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ChinaSource
Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China

# Against the Storm

## Three **Chinese peasant children** amidst the largest population shift in world history

*Mark Wendling*

*"The migrants are hated because they are an ignorant and dirty people, they are carriers of disease; they increase the necessity for police and the tax bill for schooling in a community. They are never allowed to feel at home in the communities that demand their services. Wherever they stop they try to put the children in school. It may be that the children will be in school for as much as a month before they are moved to another locality. But they still start the older children off to school, but the ragged little things will not go; they hide in ditches or wander off by themselves until it is time to go back to the tent, because they are scorned in the school. It should be understood that the old methods of repression, of starvation wages, of jailing, beating and intimidation are not going to work. These are American people."*

Mark Wendling

The government estimates that **twenty million children have migrated to the cities** with their families.

The struggles of displaced people transcend history and geography. The preceding story was told in the San Francisco news in 1936 and more fully developed in John Steinbeck's classic, *The Grapes of Wrath* as 150,000 migrant Americans left the economically depressed "dust bowls" of Oklahoma with the promise of employment in California. Yet the exact same aches are occurring today in the hearts of an even larger population in the People's Republic of China.

Today, China's rural-to-urban migration phenomenon is on a scale that boggles the mind. Imagine every American west of the Mississippi moving to Canada since the time that Deng Xiao Ping made his infamous visit to the south of China in 1992. That's right, in that amount of time, 150 million people have relocated from China's rural areas to its mid-size or mega cities. (There are now 176 cities with one million or more people.) But, as the saying goes, "You ain't seen nothin' yet."

China's government officially predicts that the migrant community will double by the year 2015. The social implications and the impact upon the Christian community are nothing short of breathtaking as the gravitational pull of China's cities is irresistible. Like water moving toward the lowest surface, China's countryside peasants have flowed en masse toward the urban centers in search of a livelihood and a piece of China's new prosperity. Having no other option, villagers leave their ancestral lands where their home is familiar, where their children have friends and, in the case of millions, where the gospel was first embraced.

While the displaced sometimes travel alone, the majority of "floaters" migrate with their families. Often, one or both parents will venture ahead to a city in order to find work, leaving their children in the care of relatives or friends. Once they have found some sort of employment and any kind of housing, they will bring the rest of the family along.

Mark Wendling

Often, one or both parents will venture ahead to a city in order to find work, **leaving their children in the care of relatives or friends.**

The government estimates that twenty million children have migrated to the cities with their families. This is understandably a life-altering move for these kids. Even a move from one village to another would be an adjustment. The contrast sharpens when the elements of dialect differences, pace of life increase, mobility, economic needs and, a new issue, education for the children, are added.

How do parents arrange education for their children in this complex, urban puzzle? Following are three stories of migrant families who brought their children to Beijing and struggle against the storm.

## The Child without a Face

It is not difficult to spot Xiao Li. She spends her days running between stalls and roaming the alleys in a makeshift outdoor produce market that services two large residential complexes in the northwest corner of Beijing.

It is not so easy to make eye contact with this diminutive, Chinese lass. During a rare moment when she is not looking away, you might see that Li has a constellation of small black flecks embedded along the right side of her face. Her self-consciousness is obviously a direct result. Li received her unwelcome tattoo when she was six years old and her family had been in Beijing for three months. Like all of China's northern residents who do not live in apartment housing, Li's family has a small coal-burning stove, essential for heating and cooking. Sometimes, small pockets of air that are trapped in the cheap coal will heat and explode from pressure. Li was unfortunate enough to have been looking into the stove when this happened. Upon rushing the little girl directly to the nearest medical clinic, Li's parents were distraught to find that they would need residence permits for anything other than minimum first aid care. Not having even temporary workers permits, they were forced to concede to a bottle of antiseptic and some salve.

While efforts have been made to reform educational policies regarding migrant children, most families still cannot receive adequate health care. According to the July 13, 2004 issue of the *China Daily*, many children suffer from anemia, rickets and serious malnutrition.

Xiao Li does not worry about classmates teasing her about her face; she does not go to school. Neither does her brother. In spite of a government regulation requiring all children between the ages of

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six and fourteen to attend school, an estimated twenty percent of all migrant children do not go to classes. The regulation is a difficult one to enforce. Migrant workers are absent from their home villages, and many are undocumented in the places where they live and work.

## Shamed

Han Guo Sheng eagerly awaits the end of class. As school lets out, he quickly gathers his things and makes for the classroom door. As he crosses the campus, he hears other boys forming teams for the daily after-school basketball game. Han frowns. He loves basketball. The exertion would feel wonderful after a long day of sitting in class, but he will not play. He knows what would happen if he tried. It has happened before. These Beijing kids are relentless. They will make fun of his shirt. They will tease him because of his accent. Worst of all, they will probably talk about his parents.

Han does not tell his parents when these things happen—that is, when he sees them. His mother leaves every morning at 3:00 A.M. to pick up a fresh fruit delivery and then take it to the early morning market. His father is out collecting recyclable scrap metal until way past twilight. He knows how much his parents have paid for him to go to this school—every semester they pay. He knows because he has heard them talk. He knows they pay 900 *yuan* **more** than the other kids' parents pay. He wishes his parents would just let him go to one of the migrant schools that the other kids on his street go to. At least there he would not be so different.

However, his parents have enormous hopes for him. He senses how much they want from him. They certainly do not want him to be a farmer. In fact, he has asked them before, "Why can't I go to one of the migrant schools?" "**No**," his father always replies. "The teachers there are stupid. They are not real teachers. They have not gone to college." So Han goes to Public School Number 63 every morning. He tries to talk like the Beijing kids talk. He uses the same slang and he shows interest in the same things. But, somehow, he just cannot seem to fit in.

Until very recently, migrant children were charged extra fees by public schools. These fees were unregulated and undocumented. While money is no longer a restrictive factor in most public schools, there is still the issue of prejudice and proximity to the schools. Most migrant workers live a considerable distance from the public schools.

## Grown at Twelve

Qu Long Fei is twelve years old and lives alone. His dwelling is a small shack made from corrugated metal sheets tied together with odd scraps of string, wire and torn fabric. His only source of heat in the winter months, a small coal burning stove, ventilates directly into his "room." Every day, Qu wakes up early to walk the four miles to school. He is a good student, his teachers say, but he is often tired. Qu studies by the light of one small dim bulb. Sometimes, when it rains, the bulb shorts out.

Qu's parents live about forty miles away from him on the outskirts of Beijing. They are hired farmers; a land owner hires them to tend his crops. They would love to live closer to the city, especially to be with their eldest son, but this job opportunity is just too good to pass up. In order to see them, Qu takes three different buses on the weekend. When he gets there, he is usually required to help them catch up on their work load.

