Insiders’ Entitlements:
Formation of the Household Registration (huji/hukou) System
in Shanghai, People’s Republic of China
(1949-1959)

by

Jie DENG

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ABSTRACT

The distinctive household registration (hukou or huji) system of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) divides the population into two groups whose political rights and legal status are unequal. This thesis focuses on Shanghai to examine the establishment of the hukou system in the 1950s in the course of the rural and urban reforms led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Although the system has been explained as a result of the CCP’s industrialization strategy, my investigation has led me to conclude that the hukou system was an indirect rather than direct consequence of industrialization. My examination also shows that “rural” and “urban” in the PRC are essentially neither residential nor occupational categories; rather they are closely connected with political privileges.

The first part of this study focuses on the consequences of the CCP’s land reform and collectivization campaigns after 1949. During this period, a large number of people who had moved freely between urban and rural areas, playing active roles in both, were uprooted from the countryside. At the same time, the CCP carried out a series of expulsions from Shanghai and other cities. Hundreds of thousands of urban residents, particularly those lacking secure employment, were removed after being labeled as “undesirable.” Thus CCP policies turned the cities and the countryside into two separate worlds. Next the dissertation outlines how the PRC state evolved after 1949, focusing on those directly maintained on the government’s payroll in Shanghai. This group was small in the beginning but soon began to expand. During the 1950s,
after taking over almost all public-service institutions, the state took steps to absorb private enterprises through the policy of “public-private joint operation.” A large cohort of workers was thus added to the state payroll. Following these changes, the cities had become home mainly to employees of the party-state, together with their dependents. The state provided various benefits to its insiders. At the same time, it reduced most of the rural population to a kind of serfdom, while putting in place a set of mechanisms to secure the boundary between insiders and outsiders.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is not only a doctoral thesis, but also a reflection of the social conditions in which I experienced my own life. It came into being with the help of many others as well, people who have contributed in various ways and at various stages and to whom I am very grateful.

The hukou issue appeared in my life from the very beginning. I was born in a village in a backwater part of the province of Anhui. My father worked as a village schoolteacher and thus holds “urban hukou.” My mother has “rural” status. Because status is inherited from the mother’s side, my two siblings and I thus held “rural hukou” and the family was registered in two separate household registration booklets held in the local police patrol dispatch station (派出所). In my father’s booklet, his address is a virtual one, given as the main street of a nearby town, rather than the address of our actual residence. Although the role of “family head” is normally assigned to the father of the family, my mother is named as family head in our family’s second household registration booklet. When I was a child, my grandmother often told me that I was not the equal of a particular playmate who held urban status because his mother was a colleague of my father. At the same time, I was strongly encouraged, especially by my grandmother, to work hard in school and to continue my education at the college level so that I would be able to attain “urban hukou” status.

I performed well in school, studying at the elementary school in the village and the junior middle school in the town. I then succeeded in a very competitive
examination and gained admission to the prefecture’s only provincial-level key senior middle school. This key school enrolled only eighteen of the county’s 20,000 junior middle school graduates that year. Because the great majority of those studying at the school held “urban” status, I belonged to a visible minority, displaying inferiority in appearance and in performance in subjects such as oral English, as a result of deficiencies in our earlier education. However I was generally not resentful on account of my disadvantages. This was because I remained unaware of the injustice of the system until I read a report on the remarkable inequity in higher-education enrolment rates between major provincial-level cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, and the provinces inhabited mainly by rural status holders such as Anhui and Hubei. This experience was in the summer of 2000, after I had taken the national university-entrance examinations.

I did well in the university entrance exams, gaining admission to Fudan University. In 2000, Fudan enrolled fifty students from Anhui out of a total of almost half a million middle school graduates in the province. Success in the exams transformed my status from “rural” to “urban.” An immediate and significant change in my personal life was that I became eligible for state-subsidized health care, provided free of charge at the university’s clinic. Entering the Department of History’s undergraduate program, I became interested in the history of modern China, and after earning the BA degree, enrolled in the Department’s Master’s program.

As a Master’s thesis topic, I considered the idea of studying the establishment of the huji system during the 1950s. Although my supervisor, Professor Jin Guangyao,
was supportive of the idea, at that time, my focus was limited to the operations of
Shanghai’s Police Department in establishing the huji system, and the relevant
materials, held in the archives of the Public Security Bureau, have not been made
accessible to the public. Therefore Professor Jin and I agreed that it would be best to
choose a different topic for thesis research.

With funding from the Chinese Scholarship Council (CSC), I entered the
Department of History Queen’s University in 2008 as a PhD student. Knowing of my
interest in the 1950s, Professor Emily Hill suggested that I work on the formation of
the huji system, unaware of my earlier consideration of this research topic. With this
encouragement, I began to develop a new perspective on the topic and a broader
approach to the research that would allow me to circumvent the problem that certain
types of source materials were not available.

I feel an obligation to speak out on behalf of China’s “rural status population,” a
group that remains subject to legal discrimination. Despite the fact that the size of this
group is now well above half a billion, the injustice of its subordination is seldom
noticed or mentioned outside China, while within China the topic is seldom discussed.
As a researcher, however, I must do more than simply air the grievances of this group,
and describe its past, present, and future suffering. I sincerely hope that my study and
analysis will be constructive in deepening general understanding of contemporary
China’s huji system and in thus helping to make China a better place.

I would like to express my gratitude to the many people who greatly helped me
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Being uprooted from familiar circumstances and placed in a completely new situation can be difficult and challenging. Local Christian communities, the Chinese Alliance Church and the Intervarsity provide invaluable fellowship and support to international students, in addition to that offered by the Queen’s International Centre. Therefore I would also like to thank Pastor Gong Lu, Professor Qingguo Li, Professor Dongsheng Tu, Mimi Kashira, Nancy Smith, Debra Fieguth, Dr. Ian Ritchie, Margo and Glen Hyde, and many others for their kindness and generosity.
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Chapter 1 Introduction and literature review

In 2001, a student from the United States observed a puzzling phenomenon while he was learning Chinese at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He could not understand why his Chinese friends, who were born and raised in cities, spoke disparagingly of migrants from rural areas who repaired bicycles and peddled fruit.\(^1\) Years later, when the student was collecting materials for his dissertation on this interesting topic, he was told by interviewees in Tianjin that “they were able to tell whether someone was rural or urban without hearing them speak a word.”\(^2\) I doubt if the interviewees were exaggerating. It is by no means difficult for the average person who has been living in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) for any period of time to distinguish between the two groups. Members of the two groups differ noticeably in skin colour, height, clothing, hairstyle, speech, and mannerisms. These differences are so pervasive that people who have grown up in the PRC tend to think of them as natural.

Even without going deeper into issues such as the causes of the phenomenon and its significance, there is no debate on the existence of two unequal groups in China that are separated by a clear boundary marked by outward appearance. Wang Fei-ling, a leading scholar on this issue, portrayed a vivid picture of the two groups at the very beginning of his monograph:

You were born to a registered agricultural family … You learned only basic work skills through the minimal education. … [you are compelled to move to a city]


\(^2\) Ibid, 25.
only to find that you were no longer in your own country and your citizenship was clearly incomplete. … You cannot vote… You cannot apply for most of the jobs there … You and your children cannot go to local public schools … 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. … Once you quit the only jobs… [you] are subject to fines, detention and forced deportation. 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.³

Wang’s generalization is so succinct and comprehensive that it can serve as an introduction for people who are not familiar with this issue to get a basic idea. To put the idea in a more abstract way, each and every person in this particular country is labeled by the national-level state either as “urban” or as “rural.” These labels are passed down from generation to generation. Those with the label “rural” are denied access to the privileges and benefits provided to those labeled as “urban.” Only the state has the power to change individuals’ labels under certain terms. Even though various reforms have been declared and some even carried out in some parts of the PRC, generally speaking the situation has not changed significantly up to now. It is not uncommon to hear in private that people complain how difficult it is to get an “urban hukou” for themselves or their children, especially in large metropolitan centres such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Nor is it uncommon to learn from media reports that people have expressed their disappointment and sense of grievance about failing to obtain “urban hukou” despite their struggles to achieve this goal.

³ Wang Fei-ling, Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System, (Stanford University Press, 2005), 1-2.
The purpose of this study is to trace the origins of the distinctive phenomenon that exists in the PRC. It aims to explain why and how the situation came into being. To begin the adventure, I will first examine how scholars have addressed these questions so far. My review of the scholarly literature is organized around analysis of the various terms that have been employed, along with the conceptual frameworks behind different terms. The following sections will discuss terms that are currently in use by scholars and the public in analysis and discussion of the situation. As explained below, I have found the understanding behind various terms to be imprecise and even extremely misleading. After analyzing the shortcomings of the concepts and the understanding behind certain terms that are now in use, I will propose a new framework to understand the phenomenon.

The household registration (huji) system was installed in the early 1950s, after the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control. Around the same time, the CCP became committed to an alliance with the Soviet Union and thus disengaged the country from the western world. Scholars from the western world were then only able to observe Chinese affairs from a distance. In addition, the CCP has considered the huji system to be a matter of state security even to this day. As a result, western academics were not well-informed about the system and its significance until after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms began in 1978. For instance, landmark books about People’s Republic of China (PRC) written in the 1960s did not mention the huji system. Doak A. Barnett, for instance, was an experienced observer and reporter on then newly-established PRC. His articles covered a wide range of important issues and
events taking place during the first years of the new state. Although Barnett’s
observations on political movements, economic development, social control and
propaganda were impressively insightful and comprehensive, he did not even mention
the huiji system. Likewise, in Ezra Vogel’s well-known monograph published in
1969, in which the urban and rural areas of a particular province were closely
examined, the huiji system remained absent.

The huiji system began to attract the attention of western scholars beginning in the
late 1980s when large-scale labour migration became a spectacular social
phenomenon. At the same time, China had opened its doors to western scholars
wishing to visit to conduct field studies and archival research.

Many academic publications on huiji-related topics such as urbanization,
industrialization and migration have appeared since the 1980s. With newly available
resources and perspectives, scholars turned on its head the romanticized picture of
Communist China that many western leftists had portrayed during the Cold War. The
functioning of the huiji system in particular became known thanks to the contributions
of Kam Wing Chan and a few other scholars in social science fields. It thus became
clear that China was not unlike other better-known Communist-led countries where
rural-urban disparities have prevailed. In the past two decades, an abundance of books

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and journal articles has appeared, documenting the features of migration and urbanization in China since 1978, analyzing the consequences, and providing policy suggestions. However, knowledge on specific aspects of the huji system, especially its formation, is still lacking.

The lack of knowledge on how the huji system was created is largely the result of two conditions. First, it has been mainly sociologists and social scientists who have conducted research on huji-related questions. Historians have seldom joined their discussions. Second, almost all the research has been motivated by concerns about the current situation, the effects of economic reforms and changes to the administration of huji, and proposals for further reform. The question of how the system was installed has therefore been neglected. Thus the specific contributions of relevant scholarship may be summarized in just a few paragraphs.

Tiejun Cheng, then a student in sociology in State University of New York at Binghamton, finished a dissertation titled “Dialectics of Control: the household registration (hukou) system in contemporary China” in 1991. He explained the initiation, formalization and development of the hukou system as well as its consequences. Covering many aspects of the huji system, he contributed a comprehensive picture of the system.7 Fei-ling Wang, also a sociologist, later published a book called Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System (2005). The main contribution of Wang’s book is to describe how the system

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functions at present, particularly the CCP’s maintenance of ideological dominance.\textsuperscript{8} These two largely works contain the most advanced scholarship on the huji system, and their mainly descriptive nature reflects how exploration of the huji system by western scholars remains in a state of infancy.

Only a few works in English deal with the early stage of the huji system. The most important is an article by Cheng Tiejun and Mark Selden titled “The origins and social consequences of China’s Hukou system” (1994). According to the authors, this article is a “documentary study.” (644) Their chronological narrative, based on a succession of national regulations and laws as well as reports in official newspapers, provides an overview of the process through which the huji system was set up. Placing governance under the CCP in a broad context, Cheng and Selden state that “the origins of the hukou system lie embedded in the baojia system of population registration and mutual surveillance perfected over millennia.” Without substantiating such links between past and present, they also go on to suggest more recent pre-1949 origins of the system, stating that “antecedents also lie in twentieth-century techniques of social control” and the “direct influence of the Soviet passbook system.” (645). Later they state that the huji system created a spatial hierarchy, privileging urban areas and urban residents over the rural areas and rural residents. The most serious shortcoming of Cheng and Selden’s article is that they overlook crucial details about the specific categories created by the huji system after 1949. Approaching the question as a historian, I realized early in my investigation the importance of distinguishing between

\textsuperscript{8} Wang Fei-ling, Organizing Through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System, (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2005).
urban residents and people holding “urban” status in the huji system. Cheng and Selden do not make this distinction, assuming that the CCP assumed responsibility for providing food supplies to urban residents generally, which was not the case. In consequence, their understanding of the hukou system as a “spatially defined status hierarchy” (645) remains incomplete. Although the system appears to have a spatial dimension, a basic link between spatial location or origin and status is absent.9 Presenting my analysis of these points mainly in Chapters Three and Five below, I explain the foundations of the phenomena that Cheng and Selden describe.

More recently, Jeremy Brown completed a dissertation at the University of California, San Diego, titled “Crossing the Rural-Urban Divide in Twentieth-Century China” (2008). Brown adopted a social and cultural approach to his question, stating that he intentionally “downgraded institutional explanations including the hukou system.” He argued that the previously constructed belief that the countryside is backward played an important role in creating the rural-urban inequality that exists in China today.10 Consequently, Brown’s research did not examine the formation of the huji system.

As the summary above indicates, the question of the formation of the huji system as it has functioned in the People’s Republic of China since the 1950s has not yet been addressed directly by researchers. Although many works have mentioned the early stages of the system in passing, as yet there have been no publications specifically

devoted to addressing the topic of my enquiry.

1.1 Huji system (户籍制度) or Hukou system (户口制度)?

The two terms “huji system” (户籍) and “hukou system” (户口) are probably the best-accepted terms employed by both academics and the public to refer to the situation described by Fei-ling Wang. Both huji and hukou may be translated as “household records” or “household registration” and there are no significant differences between the two words. The two words are interchangeable in most circumstances. For instance, the official document issued to each family is referred to as a “huji booklet” (户籍本) or “hukou booklet” (户口本). The only difference is that huji is rather formal while hukou is more colloquial.

The usage of the term huji is inherently confusing. In common usage, it refers to two completely different phenomena, one being a technique commonly used by governments in the past, while the other is a distinctive set of arrangements existing in the contemporary Chinese context. The term huji (户籍) appeared in classic texts thousands of years ago. As used by governments which ruled China in centuries past, huji a very basic official practice of collecting statistical information from each family as a basis for deciding how to distribute responsibilities such as taxes, corveé and military services among the people. The purpose of huji was to maintain stability in peaceful times and to suppress revolt in chaotic times. The specific aims and level of enforcement in the collection of information and assignment of duties varied from
time to time and from place to place. Cheng Tiejun and Wang Fei-ling both conducted
careful and exhaustive research for the purpose of detailing the long history of the
official collection and use of information by means of something referred to as huji.\footnote{Wang Fei-ling, \textit{Organizing Through Division and Exclusion}, Chapter 2, 32-60. Cheng Tiejun, “Dialectics of control: The Household Registration (hukou) System in Contemporary China.” Ph.D. dissertation (SUNY-Binghamton, 1990), Chapter 2, 25-68.} However, neither scholar provided evidence to demonstrate that there was ever a time
in Chinese history when practices associated with huji functioned to divide people
into two groups, one of which was more privileged than the other.

Huji and similar forms of official record-keeping on households in other parts of
the world were widely-known in the past. For instance, the Roman Empire at one time
required all its subjects to be registered at their native places. Actually, it seems that
similar practices have existed in every state once it has grown to a certain size and
once its social complexity reaches a certain level, for the purpose organizing the basic
functions of a society. In developed countries, governments use increasingly
sophisticated methods to collect information from each and every person living within
their jurisdictions and distribute responsibilities and benefits accordingly. This is quite
similar to the functions of huji practiced in pre-modern China except that huji in
China was less efficient and there were few benefits to be distributed in comparison to
officials’ demands for tax payments and other contributions. In the Republic of Korea,
and Japan today, the word huji is still in use, along with many other Chinese
loan-words. It is also in use in Taiwan. In all three East Asian countries, the word is
used today to refer to a kind of basic record-keeping about households. Although the
practices associated with huji in those neighbouring countries are similar to those that
the word huji referred to in pre-modern China, it is unlikely that anyone would think of claiming that huji in other Asian contexts was at all the same as the huji phenomenon existing in the People’s Republic of China. In short, huji in China before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) assumed national power in 1949 was a basic and common governmental tool. It was not the same thing as the huji system established during the 1950s.

It would be interesting to investigate how a particular phenomenon came to be labeled using a word that had previously referred to something quite different. The use of a harmless-seeming term to describe discriminatory practices might well have been an intentional choice. The continued use of the term huji after 1949 was certainly misleading. Either explicitly or implicitly, it suggested that the new circumstances were a perhaps unfortunate but nonetheless natural and even inevitable continuation of China’s long history. Thus the use of the term has served China’s CCP-led state authorities. To the extent that the huji system of the PRC period is assumed to be either a historical legacy or a natural phenomenon, they are absolved of responsibility for its inequities. In any case, the use of the word huji has misled many people, including Fei-ling Wang and Tiejun Cheng, into assuming that contemporary problems are to some extent rooted in the distant past. Because observers have been misled by a label, they have overlooked the actual origins of the phenomenon referred to as huji after 1949. Both Wang and Cheng have described the PRC’s huji system as the continuation of a traditional practice with the same name.\footnote{Wang Fei-ling, \textit{Organizing Through Division and Exclusion}, 33; Cheng Tiejun, “Dialectics of control,” 353-354.} Certainly there
similarities between the two phenomena called huji. However, Wang and Cheng also identified fundamental and significant differences between the two, were motivated by questions regarding these differences, and made significant contributions to understanding them. As described above, the traditional huji system was a governmental tool in general use and therefore, had much less academic significance than the contemporary phenomenon. Wang and Cheng have demonstrated that the fundamental differences between the PRC’s huji system and the pre-modern huji greatly outweigh the similarities between them. To express this using an analogy, although an automobile is in some ways similar to a wagon, it does not make much sense to understand an automobile as a variant of a wagon.

Fortunately, not all scholars have been hindered by an intellectual blindspot regarding the discontinuity between the huji phenomena of the past and the present. Kam Wing Chan, a geographer who has written extensively during the past two decades on issues relating to huji, has explicitly stated that the the PRC’s huji system is different in many ways from China’s traditional huji system in China. As he has stated, the “pre-1949 system never functioned as a comprehensive, all-embracing social and economic control mechanism in peacetime.”13 Turning his attention back to more current developments, Chan did not take the further step of discussing the differences in detail. Nor has he carried out an investigation of how and why the China’ post-1949 huji system was installed.

A few scholars in the PRC have noticed that there have been two very different

forms of huji in China. For instance, Lu Yilong developed two different definitions for the word huji. He stated that the term “huji system,” in a narrow sense, refers to the system of day-to-day household registration such as recording and updating information about individual households. In a broader sense, “huji system” refers to the division of population into two unequal groups, and in this sense, according to Lu, China’s the huji system has overlapped significantly with various other systems such as the legal, political, and economic systems.\footnote{陆益龙: 《户籍制度——控制与社会差别》(Lu Yilong, The Huji System: Control and Social Inequality. Beijing: Commercial Press, 2004), 54-56.} Lu has not mentioned, however, that the term huji referring to practices in pre-modern China and the term huji as used in contemporary China have two different meanings.

Generally speaking, it is problematic to link a distinctive system in which people are divided into two unequal groups to a basic tool employed by successive governments in China. Therefore, the terms huji and hukou are misleading if users do not keep in mind that the huji system in the PRC and the huji system in Imperial China are two different things.

1.2 Rural-Urban Dualism (城乡二元)?

The phrase “rural-urban dualism” is used by scholars within the PRC to refer to the social inequality described at the beginning of this section. The English translation is not very meaningful in a literal sense because of the lack of a general consensus on the specific content of the term. “Rural-urban dualism” appears not to be a clearly-defined or well-accepted academic term in English. A few papers containing
this term in reference to issues of development in different parts of the world have been published over the years. However, the meaning of this term is completely different from how it is understood in the Chinese context. For instance, scholars writing in English have stated that “rural-urban dualism” is characteristic of African agriculture. What they mean by this term is that there has been a high rate of urbanization associated with a massive flow of labor out of agriculture and into the urban service sector; they do not describe a division between two social categories. Other scholars have believed that there is “a fundamental rural-urban dualism in Indian society, paralleled by an agricultural-industrial schism.” But again, what they have meant by this term is a lack of balance in society and economic structure.

Furthermore, the term “rural-urban dualism” in English has been used to refer to a propensity to conceptualize rural areas as “backward” and “traditional,” and urban areas “developed” and “modern.” Given this variety of usage, it seems that the term does not denote any clearly defined, workable or valuable academic concept. On the contrary, it carries a negative but vague connotation as something obsolete and obstructive.

While in English the term “rural-urban dualism” is not a widely used academic term and it does not have a clear meaning, in the PRC there is consensus among academics and even ordinary people on the meaning of the term chengxiang eryuan

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rural-urban dualism). The term is so pervasively used that scholars adopt and apply it without defining it. For instance, two young scholars published their research in English, arguing in the introduction to their journal article that, “the main obstacles to accessing health service…lie in the institutional blind spot regarding health security provision, rural-urban dualism and a unique household registration system in China.” Yet this is the only place they used the term; it did not come up again in the paper and was not defined.

Rather than directly referring to the division of China’s population into “urban” and “rural” groups with the former enjoying far more privileges than the latter, or to the consequences of this division, the term “rural-urban dualism” in Chinese denotes the contrasts in physical appearance between urban areas and rural areas. The meaning of the term is simply that urban areas are characterized by large-scale modern industry and have superior infrastructure and that urban populations enjoy higher incomes and higher consumption levels, while in contrast, the rural areas feature small-scale agriculture and poor infrastructure and are inhabited by people with low incomes and weak purchasing power.

The term “rural-urban dualism” can be easily linked with the orthodox Marxist catchword “rural-urban difference” (城乡差别) and thus fits well within the Chinese revolutionary macro-narrative. To a certain degree, “rural-urban dualism” is the same thing as “rural-urban difference.” According to Marxist theory, rural-urban difference, together with worker-peasant difference and labour-professional difference are issues.

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that cannot be resolved under either feudalism or capitalism. Moreover, socialism aims to eliminating these three differences. This aspect of Marxist theory is in fact taken advantage of by the CCP to interpret the consequences of official arrangements to divide the population into two unequal groups. It is argued that rural-urban difference is a universal phenomenon and that it results from feudalism and capitalism. A socialist country would set out to reduce and eventually eliminate this difference from the very beginning. The problem, according to this interpretation, is that the damage caused by feudalism and capitalism was so extensive that socialist efforts have not yet succeeded. Recently, as scholars and CCP spokesmen have both shifted away from orthodox Marxism toward modernization theory, they have argued that rural-urban dualism is a universal phenomenon of traditional society and could only be resolved by the transition from traditional society to modern society, a transition that the CCP has been making efforts to achieve since the late 1970s.

Although the term “rural-urban dualism” itself does not necessarily imply universality, it is clear that usage of the term has made the situation in PRC look like something universal and thus has obscured the distinctive features and historical foundations of the contemporary Chinese version of rural-urban difference. It is true that rural-urban difference exists everywhere. Even in developed countries, there are numerous differences between rural areas and urban areas and rural areas are often less advantaged places in relation to urban areas. However, it is also true that in other parts of the world, there are seldom systematic arrangements to make rural people and urban people unequal in terms of civil rights and legal status. The rural-urban
difference in PRC is substantially different from those in other parts of the world.

Examination of how the term is used in Chinese makes clear that “rural-urban dualism” only captures concrete and physical differences between the rural areas and urban areas while omitting the most significant elements and failing to identify the invisible but distinctive features of the situation in PRC. In other words, what it refers to is a universal matter rather than the distinctive social inequity delineated at the beginning of this chapter. Therefore the term is not suitable for discussion of the phenomenon that people are divided into two unequal groups in terms of civil rights and legal status. When the term is employed in discussion, it can lead researchers in the wrong direction by confusing a distinctive phenomenon with a universal one.

1.3 The Rural-Urban Inequality/ Gap / Cleavage?

The shortcomings of the terms “huji system” and “rural-urban dualism” have not escaped unnoticed. A few scholars have sensed the problems in using those words. For instance, in a recent book dealing with the subject of this study, Martin King Whyte, a sociologist at Harvard, did not use those terms in his introduction to the book. However, it seems that he hesitated in choosing a single term, for he used several words with similar meanings in his rather short introduction. The terms he used include “rural-urban inequality,” “rural-urban gap,” “rural-urban cleavage,” and “rural-urban caste system.” Among these terms, “rural-urban inequality” appeared most frequently.

