
Preface

Let us consider this scenario. You are a citizen in your own country. Like the majority of the population (74 percent in 2000),¹ you were born in a village to a registered agricultural family. Like most of the people in the village, you learned only some basic work skills through the minimal education available and affordable before growing up. You could no longer make a decent living in your home village because of the increasing scarcity of land, water, and capital,² and the rising life expectations powered by movies and especially television.³ You learned that there was a different, prosperous, and far superior world in the cities not too far away, and you endured all the hardships to get there—only to find that you were no longer exactly in your own country and your citizenship was clearly incomplete.⁴

You cannot vote in the cities, regardless of how long you have lived there. You cannot apply for most of the jobs there—the good jobs often explicitly require a permanent local residency that can be had only by grant of the authorities.⁵ Without a permanent local residency, you and your children cannot go to local public schools for the compulsory state-subsidized education and cannot take part in the easier college entrance exam and admission process in the city. You cannot enjoy a host of urban benefits and subsidies in medical care, housing, job training, and social welfare programs, nor even public library access and phone services. You may be jobless, but you are not even counted as unemployed by the government, and thus you are completely outside the relief and assistance programs.⁶ Once you quit the only jobs—usually dirty, heavy, exhausting, low-paying jobs—that you could find in the cities,⁷ or the jobs more easily found in the so-called special professions and industries,⁸ you soon lose your temporary residence permit and are subject to fines, detention,

and forced deportation for further stay.⁹ You are openly looked down upon by your countrymen who have local urban residency. You can never expect to marry one of those privileged urbanites unless you are rich or else attractive and lucky.¹⁰

To legally acquire permanent local residency in an urban center as someone from the countryside, you must be wealthy enough to invest or spend at least a few dozen times your annual income or educated with at least an undergraduate degree, and you must have available to you an immigrant quota slot (nationally set at a very low 0.2 percent of the total rural population annually in 2000).¹¹ Otherwise, you must be a sports star or a national hero. Only if you are able to show your assets and your talents by elevating yourself through such narrow governmentally defined channels can you acquire transitional urban legal residence and become an elite urban resident within a few years. Indeed, virtually all the country's political, military, economic, cultural, and social leaders are urban residents.

Perhaps you will feel a strange consolation seeing other newcomers, even people from other cities who are officially categorized as urban residents, also treated as second-class citizens in your particular city. You may try to complain, or you may even want to find out how many others share your grievances and your desire to do something about the discrimination that you encounter: then you will quickly be put on a secret list of targeted people (*zhongdian renkou*) and be watched by an army of police, local residents, and informants both professional and amateur, all using an increasingly sophisticated surveillance technology . . .

Is this scenario realistic in the twenty-first century? you may wonder. Yes, it is. It is actual daily life in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the most populous nation in the world, under the PRC's *hukou* or *huji* (household or residential registration) system. The *hukou* system profoundly shapes the life chances of 1.3 billion Chinese people by registering, segmenting, and dividing them in their various regions, especially along the urban-rural fault line. Interregional migration and population mobility are controlled and regulated; people's rights and opportunities differ according to where they are registered; yet the interregional borders are open to travelers, and a centralized political authority nationally enforces laws and regulations and redistributes some income. The Chinese people are thus organized through a peculiar, profound division that mimics a truncated Westphalia international system based on citizenship: people are treated differently in accordance with where their legal resi-

dency is, and the change and relocation of any citizen's legal residency must be approved by the government.

This book is about China's *hukou* system, especially the PRC's version of it. The PRC *hukou* system, as a qualitatively different sequel to the imperial versions of China's *hukou* system, is a unique form of institutional exclusion that divides and organizes the largest nation on earth according to officially differentiated and registered families and locations. It is a proven and traditional mechanism of Chinese statecraft ensuring political stability and social control under an authoritarian regime. It has contributed significantly to rapid but uneven economic growth and technological sophistication, acting as a leading cause of China's peculiar socioeconomic stratification and characteristics, a key factor shaping China's institutional framework and future, and a major source of China's injustice, inequality, and irrationality.

This book has seven chapters. Chapter 1, a general introduction, proposes a theory of institutional exclusion and examines specifically the inevitability, typology, and implications of institutional exclusion. It also provides an overview of China's *hukou* system, and especially the PRC version of it, as a Type 3 institutional exclusion (based on *where one is*), summarizes the main arguments and findings of the book, and discusses the methodology and terminology of this study and issues remaining for further ones.

Chapter 2 traces the origin of China's *hukou* system, outlines the evolution of the imperial *hukou* system before the mid-twentieth century, and describes the rationale and development of the PRC *hukou* system. It reports on the adaptation of the PRC *hukou* system in the reform era and explains the deep legitimacy of the *hukou* system in contemporary China.

Chapter 3 explores the PRC *hukou* system in depth. It describes and examines the operational mechanisms of the *hukou* system in detail and presents the key registration forms and the data available on the PRC *hukou* system, as well as field observations of its administration.

Chapter 4 describes the institutional and policy role of the PRC *hukou* system by exploring its two leading functions: the internal migration regulations and the focused management of targeted segments of the population. It examines the principles and methods of internal migration restrictions, reports on the *zhongdian renkou* (targeted people) management scheme, and outlines recent adaptive measures regarding these two functions.

Chapter 5 describes the profound impact of the PRC *hukou* system on Chinese politics, economic development, and social life. It reveals the unique *hukou*-based horizontal stratification or spatial hierarchy in the PRC and analyzes the impact, both positive and negative, that the *hukou* system has had on China's economic development. It also presents a case study of the impact of the PRC *hukou* system by examining China's college entrance examination and admission system.

Chapter 6 attempts a comparative analysis of institutional exclusion in general and the *hukou* system in particular. It briefly reports on *hukou*-like residential registration, identification, and internal migration control systems in other parts of the world. It specifically examines and compares the cases of India and Brazil in some detail and assesses the *hukou* system and the general nature and functions of institutional exclusion.

Chapter 7 reports the latest ideas and actions regarding the reform of the PRC *hukou* system in the 2000s and offers some concluding remarks about the system's future.

A Postscript

Four months after my article on the *hukou* system was published (*China Quarterly*, March 2004) and four days after I learned that the proof pages of this book were ready for me to read, on July 25, 2004, on my way back from directing Georgia Tech's Summer Program in China, I was suddenly detained by the Chinese State Security (SS) police in Shanghai. They held me secretly for two weeks and then deported me to punish me for my "bad attitude" and my "non-cooperation."

A major cause of my ordeal, as I learned from my interrogators, was my work on China's *hukou* system. The SS police either had been attentively following my work in English or had had the assistance of informers who know my work. Their strong hatred towards my work on the *hukou* system was very apparent. As a key issue of their questioning, the SS police insisted that I must have had "insiders in the Chinese government" giving me "state secrets." Apparently, they did not read my work carefully or their informers were doing a very poor job.

People pay all kinds of prices for academic explorations and scientific discoveries, and I have had my fair share of that for this book. However, spending time inside the secret jail of the Chinese SS police and fighting them ever since for justice are costs and causes I never planned would be part of my academic exploration of the *hukou* system.

Organizing Through Division and Exclusion

China's Hukou System