The school that Qu attends is a school for migrant children. There are about one thousand children who attend this school which has only existed for three years. In those three years, the school has had to move twice. The third location, where the school is now situated, is rented from a coal processing plant. Already, the school's headmaster has been threatened that he must leave.

Qu is hopeful for the future. When asked, he says that he wants to be a politician. He really wants to effect change. Unfortunately, the young man's chances at ever reaching higher education are pretty slim. In fact, high school is a long shot. Junior high schools are about as far as migrant children are able to go.

There are over three hundred schools for migrant children in Beijing alone. Less than ten of them actually meet Beijing city educational standards leaving the rest to operate without legitimate status. De-

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Mark Wendling

**The educational needs** for an estimated 35 million children who will accompany 250 million adults to China's metropolises in the next ten years **are just the tip of the iceberg.**

Jim Nickel

# Migrant Cities

*Clarence Chan*

*China is undergoing a modernization process that has caused its urbanization process to accelerate. A mass exodus from rural areas to urban centers is already occurring. Surplus laborers in the rural areas are rapidly migrating to the towns and cities looking for jobs and better living conditions.*

Some cities harbor from one to three million or more migrants who are constantly relocating between suburban and major urban centers. Guangzhou, with a population of ten million, has three million plus migrants; Shanghai and Beijing have close to three million migrants. In the city of Shenzhen, the entire population of over five million is migrants. Most of these migrants work in factories, restaurants, service industries or construction sites. Besides grassroots workers, some are young urban professionals and university graduates.

Located on China's southern border, the major migrant city of Shenzhen sits next to the Hong Kong border. Sixty years ago, Hong Kong was once a migrant city hosting inhabitants from the Guangdong province. It was also a British colony, but is now a Special Administrative Region since its return to the sovereignty of China in 1997. Twenty years ago, Shenzhen was just an agricultural and fishing village with a population of merely 30,000. Now, a major city, the population in the city center exceeds two million with the remainder being in the suburban factory areas and villages. Most of its citizens are migrants from the neighboring provinces of Guangxi, Wuhan, Sichuan, Jiangxi, Fujian, and Yunnan. A few are from the northern provinces and a minority are Cantonese. Most of these migrants have now settled down and made Shenzhen their home.

Neighboring both Guangzhou and Hong Kong, Shenzhen has come under the influence of much Western culture and lifestyle. With exposure to postmodern pomp and prosperity under the open-door policy, Shenzhen and Hong Kong have become as inseparable as the body and its shadow. Shenzhen owes her existence today to migrants much as Hong Kong owes her existence to Guangzhou and Guangdong migrants of some sixty years ago.

Shenzhen is often described as a paradise for young people. Local statistics show that the average age of its residents is 28.65 years while people aged 20 to 29 make up 35.77 percent of the city's population. Statistics also show that 10,397 people out of every 100,000 residents in Shenzhen have received a college education or beyond, which far exceeds levels in many other major Chinese cities. A young citizen in Shenzhen said, "Life is not always working and working all the time. Young people in this city like to spend their spare time in bars and disco houses."

However, behind the modern skyscrapers and the glittering neon signs of restaurants and shops lays a vacuum of darkness and void. This vacuum has permeated the center of the city where prostitution resides, and disco houses, bars and high-class shopping malls punctuate the horizon in a glamorous display. Just across the border checkpoint between Hong Kong and Shenzhen is an array of shops displaying pirated VCD's, video players, hi-fi equipment, clothes and shoes that are counterfeits of major name brands. In the middle of the city stand the five-star hotel Shangri-La and a beautiful shopping center with a McDonald's and Hard Rock Cafe as their close neighbors. In the drive to modernization, Shenzhen has become a leader among the Special Economic Zones.

Everyday, there are more than 200,000 Hong Kong citizens that cross the border into mainland China. Most of these citizens work as professionals such as engineers or managers in "second-line" factories—the factories that are located in the suburbs of Shenzhen. Many of them stay in Shenzhen and return to Hong Kong during the weekend; some even commute between these two cities on a daily basis. During the holidays, the border crossings can increase to over 250,000 per day. Most of these border-crossers are on business or visiting their families and friends. Some men are even having extramarital affairs with their so called "second wives" in Shenzhen.

Migrants from rural areas often end up working in factories. Factories in southern China usually provide dormitory facilities for their workers which are usually built next to the production facilities. Some large factories, with thousands of employees, include a medical clinic, cafeteria, library and sports facilities inside the factory buildings; some even have a dance hall, television rooms, a computer learning center, karaoke facilities, a stage for public performances, barber shop and kiosk for daily necessities and snacks. The factory itself becomes a community within a larger urban community.

There are 26 million workers employed in the urban areas of Guangdong Province according to an investigative report made by the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee (see box).

Another major city full of migrants is only an hour's train-ride away to the north of Shenzhen. Guangzhou, formerly known as Canton, is the largest metropolis of south China and the capital of Guangdong province. Having a population of over ten million, Guangzhou is one of the busiest and richest cities of China. With a subtropical climate, an extensive coastline and a mesh of tributaries from the Pearl River, Guangzhou is located on a rich alluvial delta.

The Cantonese have always been considered a distinct group in the Chinese world. Separated from the Yangzi area by an east-west mountain range and far from the early centers of Chinese civilization in the Yellow River basin, Cantonese culture has been relatively isolated allowing the province to develop its distinct identity and its own distinct dialect—Cantonese. Its people are a little bit more distant than are the northern Chinese who are more relaxed and enjoy life at leisure. The northerners enjoy talking to strangers and neighbors as their national past time. The Cantonese, however, enjoy work much more than leisure. They have no time to talk to each other or neighbors—much less to strangers.

Time is a valuable commodity in this city; almost everyone is busy at work during the day. Even the beggars are busy bowing to the passersby to earn a few more dollars. This culture resembles the industrious nature of Hong Kong and its citizens. Almost the entire Chinese population of Hong Kong has either migrated from Guangdong Province or is descended from natives of that province. In the past decade or so, Hong Kong businessmen and manufacturers have relocated their factories to Guangzhou and its surrounding towns. Many of these factories are in Guangdong's three Special Economic Zones: Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shantou, which were opened to attract foreign trade and investment. The region offers lower labor costs than in the more developed Asian countries.

The modernization process has brought enormous international influence into Guangzhou. With Giordano's and McDonald's lining up side by side on Beijing Road, expensive modern shopping arcades and dining areas become a common sight. Whether at noon or at night, Beijing Road is always full of crowds shopping. At night, the Beijing Road neighborhood is blocked off from private cars, and people can shop and walk freely on the street. The buildings are old, and the area has a resemblance to the Hong Kong of thirty years ago. The streets are packed with buses, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, dust and people.

