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China has rigid system to control mobility to cities, yet over decades there is increased informal movement of population. The actual numbers of discontented population has multiplied and there is spread of criminal networks within and beyond China. The paper explores urban challenges due to rural-urban migration, while locating the terms “socially excluded” and “unprivileged population” in Chinese society. It focuses on the causes, nature of mobility, and urban insecurities challenging the “harmonious society”. With progression of urbanization, social equality demand will accentuate with social disharmony, and people will use pressure tactics of varied forms causing greater human security concerns.

[Key Words: Rural-urban migration, human security in China, criminal organizations, local corruption.]

Introduction
Population mobility in China is a direct outcome of Deng Xiaoping’s reform and open door policy initiated in the late 1970s. The focus on upward spiral of economic development and rapid urbanization weakened the Maoist structure of hukou (户口) system, segregating urban and rural residents. Alongside, the push-and-pull of market forces as well as substantial displacement due to re-development projects caused huge demographic shift of the populace, especially from the rural to urban and suburban areas. Due to the unplanned nature of movement, this populace is devoid of state benefits even though they share urban spaces and amenities. This has created a population of unprivileged in cities.

Besides, the restructuring of old institutions has expanded the urban underclass population. Lack of high-tech skills, old-age factor, health problems, and meagre state benefits has posed challenges for survival of these urban residents. The actual numbers of discontented population has multiplied and there is spread of criminal networks within and beyond China. The paper explores the challenges posed by rural-urban migration, while locating the terms “socially excluded” and “unprivileged population” in Chinese society and its implications. It focuses on the causes, nature of mobility, and urban insecurities
challenging the “harmonious society”. With progression of urbanization, social equality demand will accentuate with social disharmony, and people will use pressure tactics of varied forms causing greater human security concerns.

**Causes and Nature of Rural-to-Urban Migration**

Since the late 1970s, agricultural mechanization and technological modernization has re-shaped the social and economic environment of rural areas. Tens of millions of rural labour have become redundant and shifted to non-rural occupations and locations. Studies point to the family responsibility system and higher prices for agricultural produce in the 1980s as reasons for labour mobility (Zhang 1986; Fang 1984; and Wang 1987). The enormous difference in living conditions, social facilities and cultural facilities between urban and rural areas over the years, also attracted and absorbed the rural populace in cities (Song 1988; Zhao 1984; Dong 1989).

Besides, shrinking of arable land along with peasant’s losing land due to development projects poses problems for rural subsistence. Statistics reveal around 2.5 to 3 million *mu* of land is officially approved for non-arable projects every year with a total of 33.95 *mu* land converted between 1987 and 2001, resulting in 34 million peasants fully or partially losing land (Han 2005: 1). Experts opine that an additional 2 to 3 million peasants actually lost land due to unofficial occupation (Han 2005: 1). Yet, the plan for 2000-2030 is to convert 54.50 million *mu* of land for non-arable projects (Han 2005: 1). In pre-reform era, the state re-allocated those who lost land, but one-time compensation is common in recent years, which is often insufficient for long-term survival.²

Since the mid-90s, rural unemployment showed an upward trend forcing people to move.³ In 1995, official reports estimated 100 million people as jobless, though unofficial reports suggested 200 million (Rojas 1997: 1). Data from State Statistical Bureau shows that from 1978 to 2000, rural China had accumulated 130 million labourers waiting to shift to non-rural locations (Gou 2007: 1). This intensified the mobility of rural population, which was recorded under Chinese terminology of “floating population” (流动人口).⁴

Over the years, the official figure on floating population has been escalating from 30 million in 1982 to 150 million by the end of 2003 (Guangming 2000; Schell 2003). Projections are that within the next 20 years an added 300 million people will officially register as urban population (Guo 2007: 1), unofficial numbers may exceed greatly.