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The terms that Martin Whyte adopted have limitations at two levels. First, like the term “rural-urban difference,” these terms refer to the consequences of the huji system only; they are not helpful in understanding the specific mechanisms which have led to these results. Although it is important to describe results, it is also important to identify the causes of inequality. Second, these terms can be misleading for they fail to address the distinctive features of structural social inequality in China. It is too easy even for educated people to assume and argue that rural-urban inequality is a phenomenon found widely around the world. Facilities in the urban areas are always more numerous and better than those in rural areas. For instance, there is almost no way to equalize the time needed to transfer a patient from home to a hospital between people living rural areas and urban areas. Seen in this way, rural-urban inequality is always present and will perhaps exist forever. However, the situation portrayed at the beginning of this chapter certainly does not exist everywhere, and is gradually becoming known to be a distinctive feature of the PRC. The danger of using the term “rural-urban inequality” is that it naturally leads to questions such as whether the rural-urban inequality is higher in degree in the PRC and how to measure the gap, rather than questions about the fundamental differences between rural-urban inequality in China and that in other parts of the world.

The elusiveness of meaning attached to the term “rural-urban inequality” is clearly demonstrated in the book edited by Martin King Whyte. Part of the book is devoted to discussion measuring the size of China’s rural-urban income gap in
relation to income differences elsewhere in the world. In attempting this kind of comparison, scholars must pay close attention to what groups are captured in their data. While adjusting many parameters to carry out complex calculations, they tend not to mention what “rural” and “urban” mean in the context of PRC. The reality is that behind the label “rural” stands a group of people who would by no means be labeled as “rural” if they did not live in China. This is also true of the label “urban.”

It is important to keep in mind that the content behind quantitative data can be completely different from one context to another, and more meaningful than the data itself. During the 1980s, Kam Wing Chan pointed out the difficult problems of determining what groups were captured in official statistics on population changes published in China, along with the significance of these issues in studying rural-urban differences. But it seems that scholars have not always heeded his caveats, and have analyzed data without careful study of the meaning of official categories.

A basic problem arises from the concept “rural-urban.” Where is the fault line between “rural” and “urban”? What are the exact meanings of “rural” and “urban”? These questions have not attracted as much attention from academics and the public as they should have. There are two sets of understanding on the huji system. Some scholars, especially economists, tend to understand it with the help of the concept of

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sectors. They formulate “rural-urban” as “working in the agricultural sector versus working in non-agricultural sectors.” Others take a spatial residential approach. They understand “rural-urban” mainly as “living in the countryside versus living in cities.” However, neither of these approaches squares well with the reality in the PRC.

The boundary line between the two groups with unequal legal status and civil rights is not drawn between the places where they live or where they were born. Wang Fei-ling presented a typology of social exclusion, distinguishing four types and placing the huji system of the PRC as a form of exclusion based on “where you are.” In fact, his typology should be adjusted. Actually, whether a person in China belongs to the privileged group or to the other group is not determined by the place where he or she was born or the place where he or she lives. On this point, status in China is very different from citizenship in the United States which strictly follows the “territoriality principle.” In China, for instance, if a couple with the “urban” label were to give birth to a baby and then raise it in a village, the child would invariably be labeled as “urban” and grow up to be an “urban” adult even if he or she never visited a city. In the history of the PRC, there have been many employees of the state who have worked in the countryside as township-level cadres, village school-teachers and in certain other occupations such as agricultural technician and medical practitioner. They are “urban” even though they may live in the countryside all their lives, and the children might also have urban status. This also holds true for the reverse case. If a

23 If both parents are “urban”, the children are definitely urban. But if the mother is “rural,” then the children will be rural. Only after 1998, have children been allowed to inherit status from either mothers or fathers.
“rural” couple lives in a city and gives birth to a baby in an urban hospital, the child will still be labeled as “rural” even though it might never set foot on rural soil. This second scenario is the life experience today of many millions of “children of peasant workers” (农民工子弟). Those who have been born in the city and lived all their lives there remain “rural.” Their status is determined by that of their parents. Thus is it clear that the spatial line between rural areas and urban areas is not identical with the division of the population between “rural” and “urban” groups in the huji system of the PRC.

Nor is the fault line between rural and urban status found between economic sectors. Some scholars, especially economists and other social scientists, consciously or unconsciously present “rural” and “urban” as sectoral concepts. This line fits very well with the “big push” to industrialize which is a conventional explanation of the formation of the huji system. In this vein, “rural” means the agricultural sector and those who work in it while “urban” refers to non-agriculture and to people working in the secondary and tertiary sectors. But again, this understanding is challenged by the well-known fact that a large proportion of rural people are employed in non-agricultural occupations in the cities. Since the 1980s, hundreds of millions of former farmers and children of farmers have left agriculture and found jobs in industry and services, permanently or part-time. Yet even when these people have worked outside the agricultural sector for decades, they continue to have rural status and are called “peasant-workers” (农民工). They and their children can seldom obtain “urban” status. It is also noteworthy that this phenomenon was not created by the
post-Mao Reform and Opening policy announced in 1978. The phenomenon of peasant-workers in the cities already existed during the 1950s. Under Mao’s national leadership, many rural-hukou holders were recruited to work in the cities as contract workers or temporary workers, and this eventually played a role in beginning the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Also, not all agricultural workers are “rural.” For instance, early on, the CCP-led state set up many farms and some of these state-owned farms are still operating today. State farm employees work in agriculture but are categorized and treated as “urban.” Therefore, it is clear that the fault line between the two unequal groups is not located between different economic sectors. In short, none of the terms such as “rural-urban inequality,” “the rural-urban gap,” and “rural-urban cleavage” refers precisely to the social structural features associated with the term huji today.

Because of the oppressive nature of the CCP-led state, it is understandable that in many cases scholars in China do not express their ideas in a straightforward way. It is unfair to criticize them for lack of courage, for even if do speak straightforwardly their voices are often muffled. In the circumstances, they evade censorship by using vague terms and inaccurate language. However this does not mean that scholars outside the PRC should follow their terms and language. On the contrary, they should be straightforward and clear, in order to facilitate serious academic research and meaningful discussion.
1.4 Segregation?

Given the preceding analysis, it might be tempting to think of the situation in the PRC as a kind of social segregation. However, there are fundamental differences between various segregation systems that have existed around the world and the huji system of the PRC. This section will discuss the meaning of “segregation” and then compare the situation in the PRC to other cases to explain why the case under discussion should not be viewed as a system of “segregation”.

The term “Segregation” has been employed by scholars to refer to certain phenomena in various societies. The core element of these phenomena is always restrictions preventing different groups from inter-mingling physically. Therefore segregation is usually “residential,” which means that different groups are not permitted to share the same space or utilities. This generalization holds true for almost all situations which are referred to as segregation. For instance, in the case of segregation of Jews in particular places in Europe, Jews were required to live in designated districts (sometimes called ghettos). During the Qing period in China (1644-1912), Banner garrisons occupied separate zones in certain cities (the Banner forces had Manchu, Mongol and Han ethnic origins). In the United States, racial segregation revealed itself as separated sections on buses, separate restaurants and separate drinking fountains. Such phenomena are not part of China’s huji system. On the contrary, rural people are allowed to live in urban communities if they have the means to do so. Actually, many rural people do live in the cities and often live next door to people of urban status. The latter also live in rural areas and among rural
people if they wish to do so, or in certain cases when they are required to do so. In public space, there are no separated facilities or serving places. In short, the residential separation and separated facilities which have characterized segregation in other places do not exist in the PRC.

Another feature of segregation is that it is usually associated with restrictions on inter-group marriage, upheld either by law or by social custom. The reason for restriction is that inter-group marriage naturally leads to blurring of the fault line between groups. This can make segregation difficult if not impossible to maintain. In Qing China, for instance, military Banner men and their children were legally prohibited from marrying non-Banner men and women. Strict laws banning inter-racial marriage have existed in the United States and South Africa. Such restrictions do not exist in China. There is no law banning marriages between “rural” people and “urban” people. Nor do social customs prevent such marriages. Although urban people generally prefer not to marry rural people because of their lower status, those who face difficulties in finding urban marriage partners often find spouses within the rural group, and this has been the case from the very beginning of the system until today. Rural people often prefer to marry urban people because of the various privileges enjoyed by the latter group. Rural-urban marriage is a common phenomenon in the PRC.

A further feature of segregation is that it goes hand in hand with group identity. Individuals understand which groups they belong to and feel loyalty to their groups. They are voluntarily vigilant of the boundaries of their group, preventing members
from other groups from joining and also constraining members of their group from departing to join another. For instance, in the United States and South Africa, the members of racialized groups have had a clear sense of “us” and “them.” During the Qing period, Banner men and their families also knew clearly the boundary between themselves and the general population. The huji system of the PRC does not have this feature. There is no evidence that either rural or urban identity in PRC has been exclusive, nor have there been indications that individuals feel loyalty to one group or the other. This is one of the reasons why political campaigns are not launched within the rural population by activists demanding equal rights for rural people. Those who are in the rural group wish to become urban in status in order to enjoy material benefits and higher social status. Some rural people try very hard to gain urban status through narrow channels of upward mobility such as higher education, military service and cadre promotion, and, in absolute numbers, many succeed. Urban people do not object to formerly rural people joining their ranks unless their interests are directly harmed, which is seldom the case. In fact, the size of China’s urban population as a proportion of the whole rose gradually and smoothly from less than 10 percent during the 1950s to more than 40 percent today. As for movement in the opposite direction, rural people do not object to urban people joining their group. An urban person who loses his or her urban status usually has no trouble in joining a rural community. Although this does not often happen, there have been occasions during PRC history when groups of people lost their urban status. For instance, millions of urban youth were sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, and others
lost their urban status when they were persecuted during waves of political campaigns under Mao’s leadership. Urban people might also lose their status if they are convicted of criminal offences. Thus a clear sense of “us” and “them” is lacking both within the rural group and the urban group in the PRC and this is very different from the various cases of “segregation.”

Theoretically speaking, segregation does not necessarily mean inequality, although in reality segregation is usually accompanied by inequality. For instance, Constitutional law in the United States justified racial segregation system by means of the “separate but equal” doctrine. The situation in PRC for the two groups is just the opposite. Both in reality or in theory, the two groups are unequal yet not separated. Therefore it is clear that China’s huji system lacks the core features of segregation. Physical separation in public space does not exist. Inter-group marriage is a common practice. Group identity is lacking. How can this be called segregation? Actually the term “segregation” has been used so loosely that a precise meaning has been lost. It seems unlikely to be an effective tool in analyzing the distinctive situation in China.

1.5 A gradated system of entitlements:

Determined by distance from the Party-State

This dissertation argues that the huji system of the PRC is in essence a graded system of differential entitlements. A person’s status and the benefits and privileges he or she receives are determined by the person’s proximity to the party-state. Those who hold “urban” status are protégés of the party-state. Numerically, they are mainly its
employees and their offspring. That is why rural people sometimes refer to members of the urban group, especially those living in the countryside but holding urban status, as “people of the state” (国家的人 or 公家的人). The boundary line between the rural and the urban in the PRC has not followed differences in residential location or occupation, but lies between those who are protégés of the state and the rest of the population. A person is recognized as a protégé of the state would be categorized as “urban” and be entitled to the various privileges and benefits provided by the state, no matter where he or she resides or in which economic sector he or she is employed. It is partly because the majority of the state’s protégés are employed in sectors other than agriculture, that observers have been misled into thinking of a discriminatory system as an occupational issue.

The entitlements provided to protégés of the state are automatically inherited by the next generation. Those who enjoy entitlements do not lose them unless they are politically purged or convicted of criminal offences. As a result, the state has inevitably assumed responsibility for more and more protégés. As will be described in the following chapters, the group of protégés of the CCP-led state expanded in urban areas during a period of rapid population growth during the 1950s and 1960s, and also a consequence of the state’s rapid expansion during the same period as it not only staffed its offices and agencies but extended, following Chinese socialist principles, to encompass various productive activities and the service sector. During the 1960s, the capacity of the state to support a growing number of dependents reached a limit, and radical measures were taken. Mao’s call for urban youth to join a movement going
“Up to the mountains, and down to the countryside” in 1968 was one such measure. A less radical measure was to withhold employment from urban youth, while instead recruiting rural people to perform the same duties as regular urban workers without granting them standard benefits. This practice generated distinctive terms such as “temporary workers,” “contract workers,” and “hired-out workers.”

After Deng Xiaoping assumed national leadership in 1978, an alternative approach was adopted in which the state retreated gradually from direct engagement in various productive activities. One consequence was that many workers holding urban status were laid off (下岗). However, it proved difficult to deny the full range of their privileges. Although laid-off workers were in a sense kicked out from their first-class seats in the PRC ship, the entitlements which these former protégés of the state enjoyed were kept intact and could still be inherited by their children. They continue to occupy seats above deck while the majority of the population remains below deck. However, one of the outcomes of changes during the past three decades is that the nature of the entitlement system has become more difficult for uninformed observers to understand. It might seem that at present some urban people are no longer protégés of the state. Nonetheless, this study has found that the main dynamics and the nature of the system of differential entitlements have not changed significantly.

There can be no doubt that China’s great transition since 1980s complicates questions related to the huji system. Although the recent changes in how the system functions are certainly important, the main purpose of this project is to examine how
the differential entitlement system was originally created. Therefore, the evolution of the system during the reform period beginning in 1978 will not be discussed in detail, but awaits further investigation in separate studies.

1.6 Methodology

The main method followed in this research is qualitative analysis. Although tables are included in most chapters, especially in Chapters 2 and 3, in some cases, the numbers in the tables are debatable. For instance, in the table “China’s urban population and the level of urbanization” in Chapter 2, almost every figure might be adjusted if various factors and different sources are accounted for. This holds true as well for other tables in the dissertation. However, I did not include a complicated discussion about how to calculate more accurate numbers. This is mainly because the aim of this project is to explore the question how the huji system came into being. When I made the point that China experienced a wave of rapid urbanization from 1850 to 1950, which produced a significant number of “amphibious” people, it does not matter whether the level of urbanization of China in 1901 was percent or 9 percent. The analysis contained in this study is not dependent on precise quantitative data.

My study relies partly on archival sources. Because it focuses on Shanghai, I used a great deal of material preserved in the Shanghai Municipal Archive (SMA), where the collection of government documents dating from 1949 onward is very rich and the catalog is well-organized and digitized. Nonetheless, although I have used many
Archival research has become more and more admired among historians in the PRC, especially those working on modern Chinese history. They have even tended to exaggerate the importance of using archival materials. In some cases, doctoral students in the PRC are instructed to locate archival holdings which have not yet been used by other scholars and formulate their thesis topics accordingly. There are cases in which the over-emphasis on archival research backfires. Some researchers are so preoccupied with the accessibility of archival sources that they become slaves to archival materials, ending up with theses devoid of meaningful arguments. However, even though I have tried to avoid the pitfall of making archival discoveries the goal of my investigation, in fact I have made use of a number of seldom-consulted categories of documents, including CCP reports on the Land Reform campaign from Shanghai’s suburban areas and party documents on refugee detention centres in the city. Thus by searching through the SMA’s holdings of CCP documents on topics related to the party’s take-over of municipal government and the evolution of its policies toward social and economic affairs, I overcame the problem of the inaccessibility of the Police Department’s records.

1.7 Structure of the dissertation

I will briefly introduce the thought processes which led to my main findings in this dissertation before laying out the main contents of each chapter. My first
breakthrough came soon after I began a literature review. I soon realized that the huji system of the PRC is totally different from the huji of traditional China. But scholars have claimed that the traditional huji system was a basis of the huji system of the PRC. To put this in another way, they tended to think that the huji system before 1949 and the huji system of the PRC are variants of the same thing. But I found that the two systems share the same name yet are completely different. This was my main finding at the time that I prepared and defended my dissertation proposal in March 2010.

A further breakthrough came in the summer of 2010. My supervisor arranged for me to make a research trip to Cornell University in the United States. I spent three weeks in the East Asian Library there. One day while I was reading out of my interest on the famous Cornell graduate Hu Shi, I suddenly realized how significant it was that Hu and many of his contemporaries lived in an “amphibious” way. Their families owned property in both rural and urban areas. However, this became impossible after the CCP took power. I wondered just when and how the “amphibious” way of life came to an end, and guessed that Land Reform played a key role in the change. This idea was very exciting because I knew of no research mentioning the relationship between the Land Reform and the huji system.

With this finding in mind, I went to Shanghai for archival research in the fall of 2010, collecting materials on Land Reform in Shanghai and materials on the control of migration. After examining the control of migration, I came to a third important finding. I discovered that there was a systematic and large-scale expulsion effort in
Shanghai as well as other big cities after the CCP took over. That means some of the people who previously lived in cities were expelled. In other words, living in a city did not necessarily provide “urban status.” I wondered who was expelled from the city to the countryside and why?

My third finding posed a key question for this research project. If the “urban population” was not equivalent to the “urban status population”, what qualified a person to be an “urban status” holder? This question led me to explore the core content of “urban status.” I gradually formulated the assumption that “urban status” was a constructed category. This led me to trace the process of the creation of “urban status”. Thus I came to the most important finding of my study: “urban status” was in essence an insider status within the party-state. It is neither a residential concept nor an occupational concept.

This dissertation offers an analysis of the huji system of the PRC as a system of differential entitlements installed mainly during the 1950s. The system had little to do with huji practices before 1949. Rather, it was an outcome of a set of social and economic reorganization policies implemented by CCP leaders. In particular, it was formed by the campaign to nationalize urban industry and commerce (1951-56) and by the Land Reform (1947-1952) and Collectivization (1953-1958) campaigns in the countryside. The chapters of this dissertation are outlined below.

Chapter 2, “Land Reform, Collectivization, and rural-urban division” examines the impact of Land Reform and Collectivization on the rural-urban relationship. The
Chapter argues that the two campaigns carried out in the rural areas nationwide had far-reaching effects on the rural-urban relationship. They uprooted a formerly “amphibious” population from the countryside and urbanized this group. Since then, Chinese people have been permitted to live only on one side of the rural-urban boundary and this has provided prerequisites for the installment of the huji system.

Chapter 3, “Purifying the urban population,” observes the efforts made by the CCP authorities, soon after they occupied the urban areas, to move people who fell into various “undesirable” categories out of the cities and to re-settle them in rural areas. It argues that the CCP leaders differentiated among urban people and defined them as desirable and undesirable according to their vision of the new China. Therefore they expelled from the cities hundreds of thousands of people, including unemployed labourers, petty criminals, sex workers, and persons considered to be politically unreliable. They also installed institutional barriers preventing rural people from entering the cities without official permission. These efforts purified the urban population according to the party’s vision and paved the way for the state sector to absorb almost all the remaining urban population.

Chapter 4, on the expansion of the party-state, traces the growth of the CCP-led state through a set of social reorganization policies. It takes Shanghai as an example and discusses how the party-state continuously expanded during the early years of the PRC period, eventually absorbing almost all sectors and institutions operating in the city. The new state first took over a large party-state apparatus left behind by the
previous GMD-led (Nationalist) government. Next, it nationalized public service institutions such as schools and hospitals. In addition, it gradually pushed foreign institutions such as Christian missions and foreign enterprises out of China and took over their properties and functions. Finally, it nationalized the entire private sector. I argue that the process of expansion of the state sector during the 1950s is crucial for understanding the huji system.

Chapter 5, “Creating the meaning of urban-hukou,” begins by tracing the growth of the employees of the party-state in Shanghai. My research shows that in 1949 state-sector employees accounted for four percent of the population of Shanghai, while by 1956, the proportion had increased to more than one-third. Next, the chapter examines the great improvements in living standards enjoyed by state-sector employees during the same period. It discusses how the state provided a wide range of benefits to its employees, even though their productivity was not increasing significantly at the time. This generous treatment is an indication of how urban hukou status in the huji system was created by the state.

Chapter 6 is titled “Creating the meaning of ‘rural-hukou’ and maintaining the differences.” This chapter briefly examines the experiences of the people who were labeled as “rural” under the huji system, and then analyzes the mechanisms through which inequality is maintained.

The dissertation concludes with the following points. First, the huji system is essentially a differential entitlement system, under which the minority of the
population (the insiders) is well taken care of by the state while the majority of the population (the outsiders) is excluded. Second, the huji system was set up through a wave of campaigns, such as Land Reform, Collectivization and the nationalization of private enterprises, that reshaped China during the 1950s.
Chapter 2  Land reform, Collectivization, and China’s rural-urban boundary

Introduction

China’s program of agricultural Land Reform, led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 1947 to 1952, has been studied thoroughly by scholars in China and abroad. Scholars have debated whether or not agricultural output was enhanced by the program, and whether or not the reforms were egalitarian in nature or results.\(^1\) However, they have not yet considered the impact on the urban sector, which appears to lie beyond the scope of the turbulent changes associated with the Land Reform campaign. Therefore the connections between Land Reform China’s distinctive household registration (\textit{huji}) system have not yet been examined in scholarly publications. My research reveals that the Land Reform campaign, together with the collectivization of agricultural land that followed completion of the campaign, established a framework that has shaped urban-rural relations in China up to the present. Discussing the Land Reform and Collectivization campaigns as parts of a single process, this chapter argues that the two campaigns together eliminated individuals’ opportunities for continued mobility between the rural and urban sectors. Those who had been based both in rural and urban communities before 1949 were uprooted from the countryside and forced to become urban residents (城居化). Since that time, every Chinese person has lived either on one side or the other of the

rural-urban boundary and the free movement of people and other resources across the boundary has been negligible compared to what it was in the past. These changes were an essential foundation for the formation of the *huji* system which continues to divide China’s population into sharply distinct “rural” and “urban” categories.

The CCP’s Land Reform and Collectivization campaigns were carried out nationwide during the party’s extension and consolidation of control over the population of China. My research focuses on the Jiangnan area, especially the city of Shanghai. However, in various places, I present evidence suggesting that what happened in my chosen area was a general phenomenon throughout the country.

To begin with, a few definitions are necessary. The term “rural-urban boundary” is used to mark the differences between the countryside and the cities. It is a social concept. Even though containing a strong spatial connotation, it mainly means the different spheres of the rural community and the urban community. It is distinct from the terms “rural kuhou” (农村户口) and the “urban hukou” (城镇户口) in the *huji* system. In using the phrase “living across the boundary,” I refer to those who lived in both spheres, indicating their physical movement. I also call this part of the population “amphibious,” in reference to their membership in and adaptability to both the rural and urban habitats. The phrase “living beyond the boundary” alludes to identity, referring to those who did not worry about their identity. While living “across” the rural-urban boundary, they were not required to choose one side or the other. Finally, to “urbanize” is the English translation for a concept I have developed: 城居化. The term 城居化 refers to those uprooted from the rural sphere and settled
solely in the urban sphere. It refers both to location and to identity. “Urbanized” describes the final result for those who were amphibious before 1949.

2.1 Land reform and dual rural-urban identities

China’s Land Reform program of the mid-twentieth century was the largest-scale such program in human history. The CCP mobilized millions of personnel to carry out the program and accumulated a vast quantity of documentation. The records are valuable for insight into the existence of amphibious individuals in China before 1949 and their fate during the transitional period. A few illustrative cases are summarized below.