Behind the dazzling neon lights of Beijing Road and beyond, the city continues to have a spiritual void. A decade or more of economic reform has made communism a facade, an idol to be worshipped only in the minds of the Chinese authorities. Materialism is the new goddess for the young and zealous. People are living

**Continued on page 13**

Graham Cousens

**Materialism is the new goddess for the young and zealous.** People are living for today and hope for the best for tomorrow.

## GUANGDONG PROVINCE

**Of the 26 million workers employed in the urban areas of Guangdong Province:**

- 55.5 percent come from this local province
- 44.5 percent come from other provinces.

- Age distribution is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 5.8% | 16-18 years of age |
| 68.6% | 19-28 years of age |
| 18% | 28-35 years of age |
| 6.5% | 35 up years of age |

- Slightly over eighty-six percent of the workers are between 19 to 35 years of age.
- In the city of Shenzhen itself, young people constitute 82 percent of the total population. It is therefore a young city of 5.79 million migrants—all facing issues of love and matrimony.

# The Effects of **Urban Migration** on the Countryside House Churches in China

*Mai Wei Zhen*

*A summary of interviews with six senior leaders of two of the largest countryside house church movements in September, 2004.*

China Partner

**Countryside churches are encouraging their young people to go to high school and college in the cities**, and to plant churches there among their friends and classmates.

In the past, the countryside house churches tried to stop believers from going to the cities to find work because they saw it as reflecting the "love of the world." However, in recent years they have come to think differently. The countryside churches now realize that urban migration is inevitable. In addition, they have observed the lives of many people who have moved to the cities in spite of being discouraged to do so. Many believers found stable jobs and began to do well financially. Then they were able to help other believers from the countryside to establish their own lives in the cities. Moreover, in many cases, their spiritual lives did not decline but they were good examples in church life, in giving and in serving other believers. Consequently, the perspective of the countryside leaders has changed. Now they actually encourage people to look for jobs in the cities.

This has helped the countryside churches financially since many of the believers in the cities send money back to help them. Some coworkers have jobs that enable them to be self-supporting in their ministries; this practice of mixing ministry and business also was opposed in the past but is now accepted and encouraged.

When believers move from the countryside and seek fellowship with other believers in the cities, it is more common for them to gather together with other countryside people, but there are also examples of city churches that are composed of both city and countryside people.

Over the last few years, all the large house church movements have sent coworkers to the cities. In spite of the initial discrimination against them because of their different appearance and customs as well as their lack of education and sophistication, once people get to know them and their lives, they often recognize and admire their zeal and spiritual strength. Consequently, in many places, the countryside coworkers have been accepted by the city people and are winning the lost and building churches. They are also invited to teach and minister in existing city churches. In many places their ministry is received and very effective. One movement estimates they have already worked with about one third of the Christian population in one large province. In another smaller province, they are working with over one hundred churches that are very open to them. Working with city churches is naturally quite challenging for countryside coworkers due to their different backgrounds as well as theological positions, and the openness of city churches to countryside coworkers varies. While it is still relatively uncommon to find a city church composed mostly of city people and yet led by a countryside coworker, in spite of these challenges, there has been a surprising degree of acceptance of countryside coworkers in the cities. This acceptance is even, at times, among the Three Self churches.

This new city ministry is requiring new strategies for evangelization and church planting. The countryside coworkers have learned that they must first live an exemplary life among the people they hope to reach—building trust and credibility—before they can directly share the gospel with them. For example, one sister who had some computer skills went to a large city and began to work in a factory as a regular employee. When she arrived, there were five or six Christians in the factory. Now there are over sixty believers,

including high level managers and executives. These people came to the Lord as the result of her life example. She first built credibility and then was received when she shared the gospel. This has become the key strategy of the coworkers in the cities.

Back in the countryside, the children and young people are now being taught to live and minister in this way in preparation for their eventual relocation to the cities. Thus, the rapid migration to the cities has caused the countryside church to rethink their strategies of ministry as well as issues of development of their coworkers.

Another change of strategy involves mobilization of the people. In the past, the coworker was the one who did the ministry. Now the coworkers are being trained and encouraged to mobilize the people to do the ministry. The coworkers will reach several city people with the gospel and then mobilize them to reach their own neighbors and plant the church. In particular, they will target the influential leaders in business and society, recognizing their capacity for impacting greater numbers of people. Then the coworkers will help them with teaching and training the new believers.

Similarly, the countryside churches are encouraging their young people to go to high school and college in the cities, and to plant churches there among their friends and classmates. Then they send coworkers in to work with them and train them.

One movement is also using the method of tract distribution in the city, with the tracts being distributed by both the countryside coworkers as well as city believers. Of course, in some areas tract distribution cannot be done openly, but this method of evangelism is often quite effective and the movement is seeing a rapid growth of churches by this means as well as by others.

Thus, while the rapid migration of people from the countryside to the city has created many complex challenges for the house churches, it has also given rise to changes of thinking and the development of new strategies that ultimately will be positive for the growth of the church in China.

***Mai Wei Zhen*** *works with the countryside house churches in China, mainly involved in leadership development.*

# China's Migrants and the House Church

## An Interview with Brother Min in 2002

**Q: What are the biggest problems facing the house churches today?**

**A:** In the rural areas, many of the believers live in incredible poverty and hardship. Most of the brothers have no choice but to leave the farm and leave their families to look for work in the cities. Each farming family was required to pay 200 RMB tax each year. This was impossible. Even after we sold everything we were able to grow in the fields each year and sold all our possessions, it still wasn't enough to pay the government tax. But recently Beijing has increased the tax to 500 RMB per family! This is more than anyone can bear. This tax is forcing all of our young men and potential leaders away from their families into the cities. This has placed our house churches under great pressure. This is why, when you come to our house church meetings, you will see many more sisters than there are brothers. In the cities the brothers are often busy working, and the temptations of the city life mean that their spiritual relationship with the Lord suffers.

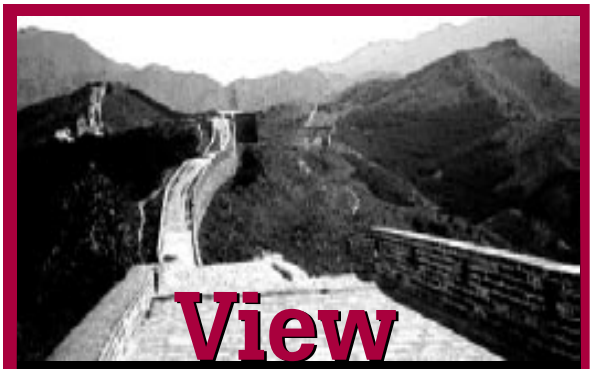
The loving hearts of people for Jesus are getting cool. Many are forsaking their first love. Even though the ministry seems to be expanding here and there, many leaders no longer have the time to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear His voice. Therefore, the spiritual quality of the house churches is going down. The older generation thinks the younger generation has a lot of zeal but not much truth.