**Discrimination and Oppression of Rural Migrants in Urban Areas**

In urban areas, rural migrants ⁵ engage in a range of jobs from garbage collection, maids, services in hotels and restaurants, construction workers, factory workers, roadside peddlers to setting up business units, restaurants and shops, all of which are under ambiguous state recognition. Till recently, the “Measures for Internment and Deportation of Urban Vagrants and Beggars”⁶ provided a legal tool to send vagrants to repatriation centre and force them to return to hometowns. “Peasant workers” (农民工人), who gain legal permits to
work, are no better due to the lack of proper guidelines and knowledge of laws. In most cases, the laws are also not migrant specific and migrants do not form a part of officially recognized trade unions.

With a larger number of rural women working in urban set up, cases of rough handling in factories, sexual exploitation, and oppression are reported to be higher (Chan 1998; Chan 2002b). Reports of confining migrant workers in factory compounds, enforcement of army like discipline and punishments creating terror to prevent voices of dissent are widespread mainly in Taiwanese and Korean companies (Chan 2002a: 1). The safety standards and precautions where mostly migrants work are given abysmal importance. According to a 1998 study, there were 15,000 serious accidents in 9,582 factories of Shenzhen, where the majority of workers were migrants (HRIC 2001: 20).

Rural migrants earn quite less compared to other workers. According to figures, more than 70 per cent migrants earn less than 600 yuan per month and only nearly 20 per cent earn in the range of 600 to 800 yuan per month (Guo 2007: 1). Incidents of delay in payment or non-payment are rampant. In Zhujiang River Delta, reported more than one billion yuan of wages in arrears in official records, and in Heilongjiang rural workers lodged about 5,000 complaints for unpaid wages of more than 10 million yuan by the end of 2001 (Xinhua News 2002a; Xinhua News 2002b).

The social discrimination is also visible in the tags attached to migrants as “country cousins”, “outsiders” (外来人口), “country bumpkin” (乡下人), “working sisters” (打工妹), “blind flow” (盲流), etc., which make them vulnerable. The notions of “regional superiority” and “supremacy of the nationality” (basically the ‘Han’ superiority) also creates social discriminations. This social discrimination of migrant workers results in their seeking a social identity in the urban market, which generally translates to hometown affiliations and linkage to family clans. These social identities place migrants in a group of workers belonging to poor areas, speaking the same dialect, with low skills, and isolated in the urban sectors.

Corruption, Local Connections, Rise in Crime

The ambiguity in state policies and the new market forces have created new centre of powers. The very existence of ‘peasant enclaves’ or rural migrant ghettos in urban areas are a sign of local acceptance or relaxation of stringent controls. More often than not rules and regulations are not rigidly followed and there is high degree of corruption. The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of China point to the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts shows that from 3.5 in 1998, the index has fallen to 3.3 in 2006, making China march towards a highly corrupt society.7 Scholars argue that by 1995, corruption in China changed from individual to organizational forms with distinguished features and by 1998 changed to an institutional or systemic form (He 2000: 3). Some argue that post-1992, individual bribery concentrated in state enterprises changed to collective bribery. Official statistics show that in the
post-1992 period, bribery cases increased by 63 per cent, intensifying corruption in China (Yu 2008: 165).

Lower-level organizations accumulate public resources to bribe upper-level organizations to gain more financial support and negotiate administrative deals (He 2000: 3). This has given rise to an established arrangement of trading and bargaining. Most of the migrants with capital and the gang leaders who have connections along with sources are able to play the ‘money-power’ game and in the process become more powerful. According to Supreme Procuratorate statistics from April 2001 to April 2003, 557 state officials were prosecuted for involvement in organized crime cases and acting as the “protective umbrellas” for gangsters (Ming 2006: 172).

