gong zufang) system utilized in Chongqing served for hosting the large incoming migrant population from the rural areas (P. C. C. Huang, 2012). Chongqing was caught in a time when a large workforce was needed, simultaneously with a rapid urbanization process, and therefore the government began an extremely ambitious project, which planned for the construction of 40 million square meters of public housing, to be completed in a ten-year span from 2010 to 2020 (Bao et al., 2019). It was stated that the rent for this public rental housing would be offered at a cheaper price, at least 40% less than the price of similar housing in the same area. Also, after having lived in the apartment for at least five years the apartment could be

purchased (Gan, Zuo, Chang, et al., 2016). These programs provided and still provide migrants with cheaper accommodations, and attract more migrants to actually take residency in Chongqing (Gan, Zuo, Ye, et al., 2016). The funds poured into the public rental housing, and the consequential larger supply of migrant workers, significantly increased the municipality's ability to ensure investments, and therefore strengthened its position in the west of China (Youqin Huang, 2012).

The Municipality of Chongqing was chosen as the main hub from which to launch development strategies in western China, and thus in 2000 the "Great Western Development" policy was begun. During the first decade after the implementation of this policy, government data showed how the GDP level in Chongqing had grown four times by 2010, the largest increase in the whole nation (Chongqing Bureau of Statistics^a, 2011; Chongqing Bureau of Statistics^b, 2011). This growth in Chongqing's GDP brought it closer to the eastern, richer provinces, reducing the financial and prosperity gap between the two areas. The Chongqing model had satisfied the State's requirements, with immediate effects on society and economy, as it improved the living conditions of many people (K., Lu, 2012). The Chongqing model was believed to be a more workable model, half way between China's initial socialist mold, and the recently imported capitalistic model that characterized, for example Guangdong. The growth model was focused not on investments and exports, but rather on improving the living condition of people, no matter their status, or hukou (K., Lu, 2012). In addition to this, the local government utilized 15-20% of its revenue from the SOEs located in the municipality, thus acquiring a certain equilibrium, while also decreasing the gap between rich and poor.

Characteristics of migrants

In order to analyze the composition of migrant groups, and provide a general average idea of migrants' characteristics, data collected through field surveys will be used. This data was collected in three different areas of the Municipality of Chongqing, so as to allow a more diverse pool of participants. The three areas from where these samples were collected are Yongchuan District (永川区) located in the east of the municipality,

Youyang Tujia and Miao Autonomous County (酉阳土家族苗族自治县) located in the southeast, and Zhong County (忠县) located in the northeast of the municipality.

When analyzing the data from the survey, the first and most obvious visible element is age. Migrants are primarily aged between 30 and 50. This segment of migrants, aged 30 to 50, has more opportunities to migrate and find jobs compared to migrants aged 50 years and above, as this group more likely prefers to live and work in their hometowns. Another element that constitutes a push factor is the condition of the residence location, i.e., profitability of the land with regards to crop production. People in the rural areas who decided to migrate, mostly belong to households whose available arable land is insufficient to guarantee profitable agricultural yield. It would be reasonable to state that the pursuit of economic benefits is one of the biggest factors that convinces people to migrate.

A third factor that was obvious when first examining the data was the distance from the nearest towns and cities. People, individuals and entire households as well, that live in remote areas are more likely to migrate to urban areas. This aligns with previous studies that suggest how migrants are more attracted to economically advanced areas (Shen et al., 2018). With regard to this trend, it is important to point out that despite the migrants' intentions and willingness to settle in urban areas, it is not always possible, nor it is an easy procedure. First of all, there is the hukou registration problem, which has been re-regulated in Chongqing, and secondly, there is price of housing (Hui et al., 2015; Lü et al., 2015).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, migrant workers in Chongqing are concentrated in five industries. Migrants workers in Chongqing are concentrated in labor intensive industries, in all three sectors. The types of employment generally have low technical requirements, low employment thresholds, and large personnel capacity (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). The secondary sector employs 61.4% of migrant workers, while 38% of migrant workers are engaged in the tertiary sector. Among them, 33.6% of the manufacturing industry employees are migrant workers, those employed in the construction industry account for 22.4%, those engaged in residential services

and others account for 11.2%, wholesale and retail industry accounted for 7.2% of employed migrant workers, and accommodation and food service industry accounted for 6.5% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). However, cultural related jobs, education, public management, technical serviced and other industries which require a high level of knowledge and a precise set of skills, account altogether for only 4.9% of the total number of migrant workers (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Migrant workers are generally introduced to their jobs through word of mouth, by relatives and friends. Because migrant workers have fewer channels to obtain information about available work positions, they are generally regarded with suspicion and deemed untrustworthy by occupational intermediaries. Therefore, migrant workers who search for employment using multiple information channels are still a minority, and just rely on information from family and friends to guide them. The survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics shows that among migrant workers, 61.8% were introduced to their jobs by family and friends, 33% were spontaneous applications, 1.8% were introduced by intermediary organizations, only 1.3% were introduced through government labor service agencies, while the remaining percentage did not provide an answer (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Because of this system of *guanxi* (关系 – connection) workers who follow recommendations from family and friends, are only employed in the same industry as their relatives, and the choice of a job is therefore restricted to a certain extent. Among the migrant workers in the city, 90% of the labor force is still engaged in traditional industries such as manufacturing, construction, residential services, wholesale and retail, and the accommodations and food industry (National Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