**Q: There is a trend of millions of people leaving rural areas and moving to the big cities. What can the house churches do to reach the city folk?**

**A:** Several years ago we started to address this question, and we have sent many workers to live in places like Beijing, Tianjin, Shenyang and so on. It is very difficult from a practical level. To send and sustain one evangelist in Shanghai, for example, costs us approximately twenty times as much money as one evangelist living in a rural area. Many of those who have gone to the cities have not tried to be the ones evangelizing themselves. The more effective workers have taken roles behind the scenes where they teach and train local urban believers to win their city. This is necessary because many city folk look down on rural people, so city people are best reached by other people of that city who know the way things work there. Some of the brothers and sisters who moved to cities have been used of God as organizers. They organize prayer and intercession teams, they organize training, they organize evangelistic outreach, and the local believers have grown in number.

**Q: Has there been much success for the house churches reaching into cities?**

**A:** In the beginning, city ministry was very difficult, but in the past few years many evangelists have seen a large number of souls come to the cross. In many cities, the number of churches has doubled in a few years, especially in places like Beijing, Chengdu, Taiyuan, Kunming and Hohot. We are finding that revival is not restricted just to the countryside; rather, the Spirit has been "blowing wherever it pleases" (John 3). In many places people who own businesses have been finding God's grace. In the city we find our workers need to consider interaction with foreign Christians much more than they do in the countryside. This has been helpful in some ways, but in other ways we are concerned because some are being given the opportunity to go and study outside of China in places like Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines. When these leaders are taken away, it always leaves a hole in our work that is difficult to fill.



# View from the Wall

*By Huo Shui*

## The "Master's" Embarrassment

Every Chinese in China knows that after Liberation the Communist Party led the working people to revolt, and workers and peasants became the "masters" of the nation. Fifty years later, the peasants, who were supposed to be the "masters," suddenly discovered that not only are they no longer the "masters" of the house, they cannot even be called "guests."

Each year after spring festival, tens of thousands of peasants from all over China, chasing their dreams, squeeze onto trains and climb onto buses headed for Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and other cities both large and small. They earnestly hope to find work in the cities. Any kind of work will do—selling vegetables, selling newspapers, repairing shoes, repairing bicycles, babysitting, transporting garbage, road repair, construction, washing dishes in a restaurant, mining coal—all manner of dirty and exhausting jobs fall upon their shoulders. Anyplace where there is difficult and dangerous work to do you will find them. Originally, they were peasants, but now they are doing the work of city dwellers. They came from the villages but have left the land and are now living in the cities. Yet, they cannot be called citizens of the city; rather, they are called by the names "hardship" and "difficulty." Discrimination and humiliation are their constant companions. With their own blood and sweat they water the flowering prosperity of the city, but prosperity has nothing to do with them. With their own bodies they support modernization, but there is no place for them at the banquet table of modernization. The creators of urban civilization are destined to live in its shadow. They are called *mingong*.[1]

The starting point for discussing the *mingong* is the "peasant" (*nongmin*). China is a large agrarian country. Out of its population of 1.3 billion people, 900,000,000 are peasants. After the implementation of the household responsibility system in the 1970s, agricultural output increased year after year, giving rise to many "ten thousand *yuan* households." In a short period of time, China's peasants appeared to have already become extremely prosperous.

However, with the continued deepening of reform, the actual life of peasants in the countryside remained burdensome and exhausting. In many villages, peasants work year after year for an average of only several hundred *yuan*, or several dozen *yuan* per month. They still live in narrow, dark, damp, mud-walled houses. Some cannot even afford a roof, so in lieu of clay tiles they use tree bark. Because of their poverty, those who get sick just tough it out if it is not too serious. If it is serious, they just wait to die since they cannot afford a doctor. Greedy officials suck the people dry, and the complicated tax code pressures peasants to the point where they cannot breathe. In the spring of 2000 in Jianli County, Hubei Province, a village Party secretary named Li Changping wrote then Premier Zhu Rongji a letter saying, "Peasant life is very hard, the village is really poor, and the agricultural sector is really in jeopardy." This became a classic description of the problems of contemporary peasant life.

Harvard University economist, Dwight Perkins, said, "From the perspective of future reformers, the political experience of China is clear but often overlooked. Any process of reform should have clear beneficiaries." At the beginning of China's reform the beneficiaries were the farmers, the specialized household enterprises and the developers in the special economic zones (SEZs). Then, when the center of reform shifted to the cities, the primary beneficiaries became the newly created entrepreneur class and those government officials who quickly became rich. The 900 million peasants who composed the majority of Chinese society were not the beneficiaries of reform; on the contrary, they returned to the lowest class of society.

Due to low prices for agricultural products and the rising cost of production, countless peasants, who had toiled arduously plowing the fields in the countryside, found that farming was a losing proposition. Farming could not feed the family. As a result, millions of farmers were forced to leave their homes and give up the land that had been their families' livelihood for generations. Enduring hardship, ridicule and discrimination, they poured into the cities to work, year after year. This was the beginning of a new phenomenon that emerged during the last decade, the wave of urban migrants. According to 2003 statistics, the floating population then exceeded 120 million. The six provinces of Sichuan, Anhui, Hunan, Jiangxi, Henan and Hubei accounted for sixty percent of the country's transient population. In 2004, the floating population in Beijing had reached four million.

The peasants entering the cities become *mingong*, but the vast majority of them can only live as the underclass of urban society. They cannot obtain household registration and, as a result, cannot enjoy the social welfare accorded to urban residents. In order to save some money from their labors to send back home to the countryside, they have to endure the following kinds of suffering.

First, working hours are long, and living conditions are poor. They work over eight hours per day, sometimes as long as twelve or more hours. They put in endless overtime without overtime pay. For these peasants who work day and night, weekends and traditional holidays are nonexistent. The work is hazardous to the health and even dangerous, but the workplace lacks safety equipment. No matter which city or whether it is the manufacturing or service industry, in order to keep costs down, employers provide only the most inferior accommodations with several tens of workers packed into an old

room with no sanitary facilities. They eat the cheapest food. For most *mingong* this is typical treatment.

Next come low pay and delayed wages. Even though the government has a minimum wage standard, this is meaningless to these workers because they just want to find a job. A sample survey conducted among fourteen enterprises in Dongwan, Guangdong Province, found that all except one paid lower than the minimum monthly wage of 450 RMB, or only 15 RMB per day. In that area, a very simple boxed lunch costs three to four RMB.

What is even more intolerable is that even with this low pay companies sometimes delay paying the workers' wages. As a result, many *mingong* go a whole year or even several years without getting paid. According to sociologist Li Chiang, in 2002, in Beijing one out of every four migrant workers did not receive his pay or had it delayed. At the end of 2003, there were 124,000 construction projects nationally that had withheld a total of 175,600,000,000 RMB in wages. The national construction bureau announced in August of this year that the accumulated withheld construction wages amounted to 367,000,000,000 RMB. Even though the government continues to advocate for the legal rights of peasant workers, this phenomenon of "It's hard to find a job; it's even harder to get paid," continues to rise. Delayed wages for *mingong* has become a serious social problem.