Reports point to the amplification in the number of criminal cases reaching 4.75 million with 530,000 serious violent crimes in 2007, while there were 4.65 million criminal cases in 2006 (PDGW 2008). Increased number of reports point to the protests and violent demonstrations by the peasants over issues ranging from refusing to leave land, inadequate compensation of land acquired for re-development projects, corrupt practices of local cadres in villages to non-payment of wages, detestation for the officialdom and animosity against the rich class in urban areas. More number of individual grievances often turns to violent actions, which due to constant state suppression results in protesters using pressure tactics of varied forms. The associations, organizations, societies and underworld gangs play a strong supporting role, especially the “peasant enclaves” as a composed community assist in joint protests.

**Criminal Activities and Organizations**

There has been an intense debate within and outside China over how the criminal organizations are formed and why. Evidence indicate, illegal migrants in urban areas and the jobless are easily attracted to criminal groups and engage in illegal activities with the lure of “money” as a strong “pull” factor. It is reported that 75 per cent of criminals in metropolis such as Beijing, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are non-residents or “sanwu renyuan” (He 2000: 13). In Beijing, out of the total number of criminals in 1980, 3.41 per cent were migrants; in 1985, 9.28 per cent were migrants; in 1988, the number increased to 23.3 per cent. According to 1999 figures, 53.43 per cent criminals were migrants in Shanghai, 52.29 per cent in Guangzhou and 80.96 per cent in Dongwan in Guangdong province (Ling 2005:1).

Some debates exist over the relationship between criminals and the region to which the migrant belongs. For example, Hunan people are often viewed as criminals, though validation of such views is questionable. In economically more prosperous regions, crimes committed by migrants are on the rise from 30 per cent in 1980 to 89 per cent by 2006 (Wang 2008). During the demolition drive of “Zhejiang village” in Beijing, two illegal markets, 53 illegal medical practices, 215 places of illegal processed foods of fake brands
and poor quality, 210 illegal small restaurants and hair salons, and 1,645 license-less peddlers were found (Jeong 2002: 36).

The feeling of abhorrence and detestation is high due to the constant neglect and suppression of the migrant community. The violent action is also an expression of day-to-day contempt of officialdom and non-institutionalized grievance redressal system. In particular, police corruption, manhandling and frequent ‘clean-up campaigns’ (清理整顿) has created an ‘unfriendly’ image of the police. Evidently, the cases of revenge against the police personnel are growing, highlighting the opposition to law enforcing agencies.

The young with high level of criminal techniques have emerged as a recent phenomenon. A survey in Jiangsu province Jurong prison found that out of the 202 prisoners surveyed, 64.5 per cent were unmarried, 59 per cent had criminal techniques, and 16.5 per cent had been in jail earlier (He 2000: 14). In addition, the survey revealed shift from hidden and individual to open and organized crimes; and from isolated action to gang operations. Such criminal groups have their own organization, plan of action, distribution of tasks, and rules for dividing burgled stuff (He 2000: 14). The highlight of the survey was “the majority of those caught after 1996 committed crimes with the conscious intention of breaking the law and defying moral prohibitions as against the earlier trends of physiological imbalance” (He 2000: 14).

Most of the mobile population is willing to engage in illegal and unlawful crimes for a suitable remuneration. Some scholars have pointed to the concept of “new generation peasant-workers” or “second generation peasant-workers”, which forms the main component in crimes (Ling 2005: 2; Luo and Zhou 2008: 2). This group born in the late 70s and early 80s has lesser tolerance with different value concepts and stronger anti-social feelings for generational marginalization of their community.

Organizational Structure

The roots of most of the secret societies need to be traced back to Tang and Song dynasties (7th and 13th century), though their involvement in crimes and illegal trade flourished at the turn of Ming dynasty (1368-1644) to Qing dynasty (Ming 2006: 157). In the 19th century, the secret societies toppled the Qing dynasty in 1911 and were having political-criminal nexus under the Chinese Nationalist Party (commonly known as KMT 国民党) government (Stratfor 2008). There were two million brigands and 300 million religious groups reported during that time (Ming 2006: 157). During Mao’s rule, these societies either went underground or shifted bases to Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. In the post-reform period, these societies effectively utilized the non-state space and the opportunities for reorganization. Many newly formed gangs emerged who became powerful with community support.