Case 1: Li Xinshun was the owner of a lumber business in Shanghai. He also owned land in his native place, Fengcheng County in Jiangxi. In January, 1951, after the Land Reform program was launched in Jiangxi, Li was arrested in Shanghai and placed under custody of the Public Security Bureau of Fengcheng. Twenty days later, Li’s son wrote via a lumber guild to the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai, requesting that the Fengcheng authorities’ investigation of his father’s case be expedited.2

Case 2: Chen Maosheng came from Wujin county in Jiangsu. In 1934, he received five percent of the stock of a small shop selling fruit and was elected as manager of the shop. In 1951 he earned about four dan of rice per month and

2 Documents on Li Xinshun’s case, Shanghai Municipal Archives (SMA), C48-2-312: 33-35.
supported a family of seven. He also owned 3.8 mou of land in his native place. In the Land Reform, local villagers wished to label Chen as a “businessman and landlord.” The local Land Reform committee decided to label him as “small land lessor” (小土地出租者) if he could provide evidence from the authorities in Shanghai. Chen argued that he belonged to the working class because as the manager of a small fruit shop he worked alongside his employees. In February 1951, he wrote to the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai, asking for verification. The Association agreed to verify his role as the manager and part-owner of the fruit shop and to confirm that he supported his family with his income from the business, but refused to confirm that he belonged to the working class.³

Case 3: Wang Degao ran a small business in Shanghai in 1951. His origins are unclear. In 1948, he invested in a workshop and also served as its manager. During the turbulent years when inflation was out of control, the workshop struggled to stay afloat. Wang and other investors received no dividends from their business. Wang himself earned a salary which amounted to two dan of refined rice per month, barely enough to support his family. Apparently, Wang decided to acquire some land in his native village, writing in January 1951 to his guild and the Shanghai Association Industry and Commerce, asking them to verify his situation so that he could apply to the Land Reform committee in his native place for distribution of a share of land to his family members. The Association’s reply was straightforward. It stated that class status had nothing to do with whether or not a person received dividends and persons

³ Documents on Mr. Chen’s case, SMA, C48-2-312: 36–41.
in Wang’s position were not eligible to receive land, citing Clause 4, Article 13 of the Agrarian Reform Law of the PRC.⁴

Case 4: Qian Yuejiang was born in a poor family in Wuxing village in Qingpu County, Jiangsu. He went to Shanghai to work as a labourer in about 1920. After ten years, he invested his savings to open a shop in Shanghai called Dalai, selling foodstuffs from southern China. In August 1937, his shop was destroyed by a Japanese bombardment. Two years later, he managed to reopen his business and operated it until 1950. In 1937, Qian sold nearly 10 mu of land to a fellow clansman. However, in April 1945, he purchased 9 mu of land in his native village, fearing that destructive bombardment was imminent in Shanghai. In 1946, as the value of currency decreased rapidly, Qian bought more than 30 mu of land as a hedge against inflation, and purchased land again in 1949, bringing the total size of his holdings, including residential plots and a graveyard, to almost 100 mu by the time CCP forces occupied the area. Because Qian had a large family with many young children, he built an extension onto his village house. While his aged mother usually stayed in the village and collected land rents, other Qian family members travelled back and forth between the village and Shanghai. Because rental rates were moderate, there were no disputes between the Qian family and its tenants even when tenants fell into arrears. When the CCP arrived, the Qians were prompt in submitting taxes and suspended their collections of rent. In the meantime, the Dalai shop in Shanghai was active in selling government bonds and received recognition from the new government. At the

⁴ Documents on Mr. Wang’s case, SMA, C48-2-312: 25-32.
end of 1950, Qian heard from his mother that some of the rooms of his house, together with the furniture and other contents, had been sealed off by the village authorities. Qian appealed to the Military-Political Committee of Eastern China asking for return of the rooms and other property.⁵

**Case 5**: Huang Rulan was born in a poor family in Yaojiejing village, in Yuyao County, Zhejiang. He received very little education after his father died when he was young. At age fourteen (around 1905), Huang migrated to Shanghai to work as an apprentice in a dyeing workshop. For more than ten years, he lived a hand-to-mouth existence. In 1916, he began to work in a shop called Run Cangxiang and was promoted to the position of manager nine years later, serving in the position into the 1950s. In 1927, he began to purchase land in his native place, buying a house in the village in 1933. Because Huang was able to support his growing family with the income he earned in Shanghai, he spent his rental income to distribute food and clothing to the poor and was the co-founder of an elementary school in the village. He also contributed funds to a road-building project to serve the villagers. After local authorities confiscated Huang’s land and his house during Land Reform, he appealed to the East China Military-Political Committee via the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai, requesting the return of his house. Huang stated that he was old and weak and would like to leave his job in Shanghai and retire in the village. He also stated in the letter that although he had lost his ability to work he still had more than ten dependents to support.⁶ Although the result of his appeal is not

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⁵ The outline of the story is based on the letter of appeal by Qian Yuejiang, SMA, C48-2-312: 6-7.

available, the Association’s comments shed light on what happened to Mr. Huang. It wrote that, “according to the law, only housing occupied by peasants should be confiscated. However, in reality, local conditions should be taken into consideration in making decisions.”

Case 6: A group of businessmen selling wine in Shanghai owned land in their native place in Hunan province. When ordered to return deposit money to their tenants, they argued that the deposits had been paid to previous landowners and kept by them as part of the payment for the land. In their appeal to the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai in January 1951, they accepted the confiscation of their land but requested lenient treatment regarding the reimbursement required by the village authorities. They said that as small-scale traders scratching out a living in difficult conditions they had no way to make the assessed payments. The Association’s reply concisely stated that it could not intervene in the case because government regulations stipulated the return of deposits, and also suggested a direct appeal to their village government, which had repeatedly sent letters and cadres to Shanghai to demand payment.

Case 7: Zhu Yongjia’s father arrived in Shanghai from Wuxi with the help of a relative. The relative worked as a buyer for the Xianshi Department Store. He used his business relationship with a glass factory to help Zhu’s father to be accepted as an apprentice in the factory. Eventually Zhu’s father married his boss’s daughter and started his own business, mainly importing glass from abroad and selling it in

7 《上海市工商业联合会筹备会: 收函记录》, (Records of Coming Letters of the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai), SMA, C48-2-312: 12.
Shanghai. He was successful in business and lived a comfortable life despite the contraction of his business during the Japanese occupation period. During the Japanese occupation, the elder Zhu purchased a large tract of land together with other property in his native place. Using rents collected in kind, he supported his family and factory workers in Shanghai with an adequate supply of good-quality rice during a period when the rations of rice provided by the Japanese authorities fell short both in quality and quantity. Zhu also provided food to his poor relations in the countryside every year after collecting his rents. His son was sent from Shanghai to live in Wuxi when he was a high-school student and lived there for nearly a year. During Land Reform, the family’s property in rural Wuxi was completely confiscated. Uprooted from their native place, the family lived only in Shanghai thereafter.\(^9\)

These vivid cases contain interesting information on the formation of the rural-urban boundary, which I will discuss in the following sections.

**Living on both sides of the rural-urban boundary: how and why**

There were certainly differences between the urban and rural areas in way of life and living standards. Together with these differences, discrimination and hostility existed between groups.\(^{10}\) However such differences did not bring about barriers to movement. In general there were hardly any barriers between the rural and urban areas before the Land Reform program. People did not need official permission to

\(^9\) Interview with Mr. Zhu Yongjia, a former faculty member at Fudan University and an active politician in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. The interviews took place at his home on May 7, 2011 and on other occasions.

migrate. They could travel back and forth as long as they had the means to do so.

Both people and funds flowed freely in both directions across the rural-urban
boundary. Some invested money accumulated in the countryside in urban enterprises.
Others purchased land with earnings from business in cities. Those able to move back
and forth could be both rural and urban, residing in both places and participating in
communities on both sides of the rural-urban boundary. In fact, the opportunity to live
this way was available even to society’s most disadvantaged members.

**Urbanization**

A period of rapid urbanization began in China around 1850. In Shanghai, for
example, the population grew from about half a million in 1850 to almost five million
in 1950.

The increase of population of Shanghai was mainly the result of in-migration.
Although most migrants came from nearby provinces such as Jiangsu, Zhejiang and
Shandong, others came from every corner of China. They also brought many different
skills and experiences to the city’s workforce. Migrants arrived from other cities and
smaller towns as well as from rural areas. Although Shanghai has the reputation of
being a city of migrants, its growth was not exceptional among Chinese cities. Cities
generally attracted many migrants during this era. In evaluating the extent of
urbanization in China before 1949, a recent study is very helpful on providing a
survey about the development of cities.
As seen in the table above, China’s population increased continuously and significantly between 1893 and 1949. Although there are some debates on how to calculate and interpret the data, it is well known that a growing proportion of China’s population consisted of urban residents, as tens of millions of people migrated to cities during this period. In Shanghai, the migrants’ backgrounds and occupations in Shanghai were various. As seen in the cases described at the beginning of this chapter, many migrants to Shanghai worked as labourers and apprentices. Qian Yuejiang in Case 4, and Zhu Yongjia’s father in Case 7 migrated to Shanghai from Jiangsu in the 1920s. Huang Rulan from Zhejiang arrived about two decades earlier. These migrants came from the lower stratum of village society. But some migrants had been quite...
well-off in the countryside and became part of an urban middle class. For instance, Hu Shi (1891-1962), later a famous scholar, arrived in Shanghai as a teenager in 1904. His family lived in rural Jixi, in Anhui and had established a tea-trading firm in Shanghai during the nineteenth century. Hu received a modern education in Shanghai and pursued further studies in the United States. The family of Gu Zhun (顾准 1915-1974) is another example of middle-class migration to Shanghai. Gu’s family lived in Suzhou. His father moved the family to Shanghai in 1910s and invested in the cotton industry. His firm was successful in the following decade but then suffered a downturn. Some migrants to cities were very wealthy, as exemplified by the family of Rong Yiren (1916-2005). Rong’s family lived in Wuxi and prospered there before investing in Shanghai around 1900. Members of the Rong family later became China’s leading entrepreneurs.

Maintaining ties to the countryside

Rural migrants who entered Chinese cities seldom uprooted themselves from their native places. They tended to maintain possession of their original property, and, if possible, to purchase land and houses in their native villages using savings from their incomes in the cities. Some family members would remain in the villages while

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11 “Middle class” is a term containing complicated connotations and theoretical debates. Here, it only refers to a level of living conditions higher than that of labourers.
13 罗银胜: 《顾准评传》, (Luo Yinsheng, Comments and Biography of Gu Zhun, Fujian Education Press, 2010), 2-3. It is unclear whether Gu’s family lived in the countryside or the city of Suzhou, or whether they owned land. But this case can definitely serve as an example for middle class people migrating to big cities.
14 荣德生: 《乐农自订行年纪事》, (Rong Desheng, Self-revised Account of Activities, Shanghai Guji Press, 2001), 1-120. Rong’s family was based in Wuxi. The elder Rong worked for the Qing government in Guangdong for most of his life. The Rong brothers (Rong Zongjing and Rong Desheng) worked as apprentices in banks in Shanghai when they were teenagers.
others lived in cities. Many made efforts to maintain their connections with their village communities, particularly clans. Describing this feature, Lu Hanchao noted that, “They [city dwellers] were closely connected with their original places. … People went back and forth. To some extent, the countryside and the cities are actually one.”

Migrants tended to identify themselves as sojourners in the cities, even though they might be very successful in their new places, and permanent residents of their original places, even though the original places might be very isolated and poor. Many migrants believed that the happiest ending of life was to die in one’s hometown and to be buried in a ritual ceremony in the clan graveyard.

“To make money through business and consolidate wealth through landowning” had long been seen as a wise way to manage a household in China. Land ownership was regarded as the most safe and reliable means of holding wealth. Therefore, landowners would usually would not sell their land and uproot themselves from the community even after setting up businesses in cities. For instance, the group of businessmen in Case 6 who were wine-dealers in Shanghai owned land in their native place. Lu Hanchao examined the prosperous towns of the lower Yangzi area and found that many landowners preferred to live in towns rather than cities so that they could keep in contact both with the cities and the countryside. Poor migrants who originally possessed little or no land in their villages tended to purchase land in their native places after they managed to save some money, like Qian Yuejiang in Case 4.

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and Huang Rulan in Case 5. However, it is worth mentioning that that their purchases of land should not be seen as simply profit-seeking. The cases described above show that urban residents owned land in their native places rather than other places such as the suburban outskirts of the cities where they lived, no matter whether they were from nearer places such as Jiangsu or a more distant region such as Hunan, even though they could probably have earned greater profits if they invested in business or purchased land elsewhere. This was partly because land-owning was an effective and practical way for city dwellers to deal with hardship and risk in turbulent times. As seen in two cases above, to invest in land in one’s native place was a hedge against currency devaluation and a means of ensuring subsistence. During the Japanese occupation, Shanghai was constantly short of food supplies and the authorities instituted rationing to maintain order. Because rationed rice was always in short supply and was of poor quality, those who could do so purchased land in their ancestral villages and collected rents in kind. In this way, they could ensure subsistence for their dependents, including employees and friends and poor relations in the countryside. As case 7 shows, political and economic instability reinforced the tendency of city dwellers to maintain ties with the countryside.

**Bridging the countryside and the cities**

People who lived on both sides of the porous rural-urban boundary of the pre-1949 era contributed significantly to narrowing the material and cultural gaps between the countryside and the cities. On the one hand, they introduced urban
culture into the countryside through their involvement in the communities. In Case 5, for instance, Huang Rulan played the traditional role of rural gentryman, making charitable contributions in his rural community and engaging in public affairs such as promoting education and building infrastructure. Moving in the opposite direction, such persons also carried rural culture to the cities. Many aspects of urban life were organized or shaped by forces emanating from rural society. Taking Shanghai as an example, employers usually employed people from the same native places and specific occupations were often filled by migrants from a specific region. Also, “native place associations” (同乡会馆) were active in urban society, playing various important roles ranging from public service providers to arbitrators of disputes.\(^\text{17}\)

Because the countryside and the cities were not separate spheres, there is no reason to assume that people at that time thought in “rural versus urban” terms. The countryside and the cities were compatible rather than exclusive spheres. Therefore, there was no foundation or even possibility for the establishment of exclusive rural or urban identities. To state this in another way, people did not have to choose between the two labels and were not assigned one identity or the other.

It is clear that a significant proportion of China’s population before 1949 was amphibious. There was free movement between the two areas and the opportunities for such mobility were available to almost everybody. Every person who migrated from a village, moreover, was a potential source of opportunity for a group of relatives and friends. In Case 7, Zhu Yongjia’s father received the assistance of a

\(^{17}\) 卢汉超：《霓虹灯外——20世纪初日常生活中的上海》, (Lu Hanchao, Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century, Shanghai Guji Press, 2004), 40–42.
relative who worked in Shanghai. Introductions through acquaintances were common in the cities. Together with the movement of people, capital flowed two-directionally and without official restrictions between the countryside and the cities as families deployed resources according to their needs. The following section discusses how the free flow of people and capital between the countryside and the cities came to an end soon after the founding of the PRC. By the mid-1950s, only the state had the right to conduct such transfers.

### 2.2 Separating the countryside and the cities

A foreign observer who had seen the rural-urban relationship before 1949 would have been shocked to return just seven years later to see the dramatic changes that had occurred in China’s rural-urban relationship. In contrast to the former fluidity, strict separation had become the norm. By 1956, almost everyone lived only on one side of the rural-urban boundary. Those who lived in the countryside were not allowed to migrate to cities without official permission, which was rarely granted. Those who lived in cities would not choose to move to the countryside for there was almost nothing left for them there and living conditions were far lower than in cities. Movement from the cities to the countryside had become a type of punishment by the state. People could no longer take along relatives and friends to the cities for education and jobs were assigned solely by the state. Capital no longer flowed from the cities to the countryside for investment in land ownership, and very little capital
flowed from the countryside to the cities because the rural population was too poor to invest and private business was banned by the state. The Chinese people were living in two separate worlds.

This section examines how the patterns of rural-urban mobility ended. The main point is that land reform and collectivization uprooted those who lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary and put an end to the possibility for people to live in that way. The barrier erected between the rural and the urban sectors through land reform and collectivization remains one of the most fundamental features of the PRC.

**Being categorized and dealt with (分类处置)**

After coming to power, the CCP leaders launched ambitious plans to re-build China according to their vision. Urban residents who were also part of rural communities were labeled by the CCP for the first time during Land Reform. One of the first steps of the Land Reform was to divide people into different “class components” (阶级成分). Those who lived in cities and held rural land were categorized either as concurrent landlords (兼地主) or small land lessors (小土地出租者, SLL hereafter). In the “concurrent landlord” category, there were two types: businessman-landlord (工商业者兼地主) and landlord-businessman (地主兼工商业者). Put simply, the difference between a concurrent landlord and an SLL was how much land each owned in the countryside. The distinction between the two types of “concurrent landlord” was determined by the main source of a person’s income.

The following sections will explore the experiences of these dual residents
during the first few years after 1949 and trace how they were uprooted from their native places. No matter in which category those who were amphibious were placed, they were eventually uprooted from the countryside. A key aspect of the process was that they were deprived of the right to hold rural land.

The nature and the mechanism of Land Reform

The main purpose of the CCP’s rural land reform project was not to benefit poor peasants materially or to develop the economy. From the outset, land reform was used by the CCP leaders as an effective and powerful weapon which could be used to consolidate their rule. When the milestone document “Instructions on the Land Question from the CCP Centre,” was issued at a crucial meeting on May 4, 1946, Mao Zedong straightforwardly summarized it by saying: “The Guomindang rules a larger area and greater population. It owns big cities and enjoys foreign assistance. … We can only rely on the people to struggle with them. If we can solve the land problem for more than 100 million people, then we will be able to sustain a protracted struggle without exhausting our strength.”18 At the meeting of high-ranking cadres in Jinsui Bureau in the same year, He Long (1896-1969) delivered a report stating that “Land Reform is the central task of the Party at present…. If the land problem is solved, the enthusiasm of the masses will be incited. Then we will not be afraid even if Jiang Jieshi [Chiang Kai-shek] keeps attacking us for five, ten, or even a hundred years.”19

It cannot be proven that the CCP’s Land Reform movement was either designed to lead or actually did lead to increased agricultural production. The campaign simply redistributed a portion of the land, transferring it to those who were relatively poor. It did not increase the supply of land, labour, or other inputs in the agricultural sector. The redistribution of land from landlords to poor peasants was not the aim of land reform. Land reform was a means to an end. Its purpose was to mobilize the peasants and establish a firm CCP presence at the grassroots level, so that the party could firmly control the countryside and collect materials and manpower with the support of most peasants. An instruction from the Jinsui Bureau made this point very clear. As it stipulated: “The aim of solving land problem for peasants is to enhance their class consciousness so that they are willing and daring to make revolutionary struggles under the leadership of our Party. … We must keep in mind that it would be incorrect to tackle the land problem only for the sake of solving the problem itself. We must avoid the phenomena that there are only cadres’ activities while the mass movement is missing. We must avoid doing the peasants’ work for them or bestowing land to them.”

Clearly for the CCP the process of mobilizing villagers to struggle against landlords was far more important than the result that land was transferred from landlords to poor peasants. Thus although a bloodless redistribution of land was feasible after the GMD’s defeat, the CCP strongly refuted and criticized proposals for “peaceful land reform.”

21 袁小伦: 《生死关头：民主人士与土改运动》, (Yuan Xiaolun, “A Time of Life and Death:
To understand the erection of a rural-urban barrier in the 1950s, it is important to examine the mechanisms of the CCP’s Land Reform campaign beginning in the 1940s. The party’s first step was to pit the have-nots against the haves within a village. This was not easy to accomplish. Despite constant conflicts at the village level, the haves and the have-nots had lived as neighbours for years if not generations, and in many cases were relatives and friends, bound together in a web of social connections. In contrast, the members of the CCP’s work teams sent to lead the land reform were outsiders. The documents produced by the CCP during this time recorded voluminous evidence of the difficulties encountered by the teams in their efforts to pit poor peasants against landlords. In most cases the have-nots were at first unwilling to “break face” (撕破脸) by confronting their better-off neighbours.\(^2^2\) The CCP cadres worked hard to instill class consciousness among the villagers, persuading them to believe that they were poor because they had been exploited by the landlords. However, the effectiveness of theory was very limited. Cadres deplored peasants’ lack of class consciousness and complained that they were muddleheaded. For instance, in “speak bitterness” meetings, designed by the CCP as emotional outbursts against landlords, villagers often veered off course, attacking people whom the party did not intend to be targets. Women, for instance, might direct pent-up anger against their parents-in-law.\(^2^3\) This showed that no matter how hard the cadres tried to raise their class consciousness, the peasants did not learn the lessons that the CCP taught or

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\(^{23}\) 《讨论会上的发言记录》, (“Minutes of speeches at the conference”), SMA, A71-1-36: 25.
accept the party’s ideas. It was eventually the opportunity to seize the property of others that induced peasants to follow the guidance of the CCP and to perform according to its “revolutionary” script.

The basic tactic of the CCP in initiating the Land Reform campaign in each community was to encourage the have-nots to attack the haves and seize their property. When they encountered reluctant have-nots they resorted to increasing the stakes. In extreme circumstance, the CCP even adopted a policy termed “whoever attacks [landlords] takes [the wealth]” (谁斗谁分), justifying this approach through Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. Remarkably, there were no serious discussions on the legitimacy of this action in the documents produced by the CCP. Given the absence of cultural or political constraints originating in a secular legal sphere or in religious beliefs, and because the CCP’s tactics matched the social conditions facing poor peasants, the party’s modified tactics proved effective.

Once the peasants’ desire for gain was ignited, their greed could be boundless. They tended to lump together as many fellow villagers as possible in the “enemy” category so that there would be more property to redistribute. Chen Maosheng’s experience summarized in Case 2 could perfectly serve as an example in which the have-nots pushed to label their better-off neighbor with a “higher class label.” At the same time, they sought to squeeze as much as possible from each target.

26 For instance, while reading archives on Land Reform in suburban Shanghai, I was shocked by the record that peasants confiscated even the diapers used by a landlord family.
Throughout the documentary materials produced by the Land Reform campaign, violence and hatred are the key tone; compassion and sympathy are virtually absent.

Poor peasants’ greed and the extreme violence that it fueled were the means through which the CCP harnessed China’s peasantry to achieve its aims. Therefore, the CCP leaders were careful not to “dampen the enthusiasm of the masses,” even in the many cases when they knew well that peasants had violated the party’s rules on correct procedures for categorizing villagers and confiscating property.27 Thus the CCP tacitly approved many extreme and violent actions in the course of the Land Reform movement.28 From the party’s perspective, it was not very serious if the peasants went beyond authorized limits in murdering landlords and confiscating their property. If the CCP had issued orders to check the violence and protect the haves strictly according to party regulations, it might have caused the revolutionary engine to stall. Although the party issued a series of orders on protecting groups such as the “middle peasants” (中农) and businessmen, it also clearly stated that its purpose was to “reduce opposition forces” (减小阻力).29 Thus it was not out of respect for rights or human life that the CCP ordered the protection of some groups but because to protect them would support the revolutionary movement.

For CCP cadres at all levels, it was better to be excessively “leftist” rather than moderate during the Land Reform movement. If their harsh treatment of class enemies caused complications, the party would consider that they had made errors but

27 《毛泽东文集》，(第四卷), (Writings of Mao Zedong, Vol. 4, People’s Press, 1996), 103-104.
were going in the correct direction overall. A cadre who showed mercy to better-off villagers was likely to be labeled as an agent of the landlords and rich peasants who had infiltrated into the party. Punishments of cadres were extreme in such cases, while over-zealous activist cadres were likely to win promotions. Therefore, like the have-nots in village communities, the more radical cadres made gains at the expense of others’ loss of life, property, and dignity.

Caught in the cross-fire between the CCP cadres and their poorer neighbours, the haves were doomed. They were too isolated to mount an effective resistance. Defenseless, many waited passively for the verdicts handed down by the CCP and the have-nots. The CCP’s records of the Land Reform movement document very few cases of resistance or subversion on the part of those who were attacked and dispossessed. The only large-scale and coordinated counter-attacks were mounted by the so-called “home-returning regiment” (还乡团) of property owners who took violent revenge after Nationalist forces regained control of certain areas during the “war of liberation” (1946-1949).

The following sections examine the experiences of people who had lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary before Land Reform. Perhaps because this group was rather small, it has not yet attracted other scholars’ attention. However, its fate is the key to understanding how the rural and urban spheres were separated after 1949.

**The characteristics of amphibious people during the Land Reform**

The general experience of those who belonged to both rural and urban
communities during Land Reform was that although they and their business assets in
the cities were protected, in the countryside their persons and their agricultural assets
were the targets of attack and seizure. Consequently, they were pushed out of the
countryside and had no choice but to become urban residents only.

**Protecting businesses and their owners**

The protection extended to business owners and their property in the cities
resulted from an explicit policy to which the CCP was committed. From the
instructions of May 4, 1946 to the Agrarian Land Law of 1950, the CCP continually
emphasized the protection of businesses (保护工商业), especially those located in the
cities. The Marxist rhetoric in which the policy was framed stressed that the Land
Reform campaign was directed against feudal exploitation, but not against capitalist
exploitation. Although ideology might have played a role in the making and
implementation of this policy, the policy had a pragmatic aspect. To attack urban
business owners did not serve the political interests of the CCP in the way that
attacking property owners in the countryside was to its advantage. There were two
reasons for this difference.

The first was the importance of maintaining production. CCP leaders paid close
attention to avoid harming production even when they were inciting violence among
poor peasants. For instance, to avoid disrupting production, the party always avoided
the agricultural busy seasons, conducting village campaigns during the slack seasons.
But no matter how harsh the attacks on landlords became and how much of their
property was confiscated, planted crops continued to grow. However, when businessmen were detained and attacked or their property confiscated, it was likely that their business operations would be disrupted or halted. The second reason was concerned revenue generation. No matter which ideology a ruling group chose, it was dependent on revenue to keep the state bureaucracy and the auxiliary organizations functioning. By removing landlords and installing its own apparatus to extract resources from the rural sector, the CCP expanded its supplies of foodstuffs. Resources previously controlled by landowners were appropriated by the party while the poor peasants who received land enlarged the tax base, as they were generally expected to submit a tax in kind called “patriotic public grain” (爱国公粮). However, if business owners were attacked and their business operations were suspended or slowed down, the CCP would promptly feel the consequences as its tax base and revenue flows were reduced.