Third, they have no social status and lack social security. Because of the household registration regulations, *mingong* cannot transfer their registration to the cities. Children cannot attend school where their parents work, so the workers cannot enjoy the social benefits of the city or the protection of workers' compensation, retirement, unemployment insurance and medical insurance. If they get sick, no one looks after them. If they are injured or become sick or disabled on the job, they are kicked out and spend their remaining years in sadness. As for the political treatment of the *mingong*, there is even less to be said, as any sort of organization to protect their rights is illegal. There are hundreds of thousands of construction projects involving these workers, but as soon as the projects are finished, they are simply let go. Their life or death depends only on fate. Some workers, with nowhere to turn, resort to begging, prostitution, drug use and drug dealing, becoming criminals in order to survive.

Last, it is difficult for the children of *mingong* to receive an education. The constitution requires that every child receive nine years of free education. Yet, because the migrant workers' children are not residents of the city, they do not enjoy equal access to education. Public schools will not accept children of nonresident parents, and private school tuition is so high there is no way for the children to attend. Thus, tens of thousands of *mingong* are faced with the harsh truth that, whether public or private, education for their children will cost an exorbitant amount of money. For these workers this is unrealistic. They pour out their blood, sweat and tears to build the glorious and rich city, but their own children have no school to attend. The education of *mingong* children is a serious problem not only in Shenzhen but for any city with a large number of *mingong*. According to *Southern Daily*, within Guangdong's floating population of 20 million, over one million children do not receive any education. Shenzhen alone has over 100,000 children who do not receive a proper education. Migrant children in Beijing and Shanghai face the same situation.

As a result, the *mingong* in many areas have started their own "workers' children schools." Most of these schools are found in the border areas between countryside and city where there are high concentrations of *mingong*. They have rudimentary facilities, inexpensive tuition and a low quality of education. They lack regular classrooms, laboratories, computers, reading materials, books, audiovisual equipment, dormitories, cafeterias and sports facilities. Sanitary conditions are poor, and the quality of teachers is in general below government standards. The biggest problem is that because these migrant schools cannot compare with public schools in terms of staffing, administration, educational model, quality of education and in other areas, there are many problems, and this kind of school will never receive official recognition or legal status. While under the same blue sky, these migrant schools do not enjoy the same radiant sun. With rundown facilities and unqualified teachers, students without household registration and schools without legal status, the Chinese society's discrimination is directed not only toward the peasants themselves but also toward their next generation.

China Partner

**Employers provide only the most inferior accommodations** with several tens of workers packed into an old room with no sanitary facilities.

This is the picture of the peasants, the so-called "masters" of China, now that they have moved into the city. How did the farmers fall from being the "masters of the country" to this embarrassing level? Analyzing the cause one can only say that it is the result of Chinese society's long-held, systematic and integral class discrimination against the peasants. The roots of the *mingong* are in the rural areas, but the processes of industrialization, urbaniza-

**Continued on page15**

# Reflections on the Roll of Migrant Labor

***Daniel Wright***

*The following was written by Daniel Wright in 1998 while a fellow in the Institute of Current World Affairs living in inland China and studying its people and societies. His "Reflections" came after sharing conversations and experiences with migrants during a 35-hour train journey from China's interior to the coast.*

To get my mind off my discomfort, I decided to visit the teenagers who had asked for a picture the night before. I asked the man who had been leaning on me for most of the previous twelve hours to hold my seat. He was glad for the chance to sit down. As I came into view, the boys seemed delighted to see me. They cleared a space on their bench, pulled out some home-cured ham strips, and asked me to do my card trick again. As I shuffled the deck, I asked them why they had decided to leave home.

"We're from the countryside in northeast Guizhou; it's very poor there. We want to come out, earn some money, and see what we can learn. Who knows what will happen? But we can't stay at home."

I have read the literature that evaluates migrant labor—like these teenagers—as a social, economic and political threat.[1] Since they form a group outside the system, it is argued, there is no way to organize or control these people. Whether for family-planning purposes, concern over rising crime, or just the menace of the unemployed sleeping in the streets, migrant labor lives beyond the reach of the state. Others also cite migrant labor's vulnerability to exploitation and the lack of basic social services available to them, especially health care. Needless to say, it doesn't take much imagination to envision a chaotic drama of fifty million jobless migrant laborers swamping China's cities.

The teenagers' attitudes fascinated me. They certainly did not consider themselves a threat. They were attracted to, not envious of, the relative wealth of the coast—a part of China they had seen only on television. And as a group of five buddies, traveling together for their first time away from home, they did not seem afraid.

From the way they talked about working the stony fields back home, these young men seemed to represent the views of a large number of China's rural laborers who consider agriculture to be an unprofitable, unattractive, and even redundant economic activity. In the rural regions of China's interior where there are few non-agricultural activities, migration is often seen as the only way out. After all, if one family member leaves home—like these young middle-school dropouts—it means one less mouth to feed. And if the migrant is able to land a job, even the dirtiest of manual-labor jobs, he earns on average in *one month* what he would earn in an *entire year* at home. In this way, one family member who has gone to the coast may be able to support an entire family back in China's rural interior.

More and more government officials view migrant labor as a normal consequence of economic reform, which, while loosening control of China's countryside through the breakup of the commune system, encourages some areas and some people of China to prosper first (namely, coastal cities and special economic zones).[2] As a de facto component of government policy, therefore, it is only natural that large numbers of people would flow from the less- to the more-developed areas of the country. The challenges of migrant labor are indeed very real. The contributions the laborers make, however, to both the coastal areas and to their home regions outweigh the costs and risks.

And while migrant labor can be viewed as a threat to stability, an equally persuasive logic argues that migrant workers are the thread that keeps a rapidly transforming China from ripping apart. Migrant labor serves to both relieve pressure from the country's impoverished regions and to transfer resources and skills back to those areas. When I put the "stability" question to a Guizhou government official who works in Shenzhen, he responded immediately with an interesting comparison: the threat of starving North Korea that looms over South Korea. "If North Koreans could travel to South Korea as migrant labor," he said, "the problem of instability on the Korean peninsula would be solved." His analogy is obviously flawed, but I got his point. The general freedom Chinese labor has had to pursue wealth, regardless of where it may be found, has alleviated what would otherwise be unbearable pressure, and certain instability, in China's impoverished interior regions.

In addition, much of China's economic growth has been built by the callused

Graham Cousens

If the migrant is able to land a job, even the dirtiest of manual-labor jobs, **he earns on average in *one month* what he would earn in an *entire year* at home.**

hands and sweat of migrant labor. In urban areas, for instance, migrant labor often does the dirty work that locals would never touch. China's powerful export market, as well, has been underwritten by the inexpensive and willing labor of those from the interior.