The organization of groups under a leadership with influential power within a community has taken roots due to the traditional notions of social hierarchy. Employment of migrant labour is routed through organized groups
that exercise enormous power in migrant communities. Ding Xueliang discusses two fundamental ways in which the organized crime has penetrated the construction sector: seize contracts through violence or threat, and blocking legal process in case of action (Ding 2001: 191). In the late 1980 and early 1990, a case in Harbin city exposed that Song Yongjia, senior manager of a large construction company, was the mafia boss. He had powerful local connections and threatened rivals with deployment of police force. He virtually monopolized the structural dismantling business in the city (Ding 2001: 191).

Another mode of recruitment is through spontaneous and unorganized labour markets, which are apparently controlled by criminal groups. These groups are based on geographical origin. These gangs referred to as “urban guerrillas” operating in labour markets with their “black societies” (黑社会) (Solinger 1993: 103). The ‘black societies’ are composed of groups of employees and labourers waiting for employment or peasants with bonded ties of personal friendship or kinship relations to establish networks. The members from a particular migrant community form these gangs and their place of origin distinguishes them like the ‘Xinjiang Gang’ in Shanghai, the ‘Beijing Gang’ in Guangzhou, the ‘Guangzhou Gang’ in Jiangxi, “local snakes” (地头蛇) in Guangdong (He 2000: 14). There are also some based on clan ties or professional connections. These have well designed vertical hierarchies and strict disciplinary rules (He 2000: 14).

The gangs have a vast network and their membership is huge. An underworld gang of Sichuan called “knives” in Guangdong has 70 to 300 odd members. Apart from other sources of income, gangs divide territories within an urban set up to extract money on daily or monthly basis on fixed dates from local businesses of the migrant communities in the name of “protection fees” or “territory fees” (Zhou 1997: 240, 246). In particular, the gang elders (老大) within a community, who have power and influence over individuals in the community, gradually indulge in using all illegal acts to maintain supremacy. The members treat them as ‘master’ (师傅) and he has all financial and decision making powers.

**Extent of Activities & State Response**

Official statistics show a 340 per cent increase in the total number of crimes with tenfold increase in serious crimes from 1979 to 1990 (Zhang 2008: 125). The crimes committed in China range from drug peddling, theft, fraud, piracy, and prostitution to money laundering, human trafficking, and terrorist activities. Reports on exploitation of women and flesh trade have been a focus of debate in China. According to some records, prostitution in Tibet Autonomous Region has expanded exponentially. Apart from the rise in the number of Tibetan prostitutes, more than 60 per cent in the region are from Sichuan province and many other are Muslim women from Shanxi (TIN 2003).
Other forms of crimes are often viewed as “terrorist” in nature. However, in China a regional bias, especially against Uyghur people and now the Tibetans, dominates the mindset and policy guidelines. Organized crime is becoming more of a concern in China. In the 1979 Chinese Criminal Law there was no mention of the organized crime, the term “Chinese underworld” was official used for the first time in 1981 (Ming 2006: 153).

The local government at all levels initiate frequent ‘clean-up’ campaigns to maintain order and to protect the showcase image of the city by removing all those engaged in street business or begging. In 2004, to better manage subway stations and to prevent the disruption of public order, Shanghai police started to hold people for criminal detention if they were begging, distributing leaflets, setting up booths wilfully, or selling newspapers or were caught more than three times.8

Authorities resort to periodic ‘Strike Hard’ (严打政策) campaign to root out illegal and unlawful activities. During the first campaign from August 1983 to the end of 1986, 1.77 million culprits were arrested along with 322,000 people sent to “education through labour camp”. Moreover, 8,000 criminal groups were found in Shanxi, 17,682 in Henan, 12,000 in Guangdong, 9,120 in Shandong, 6,597 in Jilin, 6,249 in Anhui, 4,880 in Jiangxi, 3,128 in Gansu, 783 in Qinghai, and only 444 in Ningxia (Ming 2006: 159). However, in the 2001 ‘Strike Hard’ campaign against crime unearthed 1,600 tons of illegal explosives, more than 330,000 guns, 3.5 million detonators and 1.5 million bullets along with solving 35,000 cases of illegal explosives and guns. It also exposed more than 15,000 privately owned illegal workshops producing firearms and explosives (CNN 2001).