Despite the CCP’s commitment to protecting urban business owners, the experience of boundary-crossing people was perhaps determined more by the implementation of the protecting policy than the policy itself. In considering implementation, we must bear in mind that the CCP could not single-handedly determine how its policies would be implemented. Implementation was in fact a game with many players. The mechanism of Land Reform, as described above, determined that the CCP accommodated poor peasants’ greed so as to gain control of rural resources, even when this accommodation damaged business interests and thus was also detrimental to the party itself. When we observe the whole process of Land
Reform, we will find that attacks on business owners and the confiscation of their urban property took place in almost every province even though such actions were explicitly forbidden by the CCP. It is commonly accepted that the policy to protect businesses during Land Reform was carried out more effectively in the Newly Liberated Areas (NLA) after 1949, largely because of the lessons learned earlier in the Old Liberated Areas. The CCP has confirmed this, indicating that the CCP has acknowledged that the phenomenon of attacking businessmen and confiscating their properties were quite severe during the early stages of Land Reform. In the Northeast, for instance, poor peasants entered cities with empty carts to loot shops and factories. In these circumstances, local cadres did not dare to stop them but hastily passed the problem on to their superiors. Zhang Wentian (1900-1976) was in charge of the Northeast region and was one of the top leaders of the CCP at that time, but did not take the risk of appearing to be counter-revolutionary by acting to stop the looting. Instead, he merely drafted a regulation outlawing seizures of urban property and ordered cadres to explain the policy on protecting business enterprises and their owners to the peasants. Even in the NLA after 1949 where the policy of protecting businesses was generally carried out effectively, attacks on business owners and confiscation of their property in the cities were frequent occurrences. In some places, these problems were severe. In Guangdong, for instance, many peasants travelled to Guangzhou to seek out and arrest those who were both business owners in the city.

30 程中原：《张闻天传》，(Cheng Zhongyuan, Biography of Zhang Wentian, Beijing: Contemporary China Press, 1993), 538. 《中国的土地改革》编辑部等：《中国土地改革史料选编》, (The compiling committee, Collection of selected historical materials on Land Reform in China, Beijing: National Defence University Press, 1988), 457-458. Actually, it is common knowledge among most serious scholars in China that such things were very pervasive during the Land Reform Movement.
and the owners of rural land. These victims not only lost their urban property—many in Guangzhou were killed by groups of poor peasants from their native places.\textsuperscript{31}

Nonetheless, even though there were cases throughout the country in which boundary-crossing people were attacked and their property was seized, generally their businesses in cities as well as their lives were protected, especially during the Land Reform campaign in the NLA after 1949. The CCP kept tabs on the impetus of poor peasants and urban workers to struggle against business owners, even though it sought to accommodate the desires of the have-nots at the same time. For instance, Zhou Enlai commented in January 1950 that “the peasants are justified in going to the cities to arrest landlords and bullies… if such actions are not permitted, the broad masses will be offended. That would be rightism. But if these actions are not held in check, too many businessmen and democrats will be caught. That would not be a good thing. Therefore, it is wrong not to arrest anyone at all or to arrest too many.”\textsuperscript{32} Zhou’s attitude probably represented the mainstream thinking within the CCP. Certainly the boundary-crossing people, together with their business assets in the cities, were much safer than they would have been as rural landlords only. It is also seems safe to say that the majority in this group was not attacked during Land Reform and their properties in business in cities were not confiscated. Their rural property, however, was usually subject to requisition and confiscation during the Land Reform movement.


\textsuperscript{32} 《周恩来统一战线文选》, (Writings of Zhou Enlai on the United Front, People’s Press, 1984), 205-206.
Business owners’ rural property

As discussed above, after a century of rapid urbanization in China, a significant number of people owned property in both cities and rural areas at the time that the CCP launched the Land Reform campaign. Although precise data are lacking, it may be estimated that their numbers and the total acreage of their landholdings were sizeable, especially in those areas where industry and trade were prosperous. For instance, it has been estimated that in 1952 over 80 percent of business owners in Wuhan held land in the countryside and that in Changsha the number was over 90 percent. Therefore to allow this group to retain land would have reduced the acreage available for redistribution by the CCP as a means of mobilizing the rural population. Cadres encountered difficulties on the outskirts of Shanghai, for instance, because so little land was available for redistribution. As the Land Reform campaign proceeded, the problem of confiscation of middle peasants’ land became so severe that the CCP Centre issued a series of prohibitions against this practice. Even without considering ideological principles, it is clear that the CCP could not afford to protect urban business owners’ rural landholdings. Its regulations on the issue were straightforward and consistent. Agricultural land together with other rural property should be taken over and redistributed. There were two types of takeover, namely, confiscation and requisition. Nominally speaking, confiscation was harsh treatment.

33 潘光旦、全慰天：《苏南土地改革访问记》，Pan Guangdan and Quan Weitian, Account of a Visit to Land Reform in Sunan, Sanlian Bookstore, 1952, 24.
received by enemy classes while requisition was milder treatment reserved for non-enemies. In the perspective of those dispossessed, there was little difference between the two—they lost their land either way.

A salient feature of the CCP’s Land Reform program is that what happened in reality was generally more brutal than what was stipulated in the laws and instructions promulgated by the CCP Centre. It has become common knowledge that although the CCP did not authorize the killing of landlords, at least two million landlords suffered violent deaths in the course of the Land Reform campaign. The CCP’s regulations designating targets included clauses protecting those who were targeted, specifying that landlords should not be tortured or killed and that they should retain some of their possessions. Because of the internal dynamics of the Land Reform campaign, the party’s authorization to attack was pushed to the limit while instructions on the protection of particular groups were de-emphasized or willfully ignored. Although the CCP leaders and cadres at all levels were naturally aware of these tendencies as the campaign proceeded, they considered the violence to be acceptable. For instance, when extreme violence against landlords in clear violation of party regulations was reported to Mao Zedong, Mao commented that the peasants’ fury was understandable because they had been exploited and oppressed for so long.34

Certain clauses in the Agrarian Reform Law set limits on the confiscation and requisition of rural land owned by urban residents. Clause IV stipulated that “Rooms occupied by peasants and rural land held by business owners shall be requisitioned.

34 汪东林：《梁漱溟问答录》，(Wang Donglin, Record of Liang Shuming’s Answers to Questions, Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1988), 121-122.
However, there should be no infringement on their other property and business assets in the countryside.”\(^{35}\) But as we see in Cases 4 and 5 described above, protective regulations were not upheld during the Land Reform. In Case 4, all the furniture and other possessions stored by Qian in his rural residence was requisitioned by local authorities, together with rooms which were unlikely to have been occupied by peasants. In Case 5, it is clear that rooms were requisitioned that were not occupied by peasants. Such requisitions occurred even though they were clearly illegal in the terms of Clause IV of the law. Moreover, these cases do not seem to have been unusual. In response to their appeals to the Shanghai authorities both Qian and Huang received replies implying that such occurrences were common. As the authorities stated, “According to the law, only the rooms occupied by peasants should be confiscated. However, in reality, decisions should be made by taking local conditions into consideration.”\(^{36}\)

**Did SLL owners retain land?**

A subset of the group living on both sides of the rural-urban boundary before 1949 was categorized by the CCP as “small land lessors” (小土地出租者, SLL hereafter). These were the owners of small-scale rural landholdings who rented out their land rather than cultivating it themselves. While renting out their land they were usually occupied in non-agricultural work, and many resided in cities. It is clear that the SLL and their land were protected by the “regulations” of the CCP during the

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36 《上海市工商业联合会筹备会: 收函记录》, （“Records of incoming letters of the Association of Industrialists and Businesspeople of Shanghai”）. SMA, C48-2-312, 12.
Land Reform campaign, as long their landholdings did not exceed certain designated limits. Although the SLL were mentioned often in regulations issued by the CCP, they gradually and silently disappeared from the records within a few years of the Land Reform campaign. This section examines how members of the SLL category fared during the Land Reform and afterward, demonstrating how they were gradually pushed out of the countryside.

SLL was a category defined by the CCP in 1950 in implementation of the Land Reform program. Although the term might have existed earlier, it had not been used to designate class status (阶级成分) in CCP documents. The term referred to a variety of groups, including, “revolutionary soldiers, dependents of martyrs, workers, functionaries (职员), professionals (自由职业者), peddlers, and those who rent out small plots of land when they are engaged in other work or are short of labour.”

It may be seen that SLL could live in both cities and the countryside. For instance, revolutionary soldiers and dependents of martyrs could be found in both rural and urban areas. However, a large proportion of those who were categorized as SLL must have resided mainly in cities. Unfortunately, it is unclear how many people ended up in the SLL category and what proportion of the group lived in cities. According to a CCP report, the acreage rented out by SLL amounted to between three and five

37 白希: 《开国大土改》, (Bai Xi, The Great Land Reform after the Establishment of the PRC, CCP History Press, 2009), 283-284.
percent of China’s total cultivated land.  Given that by definition a SLL’s holdings were small, we can imagine that there must have been many such landowners.

Despite the fact that the SLL were granted protection by the CCP Centre, in reality they could usually not avoid losing part or all of their land. At the central level, the CCP’s Agrarian Reform Law stipulated that the SLL “shall not be recognized as landlords in any case. If the size of the landholding divided by the number of persons in the SLL family is not more than twice what is owned by local people (for instance, if the average land ownership in the locality was two mu and the landholding per family member was no great than four mu) then their land should be kept intact. If the SLL holding is larger than the specified limit, the extra portion may be requisitioned. However, if the land was purchased using savings accumulated through hard work, or if those dependent on the landholding are widowed, orphaned, or disabled, special care should be given even if the size limit is exceeded.”

This clause makes it seem that SLL could not be targeted by the Land Reform movement. However, the movement unfolded differently following the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law. This was because the attitude of the CCP’s top leaders toward SLL was ambiguous and their decisions and policies were inconsistent. There were many internal communications within the party regarding the SLL, showing that the law did not determine their treatment. For instance, an instruction from the CCP Centre stipulated that “if they [SLL] do not rely on their land to secure their living, there is

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no necessity to take care of them. … We do not have to give them twice as much land as the average.”41 A few months after promulgation of the “Decision on how to distinguish the rural class components,” the CCP Centre backed up its vague and confusing definition of SLL with an updated “explanation and instruction,” stipulating that the standard should be set by governments at the county or prefectural level with the approval of the provincial government.42 In other words, the power to draw the line was placed in the hands of low-level CCP cadres. As pointed out earlier, in order to mobilize peasants to stand up and impress their superiors, local cadres usually pursued a more radical line than the policy set by the CCP Centre. In Wuhan, for example, many people in the city owned land. According to Pan Guangdan, a sociologist trained in the United States who published a book on Land Reform in the Jiangnan area, more than 80 percent of the business people in Wuhan owned land.43 Probably many were SLL. Eventually, their land was requisitioned and redistributed.44

**Conditions for the SLL following the Land Reform**

As the discussion above makes clear, the SLL were unlikely to emerge untouched from the Land Reform movement. The evidence suggests that many people in the

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42 《中央关于小土地出租者等问题的解释和指示》，《建国以来刘少奇文稿》（第二册）， (“Explanations and Instructions on the SLL issued by the Central CCP”, *Writings of Liu Shaoqi after the establishment of PRC*, Vol. 2, Central Document Press, 2005), 570. This document was marked Nov. 31, 1950 and the 《中央人民政府政务院关于划分农村阶级成分的决定》 was promulgated in August 20, 1950.
44 See the minutes of an internal meeting attended by high-level cadres responsible for Land Reform in Shanghai. Title missing, SMA, A71-1-36, 85.
group lost part or all of their land. However, unlike those who were labeled as landlords, the SLL were unlikely to be physically attacked. Thus following the completion of the Land Reform campaign, some SLL must have continued to live mainly in cities while owning rural land.

Those who were fortunate to be categorized as SLL (although local authorities might not recognize this status and treat them as landlords) and were fortunate enough to retain land were nonetheless at the mercy of CCP cadres at various levels. The cadres could find ways to requisition their land. Those who resided mainly in cities and relied on income from sources outside the agricultural sector, found that ownership of a plot of rural land became a liability. Rural landownership became a stigma and an obstacle to success in the new society. Furthermore, the amount of rent that an SLL could collect was reduced by regulations after 1949 and was almost negligible by the time Land Reform was complete. In the NLA, a movement to “reduce rent and interest” was launched before the Land Reform program. Moreover, in cases when tenants stopped paying rent, as many did while confronting their “exploiters” with a sense of empowerment during the Land Reform campaign, SLL dared not make demands for payment. More importantly, compared with the economic benefits they might gain from small-scale rural land ownership, invisible costs became heavy. To be stigmatized as an exploiter was an obstacle to political and economic success in urban society at a time when success was increasingly determined by the patronage of the CCP. Those who lived in Chinese cities during the transitional period experienced an unprecedented politicization (泛政治化) of
everyday life. The activities and even the thoughts of urban residents were increasingly subject to monitoring and control. Those labeled as SLL, whether entrepreneurs or professionals such as professors and physicians, were inescapably caught up in the wave of politicization. Rather than be labeled as exploiters, the SLL preferred to abandon their claims to ownership of rural land.

**Collectivization: the end of land ownership for the SLL**

The CCP aimed to establish a society without private ownership. Like Lenin and other Communist leaders, Mao Zedong feared that a small-holder rural economy (小农经济) would inevitably lead to capitalism. Soon after the CCP defeated its enemies and consolidated its rule, it began measures to collectivize agricultural production. In hindsight it is clear that agricultural collectivization was actually a means of taking land from the peasants, dispossessing even those who had “struggled” to acquire it during the Land Reform campaign. Immediately after the completion of Land Reform, mutual aid teams (互助组) were set up by the CCP as a stepping-stone toward socialist agriculture. Because the private ownership of land did not match the socialist vision, and because in many localities the mutual aid teams did not function effectively, CCP leaders, including Mao Zedong in particular, decided to organize the agricultural population into cooperatives. By 1956, the entire agricultural workforce belonged either to lower-level or advanced cooperatives.

By depriving peasants of the ownership and control of their land, collectivization reduced them to serfdom. In lower-level cooperatives, the value of land contributions
to collective production was limited to no more than 40 percent of a family’s earnings. In advanced cooperatives, land was not counted as a factor in distribution of collective income. Labour was seen as the sole contribution toward collective production and was rewarded accordingly. There was no way to uphold the rights of SLL owners in these circumstances. There seem to be no records of cases in which agricultural cooperatives farmed land rented from SLL. This implies that the redistribution of land formerly owned by SLL had been completed by 1956 at the latest.

**Summary**

The CCP created the SLL category in 1950, before launching its full-scale Land Reform campaign in the NLA. Many who lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary ended up in this category. Although the SLL were granted protection and favourable treatment in CCP regulations, all lost their land eventually. Some were dispossessed during Land Reform, while within a few years of completion of the Land Reform campaign those who had retained land lost it to cooperatives during the staged process of agricultural collectivization.

2.3 **Excluding the amphibious members of rural communities**

**The extinction of amphibious individuals**

Whatever one’s view of land reform and agricultural collectivization in China,

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45 One of the principles of agricultural cooperative was that contribution of labour must overrun land in distributing the products and that the labour reward must increase gradually. 《农业生产合作社收益分配问答》, (Questions and Answers on Distribution of yields of Agricultural Cooperatives, Shandong People’s Press, 1955), 1-3.
there can be no doubt that the rural-urban mobility that was common before 1949 came to an end during the two movements. With the completion of these two nationwide projects of social reorganization, every person in China officially belonged either on one side or the other of the rural-urban boundary. This section discusses how the Land Reform and Collectivization campaigns led to rural-urban separation by urbanizing those who had belonged to both the rural and the urban communities, and how the mobility they had formerly enjoyed became impossible.

The loss of land and other properties in the countryside was not the whole story of the uprooting process. Actually, in addition to confiscating and requisitioning their rural property, Land Reform and Collectivization further excluded those who had been amphibious in the past by severing the social ties connecting those who were mobile to their native places. Social networks and the sense of family honour were two of the many relevant factors.

The term “social networks” refers to the institutions which tied boundary-crossing people to rural communities. The clan was a typical institution in this regard, maintaining the links between its rural and urban members and gathering them together for various activities. From the outset to the very end, the Land Reform campaign targeted the clan as a major enemy. Land owned by clans provided the material resources for various activities such as providing food for poor members of the clan and worshipping common ancestors. This land was confiscated during the Land Reform. Clan halls (祠堂) where rituals were performed and entertainments were held, were also confiscated according to CCP regulations during Land Reform.
Taking over the land and the clan halls crippled clans at the material level, making it impossible for them to perform their usual functions, including those involving members residing in cities. In addition to confiscating the property of clans, Land Reform also destroyed their internal unity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Land Reform progressed by pitting the have-nots against the haves. During the Land Reform, the have-nots were mobilized to attack their better-off clan members. Collectivization further dissolved the clan by taking over many functions which were previously undertaken by clans as well as other local organizations. These measures eliminated most of the space on which clans depended for their survival.

Similar processes occurred in the cities. The tongxianghui (native-place associations 同乡会) had formerly been very powerful in certain cities, and were critical in bridging the rural-urban boundary, for instance by coordinating the recruitment of labour. The tongxianghui were first crippled and then dissolved within a few years of the CCP’s takeover. The CCP first confiscated their real property, and then gradually limited their activities and supplanted them by performing services that they had traditionally provided. The fading of the tongxianghui accelerated the process of separating urban residents from their native villages. It did not take long for this to affect how people identified themselves. As they interacted less often with other members of an institution linked to a particular rural place, the significance of being from a certain place decreased.

In retrospect, it is clear that during the early years of the PRC, the CCP worked to establish its presence in every corner of society. In the process, it atomized society,
dismantling and supplanting existing organizations and networks which might obstruct its efforts to establish complete authority over the Chinese people. Various non-state institutions, such as clans and rural self-defense associations, along with urban-based secret societies and unions, were labeled as “feudal” and “reactionary” and were the targets of movements to eliminate them. Because clan power was a major target, the CCP’s success in attacking it was an indirect cause of the uprooting of mobile groups from their rural communities. The clans had often been an “umbilical cord” connecting urban residents to rural society.

The sense of family honour had helped to maintain rural-urban networks. Honour was a motivation for boundary-crossing people to remain involved in rural communities, contributing generously if they could to charitable efforts and other collective efforts such as promoting education and building roads. Therefore to deprive those targeted by campaigns of respect from and to damage their own self-esteem was a critical element of the Land Reform campaign. Thus landlords were humiliated as their less prosperous relatives were incited to attack them. High-level CCP leaders such as Mao and Liu Shaoqi emphasized the importance of “clearing the air of landlords’ authority” (打掉地主威风). Emotional “struggle meetings” during which landlords were shamed were much more effective in achieving this than reasonable discussions would have been. Moreover, following the Land Reform and throughout the entire Mao period, the shame of those who had been targeted by the campaigns of the 1950s did not fade. Together with their children and other relatives, those who had been humiliated bore the burdens of shame for decades if not longer.
Because members of the amphibious rural-urban population had generally been more prosperous than their fellow villagers and thus able to rent out land, it was difficult for them to avoid being labeled as exploiters. In the circumstances, to hold onto rural land was detrimental to family honour.

Those who had been amphibious did not wish to be uprooted from the countryside. However, because they had been linked to rural communities mainly through the clan structure and other networks, as the clans were destroyed and landholders were attacked, these social networks dissolved and honour turned to shame. To protect and rebuild family honour, it was best to sever all ties with one’s native place. As urban residents discarded their rural identities, the old Chinese concept of *jiguan* (native place or ancestral home 籍贯) became attenuated and abstract. In many cases it was lost after one or two generations, as residency in particular city was constituted as a new form of *jiguan*.

**Extinction of the possibility of being amphibious**

If the land Reform and collectivization programs had simply uprooted and urbanized those who lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary, it would be risky to state that the amphibious phenomenon was thereby eliminated, for it might have emerged again given favourable circumstances. More than half a century later, however, rural and urban China remain two separate worlds. This is because during the 1950s it gradually became impossible to be amphibious. It was no longer possible
for rural people to migrate to cities, as their ancestors had been able to do. Land Reform created a rural world where nobody could own enough land to accumulate resources that they might invest in urban enterprise. Then, soon after Land Reform, collectivization deprived each and every peasant of the right to own land. Farmers then received shares of collectively-owned yields that were often barely adequate to feed themselves and their dependents. It became impossible to accumulate investment funds. Second, villagers were largely deprived of the freedom to migrate to cities to seek work. Permission from the collective was required even for short leaves. At the same time, the CCP closed the gates of the cities to the rural population. The new authorities reorganized the urban industrial, commercial and service sectors and assumed authority over the recruitment of labour. The demand for labour in these sectors shrank and urban residents received priority in hiring. Although migration from the countryside to cities did not cease completely, it was strictly controlled and monopolized by officials. Flows of both authorized and unauthorized rural-urban migration dwindled to a trickle. Most of those who crossed the rural-urban barrier were selected for mobility by official agencies, including armed forces personnel who received promotions in the course of their military careers and students who were admitted to institutions of higher education, all of which were located in urban areas.

Other conditions made it impossible for those living on the urban side of the rural-urban boundary to move to the countryside. Following Land Reform, land was owned by individual peasants and thus could be legally bought and sold. Even though a few transactions occurred that worried the CCP leaders, land sales were generally
rare. Those who could afford to do so were reluctant to purchase land after witnessing the landlords’ fate. In any case, there was only a brief interval between land reform and collectivization, and rural land could no longer be bought and sold after collectivization. Thus the long tradition of purchasing land after saving money came to an end in China. Therefore villagers had no opportunities to migrate to cities as their predecessors had done and urban residents had no way to continue their predecessors’ practice of investing in rural land. With the erection of a rural-urban barrier through these changes, China’s population was divided into two parts.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the main contours of the dramatic changes in the relationship between rural and urban society in China that occurred during the transition into the PRC period between 1947 and 1956. When the period began, migrants to the cities and their urban-born children tended to maintain ties with rural communities for various reasons ranging from traditional beliefs and practices to modern political and social circumstances. As a result, many people were both rural and urban, or “amphibious” as described in the discussion above. People and capital flowed freely in both two directions between cities and the countryside. The Land Reform and the Collectivization campaigns that followed turned this picture on its head. The amphibious population was urbanized, and the CCP’s campaigns and policies created an insurmountable barrier between the cities and the countryside. In other words, after land reform and collectivization had separated the rural and urban
sectors, neither people nor capital could flow freely between them. “Land to the tillers” (耕者有其田) had been an exciting slogan animating waves of revolution, including the nation-wide land reform campaign. However, it is now clear that land reform and collectivization in China did not distribute land to the tillers but instead achieved the result of separating land from the non-tillers.

These changes laid the foundations of China’s distinctive household registration (huji) system. It is unlikely that the huji system could have been installed without land reform and collectivization. To divide the population into two groups which are unequal in civil rights and legal status requires that not many people can claim membership in both groups. Therefore to eliminate the possibility of dual identity was a prerequisite of installing such a system. It has been argued here that this prerequisite was fulfilled through the CCP’s campaigns of Land Reform and Collectivization.
### Chapter 3  Expelling undesirables from the cities

#### 3.1 The removal of undesirable urban residents (1949-1952)

After they occupied an urban area, it was essential for Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders to consolidate their authority before the tasks of social reconstruction could begin. To this end, they followed a series of steps to identify, locate, and control those who were enemies and potential enemies in the party’s understanding. Accordingly, it was necessary to increase the legibility of the urban population, to deprive those who were considered undesirable parts of the urban population of their rights to reside in the city, and also to rehabilitate some of those who were deemed undesirable.

#### The mindset of the CCP concerning cities and countryside

It is common knowledge that the CCP leaders adopted an approach of the “countryside surrounding the cities” (农村包围城市) to win victory, thus contradicting the experience of their Russian mentors. When the CCP took up the task of administering cities after defeating the GMD regime, it lacked experience in administering large cities. Because of this, not only did enemies of the CCP predict that the CCP might fail in this task, but CCP cadres themselves doubted whether they could meet the challenge successfully. For instance, when he moved the headquarters of the CCP from Xibaipo (西柏坡) in Hebei to Beijing, Mao Zedong told his
comrades that they “were going to take the imperial examinations” (进京赶考) and
warned them not to follow the example of Li Zicheng (李自成, 1606-1645). It is
clear that the CCP did not have the same confidence as they had in ruling rural areas
when they took over cities. Uncertainty and the ensuing desire to demonstrate that
they were capable of governing urban China preoccupied the party at that
conjuncture.

What is more, seen from the viewpoint of the ideology advocated by the CCP at
that time, Chinese cities were evil because they were parasitic and consuming (寄生
性消费性城市). Such cities, according to the theories of the CCP, had developed in a
“semi-feudal and semi-colonial” environment (半封建半殖民地) and accordingly
carried semi-feudalistic and semi-colonial characteristics. As a bridgehead for
imperialists and a hotbed for reactionary class elements, the city was filled with
various vices and threats associated with imperialism and reaction. Therefore, the
CCP had no choice but to transform the cities. For instance, Zhu De wrote that “for
cities in old China, especially big cities, their ‘prosperity’ was the ‘prosperity’ of the
colonial economy. The ‘prosperity’ was based on the feudal exploitations of the
peasantry. We must turn such cities into New Democratic cities (新民主主义的城市)
and productive cities (生产的城市).”