Like the powerful force of Overseas Chinese—ethnic Chinese who live outside China but who contribute billions in gifts and investment to their ancestral homeland each year—China's "Overland Chinese" (my term for the millions of migrant laborers who work on the coast but who remit significant amounts of cash to their homes in the interior) play an important role in their local economies. A Guizhou official told me that in 1997, migrant laborers from Guizhou remitted five billion *yuan* (U.S. $600 million) to family members back home. Equivalent to ten percent of the province's gross domestic product, the figure equals Guizhou's entire annual local-government revenue. In this regard, one of the most important contributions made by migrant labor is the ability to channel resources directly into the hands of individual families in China's poor interior, something government bureaucracies and aid programs seem to have great difficulty doing.

The *Guizhou Economic Daily* reported the story of thirty migrant laborers, all from the same village in Guizhou but who work in different locations on China's coast, who recently formed an "association" to support their home village.[3] Most funds from migrant labor are remitted directly to family members and do not contribute to village services like education and health care. Nevertheless, the example illustrates the Overseas Chinese-like role that migrant labor plays. To become a member of the association, each worker must agree to do three things: First, learn one skill he or she can share with fellow-villagers; second, provide at least one piece of information to the village regarding work conditions on the coast; and, third, provide an annual donation to the village.

The contribution made by migrant labor to their home villages is, therefore, not just monetary. Several migrant laborers told me, as we traveled down the tracks, that beyond the funds remitted home, they believe their role is to open their family's minds to new ways of doing things and try to keep their village from being satisfied with simply having enough clothes to wear and food to eat. In fact, many migrant laborers, after a few years of "eating bitterness" on the coast, wake up to realize that they could be their own boss back home, using the skills they have learned.

**Endnotes**

1. Kam Wing Chan, "Recent Migration in China: Patterns, Trends, and Policies." *Asian Perspective* 25, no. 4 (2001): 141-51.

2. Ezra F. Vogel, *One Step Ahead in China: Guangdong under Reform* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 125-60.

3. *Guizhou jingji ribao* (*Guizhou Economic Daily*), February 5, 1998.

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## Peoples of China

# Transformation

*Nathan and Sue Lee*

*"Again, Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'" (John 20:21). "To preach good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners; to comfort all who mourn; to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:1-3).*

Where are the people? Where do we start? If God is constantly at work, how do we join Him?

Nestled in a mountainous region of China by the Jin Sha River, ethnic minority tribes such as the Dai, Yi and Lisu live in close union with their surroundings and worship natural forces. The practice of demon worship, sorcery and black magic has been a way of life for generations. As people turn to the witch doctors for answers and healing, they become indebted to evil sprits until death. From doing heavy labor to obeying ceremonial customs commanded by the witches, villagers can never pay back their debts. They owe their souls, spirits, dignity and children in servitude to the clutches of darkness. They are broken, hurting and lost.

Between the late 1800s and early 1990s, people traveled for days and weeks into these villages of Yunnan to proclaim the Savior's message of redemption, forgiveness and new life. Lives were transformed and light was brought into the lives of villagers enslaved for generations by evil spirits, animism and hatred.

Now, as urbanization is changing the way of life, village people from all over Yunnan are leaving their homes to find better employment opportunities in Kunming, the capital of this province. The Spirit is at work in China. He is bringing the unreached peoples into the city.

Two years ago, a few girls from an interior mountainous region left their village to find work in Kunming. As the years progressed, more and more girls followed. By the time we crossed paths with these girls, around ten were working in the city. Most of these girls are from the Dai ethnic tribe. Witchcraft, animism and other forms of spiritual evils influence most of their lives and families. Many have been wounded or hurt by these practices. They desire freedom from such bondage. One by one, each has shared the gospel with a newcomer. As they meet and fellowship regularly, they see the truth in God's word. It is their vision to establish a meeting point or church in their own village. Hope and Faith are two girls who have been praying fervently for redemption and salvation for their village.

Hope's father died of alcoholism in

China Partner

Witchcraft, animism and other forms of spiritual evils influence most of their lives and families.

Melvin Sletch

As urbanization is changing the way of life, village people from all over Yunnan are leaving their homes to find better employment opportunities in Kunming, the capital of this province.

March of 2002. Buddhist witches were invited by the family to cast spells in hopes of reviving him. Hope was sleeping in her room while he was in a coma. She saw an evil spirit that looked liked him approaching her. She screamed and told it to leave. A month after he died she decided to leave her village, find employment in the city, forget her sorrows, make money to support her family and pay off debts.

Hope had various jobs before the Lord led her to our family. In the city, her friend, Faith, shared the gospel with her. As Hope's desire to draw near to God grew, her spiritual attacks increased. Often she would have nightmares of her deceased father trying to kill her or dream of her nephew who drowned asking her for food. These dreams would disturb her. Through prayers, her reoccurring dreams stopped and she was no longer afraid.

Before knowing Christ, Hope lived with a strong sense of hopelessness and despair. After accepting Christ, she shares how wonderful it is to have peace in her heart, not fearing for the future. Hope has a strong desire for someone, or herself, to be sent to her village to share the new hope she has found. She wants the joy and peace she experienced in Christ to permeate her village. She feels her village has been terrorized by evil spirits long enough.

The Lord has been preparing people to answer this call. Hope's best friend, Faith, told her parents during May of this year her decision to serve the Lord in choosing to learn how to set herself apart for Him. She will be attending a Bible school this coming September to know more about God's Word. It is her vision to return home after a few years of Bible training to share the wonderful truth of the gospel with her village which has never heard the "Good News."

There are three more girls praying for God's will. They are being discipled to become spiritual leaders within their fellowship. Each is aware of the cost of becoming a disciple. Prayers are needed for protection of the hearts of those who desire Christ and that they not be plucked away by the Evil One.

Where are the people? Where do we start? The people are next to us if only we are willing to be a vessel.

***Nathan and Sue Lee*** *live in China and work for an international company.*

## Against the Storm

**Continued from page 3**

spite the fact that these schools are meeting a massive educational need, the government provides zero subsidy for starting the schools or maintaining them. This means that every headmaster has to borrow money from friends and relatives to secure a property lease.

These schools are humble and crowded at best, destitute and hazardous at worst. The schools have usually been started by former village teachers, headmasters and entrepreneurial countryside business men—people with a heart for the children from their hometowns. Migrant schools are frequently criticized for their lack of equipment—from the playground to the classroom. Most often, the tables and chairs that the schools use have been discarded from public schools.