Regarding the wages of migrant workers and the competitiveness of the labor market, it appears there are no apparent affiliations (Knight & Li, 2005). It is understood, at least for Chongqing, that the wages of local residents are secured by regulations established by the local enterprises, and that they're not determined by the market. On the other hand, the wages of migrant workers are determined by the market itself. This has caused segmentation on the labor market; this is the same phenomenon explained

in the second chapter, where hukou status impacts wage. In other words, it appears that rural-to-urban migrants would be less able to find appropriate positions, despite having their hukou converted, compared to the native residents (Zhao, 2005).

Furthermore, the municipality, after 2003, experienced an interesting occurrence: there was a surplus of rural labor that happened at the same time as a lack of migrant labor force. The main point stands in the age of the migrant workers. Young migrants are the principal resource for the industries which use this workforce, and the number of young migrant workers has plummeted since 2010 (Chan, 2010). Another possible explanation for the shortage of rural migrants could be explained by the institutional restraints in the city, such as the few permanent job positions that can be found.

Conclusions

The inflow of population to the Municipality of Chongqing is predominantly focused on the city itself. This phenomenon is similar to what happens in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, where migrants are attracted to the large, developed cities. However, it differs from the cities in eastern China, like those in Jiangsu province, where the already present local model has attracted migrants to villages and townships. First of all, the presence of floating population in the center of Chongqing is a consequence of the implementation of reforms that pushed vast industrial and land revitalization projects. At the same time, it is apparent that the establishment of the Liangjiang New district, which is near the center of the city, was a motor for development, thus also attracting large numbers of migrants.

Regarding the flow of migrants, the patterns seen in the various provinces that have been compared, and Chongqing, are quite similar. Intra-provincial migration is the common factor, but there are also inflows of migrant workers from other provinces. Intra-provincial migration is characterized by movements from rural areas, which are poorer and underdeveloped, to the urban areas, which are generally wealthier, and have places where migrants can find employment. Another common characteristic the migrants have in common is their level of education; most of them are not highly educated, and do not possess a specific set of skills. This means that most of these rural-to-urban migrants are

willing to accept the highest-paying job offer that is presented to them. However, it has been noted that most migrants in Chongqing rely on a system of connections, or *guanxi*, to find employment. A migrant to Chongqing is typically introduced to a job in the same industry as friends and family thanks to a network of connections.

In Chongqing the institutional barriers are not as high as in other highly developed areas in China. Some of the constraints for labor development and population are industrial and economic growth, which cause an increase in the cost of living, and changes in the working environment. Arguably, simply because there is industrial and economical development, does not mean that the quality of life is also improved for everyone. Simultaneously, the household registration reform implemented by the government of Chongqing for rural-to-urban migrant workers came under scrutiny and was debated on a national level. The *dipiao* system with its market, definitely played a salient role for the household registration reform to advance efficiently, helping to maintain equilibrium between the rural and the urban areas, while adding the notion of “rights over land development” to the legal practice.

The government of Chongqing started the most extensive program in the whole nation regarding household registration policies and convertibility for rural migrant workers. This allowed them to be incorporated into the city urban social fiber, granting them access to health care, education for their children, retirement schemes, and public housing. To begin with, this project planned for the registration of about three million migrant workers, and to convert their rural hukous to an urban hukous within three years. Longer term plans envisioned the registration of ten million rural migrant workers by 2020.

Reforms to the household registration system have brought about a reduction in discrimination, and have provided economic prospects to migrants, while simultaneously bettering social provision for the migrants in the city, facilitating their integration into the urban fabric of society. Public housing programs reduced the phenomenon of social segregation, and bettered migrants’ quality of life. Lastly, the *dipiao* system facilitated the migrants’ transition from the municipality’s rural areas to the city.

By granting privileges to rural-urban migrants from within the municipality, allowing them to acquire permanent residency, the reformed household registration generated a dichotomy, on one side these former migrants, and on the other the native local residents. The strategy behind this is connected to Chongqing's development projects, where the government's expectations are for migrants to settle in the city and increase growth, while at the same time exchanging their rights and privileges in the countryside.

People who leave their hometowns permanently, looking to live in the urban areas, however, risk losing the protections and security which derive from living in the countryside. It is true that the rural areas are underdeveloped, but there, people have land that can be used; this is arguably a stable source of income. For this reason, the policies implemented in Chongqing were primarily aimed at the migrants' livelihood, and social and financial security as well, and not only at economic growth.

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