The uncertainty when facing cities, as well as the viewpoint that cities were

1 冯爱珍、陈毓述: 《进京赶考:中共“五大书记”》, 福建人民出版社, (Feng Aizhen and Chen
Yushu, Going to Beijing to take the examination: the “Five Great Secretaries” of the CCP, Fuzhou:
Fujian People’s Press, 2005), 394. Li Zicheng was a 17th-century rebel who toppled the Ming dynasty
but was soon pushed out of Beijing by the Manchu invaders who established the Qing dynasty.
2 《朱德选集》, (Selected writings of Zhu De, Beijing: People’s Press, 1983), 265. Cited from 徐勇:
《非均衡的中国政治:城市与乡村比较》, 中国广播电视出版社, (Xu Yong, China’s unbalanced
politics: comparing cities with the countryside, Beijing: Chinese Broadcast and Television Press, 1992),
346.
spaces of evil and needed to be overhauled, determined that the CCP would very likely take radical measures to transform the cities. The expulsion of tens of millions of urban residents from China’s cities was among the party’s measures.

On the one hand, the CCP leaders believed that many people must be moved out of cities. On the other hand, they appeared to believe that the countryside could absorb unlimited amounts of labour. They were optimistic that both urban and rural areas would benefit from the campaign to relocate unemployed urban residents to the countryside. Many official documents declared that agricultural production would be greatly increased in this way. Concepts such as “invisible unemployment” and “under-employment” were apparently far from their minds. It seems that they assumed that to add to the rural population would certainly result in increased production overall as unproductive urban consumers were placed in the countryside where they could become producers. The increased supplies of agricultural goods resulting from additional inputs of labour in the rural sector would be delivered to the factories in urban areas that were struggling with the problem of insufficient supplies of raw materials, a problem partly caused by the United Nations embargo on trade with China imposed after the Korean War began in 1950. Jobless people who had no income in the cities would thrive in the countryside where the government could provide them with tools and other encouragement. However, the assumption that labour was lacking in the countryside was never supported by strong evidence in the documents of the Party.³ In fact, the subsistence needs of former urban residents

³ It is difficult to calculate how many labourers the countryside could absorb in 1950s. But it is not difficult to tell that the reason why the CCP moved large amount of people from cities to the

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might have reduced the availability of agricultural produce to the urban sector.

Nonetheless, the CCP devoted its powers of command and mobilization to transferring large numbers of people from cities to villages during the early years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

**Evacuating “refugees” to their native villages (遣散难民)**

Units of the People’s Liberation Army entered Shanghai in late May, 1949. CCP representatives then began the operation of evacuating the “refugees” from Shanghai during the process of taking-over. At the outset, party authorities did not consider follow-up measures for those who they would like to send back to their native places. It seems that the priority was to get the “refugees” out of the city as soon as possible.4 In order to achieve this priority, they promised lenient treatment and transportation subsidies to those who had fled to the cities after being categorized as “landlords,” and “bullies” in their villages. They also promised “refugees” that land would be granted to them in the countryside if they returned. In addition, the government attempted to persuade “refugees” to leave the city willingly by telling them there would be no job opportunities in Shanghai and that public relief activities such as the distribution of rice gruel would soon be terminated.5

As used in Shanghai in 1949, the word “refugee” had a broader meaning than

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4《关于动员难民还乡的暂行办法通知》，(“Notification on the temporary measures on mobilizing refugees to return home”), SMA, B168-1-681: 1. This document does not have a signature or date. Judging from the content, it must have been issued by the Military and Political Committee of East China (华东军政委员会, MPCEC hereafter) in the first couple of months when a regular bureaucratic system had not yet been established.

5 Untitled document, SMA, B168-1-681: 10; 15.
normally. It not only referred to those who fled their home places and were in need of the basic necessities of life, but also the poorer city dwellers, laid-off and unemployed workers, and many other kinds of people who were seen as undesirable by the authorities. The first paragraph of the official Notification of temporary measures on mobilizing refugees to return home, probably issued in mid-1949, stated that, “There are large numbers of vagrants, hooligans and all kinds of jobless people who have nothing to do with production. There are no jobs for them. They have no income and engage in various kinds of disreputable activities and are thus a severe threat to social order.”⁶ As for the components of the “refugee” category, the government estimated that were 250,000 jobless workers, who together with their dependents numbered over one million, and that another 650,000 Shanghai residents were living in poverty. Furthermore, there were a total of 170,000 vagrants together with their dependents, along with about 100,000 landlords, rich peasants, and rural “bullies” and their family members who had fled to Shanghai from Land Reform in their villages.⁷ These population estimates and classifications were restated in a report by Cao Manzhi (曹漫之), a high-ranking official of Military and Political Committee of East China (华东军政委员会, MPCEC hereafter), which was published in Jiefang ribao (Liberation Daily) on August 9, 1949.⁸

The perceptions and the planning of CCP authorities in Shanghai may be seen clearly in the same document, in a section on the evacuation of refugees and

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⁶ 《关于动员难民还乡的暂行办法通知》, (“Notification of temporary measures on mobilizing refugees to return home”), SMA, B168-1-681: 1.
⁷ 《疏散难民回乡生产救济方案》, (Relief plan for dismissing refugees and resettling them in the countryside to produce), SMA, B168-1-681: 2.
⁸ Ibid, 6.
resettlement policies. A portion of the document is translated below.\(^9\)

I. **Unemployed workers.** Most of these people should be evacuated to the countryside to work in production. Those who are well-educated and skilled can be deployed to factories in other liberated areas, or may be recruited as cadres after political re-education.

II. **Poor people, coolies, landlords and rich peasants who fled to Shanghai and all other people who have nothing to do with production and have no source of income.** All of these should be transferred to the countryside where they came from to work in production, regardless of why they have ended up in Shanghai.

III. **Homeless people and those whose home villages cannot provide them with the means of production.** These people can be moved to flood-prone areas along the Yellow River region (黄泛区) and sent to reclaim saline land in northern Jiangsu (苏北盐垦区), or to other places where land is sufficient and harvests are good.

IV. **Vagrants who have long lived by thievery, robbery, extortion, begging, gambling and similar activities.** They should be compelled to leave Shanghai and sent to the countryside as labourers. Thus they will be rehabilitated as labouring people (劳动人民). In the latter half of this year, institutions where they will undergo compulsory rehabilitation should be set up in the countryside far from Shanghai.

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\(^9\) Ibid, 6-7.
The destinations planned by the authorities for the “refugees” described above were mainly rural rather than other cities. In Chinese, “乡” means both hometown and countryside. Therefore, 回乡 huixiang could mean either going back to one’s hometown or moving to the countryside. Official documents give the impression that the CCP was not bothered by this ambiguity. Their language assumes that all “refugees” had come from the countryside, which was far from the truth. However it seems that the CCP deliberately made use of this ambiguity. It was obvious that party officials intended to eject certain groups from the urban areas to the countryside. Party spokesmen stated explicitly that “the purpose of the evacuation is to return to the countryside unemployed persons who reside in Shanghai but have nothing to do with production in order to increase the number of agricultural workers.”

The principle of the party’s evacuation program was to return such people to their ancestral villages.

In August 1949, CCP officials in Shanghai claimed that within ten days of Shanghai’s liberation 200,000 “refugees” had left for their former homes, and that during the following period of takeover, another 200,000 persons had departed thanks to the efforts of the new government and various non-government organizations. They also stated that their aim was to mobilize the departure of a further 500,000 “refugees” before the end of 1949. They estimated that there were 1.8 million “refugees” in Shanghai who should be transferred to the countryside. In their plan, a

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10 《疏散难民回乡生产救济方案》, (Relief plan for dismissing refugees and resettling them in the countryside to produce), SMA, B168-1-681: 6.
11 Ibid, 6. It is not clear how accurate these data were calculated in a period of upheaval (without modern technology and functioning apparatus). However, in the absence of more accurate information, the figures are useful as estimates.
total of one million would be evacuated by the end of 1949.

Not all the “refugees” that the CCP targeted for removal had homes to return to in the countryside. Many had lived in Shanghai for long periods and had lost contact with the villages where they or their parents were born. Unemployed clerical workers and former government employees such as teachers and functionaries (店员，公教人员) who had no experience working in agriculture were naturally reluctant to move to the countryside. The CCP chose some sparsely settled areas as “reclamation areas” for the resettlement of such people, and sought to indoctrinate them with the idea that manual labour was glorious.12

It seems that the CCP government simply labeled all residents of Shanghai who were not “producers” in their eyes as “refugees” and made concerted efforts to remove them from the city. Under this definition, over one million people who had settled down in Shanghai, in some cases long before the CCP entered the city, became “refugees” because they were considered as “consumers” rather than “producers,” and were thus the targets of official evacuation operations.

**Taking-in and sending-back victims of natural calamity (收容遣送灾民)**

By mid-December 1949, it was clear to Shanghai’s CCP-led government that more “refugees” had arrived in Shanghai than had been transferred out. Many of the new arrivals were refugees from floods in eastern China. Flood conditions were especially severe in the northern parts of Jiangsu and Anhui at that time. Officials also

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12 《疏散难民回乡生产工作总结》，(Summarizing the work of dismissing refugees and resettling them in the countryside to produce), SMA，B168-1-683: 13-14.
recognized that the trend was for fewer and fewer “refugees” to be successfully transferred to the countryside every month. Consequently, they decided to devote more effort to the population transfer campaign by setting up an authoritative “East China Committee for Production and Relief” (ECPR 华东区生产救灾委员会). The Committee was responsible for coordinating organizations and government bureaus throughout the macro-region. The ECPR sought to prevent people from fleeing their home villages and seeking refuge in the cities by investing large sums in repairing damaged infrastructure in the calamity-stricken areas. Despite these efforts, many flood refugees entered Shanghai and other cities. With many refugees living in the streets as winter approached, officials in Shanghai pressed forward with evacuation operations while also launching a program of relief.

An agency called the Winter Relief Committee (冬季救济委员会) was set up in Shanghai to conduct relief programs in the city. Its members represented a variety of government bureaus such as the Public Security Bureau, and the Bureaus of Public Health Bureau and Civil Affairs. The Committee directed four operations: managing Taking-in and Sending-back centres (TISB hereafter) and housing refugees, the distribution of food and clothing, employing refugees to work in public construction projects, and other temporary relief activities. These relief programs and activities were guided by the principle that “refugees” would return to the

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13 Ibid, 12.
14 《疏散难民回乡生产与冬令救济问题》, (Dismissing refugees and resettling them in the countryside to produce and the problem of winter relief), SMA, B168-1-681: 7-8.
16 Ibid, 21.
countryside. As a CCP document declared: “Our relief work was fundamentally different from that conducted by the Guomindang. We educated and organized the refugees through relief work and mobilized them to return to the countryside to produce when opportunities were present. Therefore our work is active rather than passive relief.”17 Another way of explaining the distinctive nature of the CCP’s relief programs is to introduce the development of the TSIB system. In Shanghai during the 1950s, the shelters for true refugees and the various types of correction centres for a wide spectrum of vagrants were all essentially TISB centres.

The TISB system became well known in China and overseas as well in 2003 when the regulations governing it were rescinded by the State Department. This followed a widely-reported criminal case in which a college graduate named Sun Zhigang was beaten to death in a TISB centre in Guangzhou. The institutions and operations that became part of the TISB system developed during the “refugee-evacuating” campaigns which the CCP launched soon after they took over large cities in 1949. The TISB centres set up in Shanghai in 1949 appear to have been among the earliest of such centres run by the CCP.

The TISB operations may be categorized into two forms, namely the shock TISBs (突击收容) and the normal TISBs（经常收容）. Shock TISB operations were conducted when the CCP believed that a situation was becoming dangerous and some measures had to be taken in advance. Higher-level authorities (for instance, the Municipal government of Shanghai or the MPCEC) coordinated various government

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17《上海市一九四九年冬令救济计划草案》, (Draft winter relief plan of Shanghai in 1949), SMA, B168-1-681: 20.
bureaus to plan and implement the operation. They chose a date and deployed thousands of police forces along with some soldiers to arrest people such as vagrants and beggars whom they wished to dispatch to the countryside, even when the people targeted lived in their own homes rather than in the streets. Detainees were held in large groups in the TISB centres before being transferred to rural areas. Such operations usually took place at the same time as major political campaigns. For instance, during the Campaign to Suppress Counter-revolutionaries of May 1951, the Shanghai government launched a shock TISB operation in which 8,000 people were detained, most of whom were moved out of the city.\textsuperscript{18} In the winter of the first year of CCP rule in Shanghai, a large-scale shock TISB operation was launched simultaneously with the program of winter relief, rounding up over 5,000 people targeted for evacuation. The aim was to detain Shanghai’s least desirable residents, such as hooligans, beggars and thieves, house them in TISB centres for a period of rectification and then transfer them to villages or reclamation areas (垦区).\textsuperscript{19} It is noteworthy that the government acknowledged that part of this group had urban origins even while assigning the whole group to rural resettlement.\textsuperscript{20}

It is problematic to assume that coercive measures were reserved only for vagrants. True refugees were also required to enter the TISB centres in most cases.

District governments (区政府) were ordered to conduct TISB work as well as operate

\textsuperscript{18}《上海市灾难民收容救济遣送工作中的收获，优缺点及经验教训》，(Gains, strong points, weak points, experience and lessons of the taking-in, helping and sending-back refugees and victims of disasters in Shanghai), SMA，B168-1-683: 49.《通报》，(Notification), SMA，B1-2-492: 81.

\textsuperscript{19}《关于冬令救济强制收容改造对象及其处理办法》，(Objects of the coercive taking-in and reforming operation during the winter relief and the solutions), SMA, B168-1-681: 25.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid, 28.
TISB centres in their jurisdictions. Numerous TISB centres were established in Shanghai as a result. These centres did not function like regular charity or public relief organizations providing food and shelter to those who approached them for help. Instead, the government actively directed people to enter the centres. Their efforts were not always successful. Many newcomers to Shanghai had brought along household goods, built makeshift houses, and prepared to settle down. Some even sent for relatives and friends to join them in Shanghai. They tended to refuse to enter the TISB centres, and those who had entered the centres tried hard to leave.\footnote{《上海市收容遣送灾民工作计划》（1950年冬季），(the working plan on taking-in and sending-back victims of disasters of Shanghai (winter 1950)), SMA, B168-1-683: 24.} When persuasion was insufficient, the government was not reluctant to use coercion.

Working teams made up of cadres sometimes called on the police to take people to the centres. Detainees were not permitted to leave voluntarily.\footnote{《上海市收容管教与遣送灾民暂行办法》，(Temporary measures on taking in and disciplining and sending back victims of disasters in Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-683: 7.} To prevent unauthorized departures, TISB centres were guarded by police forces and in some cases by troops.\footnote{《上海市收容遣送灾民工作计划》（1950年冬季），(Working plan for taking in and sending back victims of disasters of Shanghai (winter of 1950)), SMA, B168-1-683: 25.} Once those in charge in their designated resettlement sites were prepared for their arrival, detainees would be sent out of Shanghai.

The authorities intentionally kept living conditions inside the TISB centres slightly above the subsistence level but lower than being free from hunger and cold (吃饱穿暖).\footnote{Ibid, 29.} They argued that “if the living standard was high, the removal work would be difficult to conduct as people would want to come back to cities again after their transfer.” Therefore, they argued that, “the living standard inside the TISB...
centres in all cites should be the same, and should be lower than that of the calamity-stricken districts.‖

Detainees received two meals daily, with rice gruel (congee) as the main dish. The ration of rice per person was twelve liang (两) (about 375 grams) at the beginning. In order to facilitate transfers and discourage refugees from entering Shanghai, the authority intentionally lowered the standard to ten liang (about 313 grams) beginning on November 19, in 1950, and then further lowered it to eight liang (about 250 grams) ten days later, and further reduction was reserved for the future. The inmates were intentionally kept in the condition of hunger but were not allowed to go out to beg for food. The authority also transferred clothing collected from Shanghai directly to the countryside for distribution rather than distributing it in Shanghai, with the purpose to enhance the attraction of the calamity-stricken areas and to encourage rural people to stay at home. Because of these harsh conditions, some detainees became weak and died in the course of the transfer operations.

In conducting TISB operations, it is quite obvious that the CCP prioritized “social order” above the welfare of the so-called refugees whom they claimed to help. The CCP did not disguise the fact that their prime purpose was to establish productive and

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25 《上海市灾难民收容救济遣送工作中的收获、优缺点及经验教训》, (Gains, strong points, weak points, experience and lessons of the taking-in, helping and sending-back refugees and victims of disasters in Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-683, P48.
26 《上海市收容管教与遣送灾民暂行办法》,第十条、第十九条, (Temporary measures on taking in, disciplining, and sending back victims of disasters in Shanghai, Clauses 10 and 19), SMA, B168-1-683: 8.
27 《上海市收容遣送灾民工作计划》（1950 年冬季），(The working plan on taking-in and sending-back victims of disasters of Shanghai (winter of 1950)), SMA, B168-1-683: 24-25.
28 《上海市灾难民收容救济遣送工作中的收获、优缺点及经验教训》, (Gains, strong points, weak points, experience and lessons of the taking-in, helping and sending-back refugees and victims of disasters in Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-683, P48.
healthy cities rather than to help those disadvantaged people on the streets. When they discussed the achievements of the TISB program, their first point was “keeping social order in the city.”

The TISB operation deprived people in marginalized positions of the right to stay in Shanghai. The government stipulated in early 1950 that refugees would no longer be allowed to beg or to sleep in the streets, that any makeshift shanties would be forcefully demolished, and that refugees would be sent to TISB centres. Then, the story went like this: when catastrophes took place in their home villages, refugees were discouraged from entering Shanghai. If by chance they ended up in Shanghai despite the discouragement, they were forced to enter TISB centres where living conditions might be much lower than if they were allowed to freely beg on streets. Then, after a period of hunger and forced confinement, they were sent back to their homes in the countryside. Only those who owned enough economic or human resources could move to Shanghai. But obviously these prerequisites were out of reach for most poor rural dwellers. To put it in another way, after the CCP established control over Shanghai, it was more and more difficult for the rural poor to take up residence in the city.

**Rectifying vagrants (改造游民)**

The CCP defined as “vagrants” people such as professional thieves and beggars

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29 《上海市灾难民收容救济遣送工作中的收获、优缺点及经验教训》，(Gains, strong points, weak points, experience and lessons of the taking-in, helping and sending-back refugees and victims of disasters in Shanghai), SMA，B168-1-683: 47.
who had been living by disreputable means for three years or more. CCP authorities considered such persons to be lazy and lacking in discipline, and viewed them as the primary source of urban unrest. At the same time, CCP leaders appeared to believe that most of the so-called vagrants had working-class origins (劳动阶级) and that because they had labour experience they were therefore remediable. The CCP adopted a policy of instruction and guidance through production (生产教养). The policy led to the establishment of TISB centres called Education Centres for Labour and Production (ECLP, 劳动生产教养所) where vagrants (游民) and prostitutes were detained separately. There were four such ECLPs in Shanghai in the early 1950s. The government planned to expand the operation of these ECLPs to rehabilitate all vagrants including prostitutes in Shanghai. They would be turned into “new people” and vagrants would no longer exist in the city.

CCP authorities in Shanghai estimated that there were about 20,000 professional thieves and beggars in the city, 2,000 drug dealers and gamblers, 2,000 discharged soldiers, and 4,000 garbage-pickers (拾荒者). Together with their dependents, there were 70,000 persons in these groups. In addition, about 30,000 prostitutes worked in Shanghai, supporting 75,000 dependents. Thus the total population in these groups was more than 150,000. Because the government believed that methods of persuasion

31 《游民收容教育改造工作总结》，(Summarizing the work of taking in, disciplining, and reforming vagrants), SMA，B168-1-683: 17.
32 《游民生产教养所调研工作组工作计划纲要》，(Outline of the working plan of the investigating and researching team of the ECLP for vagrants (February 2, 1950)), SMA, B168-1-927: 1.
33 《游民生产教养所调研工作组工作计划纲要》，(Outline of the working plan of the investigating and researching team of the ECLP for vagrants (February 2, 1950)), SMA, B168-1-927: 1.
34 《游民收容教育改造工作总结》，(summarizing the work of taking-in, disciplining and reforming vagrants), SMA，B168-1-683: 17.
would not be effective in dealing with these groups, coercive measures were used. Shock TISB centres were reserved to deal with these difficult groups. For instance, in mid-December of 1949, over 5,000 persons were rounded up in one operation in Shanghai. It was also reported in mid-December that 6,316 persons were then housed in ECLP centres. These detainees and charges were provided with political indoctrination and production training with the aim of preparing them for labour in the countryside. After receiving rehabilitation and training in the centre, most would eventually be resettled in the countryside. From the outset, the purpose of the program for vagrants was defined as “sending them to reclamation and agriculture areas (农垦区) for production; only disabled vagrants would be considered for manufacturing jobs in (手工业) in Shanghai”.

Because it would not be possible to round up and detain all so-called vagrants immediately, the government made plans to proceed step-by-step toward a completely eliminating them from Shanghai. As a first step, persons who were identified as the “leading elements” in vagrant society were placed in the ECLP centres. Their followers were then rounded up gradually.

It might be difficult to assess how successful the CCP’s rectification programs were in terms of reforming individual “vagrants.” But it was a great success in

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37 Ibid, 17.
38 《游民生产教养所调研工作组工作计划纲要》，（1950年2月2日），(Outline of the working plan of the investigating and researching team of the ECLP for vagrants (February 2, 1950)), SMA, B168-1-927: 4.
moving “vagrants” out of cities. From early 1950s all through Mao’s era, there were very few professional beggars and prostitutes in Chinese cities, if they existed at all.

Mobilizing unemployed workers to go back to the countryside to produce (动员失业工人回乡生产)\(^{40}\)

The CCP leaders not only regarded beggars, thieves and prostitutes as undesirable members of urban society, but also viewed unemployed urban workers as an intolerable burden. Therefore, they launched a national campaign to relocate these workers in the countryside. Once again, this effort was conducted in the name of relief. In June 1950, the central government promulgated Instructions and temporary measures on relief for unemployed workers. The twenty-ninth article stipulated that “all unemployed workers who arrived in cities from the countryside recently or who have relatives in the rural areas and are thus able to go back to the countryside to participate in production, should be organized and encouraged to return to take up production work.”\(^{41}\)

The government in Shanghai set up a specific bureau, the Department of Relief for Unemployed Workers in Shanghai (DRUWS 上海市失业工人救济处), to assume responsibility for mobilizing unemployed workers in Shanghai for relocation to the

\(^{40}\) I chose the word “mobilize” to translate the Chinese term “动员”. “动员” was the official discourse of the CCP when they were moving people out of cities. The content of “动员” covered a wide range of measures from encouraging to coercion, many of which go beyond the meaning of “mobilize”. To translate “动员” to “mobilize” does not mean accepting CCP discourse as objective reality. In fact, I suggest that it would be worth examining further how the people reacted to the “动员” of the party in this wave of expulsions.

\(^{41}\) 《上海市失业工人救济处关于各级工会迅速动员失业工人回乡生产的通知》，(Notification to all levels of labour unions to quickly mobilize unemployed workers to return home to participate in production by DRUWS), SMA, B129-2-73: 1.
countryside. The DRUWS propagandized among unemployed workers via the labour unions, leading the workers to believe that to move to rural areas would be only a temporary measure and that they would be welcome to return to Shanghai when job opportunities arose with economic recovery. However, it seems that few unemployed workers answered the call of the CCP through DRUWS. Every month, only several hundred workers and their dependents enrolled in the program. By the end of the year, the program had transferred only about 5,000 people out of Shanghai. This number is modest considering that the total number of unemployed workers in Shanghai then was estimated at around 200,000.

Table 2. Statistics on unemployed workers going to the countryside (April 21- November 30, 1950)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Number of workers going to the countryside</th>
<th>Number of dependents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May*</td>
<td>419</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>233</td>
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<td>August</td>
<td>537</td>
<td>529</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2699</td>
<td>2219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*May refers to the period from April 21 to the end of May

(Source: 《失业工人回乡生产统计表》, (“Statistics on unemployed workers who returned home to produce”), SMA, B129-2-73: 61.)

It is not clear when the DRUWS campaign ended. Perhaps it just faded away

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42《回乡生产暂行办法》, (Temporary measures on returning home to produce), SMA, B129-2-73: 2.
43《一九五零年上海市失业工人回乡生产人数分配图》，(Diagram of numbers of unemployed workers who went back home to produce of Shanghai in 1950), SMA, B129-2-73: 63.
without ending officially. Judging by the figures shown above, it seems safe to say that the campaign to mobilize unemployed workers out of Shanghai was a failure. This is understandable as large-scale migration usually takes place given one of two conditions. The first condition is that opportunities for a much better life become available to most people. The other is that people have no choice but to migrate, for instance because of natural disaster or coercion by an authority. In the campaign conducted by DRUWS, neither condition existed. The prospect of working in the countryside was not appealing and the state did not resort to extreme coercion, such as that employed by the Nazis in the deportations of Jews, to conduct the campaign. It is no wonder that very few unemployed workers moved from Shanghai.

The campaign itself did reflect the fact that the new regime of the CCP regarded unemployed workers as “undesirable” who should be expelled from the cities, and that they put this idea into practice, even though the results were poor.