Despite new government regulations ordering public schools to eliminate extra fees that they have been charging migrant families, enrollment in most of Beijing's migrant schools increased in September 2004, bringing the student population to approximately 150,000 children with as many in the public school system. On the one hand, with pressure from local authorities to restrict their existence due to poor educational quality and, on the other hand, with pressure from legitimate city developers to clear out and make room for more modern developments as the 2008 Beijing Olympics approach, the schools are in a pressure cooker for survival.

The demographic shift is seismic in scope. The social implications are staggering. The educational needs for an estimated 35 million children who will accompany 250 million adults to China's metropolises in the next ten years are just the tip of the iceberg. Of greater significance are the ramifications of hundreds of thousands (possibly millions) of rural Christians exiting the countryside with an estimated ten million disenfranchised peasants annually for the next decade.

The questions remain. Will those who have embraced the faith in China's impoverished villages now bring the treasure of their spiritual wealth to the cities amidst the storm, or will the red coals of His stirring be cooled by the beguiling winds of materialism? Will the children from households of faith be nurtured to love the Lord their God, and their neighbors as themselves, or will only the urban economies experience revival? May God grant these believers courage to be bearers of light. The stakes could not be higher as China is on the verge of superpower status in the 21st century.

***Mark Wendling*** *lived in Beijing for five years and currently serves as a staff member of the Thornston Educational Fund.*

## Migrant Cities

**Continued from page 5**

for today and hope for the best for tomorrow. Chinese people need to have a hope: a hope for a better future, not merely in this material world but for the world to come.

For the past 25 years, Christian ministry has taken place mainly in the rural areas of China. A mass movement of the house church was initiated in the villages and spread to nearby suburban and urban centers. The gospel to China's urban centers was primarily targeted at university students. Now, however, these university students have graduated and formed small, young, urban, professional churches in the cities that have no connection whatsoever with the rural church network.

The percentage of Christians in the urban centers is very low. For example, in the city of Shenzhen, about one percent of the population is Christian and in Guangzhou, less than two percent. Some cities are really unreached, especially townships of less than one million people. Sometimes, migrants in the megacities consist of more than thirty to fifty percent of the population. They are the new "unreached" people group in the urban centers of China. Young and energetic, some even well educated, they will become the morning stars of the New China.

May God send more of his laborers to the harvest fields of the cities. May we all keep watch and pray for China's migrants in the cities.

***Clarence Chan*** *is the CEO of Pacific Rim Foundation, Limited, an educational foundation in Hong Kong (www.prfoundation.com) and may be contacted at <prfoundation@yahoo.com>.*

# Book Review

## Strangers in the City

*A review by Scott Faris*

***Strangers in the City*** *by Li Zhan. Stanford University Press, 2001, 229 pp. ISBN: 0804742065, paperback. Cost: $22.95 at <www.barnesandnoble.com>.*

In April 2003, Beijing was gripped by fear as the full scope of China's SARS outbreak became known. Its migrant communities were alarmed as well with fear of infection, possible quarantine and economic hardship driving countless numbers to evacuate on packed trains and buses. As they left town, they packed the sidewalks, wearing crude gauze masks for protection and hauling their belongings in cheap rice sacks. For a short time, ironically, migrant workers ruled the streets that the majority of Beijing residents had left deserted. A far cry from being mere victims of circumstance, these Beijing migrant workers—part of China's aptly named "floating population"—would return quickly in the following months to pick up the work they had left behind in the city that owes most of its growing cosmopolitan profile, and a significant part of its commercial vitality, to their labors.

Professor Li Zhang's *Strangers in the City* is a well-researched ethnology focusing on this resilient, embattled, fast-growing and increasingly influential segment of "late-socialist" (Li's favored terminology) China's urban migrant population, which Li conservatively estimates at roughly 100,000,000 people. Published as a revision of her doctoral dissertation while at Cornell, Li's work successfully captures and analyzes the experiences of migrant workers concentrated in Zhejiangcun—a migrant community in Beijing's Nanyuan township located to the south of Tiananmen Square and just outside Beijing city limits. Li, herself a native of Yunnan province in China's southwest, did her research during visits to the area between 1994 and 1999. Its pages include charts, diagrams, photos and footnotes, as well as extensive transcriptions of interviews with the subjects of her study.

**Li's work successfully captures and analyzes the experiences of migrant workers** concentrated in Zhejiangcun—a migrant community in Beijing's Nanyuan township.

According to Li, Zhejiangcun took shape in the early 1980s as an influx of entrepreneurial migrants arrived from Wenzhou, a large industrial city in China's southeastern coastal province of Zhejiang. Wenzhou's entrepreneurs had embraced market-driven economic reforms in that prefecture (a phenomenon Li references as "the Wenzhou Model") and began clothing production inside migrant worker's homes that supplied goods to rented stalls in Beijing's wholesale markets. Throughout the book, Li refers to those following in the footsteps of these initial free-market pioneers as "Wenzhou migrants," though by the time she arrived to do research in the early 1990s, Zhejiangcun was becoming home to migrants from other parts of China as well.

Although Li's work is intended as a broad portrait of one particular migrant community, several universal theses emerge as she applies interpretive tools from a variety of academic disciplines to the task. She borrows from theoretical frameworks as exotic as semiotic analysis to sub-disciplines within the fields of psychology, history, sociology and anthropology.

One general but important thesis woven throughout the book, is Li's point that China's floating populations relate to both local residents and city leaders in very dynamic ways. They create what she terms "clientelist networks" and complex webs of relationship that are both strategic and highly collaborative. These realities are successfully contrasted against what Li identifies as the prevailing and incorrect assumption—especially common in Western media—that depicts migrant workers and their communities as passive victims, preyed on by all-powerful Communist Party structures that neither change nor adapt.

However, what Li observes is quite different. The economic and social realities of migrant communities, such as Zhejiangcun, are powerful enough to force the hand of leaders in cities and provincial governments (at one point even apparently requiring the attention and directives of then-Premiere Li Peng). They compel the leadership to adopt policies that help to manage the reality of migrant workers' presence, rather than merely suppressing or removing them from a given context. Li sets forth an example of this tendency in her translation of a fairly recent (1996) training document written for officials in Beijing's western district. It says, "The fundamental goal of making regulatory rules is not to clean up, drive away or disperse migrants as before, but to guide, control and regulate them under the new condition of socialist market economy." (p. 28)

Another trend Li highlights throughout her book is the tendency of those in the migrant communities to redefine their identity as city-dwellers through the ability to earn money and become consumers. This contrasts with the difficult

(and, as Li demonstrates convincingly by anecdote, unimaginably corrupt) official channels of acquiring a city's *hukou*—the document that entitles a person to legal residence in a city and access to social services and public education. "I do not need a Beijing *hukou* to stay in Beijing as long as I have money," says one of Li's subjects, a migrant worker who has managed to do well financially and does not intend to ever become an official participant in the *hukou* system.