From April to December 2001, courts gave ruling on 300 mafia-type syndicate cases and sentenced 12,000 organized crime group members (Ming 2006: 166). The trend shows increasing sophistication in criminal activities and rise in the numbers of criminals. In 1986, 114,000 were arrested, whereas some 570,000 in 1994 (Ming 2006: 160). The figures also point to the escalation of crime and criminal groups after every campaign. There was a 10 per cent increase in the number of criminal cases in 1988 reaching 827,594 compared to 1983 figures, while the number of criminal groups rose from 30,000 in 1986 to 150,000 in 1994 (Ming 2006: 160). The state control is no more a deterrence, but further ablaze repressed grievances. Paradoxically, the continuous existence of such illegal activities means the authorities are more tolerant of the expansion of underground economy. Hence, various underground activities flourish with authorities making the “cage” bigger.9

Concluding Discussion: Urban Security and Harmonious Society

The ‘migration wave’ has become one of the most serious problems in urban China, for the infrastructure in most cities is inadequate. However, consistent rural-to-urban migration has weakened state’s capacity to control the flow of population and the management of urban areas, hence, threatens the
very basis of urban security. Large-scale movement of population, increased heterogeneity of nationalities, and the emergence of inter-provincial and intra-regional networks that allow movement of goods, capital as well as information – all threaten existing demarcation of administrative entities in China. This puts pressure on the state to re-think traditional urban protection and security policies and design strategies that redefine the population in a more composite form. In other words, this requires removal of state barriers dividing populations in any structured manner and to regard them as human entities with individual rights. Conversely, the state is increasingly dependent on market criteria to formulate migration policies. In the reform of *hukou*, economic criterion has formed the basis to assess the extent of relaxation in migration flows.

In China, non-state actors have emerged to play bigger role in the society. In some places, underground societies and illegal associations with broader networks directly confront with local governments to negotiate power relations. Some scholars opine that underground societies and organized groups have emerged to fill the vacuum left by the state and in many places they function as “the second government,” “the second court,” or “the second police station” (Ming 2006: 170). The Ministry of Public Security news release in 2005 had highlighted that along with the emergence of new types of criminal activities, criminal cases now happen more often in public spaces, meaning the streets are less safe (PDGW 2008).

Scholars within and outside China put forth the idea of ‘forming a harmonious society’, which is a concept to pacify the many contradictions and conflicts destabilizing the social and economic fabric of Chinese society along with spill over effects on other societies of the world. In particular, the criminal organizations having ‘supra-state’ networks and links at ‘sub-state’ levels, pose a greater challenge to composed form of national, sub-national and trans-national entities. Thus, the calls for ‘people-centric’ approach (以人为本) aims to reduce the range and intensity of social risks faced directly by the people (Cao 2006: 8).

The contradictions and clashes within a particular region are examples of supra-state forces existing in China. These forces when politically mobilized will result in creating an uncontrollable pressure of division within a state or call for more autonomy of regions like that of Tibet. Migrants with their hometown ties or the new generation of migrant descendants feel secluded in the existing urban space and hence, take active part in the emergence of dense trans-regional networks and organizational structures, which creates a new set of Diaspora. This diasporic identity or the creation of ‘China towns within China’ (peasant enclaves) provoke a sense of regionalism and promotes the revival of idea of a ‘Federal state’ in China due to conflicting regional and political identities.