The TISB and poor shanty-dwellers (棚户贫民)

The poor who lived in shanties were also designated as people who should be moved to the countryside after the CCP entered Shanghai. Some of this group might have been included in the large-scale evacuation and TISB operations in the first couple of years after 1949. But specific operations targeting this group did not take place until 1952.

Shanty dwellings had probably existed since the beginning of Shanghai’s
formation as a metropolitan centre. Because migration into and out of Shanghai had not been restricted, many people arrived without possessions, finding accommodation in shantytowns and scratching out a living in the city by legal or illegal means. Some arrived by boat and then built shanties partly on their boats and partly on land. These migrants sometimes travelled back and forth, or left Shanghai for elsewhere. Their marginal existence had been accepted before 1949.

It seems that various groups of shanty-dwellers continued to live in Shanghai after 1949, although some might have been moved to rural areas in the course of various official operations. In 1952, the Three Antis and Five Antis campaigns (三反五反运动) that targeted capitalists severely constrained economic activities in Shanghai, making shanty-dwellers’ lives even more difficult to sustain. In these circumstances, the CCP municipal government launched a relief program especially for the shanty-dwellers. The program’s main substance was the detention of shanty-dwellers in TISB centres.44

The government stipulated that all shanty-dwellers who had the conditions to engage in production in their home villages should be sent back and the cost of transportation would be subsidized by the government. Those who matched the criteria for being taken into TISB centres should be directed to move in.45 As discussed above, most of those detained in the TISB were designated for rural resettlement. While delivering relief rice to shanty-dwellers in 1951, providing from

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44 《上海市人民政府指示》，(Instructions of the People’s Government of Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-686: 16.
45 《棚户贫民紧急救济实施办法》, (Measures on urgent relief for shanty-dwellers), SMA, B168-1-686: 17.
10 to 15 catties per person, the Shanghai Branch of the Chinese People’s Relief Congress (中国人民救济总会上海分会) also proposed to the Civil Bureau of Shanghai Municipal Government that “each district should convene large-scale meetings in the shantytowns and educate people on the meaning of relief as well as the kind care from the government. At present, our nation is making every effort to build itself up. They should therefore rely on themselves rather than on relief programs.”

Given the CCP’s policies, the idea of self-reliance was a way to refer to their policy of moving urban residents to the countryside to engage in agricultural production.

Although it is not clear how many shanty-dwellers were transferred to the countryside directly and through the TISB centres, documentation shows that the new regime led by the CCP viewed the shanty-dwellers as unsuitable for permanent residence in Shanghai, and carried out a program to resettle them in the countryside.

3.2 Purging undesirables (1953-1960)

According to CCP rhetoric and theoretical doctrine, refugees (难民) and vagrants (游民) in China could only be products of the “evil old society” (万恶的旧社会) because the rural economy had been driven to the brink of bankruptcy through feudal exploitation and imperialist invasion. After the CCP took national power and the “New Society” (新社会) was established, there would be no more refugees. But because the CCP could not command the natural environment, natural calamities such

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46 《为遵照中央内务部指示就本市紧急救济实施办法提出修改意见报请核示由》, (Request for review and instructions on suggestions of revision of measures on urgent relief of Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-686: 26.
as flooding or drought still resulted in victims (灾民). In theory, operations to remove people from the city would end once the existing groups of “refugees” had been resettled.

But it seems that the stream of migration kept moving all through the 1950s, with people flowing into Shanghai from almost every corner of the country just as before 1949. Resettlement operations therefore continued as a regular function of the Shanghai municipal government. The authorities frequently launched campaigns encouraging and pressuring people to move to the countryside to participate in production. The coercive activities associated with the TISB centres continued as a day-to-day governmental practice throughout the 1950s. However, because of the invalidity of the terms and explanations that had been used before, it was necessary to develop new terms and theories to make the situation and policies sound reasonable. Under the circumstances, terms such as “peasants who blindly entered the city” (PBE 盲目流入本市的外地农民) and “landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries and bad elements” (LRCB 地富反坏分子) came into being. The interpretation goes that Shanghai was burdened by outside peasants who blindly entered the city, and that some LRCBs were among the peasants. Therefore, it was necessary and valid to get them out of the city.

**Population increase**

Despite the ambitious evacuation plan in 1949, which stipulated that one million people would be expelled to rural areas, together with the ruthless, human
rights-violating TISB operations and other campaigns to move people out of Shanghai, it seems that the municipal government was not successful in reducing the population of Shanghai in the first half of the decade. The overall population of Shanghai kept increasing during this period. In January 1950, a survey conducted by the government showed that the population of Shanghai was slightly over 5 million. In April 1955, the total had surpassed 7 million.

**Table 3. Statistics on the increase of population in Shanghai**
(End of 1949 to April 1955)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of 1949</td>
<td>5.03 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 1950</td>
<td>4.93 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 1951</td>
<td>5.52 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 1952</td>
<td>5.73 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census of 1953</td>
<td>6.20 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of 1954</td>
<td>6.60 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1955</td>
<td>7.20 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 《关于贯彻执行市委“关于动员外来农民回乡生产工作的指示”的几项说明和具体办法（草案）》, (Explanations and solutions on thoroughly implementing the instructions on mobilizing alien peasants to return home to produce by the Shanghai Committee of the CCP (draft)), SMA, B168-1-859: 12.)

Shanghai’s rising population was not what the government wished to see. In 1955, the authorities in Shanghai thought that only a small part of the newly increased population represented those who were needed in Shanghai for the purpose of economic recovery and development, while the majority “entered Shanghai blindly,” abandoning their means of production at home and waiting for opportunities to work in Shanghai in pursuit of “good” life. It seems safe to say that almost a million

47 《市委关于加强本市户口管理与逐步紧缩人口的指示（草稿）》, (Instructions of the Municipal...
people entered Shanghai without authorization during the first six years of CCP rule, for the natural increase of the city’s population was estimated to be 900,000 people. It is likely that the campaigns of expulsion waged by the CCP regime in Shanghai during the early 1950s mainly targeted those who ended up in the streets or shanties. To put it in another way, there were still a great many opportunities for newly-arrived people to stay in Shanghai if they could manage to support themselves as peddlers or other work in the service sector or were supported by relatives and friends.

Land reforms failed to induce peasants to remain in the countryside, despite the stated rhetoric of the CCP which aimed to portray the Land Reform movement as fanshen (turning over) or “liberation” for peasants. At least in the lower Yangzi river area, the situation went against the rhetoric. On the one hand, Shanghai was a large industrial and commercial city which could provide its residents with a higher living standard than the surrounding countryside. On the other hand, the population-land ratio was so high in this area that Land Reform could not greatly increase individual land-holdings. As a result, people kept moving to Shanghai even though they had land to till in their home villages and could survive there, just as they had done before the CCP rule. Before 1949, not all people who moved to Shanghai were landless. Even “refugees” might own a plot of land in their home village, as mentioned in earlier sections. After the Land Reform, peasants still chose to move to Shanghai to make a living or to pursue a better life. When collectivization began, the attractions of toil in

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CCP Committee on strengthening household management and gradually reducing the population (draft), SMA, B168-1-859: 2.

48 Ibid, 1.

49 《农民流入上海的调查报告》, (Investigation report on peasants flowing into Shanghai), SMA, B59-1-70: 89-90.
Refugees from the turbulence of Land Reform usually worked in Shanghai peddling food and other goods, repairing umbrellas, shoes, or barrels, collecting garbage, catching fish, working as carpenters, and in other temporary and casual jobs. To collect garbage in Shanghai might well be more rewarding that toiling in the countryside. Some peasants even mortgaged their land or asked others to take care of the land for them before leaving for Shanghai. In some cases, local cadres also encouraged peasants to go to Shanghai and make a living there by issuing them “road passes” (路条). Therefore, most of this group did not want to leave Shanghai to return to their villages.\textsuperscript{51}

This group of people was seen as a set of trouble-makers by the government of Shanghai. It was not surprising that some begged or stole from others when they fell on hard times. First, some came by boat, moored their boats along the rivers, and then lived onboard. The authorities argued that their activity narrowed the arteries of the city and slowed down the traffic, which was quite important at that time. Second, some of these people stole from others and allegedly there were even counter-revolutionaries among them. Therefore, they were a threat to social order. Third, these poor people could not keep a clean living environment and thus were a threat to public health. Fourth, their existence made the city look ugly. Numerous “international guests” (国际友人) were visiting Shanghai at the time. Thus, their existence was inappropriate. Fifth, they increased the burden of the city. The majority

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{《农民流入上海的调查报告》}, (Investigation report on peasants flowing into Shanghai), SMA, B59-1-70: 110.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, 90-91.
did not have secure jobs and requested relief whenever they were stricken by accidents. Also, their departure from the countryside hindered the development of agriculture because of the loss of labour.

There was perhaps some truth in each of these arguments. Yet some of the accusations were problematic. For instance, thieves existed among permanent residents as well. It is not reasonable to ban a group from entering by saying that there are thieves in this group. Also, in the case of northern Jiangsu, the authorities acknowledged that many people came to Shanghai because landholdings were small and the people were very numerous. Therefore, the argument that their migration to Shanghai caused a rural labour shortage and thus hampered the development of agriculture was unreliable. It seems that the real concerns for the government was the illegibility of this group and the fact that they could not be absorbed by the party-state, as will be explained further in the following chapters.

**Dealing with PBE: TISB**

Facing a large number of migrants to Shanghai, the authorities’ response was still to send them back to their original villages to participate in production (动员回乡生产). In a government document, the authority of Shanghai, in accordance with the instruction from the central government, stipulated that:

Peasants from calamity-stricken areas who have no friends or relatives to rely on and have ended up on the street, should be taken in by police to TISB centres, and thus wait to be sent back.

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52《农民流入上海的调查报告》，(Investigation report on peasants flowing into Shanghai), SMA, B59-1-70: 92-94.
Peasants from calamity-stricken areas who have friends or relatives, should be persuaded to go back to produce, with the work of various bureaus and their friends and relatives.

The TISB work should be coordinated with local governments to prevent these people from coming to Shanghai again.

Dispatch cadres to provinces such as Jiangsu and Anhui and help them dissuade the peasants from leaving, when necessary.\textsuperscript{53}

As mentioned above, the rhetoric of the CCP could not admit that the PBE were the result of a social and economic system, for they claimed that their system was the most advanced. Therefore, it is very likely that the government described all newcomers to the city as “peasants from the calamity stricken areas,” as an excuse for supporting the official story and to validate the policy of expulsions. This motivation may be seen from another internal document which stated straightforwardly that “during the past year, the problem has still been so severe that peasants and poor people from outside counties (外埠各县农民和贫民) have blindly entered Shanghai.”\textsuperscript{54} This indicates that people kept entering Shanghai whether or not they were affected by natural calamities and that this phenomenon was there for a long time. In addition, it was unlikely that the authority would carefully distinguish between people from calamity-stricken areas and non-calamity-stricken areas, which would in fact be nearly impossible. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that this policy

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{53}《关于处理灾区农民盲目流入本市的暂行办法》, (Temporary measures on dealing with peasants who have blindly fled to Shanghai from disaster-stricken areas), SMA, B168-1-858: 3.

\textsuperscript{54}《报告外埠农民盲目流入本市的情况》 (July 1954), (Reports on the situation that peasants from other places have blindly flowed into Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-858: 32.
\end{footnotesize}
was applied to almost all migrants arriving in Shanghai.

This policy was very strange, if not paranoid, taking into consideration that the authorities had already learned through investigation the main reason why most of the PBE had arrived in Shanghai. They understood clearly that harsh conditions in the countryside compared to the relatively comfortable quality of life in Shanghai were the real cause of the migration. Nonetheless, they simply decided to send people back to their villages and attempted to confine them there. Given this policy, it is safe to say that the government left no possibility for these migrants to become legal residents of Shanghai. The migrants were forbidden to erect shanties in Shanghai and residents among the general population of Shanghai who were most likely to have ties to the villages were mobilized to write to their friends and relatives to dissuade them from moving to the city.55

The numbers of people being sent back to the countryside provide an indication of the success or failure of the efforts to prevent newcomers from settling down in Shanghai.

55 《关于处理灾区农民盲目流入本市的暂行办法》, (Temporary measures on dealing with peasants who have blindly fled to Shanghai from disaster-stricken areas), SMA, B168-1-858: 8.
Table 4. Numbers of refugees sent back by Shanghai, 1949-1954

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1949-Dec. 1949</td>
<td>Pre-war refugee</td>
<td>14,583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1949-Dec. 1949</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>23,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 1950-March. 1950</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>14,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1950-Dec. 1950</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>58,825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Vagrant</td>
<td>7,698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>22,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>3,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Unlicensed rickshaw-puller</td>
<td>2,036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>6,637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Refugee</td>
<td>17,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>170,547</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These people were sent back by TISB centres. Those who went back on their own are not included here.

(Source: 《上海市四年来遣送灾难民人数统计》, (Statistics on the numbers of dismissed refugees and victims of disasters of Shanghai in the past four years), SMA, B168-1-865: 1.)

The campaign to return to the countryside to produce (回乡生产运动)

In mid-1955, the government of Shanghai, under instructions from the central government, decided to reduce the population of the city. Authorities made the decision partly because of the population of Shanghai had become very large by this time. However, a more important factor leading to this decision was how they understood the structure of the population. It seems that the CCP adopted a distinctive method of categorizing urban populations. They placed Shanghai’s residents in four categories: the fundamental population (基本人口), the service population (服务人口), the agricultural population (农业生产人口) and the non-working population (非在业人口). The fundamental population included those who worked in industry,
construction, institutions of higher education, the railway system, and in ocean and air shipping. The service population included those who worked in commerce and the civil service, as well as in other departments such as education, public health and sanitation, and culture. The non-working population referred to children, students, the old, the disabled, the unemployed and a group called “temporary population” (临时人口). Official estimates of the sizes of these population categories in 1955 were as follows:

**Table 5. Population categories in Shanghai in 1955**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental population</td>
<td>1.18 mil</td>
<td>16.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service population</td>
<td>1.19 mil</td>
<td>17.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural population</td>
<td>0.20 mil</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-working population</td>
<td>4.40 mil</td>
<td>62.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of these estimates, officials argued that the non-working population was too large, and that therefore the population structure was not optimal.\[\text{56}\]

This way of viewing Shanghai’s population structure is obviously problematic. First, the temporary population was categorized as part of the non-working population. People in this group were not eligible for registration as regular residents. But actually the great majority of those in the “temporary” population worked as peddlers or servants, temporary labourers and in various other jobs. In other words, they were in fact working despite being categorized as non-working people by the government in this strange way of categorizing. Second, the government did not provide any

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56 《市委关于加强本市户口管理与逐步紧缩人口的指示（草稿）》，(Instructions of the Municipal CCP Committee on strengthening household management and gradually decreasing the population (draft)), SMA, B168-1-859: 1-2.
scientific or empirical data from other cities in comparison to support their estimates of the sizes of the population groups.

Based on their understanding of how many people in Shanghai were not working, officials stipulated measures to deal with the issue. Their aim was to “reduce the population by 800,000 to one million people within a year.” To achieve this goal, they decided to tighten control over in-migration. However if they could have completely blocked the arrival of migrants, this would not have been sufficient to meet their ambitious population-reduction target. The most powerful weapon in the hands of the government remained their tried-and-true method of putting pressure on people to “to return to the countryside to participate in production.” The main target of their renewed campaign remained those who did not have secure jobs, particularly peasants who had entered Shanghai since 1953 and failed to be employed by the party-state.

It seems that the government achieved their population-reduction goal the following year. In this large-scale campaign, more than 800,000 thousand people were moved out of Shanghai in less than two years. Among them, “peasants who blindly entered Shanghai” were the overwhelming majority. However, a few other smaller groups were also targeted for expulsion.

57 《市委关于逐步紧缩本市人口与加强户口管理的指示（草稿）》，(Instructions of the Municipal CCP Committee on gradually reducing the population and strengthening household management (draft)), SMA, B168-1-859: 9.


**Table 6.** Numbers of people who “went back to produce” and their origins  
(January 1955 to June 1956)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Among them</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jiangsu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>687,208</td>
<td>507,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 《上海市四年来遣送灾难民人数统计》, (Statistics on the numbers of dismissed refugees and victims of disasters of Shanghai in the past four years), SMA, B168-1-865: 2.)

**Table 7.** Statistics on employment and population in Shanghai  
(January 1955 to April 1956)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population in May 1955</td>
<td>6,735,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population in April 1956</td>
<td>6,064,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction</td>
<td>811,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I  peasants going back to produce</td>
<td>643,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II  volunteering for reclaiming in Jiangxi</td>
<td>32,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III  labourers dispatched out</td>
<td>77,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV  Sent out from TISBs</td>
<td>11,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V  Convicts sent out for reform through labour</td>
<td>46,299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 《上海市就业及人口统计表》（总表）, (Statistics on employment and population of Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-865: 6.)

**After the Campaign**

The expulsion operations of 1955 to 1956 did not end with the victory of the movement to “return to the countryside to produce” which had successfully removed 800,000 people from Shanghai. Although it is commonly believed that China’s cities swelled greatly in size after the Great Leap Forward (GLP) was launched, it appears that this did not happen in Shanghai. At least at the policy level, the main emphasis
was to prevent the increase of population in this city, and the tendency of some factories to hire peasants without the approval of the Labour Bureau was criticized. After 1956, the government of Shanghai made continual efforts to prevent in-migration and expel those deemed undesirable as residents.

The authority tightened the control over in-migration. First, detailed stipulations were made concerning to whom the regular Shanghai hukou might be granted. Also, food supplies were further restricted and those without regular Shanghai hukou status were cut off from food supplies. Second, the authority put strict control on recruiting labour from outside Shanghai. No recruitment of non-residents would be permitted without approval from the Labour Bureau. It was decided that in 1957 no quota would be available for recruiting people out of Shanghai. If factories, government offices and other enterprises needed workers and staff, they would be provided by the Labour Bureau from the within the existing workforce of Shanghai. Third, Shanghai residents were told not to invite relatives and friends to Shanghai, not to help them get jobs in Shanghai, and to persuade their friends and relatives who were “temporary” residents to leave the city.

The municipal authorities also continued the efforts to move undesirables out of Shanghai. In 1957, soon after their success in expelling 800,000 people, the government discovered that the city’s population had risen above seven million

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59 Solutions by the Shanghai People’s Committee on dealing with and preventing people from outside to flow into Shanghai (December 13, 1956), SMA, B168-1-868: 3-6.
60 Solutions by the Shanghai People’s Committee on dealing with and preventing people from outside to flow into Shanghai (December 13, 1956), SMA, B168-1-868: 6.
61 Propaganda outlines of Shanghai on continuing to mobilize peasants to return home to produce (draft), SMA, B168-1-871: 87-91.
because many of those who had been removed had returned. Therefore, they exerted
efforts to move them back to the countryside. After the launch of the GLF,
Shanghai took the opportunity to mobilize more than half a million people to leave the
city to “join the industrial and agricultural construction” in rural areas. The majority of them were put into the countryside to “assist socialist
agricultural construction.” The government then came to the conclusion that “blind” population increase had come to an end. In the last two
years of the 1950s, the famine caused by the GLF took its toll. Although government
documents do not state that peasants within Shanghai municipality were pushed to the
brink of starvation, as the CCP did not publically acknowledge the existence of the
famine, many documents dating from those two years, reiterated calls for the transfer
of urban residents to the countryside and the further enforcement of the TISB
operations targeted at vagrants, peasants “blindly” entering cities and others “from
outside.” In a word, the mechanisms for expelling undesirables from
Shanghai continued to function after 1956.

3.3 Was Shanghai an exception?

Did the operations of moving undesirable residents to the countryside only take
place in Shanghai? If Shanghai were an exception to any general rule about urban
social control in China during the 1950s, it would not be possible to make any

62《上海市人民委员会关于进一步贯彻“处理和防止外地人口流入本市的办法”的指示》,(Instructions from Shanghai People’s Committee on further implementing the solutions on dealing with people from outside and preventing them from flowing into Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-876: 5-8.
64A series of documents covered this issue, see SMA, B168-1-105. SMA, B168-1-140.
conclusions based on the case of Shanghai. However, there is in fact a great deal of
evidence from elsewhere to demonstrate that Shanghai was not an exception.

Expulsions took place in cities all over the country as local policies and operations
responded to national instructions from the central government. It is possible that
Shanghai’s government made more efforts in their campaigns than those of most other
cities. Yet, the expulsions took place in many cities, especially in those considered by
the CCP to be important but largely non-productive centres.

The operation of the TISB system in dealing with victims of natural calamity was
a national-level campaign. Instructions from the central government to all the
macro-administrative areas (大行政区) in the country were to discourage migration
from the calamity-stricken areas and to send people back to their native places to
produce when they managed to flee from their homes.65 Thus there is no reason to
think that other cities did not also send broadly defined groups of “refugees” back to
their home districts and to reclamation zones.

Similarly, almost all documents concerning expulsions from Shanghai mentioned
that the procedures followed instructions from the central government. For instance,
the strict enforcement of TISB operations in Shanghai in 1954 proceeded according to
“policies from the centre on organizing the victims of natural calamity to produce and
rescue themselves.”66 The large-scale campaigns called “sending back to the

65 中央人民政府内务部代电：《为帮助逃荒灾民返乡生产由》（1951年3月21）, (Telegraph from
the Internal Ministry “On helping victims of disaster return home” (March 21, 1951)), SMA, B1-2-492:
13-14.
66 《关于处理灾区农民盲目流入本市的暂行办法》（1954年）, (Temporary measures on dealing
with peasants from the disaster-stricken areas who have blindly fled to Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-858:
3.
countryside to produce” launched in mid-1955 were also initiated according to the “instructions from the centre (中央指示).”\textsuperscript{67} Official documents also mentioned that “all the large cities, especially coastal ones, are reducing their populations”.\textsuperscript{68} Thus it seems unlikely that the expulsions were carried out only in Shanghai. It seems that they were part of a nationwide phenomenon in which large cities exerted the greatest efforts to resettle people outside their jurisdictions. Smaller cities also followed the policies, complying with directives from central government officials who were demanding conformity. Additional case studies would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the formulation and implementation of the urban expulsion policies.

3.4 Conclusion

Based on the description and analysis above, it is may be concluded that a systematic and long-lasting mechanism to prevent certain population groups from settling permanently in Shanghai was installed at the outset of CCP rule. The mechanism was made up of regular operations conducted mainly by TISB centres and by irregular campaigns such as the campaigns of 1949 and 1955 conducted jointly by various government bureaus. Technically speaking, all residents who lacked secure employment or other means of securing their livelihood were subject to the expulsion system. At the same time, as I will explain in detail in the following section, after

\textsuperscript{67} 《上海市动员农民回乡生产工作初步总结（四稿）》, (An elementary sum-up of the work of mobilizing peasants to return home to produce in Shanghai), SMA, B168-1-864: 13.

\textsuperscript{68} 《关于动员外来农民回乡生产工作的初步方案（草案）》, (A preparatory plan on mobilizing alien peasants to go back home to produce (draft)), B168-1-860: 33.
1949 the CCP-led state sector became the main provider of secure employment and the means of subsistence. After institution of the “cooperation of public and private” (公私合营) policy in industrial and commercial sectors, the state sector was the exclusive provider of secure employment and the means of subsistence. Thereafter, Shanghai’s doors were almost completely closed to migrants from rural areas.

The Party devised various theoretical justifications to validate their expulsion activities, refusing to admit the obvious problem of rural underemployment. In hindsight, it is clear that both the cities and the countryside faced problems of imbalance between labour and the means of production. The ratio of population to productive resources in the countryside was so adverse that many migrants departed for the cities even though they were not welcome there. Many urban residents living in marginalized positions still fared better than if they had stayed in the countryside.

In the new CCP-led economy, the cities could not provide employment to so many newcomers. It seems that the CCP then decided to assume that the countryside could absorb an unlimited population and that urban residents that they viewed as superfluous could only be burdensome in the cities but would become economic assets if they were transferred to countryside. This logic was used to justify the policies even though CCP leaders were aware from their own investigations since the 1920s that China’s high population-land ratio limited the capacity of the rural sector to absorb additional labour productively. The new undercurrent of logic seemed to be in the minds of the top CCP leaders as well as their followers from the beginning of their takeover of the cities and lasted until the end of the Cultural Revolution (CR).
For instance, the Politbureau straightforwardly stated in 1956 that the main way to solve unemployment in cities was to move people to the countryside and reclamation areas to participate in agricultural production. The Cultural Revolution period featured similar logic, according to which urban youth were sent “up to the mountains, down to the countryside” in a nationwide campaign aimed at permanent resettlement, in which about 21 million young people moved out of the cities where they had grown up. At first, CCP statements attributed the excess urban population to the evils of the “old society,” arguing that imperialist invasion and feudal exploitation were its causes. When the problem persisted after several years of CCP rule, officials attributed it both to the legacy of the “old society” and to the blindness of migrants from the countryside, along with the subversive activity of counterrevolutionary landlords and rich peasants. To put it in another way, the CCP refused to address the long-lasting economic problem facing every government of China in a neutral economic way. They took an ideological perspective to analyze and explain this issue and thus addressed it through a political approach—blaming rival regimes at first by using this phenomenon as evidence of the incompetence and vices of previous rulers and then making peasants the scapegoats when the migration phenomenon continued in the new society.