As a work of scholarship, *Strangers in the City* has many strengths which far outbalance its weaknesses. Its footnotes contain extremely useful clarifications and amplifications of points the author makes, and the book's eleven-page pinyin-English-Chinese glossary at the end adequately captures the colorful, colloquial speech of Li's interview subjects as well as unpacking the use of political language and its meanings. Along with Li's liberal use of *pinyin* translations embedded in the text, this glossary is in itself a useful reference for vocabulary related to migrant issues, and these two features alone make the book worth its price. (An example from the glossary: *yimin* 移民 "migrants; immigrants" and *zirancun* 自然 "naturally formed village")

Li also demonstrates her ability to form deep trust relationships among Wenzhou migrant workers and their bosses as well as to access and assimilate information from local media and government documents. This lends her work a refreshing sense of breadth as well as depth.

An example of Li's attention to detail is found in her description of a meeting held by the city government of a Beijing suburb. They were courting the attention of Wenzhou migrant business owners who had been run out of Zhejiangcun when it was demolished by the Beijing government. She mentions the legitimizing significance of the word choice used in the hotel's welcome sign: "Reception Station to Welcome Zhejiang Industrialists and Merchants." Besides showing her sensitivity to subtle details, it also reaffirms Li's assertion that for migrants and those in power over them, the struggle to control language and discourse about the other is paramount.

The book's weaknesses are modest, but include a lack of adequate handling of the religious dimension of her subjects' lives. In only one place does Li mention that the majority of Wenzhou migrants practices some form of folk Buddhism and that the minority is Christian, and she fails to elaborate upon this. Doing so in a religious context as rich as China's belies naturalistic assumptions about how research is done and the very nature of knowing. Also, while Li's interdisciplinary approach facilitates a welcome breadth in handling her theses, she depends heavily on modernist assumptions about human nature and the motivations of those holding power. On several occasions, Li exhibits an almost unquestioning faith in the validity of cultural analyses drawn from Michel Foucault's *Power/Knowledge* and "Space, Knowledge and Power." There is little use for the supernatural in Li's worldview.

While having written a generally very readable piece of research, Li sometimes exhibits a penchant for using highly specialized technical language and jargon (related to the wide range of various interpretive theories she intentionally embraces) that can make reading her analyses towards the beginning of the book unnecessarily difficult.

However, despite these shortcomings, *Strangers in the City* still represents a good investment for those serving in China, useful, if for no other reason than for its value in posing questions that must be answered:

- To what extent have Christian ministry practices in mainland China in past decades shaped government policy in either positive or negative ways?
- How can those serving in China seek to understand the role of physical location and the dynamics at work in the creation of living and working spaces in China's cities?
- What is a biblical, gospel response to the urban poor in the context of Chinese cities?
- How will urban churches respond as some of their members grow in wealth and social influence?

There are certainly many more questions to ask, but answering them is the order of the day for Christians working in China's urban context, and the insights of Li's book will prove helpful in this task.

***Scott Faris*** *coordinates China-related research for Geneva Global Inc.*

**The "Master's" Embarrassment**
Continued from page 9

tion and modernization have brought about the continued decrease of arable land and increase of excess labor in the villages, forcing the farmers to leave the countryside. However, the Chinese policy of *eryuan shenfen* (separating into two classes those who live in the cities and those who do not) does not recognize the equal rights and status of *mingong*. Government policies still treat the *mingong* as if they were peasants living in the countryside, denying them any kind of social security. The worth of the *mingong* has been artificially and systematically degraded. The growth and development of the city is, to a certain degree, precisely dependent upon taking advantage of the degraded worth of the masses of *mingong*. An indisputable fact is that once the *mingong* enter the city, no matter what they do, they are still considered peasants. Although their children grow up in the city, they still have peasant status. In China, where "the workers and peasants are the masters," regardless of where the peasant lives, in reality, he is still on the bottom rung of the social ladder. In the city that does not offer peasants any mercy or tender feelings, peasants and *mingong* feel a humiliation and exploitation that have been legitimized by the system. To change this system implies that one must change the current order of things, which implies that the "masters" of the republic must struggle anew for their own status as masters. For the Chinese peasants who were already liberated more than half a century ago, this is a huge irony and tragedy.

Only when the millions of peasants who have left the land, traveled through the villages and entered the cities can truly stand toe-to-toe with city dwellers will the two-class system be finished, the problem of migrant workers solved, and the modernization of China have a future. We believe and anticipate this day will come soon.

**Endnotes**

1. The term here traditionally refers to a laborer working on a public project.

***Huo Shui*** *is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translation is by Alice Loh, Brent and Jasmine Fulton.*

# A Church on the Move



China is in the midst of what is arguably the most massive human migration in history, as hundreds of millions flock from the countryside to the cities. This migration spells fundamental change for the rural house church networks that have been the stronghold of Christianity in China for the past three decades.


Brent Fulton

One of the most significant challenges concerns how workers in the rural church will be supported in the future. Evangelists in China's rural house church networks have traditionally relied upon agriculture as their economic base. The seasonal nature of agricultural work allowed evangelists to spend part of each year traveling and church planting. Today, with the shrinking agricultural sector, the industrialization of the countryside, and more evangelists moving to the cities, this model has become less and less viable.

## From Farmhouse to Factory Floor

New models are emerging that provide Christians who move to the cities with a means of support, a legitimate status within the city and a platform for ministry—often to migrants like themselves who work on construction sites, in the homes of urban families or in the factory towns that have sprung up in the Pearl River Delta and elsewhere. Separated from family and the familiar surroundings of the countryside, these peasants are particularly open to the Gospel at this transitional stage in their lives. While rural Christians generally find it difficult to relate to sophisticated urbanites, they are well-positioned to minister to their fellow migrants in the cities.

One model that has been proven successful involves providing evangelists with short-term loans and basic training on how to run a small business. Located near a factory, the business becomes a convenient contact point with migrant workers. This "shop church" also provides a location for worship and training. As migrant workers are discipled and then eventually return to the countryside, the evangelists can connect them with existing churches in their home towns.

## New Opportunities for Partnership

According to one Christian worker who has spent years serving alongside the rural church, helping rural believers to maintain economic viability while developing new ministry into the cities is one of the most significant contributions those outside China can make to the church at this time.

"If more foreign 'China workers' would give themselves to this vision," he urged, "they would discover their true purpose and role for this time in China's history. All [the rural Chinese believers] need is a vehicle to take them into their future and destiny and our part is simply to provide that vehicle. They are already leading, discipling and growing faster than any church in the world at this time."

While China's rural Christians grapple with the implications of urbanization for their ministry, we who would seek to partner with them must also be willing to consider new avenues of involvement. Leadership training and the provision of spiritual resources remain critical needs, but now business expertise and strategies, vocational training and micro loans are joining the list as practical ways to encourage China's growing church.

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