In societies where ethnic harmony and domestic security is destabilized through both internal and external forces, the distinctive line between criminal
groups, rebellious organizations, and terror outfits become blurred. China is facing a similar crisis of distinction. Particularly, with limited resources and high degree of corruption, the internationalization of the criminal networks can overtake state institutions with mafia-like organizations. According to a report of the Ministry of Public Security, there were about 4,200 mafia-style syndicates operating in Chinese society in 2004 out of which more than 60 were cross-border, transnational organized criminal groups that are active in money-laundering, and the smuggling of goods and illegal immigrants (Ming 2006: 166). Hence, China needs to re-think its policies and strategies to deal with future issues and focus on civil liberties, rule of law in real sense, and diversity. This, in essence, means that rather than provisional operations to cover problems, long-term plans to root out causes need to be employed.

Notes:
1 *Hukou* is a system of registration since 1950s, dividing the population in two groups: agricultural and non-agricultural population. The system restricts the mobility of individuals in China as a non-agricultural registration leads to urban residence and an agricultural registration to rural residence with some exceptions and the conversion is very difficult. Registration establishes proof of identity, official status and welfare entitlements. A non-agricultural *hukou* entitled a person to receive coupons to buy rationed goods at government prices (which includes food and most daily necessities), employment, superior education, public housing, free medical services and retirement benefits in urban areas; while with an agricultural *hukou* a person could obtain daily necessities from their own production units in rural areas with no benefits for employment, housing, medical services, and pensions. Reforms in *hukou* are in progress, but as yet rural population with rural *hukou* is not entitled to state benefits in urban areas.

2 Peasants have no state welfare provisions and have to pay for high cost of medical expenditure. Moreover rural China is confronting with problem of aging. According to a survey in Jiangxi, out of every 100 peasant households who lost land, seven people were above 70 years old. See Han 2005.

3 Rural employment was mainly in rural enterprises and in collective enterprises. Chinese classify rural enterprises into four categories in terms of ownership: townships (乡办), villages (村办), groups of households (联户, including cooperatives and partnerships), and individual households (个体, i.e., a sole proprietorship employing less than eight employees). Town and Village Enterprise (TVE) refer to the first two categories. Although each village is under the jurisdiction of a township, a village enterprise differs from a township enterprise; the village government runs the former and the latter by the township government. ‘TVEs’ has become a generic term covering rural enterprises run by townships (former communes including towns and districts), villages (former brigades) and villagers’ groups (former work teams) as well as jointly owned private and individual enterprises. For further discussion see Jing 1995:369.

4 The term “floating population” includes rural populations moving to urban centres along with millions who are on the move for reasons varying from short-term or contract employment to roaming in cities for travel, movement of populations from
urban-to-urban and also urban-to-rural destinations, sojourners, and people on business trips. Hence, Chinese authorities use this term for those people who do not have a permanent household registration status at their place of residence. Here the term is used, as there is no accurate and viable statistics on rural population in urban areas in the 1990s.

5 This paper uses the term “rural migrants” in the strictest sense of the permanent or semi-permanent change from the usual place of residence, even if the change is not recorded in registration book.

6 The “Measures for Internment and Deportation of Urban Vagrants and Beggars” has changed to “Regulation on Assisting the Homeless and Vagabonds in Cities” from August 1, 2003. Under the new “Regulation”, police is not allowed to imprison people as vagrants or beggars; rather have the duty to inform them of shelter homes. The repatriation Centre has changed into relief center, mainly to act as shelters for those in need. Beggars or vagrants receive help from these aid stations if they are unable to feed themselves, have no relatives or friends with whom they can seek refuge, and if they receive no ‘minimum living allowance’.

7 The index ranges from 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). See Transparency International CPI over the years.

8 According to China’s Criminal Law, the charge of disrupting public order is equivalent to offences such as disrupting public services and crimes of picking quarrels and provoking trouble. China Daily 2004.

9 Chen Yun used the term ‘cage’ to refer to ‘market’. His theory of ‘bird cage’ became the main ideology for the development of socialist market economy.

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