Taking a political approach to deal with the excess urban population, the CCP developed different terms. The authorities used different terms to label undesirable groups, such as “refugees” (难民), “victims of natural calamity” (灾民) and

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69 《上海市继续动员农民回乡生产的宣传提纲（草稿）》 (1956). (Propaganda outlines of Shanghai on continuing to mobilize peasants to return home to produce (draft)), SMA, B168-1-871: 89.
“vagrants” 《游民》. These terms were used very loosely, partly because it was in fact sometimes difficult to differentiate between categories of migrants. When the victims of natural calamity arrived in Shanghai, the majority automatically became refugees unless they could afford to live adequately on savings or had relatives willing to take care of them. Refugees could easily join vagrant groups. But more importantly, the new regime saw all those who could not support themselves and their families in conventional ways as undesirable and targeted them for removal to the countryside. Therefore, there was no point in attempting to make careful distinctions. It is not surprising that officials tended to expand the scope of these terms so that they could include the entire population deemed to be undesirable as urban residents and thus exclude a larger group from the city. For instance, they labeled unemployed workers as “refugees” and made serious efforts to mobilize unemployed people to leave Shanghai even though they had been long-time residents of the city. The aim of the removal operations was clear even though the regime used different terms and perhaps applied different measures to different groups. For instance, it is likely that “vagrants” were treated more harshly than “victims of natural calamities.” However, their treatment was fundamentally similar—they were transferred from Shanghai and resettled in the countryside to engage in agricultural production. Thus it may be concluded that the purpose of the entire set of related operations was to remove undesirable groups from Shanghai and resettle them in the countryside.

The question of who belonged to an “undesirable” group was defined only by the state and the standard was mainly how useful people were in the eyes of the
party-state. For instance, a worker who toiled in a factory was seen as much more useful than a peddler who sold fruits to urban residents. The former was categorized as part of a fundamental urban population group and the latter as part of the “non-working population.” In the operations of expelling the undesirables, the regime drew a line between the rural and the urban populations. In the case study of this chapter, the overwhelming majority of the undesirable residents who were moved out of Shanghai ended up in the countryside with “rural” status. Their hukou status was transferred when they were resettled, and only a small percentage was moved to other cities. Those who were permitted to stay in urban Shanghai received the privileges of urban status from the state. (The 200,000 people living in villages in suburban areas within the jurisdiction of Shanghai were granted urban status at various times during in the following decades.)

The essence of the expulsions may be seen more clearly if we take a comparative perspective. Except for wartime periods, before 1949 people from everywhere had always been free to come and go from Shanghai. No matter who administered the city, people of various socio-economic statuses moved freely to Shanghai for various purposes. Those arriving were Chinese, French, British, Japanese and many other nationalities. It was not uncommon that people facing difficulties in their native places went to Shanghai to pursue a better life or simply to survive. These migrants often ended up in shantytowns. Although some returned to their former homes or moved to other cities when opportunities presented themselves, others managed to settle permanently in the city. In short, Shanghai had been a place open to everyone
who arrived seeking opportunities. After the CCP took over, Shanghai’s doors were closed to outsiders, particularly to disadvantaged residents of rural areas who lacked material and human resources. Such people were not permitted to stay in Shanghai if they appeared there. If they arrived in the city and found a way to get by living in the streets, they were labeled as “refugees” or “peasants blindly entering the city” by the government. They would be then directed to enter TISB centres established with the aim of transferring undesirable groups to the countryside. Those who did not comply with directives were subject to coercion; they too were resettled in rural areas.

Concepts of “human rights” or “civil rights” were apparently not considered in relation to the CCP-led state’s system of urban population control, either by the officials or the groups whose rights were arguably being violated by coerced expulsions from Shanghai. If human rights had been recognized and upheld, migrants from rural China would have had the right to stay in Shanghai, live in makeshift shelters, and to beg in the streets. At the outset, the CCP officials viewed what they saw as excess urban populations as a reflection of the failings of the Guomindang regime. They argued that the “excess” urban population was a result of the bankruptcy of the rural economy. The primary causes of the problem were feudal exploitation and the imperialist invasion, both of which had allegedly been facilitated by the Guomindang. CCP leaders claimed to be creating a new country which would be far better than the previous one. From the very beginning, they were proud of their system of expelling those they considered as undesirable residents of urban areas. The party’s positive view has persisted to this day. The official line of the CCP portrays
the early 1950s as rosy and narrates the population-control operations as a great achievement.\footnote{This line of narrative was used to put operations such as the rehabilitation of prostitutes and vagrants under the broader title “social reform” (社会改造). These operations were portrayed as successful social reform programs which eradicated the evils and vices of the old society (清除旧社会的污泥浊水). There are numerous publications (both academic and non-academic) on “social reform” soon after the Liberation. Just a few are listed here: 中共上海市委党史研究室、上海市档案馆: 《上海解放初期的社会改造》, 中共党史出版社, (Party History Researching Room of the Shanghai Committee of the CCP and Shanghai Municipal Archive ed. Social Reform of Shanghai soon after the Liberation, CCP History Press), 1999. 付启元，卢立菊：《试述南京解放初期的社会改造》，《江南大学学报（人文社会科学版）》, (Fu Qiyuan, Lu Liju, “Social Transformation in Nanjing after the Foundation of PRC”, Journal of Southern Yangtze University (Humanities and Social Science Edition), No.4, 2004), 56-60. 廖胜平：《北平解放初期对乞丐的收容和改造》，《北京人民警察学院学报》，(Liao Shengping, “On beggars’ housing and reform during the Early Period after Liberation in Beiping”, Jounal of the Beijing People’s Police College, No.5, 2009), 27-33.}

The most significant point which this enormous operation of expulsion indicates is how the privileged group took form and how the party-state designated the first generation of permanent “urban” residents. As could be seen from the consistent and systematic removal efforts, urban residence (living in cities) and occupational status (employment in a non-agricultural sector) were insufficient to guarantee a person’s “urban” status. It was the party-state which determined who was eligible to be a member of the privileged “urban” group, no matter where one lived or what work one did. Moreover, urban status could be revoked by the party-state even after it was granted. When the party-state decided that some urban status holders were no longer desirable, they held the ultimate power to transfer them to the countryside and to turn them into “rural” people.

It is unlikely that the CCP anticipated clearly that the removal of undesirable residents from the cities during the early 1950s would definitely lead to the final absorption of the remaining urban population by the time they had completed their project. However, seen in hindsight, the project defined those who remained in the
cities as comparatively desirable. This paved the way to the eventual absorption of almost the entire urban population into the state sector. Following the completion of the campaign for public-private economic cooperation, the expulsion system focused on removing those who seemed least likely to be absorbed by the state sector, resettling these persons in rural areas.
Chapter 4  Growth of the Party-state:

The Creation of an Urban Status Population

The term “urban population” (chengli ren 城里人) is imprecise. Although it refers mainly to those living in cities, those who lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary belonged to the “urban population” when they resided in a city but not when they left the city and again took up residence in the countryside. Any person could become a member of the “urban population” by taking up residence in an urban area. To join or leave the “urban population” did not require any endorsement. Furthermore, whether or not a person belonged to the “urban population,” depended to some extent on his or her self-recognized identity and the recognition of others. For instance, residents of the central area of a city might consider that residents of the peripheral areas were not part of the “urban population.” In contrast, “person of urban status” (chengzhen hukou ren 城镇户口人) is a concrete legal term with a clear-cut boundary. It was a label assigned to individuals by the party-state. People could not join the urban status population on their own volition. Nor could they leave the category on their own. Only official authorities could grant or revoke urban status, as the status was not defined by self-recognition or the recognition of other non-officials.

Before the CCP’s national victory in 1949, the residents of cities constituted an “urban population,” whose ranks could be easily joined by migrants from every corner of the country. However, within a few years of the Communist victory, most urban residents were part of an “urban status population,” which enjoyed various privileges that their fellow Chinese could not easily share. How did this dramatic
change take place? This chapter aims at exploring the formation of “urban status.” To reside in a city before the Communist take-over did not necessarily entitle a person to “urban status” after 1949. In other words, the urban population before the CCP’s take-over did not equal “urban status population” latter. In contrast, all cadres of the Party-state, no matter they came from the countryside or cities, or were sent to work in rural or urban areas, were considered to hold “urban status.”

My research shows that the boundary of “urban status” was determined by the scale of the Party-state rather than by the scale of the previous urban population. It takes Shanghai as a case study, tracing the rapid and steady growth of the Party-state in Shanghai and examining the simultaneous granting of privileges and material benefits. By the end of the transition from Nationalist to CCP rule in China, “urban status” was in essence the status of being an insider of the Party-state.

Simply put, by “growth of the party-state” I mean the expansion of the party-state apparatus, its assumption of new responsibilities, and the accompanying increase in the number of people who worked within its apparatus and were thus on the state payroll. This section traces the main steps of the growth of the party-state and analyzes the momentum behind this growth.

4.1 The takeover (jieguan, 接管) process

The CCP started its “takeover” (jieguan, 接管) work in 1949. Party officials assumed ownership and responsibility for everything left behind by the preceding government, including the official apparatus, state assets, and administrative functions.
However, this is only a narrow definition of what was meant by takeover. In fact, the CCP went much further than this, “taking over” many assets and organizations that had not been owned or administered by the Nationalist government. These actions were also referred to as jieguan (or alternatively as jieban 接办). In this chapter, I will usually use the word “takeover” in this broader sense.

Although political transitions are common in the history of China, there were at least two new features in the CCP’s takeover procedures. First, perhaps for the first time in Chinese history, many administrators who had served the preceding regime remained behind. Second, the takeover operations of the CCP were not limited to institutions administered by the preceding regime, but included many others as well. For instance, while the CCP was preparing cadres in Danyang (丹阳) for the takeover of Shanghai, the cadres were instructed that, “After we arrive in Shanghai, we shall take over not only all the administrative institutions of the GMD, but also factories, schools, financial and commercial systems, and systems of media, culture and education.”¹ This statement makes clear that the takeover program was not intended to be limited to government institutions. The state apparatus of the PRC quickly became very large because the apparatus of the Nationalist state, including both governmental and non-governmental agencies, had already been extensive and also because the CCP assumed control over many other organizations at the same time as

taking over those formerly under Nationalist control.

**The large scale of the Nationalist state apparatus**

Like its rival the CCP, the Guomindang (GMD or Nationalist Party) was not an ordinary political party but a Leninist-style organization committed to social mobilization on a large scale. It left behind a large party-state apparatus, including many institutions such as state-owned factories. Except for those portions which had been transferred by the GMD to Taiwan, the apparatus and assets of the GMD-led Nationalist government were all taken over by CCP authorities.

In order to understand what was inherited from the former regime, it is worthwhile to survey the large group of organizations taken over by the CCP in Shanghai. The index of a book published in commemoration of the takeover operation provides valuable information about the scale of the Nationalist party-state apparatus when the takeover operations of the CCP began. In addition to the “pure” governmental agencies such as the Police Department, the Bureau of Civil Affairs and the Bureau of Taxation and Finance, the index lists many non-governmental institutions on the list. For instance, tobacco firms, textile enterprises, ironworks and hospitals are also included.²

Many non-administrative institutions in Shanghai had been taken over by Nationalist authorities from the Japanese and their protégés just four years earlier. For instance, after the end of the Sino-Japanese war, the Nationalist government took over

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² 上海市政協文史資料委員會：《接管上海親歷記》，(Committee of historical materials of the Shanghai Political Consultation Conference, *Personal experience of taking over Shanghai*, no publisher, 1997), 1-3.
all the factories in weaving and dyeing industry operated by the Japanese, and then put them together to form the China Textiles Construction Company (中国纺织建设公司), an enterprise consisting of eighty-five factories in various locations throughout China, including thirty-eight factories located in Shanghai. It was an enormous company, holding 34 percent of all the cotton spindles in China, and constituting one of the largest textile firms in the world at that time.\(^3\) The company was taken over on May 29, 1949, two days after People’s Liberation Army forces occupied Shanghai.

The China Tobacco Company was a similar case. After the surrender of the Japanese, the Nationalist government took over Japanese-operated tobacco firms and merged them together to create a large state-owned enterprise. Although small compared to the China Textiles Construction Company, the China Tobacco Company had more than 2,000 employees at the time of the take-over on May 31, 1949.\(^4\)

Not all non-governmental institutions existing in 1949 had been taken over from the Japanese and the collaborationist government. Non-governmental institutions associated with the Nationalist government were already very large-scale before the surrender of the Japanese. The expansion of the non-governmental institutions, most of which were business enterprises, was on a large scale and very rapid between 1927 and 1949.\(^5\) Whatever the origins of the non-governmental institutions of the GMD state, suffice it to say that the party-state apparatus left to the CCP was vast. This

\(^3\) 顾毓瑔：《在中纺公司迎接解放和接管》，(Gu Yuqian, “Welcoming Liberation and Take-over in China Textiles Construction Company”),《接管上海亲历记》，\textit{Personal experience of taking over Shanghai}: 305.

\(^4\) 曹达：《接管中华烟草公司经过》，(Cao Da, “the processure of taking over China Tobacco Company”),《接管上海亲历记》，\textit{(Personal experience of taking over Shanghai)}, 315-321.

sector provided the crucial foundation for the development of the CCP’s party-state apparatus.

**Beyond the GMD apparatus**

As noted above, the scope of the CCP’s takeover operations was greater than the scope of what the GMD left behind. The targets of takeover were not limited to the agencies and assets legally owned by the previous state, but also included those belonging to individuals or organizations that were labeled as enemies by the CCP. In other words, businesses and institutions that had not been legally owned by the previous state were also taken over by the CCP. This made the party-state apparatus much larger than that of the GMD. Among the enterprises taken over by the CCP that did not belong to the GMD were enterprises categorized by the CCP as “bureaucratic capital,” despite the fact that they had not been formally part of the GMD apparatus. Foreign enterprises belonged to another such category.

The policy of the CCP was to confiscate assets that it classified as “bureaucratic capital.” Although the party held the power to define this term, the CCP’s definition left room for maneuver for authorities at various levels. In order to facilitate confiscation operations all over the country, soon after the CCP’s national victory the Central Committee on Finance and Economics defined bureaucratic capitalists as “all those who accumulated enormous wealth by making use of political privileges under Guomindang rule.”

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broader than the property legally owned by the Nationalist party-state. While all property of the former regime was considered as bureaucratic capital, the category also included other property and agencies. In fact, it was officially stipulated that “all factories, shops, banks, warehouses, ships, docks, railways, postal services, telegraph, electricity, and telephone services, waterworks, farms and pastures operated by the reactionary Guomindang government as well as its high-ranking officials must be taken over by the People’s government.” In practice, CCP authorities were the sole judges of whether or not an enterprise belonged to the bureaucratic capitalist category. There was no legal process to judge appeals. Therefore, it seems reasonable to speculate that the confiscation might have actually been more radical than what was stipulated in documents.

CCP leaders did not conceal what it gained from the confiscation of bureaucratic capital or the significance of this policy. Zhou Enlai stated in a speech in 1950:

“Bureaucratic capital provided us with a foundation. The ‘four great families’ made use of state power to swallow up others and ended up holding many enormous monopolistic enterprises. By taking over these firms and turning them into state enterprises we have established a base. The issue now is how to further develop and expand the state enterprises.”


The takeover of foreign-owned firms also contributed to the growth of the CCP’s state apparatus to a scale far beyond that of the GMD. Protected by privileges granted in various treaties and supported by advantages in technology and management, foreign-owned enterprises had flourished in coastal China since the late nineteenth century. State protection of foreign firms came to an end when the CCP assumed national power. Even though the CCP did not make it a policy to confiscate foreign companies immediately after they occupied cities where these companies were located, the hostility of the CCP toward these firms was very obvious. In CCP ideology, the foreign enterprises embodied the invasion of China by “imperialism” in the Leninist sense. Mao Zedong instructed the Party in March 1949 that “the foreign economic and cultural organizations may be allowed to exist temporarily under our supervision and control. We can settle the problem after we win national victory.” The later experiences of foreign organizations matched Mao’s instructions closely. The organizations were permitted to continue operations for just a brief period before the start of the Korean War in 1950 sealed their fate.

I will now turn again to Shanghai to illustrate the process of the CCP’s assumption of control over organizations owned and administered by foreigners in China. Before 1949, Shanghai was famous for cosmopolitanism and hosted a great many foreign organizations, including foreign-owned businesses. At one time there were more than 1,800 foreign-owned enterprises in Shanghai. By May 1949, when

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PLA forces occupied the city, the number of foreign firms had already fallen to 910. The owners of 685 of these enterprises, altogether employing more than 50,000 people, were from western countries, and another 225 smaller enterprises were owned by agencies of the USSR and its satellite countries in Eastern Europe. Foreign enterprises were the main providers of a great variety of public services in Shanghai. For instance, they provided telephone service, running water, electric power, and public bus transportation to large numbers of paying customers, employing tens of thousands of people altogether in these businesses.

While meeting in Danyang to prepare the operations through which they would assume control over Shanghai, CCP planners set up an eighteen-member team of cadres who would take responsibility for nine key foreign enterprises operating in Shanghai, including the French Electricity and Running Water Company and British Tramways. Part of the team’s mission was to supervise these companies so that public service would continue smoothly. The employees in these firms were organized by Party members and activists into workers’ unions. The CCP authorities in Shanghai then began to exert pressure on foreign enterprise administrators through the unions. To begin with, the administrators were forced to make concessions to the unionized staff, improving their terms of employment. Under pressure both from employees controlled by the Party through its cadres and activists and from the new government,

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11 倪复生：《接管美商上海电话公司前后》，(Ni Fusheng, “Before and After the Take-over of the US Telephone Company”),《接管上海亲历记》，(Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 166-176.
the managers of the foreign companies were compelled to comply closely to the various terms and conditions imposed on them. In the US Telephone Company, for example, underground CCP members and activists within the company were mobilized to take action soon after the PLA occupied Shanghai. A labour union was newly organized for the purpose of negotiating directly with foreign administrators. The union leaders reported situations to and took orders directly from the CCP representatives in Shanghai. During a series of confrontations between the foreign management of US Telephone and the CCP-controlled unions, the firm’s foreign management was defeated. After the February Sixth Incident of 1950, in which Shanghai was bombarded by the GMD air force, the chief executive and other foreign staff members of the company left China, and after the Korean War broke out, the firm was taken over by CCP authorities at the municipal level.12

The case of the US Telephone Company illustrates how the CCP assumed control over foreign enterprises in Shanghai through indirect means. This stage of indirect takeover operations lasted for less than two years, before ownership of the firm was legally transferred. Thus foreigners were pushed out of the businesses in which they had been dominant in Shanghai, as the public service firms were taken over by state enterprises, which continue to operate them today.

Other foreign companies in China had similar experiences. Although not all were directly appropriated like US Telephone, in one way or another they ended up being taken over by the state. Some were requisitioned, some were bought out, and others

12. Ibid.
closed down. Thus the foreign firms that had been a prominent feature of Shanghai ceased to exist in the early 1950s. Their former employees became part of the CCP state sector. Like the foreign-owned business firms, other organizations, such as schools and orphanages that had been founded and operated by foreigners in Shanghai, were also taken over by the state after the Communist victory, thus contributing to the creation of a CCP party-state that was much larger than the preceding GMD regime.

4.2 Absorbing the “non-productive” sectors: becoming bigger

As the CCP’s takeover operations proceeded in Shanghai, the new state sector continued to expand, absorbing more and more non-governmental institutions along with those who worked in them. As it assumed control over these organizations, the CCP assumed responsibility for the people who “officially” worked in them. There was also a category of employees who were not officially recognized by the party-state but actually treated like other workers, as will be discussed further on. In this section, the term “non-productive sector” mainly refers to organizations making intangible products. The fields of education and health care will be examined to show how absorption into the state sector proceeded. Although the focus of discussion here continues to be on Shanghai, Shanghai was not exceptional in this process.

Absorbing higher educational institutions

At the time of the CCP’s national victory, institutions of higher education were

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13 For an official description of the various ways that foreign ownership was eliminated, see 《当代中国》丛书编辑委员会: 《当代中国经济》，中国社会科学出版社, (The compiling committee ed. Contemporary Chinese Economy, Chinese Social Science Press, 1987), 61.
concentrated in Shanghai. From the outset, the CCP’s goal was not simply to succeed the GMD in educational institutions. It followed much more ambitious “principles and policies” in the educational sector. Its fundamental policy line when entering Shanghai was to “maintain the original conditions while reforming gradually.”

Even before they set foot in the cities, CCP leaders aimed to completely overhaul educational activity.

There were forty-two institutions of higher education in Shanghai in 1949, accounting for around twenty percent of the national total. These may be placed in three categories. Fourteen institutions, such as Fudan University and Jiaotong University, were public, and twenty-two were private. Six universities and colleges were owned and administered by Christian missions.

The CCP took over all the public institutions of higher education immediately after occupying Shanghai. A couple of years later, the party decided to take over all the higher educational institutions, including the private schools and Christian mission schools. The policy was to “take over all and make unified adjustments.” In 1952, the educational institutions owned by missions were dismantled and their faculties were merged with those of the public universities, losing their original names in the process. For instance, the various Arts, Science and Law departments of the

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14 唐守愚：《回忆上海高等学校接管前后的统战工作》，(Tang Shouyu, “Recollections of the United Alliance Work in High Educational Institutions in Shanghai before and after the takeover”), 《接管上海亲历记》 (Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 361.
16 唐守愚：《回忆上海高等学校接管前后的统战工作》，(Tang Shouyu, “Recollections of the United Alliance Work in High Educational Institutions in Shanghai before and after the takeover”), 《接管上海亲历记》 (Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 364.
universities owned and run by missions, such as St. John’s University and Hujiang University, were transferred to Fudan University and other public universities.\textsuperscript{17} The fate of the private universities was similar.

The carving up of Shanghai’s Datong University is an example of how the program called the “Adjustment of Colleges and Departments” proceeded. Datong was one of China’s earliest and most successful private universities, famous for its strengths in science and technology. The school endured and survived various crises during the turbulent years, including warlord conflicts and the long years of Japanese occupation. Yet Datong’s existence came to an end in 1952. Its business school became part of the Shanghai College of Economics and Finance, its Faculty of Science was transferred to Fudan University, its School of Engineering was divided between Tongji University, Jiaotong University and the East China College of Chemical Engineering, and its College of Arts became part of East China Normal University.\textsuperscript{18}

St. John’s University in Shanghai is an example of the fate of the universities owned by Christian missions in China after 1949. Founded in 1879, St. John’s was a leading university in Shanghai. For various reasons, the university gradually became alienated from its sponsors in the United States beginning in 1949. In August 1949, there was a thorough restructuring of administration of the university, in which the

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\textsuperscript{17} 王红岩: 《20世纪50年代高等学校院系调整的历史考察》, 高等教育出版社, (Wang Hongyan,\textit{Historical Observations on the Adjustment of Colleges and Departments in the 1950s}, High Education Press, 2004), 206.
\end{flushleft}

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\textsuperscript{18} 李雪、张刚: 《海上依稀大同梦——上海大同大学》, 《科学中国人》, (Li Xue and Zhang Gang, “A Vague Dream of Being the Same: Datong University in Shanghai,” \textit{Scientific Chinese}, 2009, No. 5), 35.
\end{flushleft}
power and responsibility of the representative of the American mission was greatly limited and authority was turned over to a committee composed mainly of Chinese professors. In 1950, the university’s Departments of History and Journalism stopped admitting students, and in the same year, over seventy students left St. John’s and joined diplomatic agencies in Beijing, while nineteen other students departed to enroll in military colleges. During the Adjustment of Colleges and Departments in 1952, St. John’s University came to an end, as its departments of Foreign Literature and Journalism were transferred to Fudan, its department of Politics became part of the East China College of Politics and Law, its Department of Education and the School of Science were assigned to East China Normal University, and its College of Technology was given to Tongji University. The St. John’s College of Medicine was merged with the medical schools of Zhendan University and Tongde University, becoming part of the Second Medical College of Shanghai. The university’s campus was turned over to the East China College of Politics and Law.19

Pronouncements at the central level make clear that the CCP was determined to reform education soon after it won national victory. The First National Meeting on Educational Work held in December 1949 declared that fundamental reforms would be necessary.20 The First National Meeting on Higher Education in June 1950 expressed the antagonistic attitude of the new CCP-led state toward the private

19 徐以骅、韩信昌：《海上梵王渡：圣约翰大学》，河北教育出版社，(Xu Yiye and Han Xinchang: St. John’s University, Hebei Education Press, 2003), 37.

universities and stipulated that higher education should be subject to central planning under the central Ministry of Education.\textsuperscript{21} By the end of 1952, the new regime had achieved its goal of direct control over higher education. The table below illustrates how privately-run institutions of higher education were quickly eliminated within just three years of the CCP’s national victory.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & \multicolumn{3}{c|}{Number of Institutions} & \multicolumn{3}{c|}{Number of Students} \\
\hline & Total & Public & Non-Public & Total & Public & Non-Public \\
\hline
1949 & 205 & 121 & 84 & 117,133 & 85,659 & 31,474 \\
1951 & 206 & 178 & 28 & 155,570 & 136,769 & 18,801 \\
1952 & 201 & 199 & 2 & 193,910 & 193,657 & 253 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Private Institutions of Higher Education}
\end{table}


The significance of the fact that China’s entire sector of higher education was gradually absorbed into the apparatus of the party-state soon after 1949, becoming part of the state, is that all who worked in this sector became public sector employees. Previously only part of this group had been on the state payroll.

\textbf{Absorbing elementary schools and middle schools}

Elementary school and middle school in Shanghai followed a similar path after the CCP’s national victory. CCP authorities first assumed control over the city’s

public middle schools and elementary schools and then gradually took over all other schools. Unlike higher educational institutions, the number of elementary schools and middle schools was very large. Thus only a few were public schools were taken over immediately after the CCP entered Shanghai. Putting aside legal and policy issues, technically speaking, the CCP could not immediately assume responsibility for each and every school, for too few cadres were available to be posted in so many institutions. Nonetheless, plans to take them over were set in motion early on. The CCP’s term for its policy in this early stage was “reinforcing supervision and straightening out key issues.” During this phase, the autonomous rights of educational institutions were greatly reduced. For instance, property transactions, the opening of new schools, and the closing of schools were permitted only with the approval of the CCP authorities. A curriculum designed by the CCP was imposed and the schools were required to use designated textbooks. The new authorities closed a few schools labeled as “reactionary” and cultivated the presence of the CCP in others. From time to time, the CCP authorities resorted to administrative power to dismiss headmasters and principals, posting party cadres to replace them in positions of leadership.  

Schools subsidized by foreign funding were taken over by the CCP immediately after the Korean War began. Those subsidized by funding from the United States were taken over first. Soon after, all schools subsidized by funds originating overseas were taken over under the slogan of “the resumption of sovereign rights in education” (shouhui jiaoyu zhuquan 收回教育主权). Takeover operations in these schools were

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22 杭苇: 《接管上海中小学的一些回忆》, (Hang Wei, “Recollections on the takeover of middle schools and elementary schools in Shanghai”), 《接管上海亲历记》, (Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 367-373.
completed by July 1953.\textsuperscript{23}

Through the closures, amalgamations and takeovers of numerous elementary schools, the number of non-public schools in Shanghai was reduced from 282 in 1949 to 123 in 1953. However, this was not the end-point of the absorption process. It seems that the CCP authorities were constantly concerned about schools operating beyond their sphere of control, despite the fact that they were capable of imposing a tight grip by issuing orders, appointing principals, and issuing instructions to their followers in the schools. After 1953, the CCP decided to turn all private educational institutions into public schools, and this was completed in 1956.\textsuperscript{24} Thereafter, all elementary and middle schools in Shanghai were publically owned and operated until after the launching of reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1978.

\textit{Absorbing the health care sector}

Turning now from education to medical care, it soon becomes clear that the two sectors followed similar paths during the transitional period. The CCP took over some medical institutions immediately while intensifying its supervision over those which were not yet under its direct control. In the end, all institutions in the medical care sector were absorbed into the party-state apparatus and almost every person working in the medical field became an employee of the state.

The CCP established an agency called the Bureau of Public Health (PHB) in 1949

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 373.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 379.
to supervise the health care sector in Shanghai, placing it under the command of the municipal takeover team. The PHB first sent representatives to organizations owned by the former government such as public hospitals and some state-owned pharmaceutical enterprises, and soon took over many of those organizations. For instance, the Gongji Hospital, originally established in 1864 by foreigners mainly to serve foreigners, had been a private organization, but was occupied by the Japanese during the war. After Japan’s defeat in 1945, GMD authorities assumed ownership of the hospital, and in June 1949, CCP representatives took it over, later renaming it the No. 1 People’s Hospital of Shanghai.25

The PHB also took over certain foreign-funded hospitals and private hospitals, claiming to do so in response to popular demand.26 The Guangci Hospital, for example, had been established in 1907 by French sponsors. Even though the Japanese had occupied it as an Army Hospital and the GMD had also posted officials to direct the hospital after 1945, the organization continued to be managed mainly by French missionaries and the nurses were mainly nuns of a French Catholic order. After the CCP occupied Shanghai, it set up a party cell within the hospital and then launched a series of actions to remove the French missionaries and nurses from positions of leadership. In September 1951, the Shanghai authorities issued an order to requisition Guangci Hospital, sending a work team to handle the transfer. The hospital has been part of Shanghai’s public sector ever since, and as the Ruijin Hospital, it remains one

25 陶乃煌：《公济医院的新生》, (Tao Naihuang, “Rebirth of the Gongji Hospital”), 《接管上海亲历记》, (Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 389-392.
26 王希孟：《上海卫生系统接管工作的若干回忆》, (Wang Ximeng, “Some Recollections on Taking Over the Health Sector in Shanghai”), 《接管上海亲历记》, (Personal experience of taking over Shanghai) 380-384.
of the city’s best medical facilities.\footnote{朱瑞镛、燕山、龚静德:《上海市军管会征用广慈医院前后》, (Zhu Ruiyong, Yan Shan, Gong Jingde, “Before and After the Requisition of Guangci Hospital by the Shanghai Military Control Committee”), 《接管上海亲历记》, (Personal experience of taking over Shanghai), 393-402.}

Like their comrades in the education sector, the PHB cadres intensified their supervision over other institutions providing medical care which were not yet under their direct control. In the spring of 1951, the authorities in Shanghai stipulated a variety of regulations for private health care institutions, ranging from setting standard fees and working procedures to the payment of staff.\footnote{王希孟:《上海卫生系统接管工作的若干回忆》, (Wang Ximeng, “Some Recollections on Taking Over the Health Sector in Shanghai”), 《接管上海亲历记》, (Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 386.} Through these measures, the autonomy of these organizations was greatly reduced.

The CCP’s supervision was aimed at reforming the health care sector according to its vision. Efforts began as early as 1951 to indoctrinate Shanghai’s private medical practitioners with Chinese Communist ideology. They were encouraged to transfer their practices to public institutions. Facing pressure to “follow the socialist path” and to “serve the people,” many private practitioners accordingly closed their clinics and joined state-run facilities.\footnote{Ibid. 387.}

At the same time, the CCP authorities in Shanghai expanded many programs in medical schools and professional schools such as training for nurses and midwives. Almost all graduates of the programs were assigned to positions in public institutions. In addition, the authorities set up temporary training centres to recruit unemployed workers who had reached a certain level of education. These workers were then
trained in medical care work, and assigned to staff positions in public institutions.\(^{30}\) Through these means, the CCP authorities successfully absorbed Shanghai’s medical care sector, making it part of the party-state apparatus. Naturally, all who worked in the sector became state employees on the public payroll.

**Summary**

Circumstances in the sectors of education and health care in Shanghai changed greatly between 1949 and 1956. The most salient feature of the transformation is that between 1949, when various actors operating in a diversity of ways were active in both fields, and 1956, two entire sectors had become part of the apparatus of the party-state. Moreover, although the year 1953 marked a point where the trend became clear during a period of expedited change, we can also see that there was no turning point in the transition at that time. The changes discussed above began not in 1953, but at the very beginning of the CCP’s control of Shanghai.

The two sectors discussed above exemplify changes that were widespread throughout the “non-productive” sectors of society. For instance, artists in various fields, including novelists, journalists, and lawyers who had long been making a living by selling their services as free agents, were also transferred to agencies of the party-state within a few years of the CCP’s victory. It should be noted again here that Shanghai illustrates the general expansion of the party-state and the absorption of non-producing sectors. The phenomenon portrayed above was a national one.\(^{31}\)

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30 Ibid. 387.
31 严镜清: 《我与北京市的公共卫生工作》, (Yan Jingqing, “The Work on Public Health in Beijing and I”), 《城市接管亲历记》，中国文史出版社, (the compiling committee ed. *Personal Experiences*)
4.3 Absorbing the productive sectors: steps towards Socialist Transformation

The term “productive sector” here mainly refers to industry and commerce (gongshangye). This section examines a substantial change taking place through the “socialist transformation” movement: activity in the sectors of industry and commerce in cities was totally absorbed into agencies of the party-state. Given that industry and commerce together employed the lion’s share of the urban workforce, the successful absorption of this economic sector was a crucial step in the expansion of the party-state. The completion of socialist transformation in the cities created a situation in which the party-state was the sole employer and all who earned wages or salaries were employees of the state. However, this process of absorption did not begin with the socialist transformation movement. It was set in motion soon after the establishment of the PRC. Nonetheless, the completion of the program of socialist transformation marked the endpoint of the absorption of this sector. It should be clarified that enterprises in the industrial and commercial sectors had been operated by three types of actors before 1949: Nationalist government agencies, foreign-owned firms, and Chinese private entrepreneurs. The first two types have been featured in the preceding discussion. This section will focus on the third category. In the terminology of the CCP, Chinese business owners were labeled as “national capitalists.”

of Taking over cities, Chinese Wenshi Press, 1999), 408. 朱明镜: 《接管南京市文教系统和“总统府” 的回忆》, (Zhu Mingjing, “Recollections of the Takeover of the Education System and the ‘White House’”), 《城市接管亲历记》, (Personal experiences of taking over the cities), 467. The book Personal experiences of taking over the cities is a vivid and comprehensive source surveying the measures the CCP took and the dramatic social changes which ensued in cities all over the country in the first few years of the CCP rule.
Again, I will mainly use Shanghai as the example to narrate the process. Shanghai is a particularly relevant example of how changes proceeded in the economic realm, for it was China’s largest and most important industrial and commercial city in China at that time.

**The CCP’s vision of national capitalists at the time of victory**

In order to understand the absorption of the industrial and commercial sectors by the CCP party-state in the early 1950s, it is helpful, if not indispensable, to observe the CCP leaders’ view of national capitalists shortly before their national victory. After all, the CCP was essentially a Leninist party; its ideology was as powerful as religious doctrine and played a crucial role in determining the actions of the Party.

Even though there were ups and downs in terms of the harshness toward the “capitalist class” (zichan jieji), the CCP never gave up its goal of eliminating the capitalist class as one of its ultimate aims. While the CCP was struggling to survive in the countryside, it did not have much chance to deal with capitalists, who lived mainly in the large cities. This situation changed greatly in 1949, when the CCP realized that they might soon win national victory. With the occupation of every large city in succession from the north to south, clashes and cooperation between the CCP and those who were labeled as “national capitalists” by the CCP emerged. Therefore it is important to know how the CCP conceived of the roles of the national capitalists and formulated policies toward them accordingly.

Radicalism toward industry and commerce and businessmen prevailed during
1947 and 1948, when the CCP began to take control of the cities of northeastern and northern China. By immediately taking over almost every shop and enterprise in those cities, the CCP caused paralysis in local industrial and commercial sectors. Consequently, high-level party leaders adopted measures to rectify the situation, not only by restraining their cadres and followers but also by establishing new party guidelines for dealing with national capitalists. Their keywords were “use and constrain.”

In October 1948, Mao pointed out that “generally speaking, our economic policy is to constrain private capital” and explained that private capital should be led into a path of service to the nation. Mao further expressed this attitude toward the national capitalists in March 1949 at the second plenary of the seventh Central Committee, saying that, “On the one hand, the positive aspects of private capitalism would be made use of to the highest degree for a long period after the victory of the revolution so that the national economy can be developed… On the other hand, we shall impose flexible constraints on various aspects toward the development of capitalism, according to the specific conditions.”

To be sure, the “use and constrain” strategy was applied by the CCP toward national capitalists after they took control of the cities. The experiences of those who were categorized by the CCP as national capitalists was to a large extent...

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32陆和健：《上海资本家的最后十年》，甘肃人民出版社，(Lu Hejian, The Last Ten Years of Shanghai Capitalists, Gansu People’s Press, 2009), 91-92.
National capitalists are cornered economically soon after 1949

In the late 1940s, many business owners moved their assets out of mainland China as a result of the destruction caused by the civil war and mismanagement by Nationalist officials, and also because of the fear of the Communist rule. In these circumstances, the CCP decided to try to discourage the national capitalists from leaving China, anticipating that they would help to bring about economic recovery and growth. In order to achieve this goal, the CCP mobilized its networks to propagate its policies toward the national capitalists, urging them to remain and wait for “liberation.” The efforts made by the CCP appear to have been very effective, as most business owners remained in mainland China. Some of those who had moved to Hong Kong actually returned. The main message that the CCP presented to the national capitalists was that the Party would “protect national industry and trade” and that the policy was to “develop production, encourage economic prosperity, and balance the state and private sectors for the benefit of both workers and capitalists.”

Given their behaviour, it seems that the national capitalists were unaware of the CCP’s “use and constrain” policy.

The CCP appointed a few of Shanghai’s most influential capitalists of Shanghai

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35 This is not to say that the author attributes all the reasons why they returned to the mainland from Hong Kong and many other places to the efforts made by the CCP. Actually, the reasons were very complicated and some of them were apolitical. But their return at least showed that the CCP successfully made them believe that the prospective Communist rule would not be unbearable.

36 陆和健：《上海资本家的最后十年》，(Lu Hejian, The Last Ten Years of the Shanghai Capitalists), 96-100.
to real and honorary positions within the government.\textsuperscript{37} For instance, Sheng Pihua (1882-1961) was appointed as vice mayor of Shanghai and Liu Hongsheng (1888-1956) was appointed as a member of the National People’s Congress, the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and many other political organizations. Sheng was a magnate whose activities ranged widely in fields such as textiles, real estate, finance and pharmaceuticals. Liu was the famous “King of Coal” (煤炭大王) and “King of Matches” (火柴大王) yet also invested in various other businesses. However, at the same time the CCP upheld its aim to eliminate capitalism and the capitalist class. In June 1950, Mao said in his address to the Third Plenary of the Seventh Committee: “we must eliminate the national capitalist class in the future. But now we need to be good to them and allow them to stay with us, rather than to push them away. We need to struggle with them on the one hand and be good to them on the other hand.”\textsuperscript{38} This shows consistency between the CCP leadership’s key emphasis regarding the treatment of national capitalists and the implementation of the “use and restrain” policy.

To describe the policy in straightforward terms, private enterprises were subordinated into a subsidiary role by the new party-state through measures of “adjustment of capitalist industry and commerce (调整资本主义工商业) after the CCP took control. Following its takeover of the apparatus of the GMD party-state,

\textsuperscript{37} Mao said in April 1949 that the CCP should take in some NC before and after the occupation of Shanghai. See 《注意吸收自由资产阶级代表参加工作》 (1949 年 4 月 7 日), (“Pay attention to taking in representatives of Liberal Capitalists to join us” (April 7, 1949)), 《毛泽东文集》第五卷, 人民出版社, (Works of Mao, Vol.5, People’s Press, 1996), 274.

\textsuperscript{38} 《不要四面出击》 (1950 年 6 月 6 日), (“Do not attack in many directions” (June 6, 1950)), 《毛泽东选集》第五卷, 人民出版社, (Selected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol.5, People’s Press, 1977), 23.
including a number of large-scale enterprises, the CCP had become very powerful and resourceful relative to the private firms. The party-state of the CCP could definitely dominate the economy and corner the private enterprises. For their part, the private enterprises were now operating in a world dominated by the party-state rather than in a free market. They could survive only by acting as weak and obedient followers of such a strong state. Industrial enterprises, for instance, were linked and gradually subordinated to the CCP-led state through official orders for “processing, commissioned work, unified purchasing, and monopoly sales” (加工、订货、统购、包销). In processing orders, the authorities provided raw materials, received the finished goods, and paid processing fees to the enterprises. Work was commissioned according to contracts between the state and private enterprises. In “unified purchasing” important products such as cotton cloth could be sold only to state agents. In the monopoly sales system, state trading companies had the exclusive right to sell certain goods produced by the private enterprises.39

Private enterprises entering any of these four types of relationship with state agencies lost their former autonomous and equal status vis-à-vis government authorities. In the face of a powerful and large state sector, they could only survive as obedient followers, doing what they were told. Because the CCP exerted political power so effectively and exclusively, the new party-state was far more than a strong rival of the private firms. The CCP authorities readily resorted to tax levies and various other official measures for the purpose of regulating private enterprises. It

39 陆和健：《上海资本家的最后十年》，(Lu Hejian, The Last Ten Years of the Shanghai Capitalists), 140-141.
also monopolized various elements such as the raw materials and financial resources which were crucial to the operation and survival of private enterprises. For instance, all banks were nationalized, giving the CCP leaders exclusive decision-making authority in granting loans to private enterprises. Strategic resources such as cotton, electricity and fuel were also in their hands, and official decisions determined whether or not private enterprises could be supplied with these key production inputs. This was validated by what happened during the “Five Antis Movement” in 1952.

The nationalization of private banks in Shanghai began in 1949 and the process of nationalization was complete by the end of 1952. Therefore, there were very few private banks from which private enterprises could receive loans even before the Five Antis campaign began, when the CCP Centre issued the order to launch the campaign, and the directors of state banks halted lending to private firms. The remaining private banks then became very reluctant to lend to private enterprises. State enterprises, moreover, became hesitant about placing orders with the private firms. In these circumstances, the private enterprises generally began to suffer financial difficulties, and some fell into bankruptcy. Their critical circumstances vividly revealed the extreme dependency of private enterprises on the party-state.

In short, in 1949 the new CCP-led state was already very powerful and resourceful after carrying out its first round of take-over operations, along with its concomitant reorganization and consolidation. To use the CCP’s own terms, the new authorities had “grasped the lifelines of the national economy” (掌握国民经济命脉).

At the same time, the new CCP-led state assumed a strongly assertive position toward the private sector. In these circumstances, the private enterprises had no choice but to become obedient followers.

**The Five-anti and Democratic Reform Movements: weakening NC politically**

Economic measures were not the only measures taken by the CCP to subordinate the national capitalists. The capitalists also bore the brunt of direct political attacks during the first few years of CCP. The Five Antis campaign and the Democratic Reform movement were both directed against them. During these two campaigns, many capitalists lost not only managerial authority within their enterprises, but their personal influence and dignity as well.

The Five Antis movement was the first national political campaign to be directed explicitly against national capitalists. The CCP Centre issued instructions on launching the campaign on January 26, 1952, identifying five types of activity deemed to be actions against the state: bribery, tax evasion, the theft of state property, the production of low-quality products, and the divulging of sensitive information about the national economy. The authorities in Shanghai began to implement the party centre’s instructions on the Five Antis in February 1952, subjecting the national capitalists to enormous pressure during the following six months. Workers and clerks were mobilized to struggle against their bosses, who in some cases suffered violence and torture at the hands of their employees. Capitalists’ family members were also mobilized through the Women’s League and the Youth League to push their husbands
and fathers to make confessions to the party and the people. In the face of such pressure from their family members and employees in addition to representatives of the state, hundreds of Shanghai’s national capitalists chose to end their own lives during the six months of the campaign. 41

The Five Antis movement reversed the power relations that had existed in private enterprises. Under CCP leadership, authority over enterprise operations, including the handling of assets and the hiring and firing of staff, was transferred from bosses to the employees. 42 Moreover, the movement destroyed the confidence of many national capitalists that they would be able to continue their business careers. For instance, some readily confessed to having stolen money from the state, agreeing that they were guilty of pocketing whatever sums were named by their accusers, even in cases where they had in fact been perfectly honest. Realizing that their enterprises would be nationalized sooner or later, these accused business owners sensed that eventually their enterprises would be taken over by the state and hoped that the earlier they confessed, the sooner they would be free from intolerable pressures. 43 Thus the Five Antis movements of 1952 wrested managerial power from the owners of private enterprises and turned the national capitalists into a pariah group. Through this process, the private sector’s share in that national economy as a whole was greatly

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43 杨奎松: 《1952 年上海“五反”运动始末》, 《社会科学》, (Yang Kuisong, “the ‘Five-Antis’ Campaign,” 20.)
reduced. Direct political attacks following upon close supervision and financial constraints further weakened the national capitalists and established a basis for the nationalization of their enterprises, which began in 1953.

A Democratic Reform movement proceeded in Shanghai more or less at the same time as the Five Antis movement, winding down in the spring of 1953. Nominally aimed to abolish practices that were oppressive for workers, it was in fact a campaign to reshape the social networks and political loyalties of the urban workforce so as to serve the interests of the CCP. The campaign’s basic form and procedures were similar in private and state-owned enterprises. CCP authorities at various levels dispatched work-teams to enterprises that were assigned to them and these teams were responsible for leading the reforms. Their first step was usually to establish the political profiles of each and every worker in an enterprise with the help of documents that had been gathered by CCP authorities and information provided to them by party members and activists within those enterprises. They then divided workers into small teams and organized them to “speak bitterness” in sessions denouncing the “dark old society.” The workers were then coaxed and coerced to confess their political histories to the Party, as well as to disclose others’ political pasts. Those who were thus found to have joined “reactionary organizations” such as political organizations controlled by the GMD or secret societies and gangs before 1949 were dealt with accordingly.

ranging from “arrest and punishment (逮捕法办)” to simply “criticism and education (批评教育)” depending on their roles. The majority of this group was later “liberated” and only a small percentage were fired or arrested. However, the significant issue was that during this process, the work-teams became familiar with workers who could be useful as activists, and through these workers established cells of the CCP in almost every private enterprise. Thenceforth, these cells were unchallengeable power centres within the enterprises.  

The Democratic Reform campaign actually had nothing to do with democracy. It served to make the urban workforce transparent to the CCP. Through the campaign, workers’ political loyalties were transferred to the CCP. The campaign also dissolved the social networks which had formerly united the workers, replacing them with party-controlled networks. In private enterprises, employees were brought under direct CCP leadership, both in terms of political thought and organizational structure. This fact is crucial in understanding the subsequent history of organizations in the private sector in the PRC.

The Five Antis movement and the Democratic Reform in private enterprises together weakened the national capitalists and reinforced the strength of the party-state. The two campaigns paved the way to the final absorption of the private sector by the state.

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Socialist Transformation: absorbing the private sector

As may be seen in the preceding discussion, the CCP was consistent in its commitment to the revolutionary goal of eliminating capitalism and capitalists. The top CCP leaders focused only on how quickly the transformation should be completed; they did not debate whether or not the private sector should be eliminated.

Immediately after coming to power, party representatives took possession of a very substantial quantity of resources, beginning the construction of an enormous state-owned sector on this basis. At the same time, the CCP also took various measures to corner and constrain the private sector and thus weaken the national capitalists. The final absorption of the private sector was only a matter of time. In the latter half of 1953, the CCP formally laid out its “main line in the transitional period” (过渡时期总路线), as articulated by Mao Zedong. This main line stipulated the official policy of “socialist transformation” of “capitalist industry and commerce” over a relatively long period of time. However, in 1955 Mao decided to accelerate the process. In 1956, the CCP announced that the socialist transformation had succeeded and a socialist China had been successfully established.

Put simply, the process of “socialist transformation” was intended to change the industrial and commercial sector from private into public through peaceful means. “State capitalism” would grow through forms of cooperation with the private sector and the purchase of private enterprises by the state. Cooperation was strongly promoted by the CCP. In January 1954, the central government convened a national planning conference, at which it was announced that steps would be taken to turn all
capitalist industrial enterprises with more than ten workers into cooperative enterprises. According to the terms of official purchases of private enterprises, the assets and profits of private businesses were calculated and divided into shares among several parties, including those who had owned and operated the firms. “Cooperative entrepreneurs” would then receive annual payments of interest on the value of their capital for a certain number of years. In this manner the CCP-led state was eventually able to take over the enterprises at an extremely low cost. Actually, the state did not disburse any money from its coffers. The small amount of interest they promised to give the previous owners would come from profits generated by the enterprises in the coming years.

The main aim of the socialist transformation of industry and commerce was to transfer the formal ownership and managerial authority that existed in private firms from the capitalists to the state. In order to facilitate the transition, very few employees were fired and in most cases their pay remained unchanged. Capitalists were quite well treated in this transition. Although they became employees of the party-state together with their former workers, they generally continued to receive salaries adequate to maintain their former standard of living.

Summary

Observing the relationship between the CCP’s party-state and the private sector

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47 陆和健：《上海资本家的最后十年》，(Lu Hejian, the Last Ten Years of Shanghai Capitalists), 206-207.
48 《陈云文选》第 3 卷，人民出版社，(Selected Works of Chen Yun, Vol.3, People’s Press, 1995), 35. Cited from 陆和健：《上海资本家的最后十年》，(Lu Hejian, the Last Ten Years of Shanghai Capitalists), 209.
from the beginning of the Communist rule to the completion of the socialist
transformation, it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that it was a consistent
process of the absorption of the private sector by the party-state. From this perspective,
there is no reason to interpret the socialist transformation program which was
launched in 1953 as a pivotal event, for it was neither the beginning point nor a
turning point. The socialist reshaping of privately-operated industry and commerce
was no more than an integral component of the “use, restrain and eventually
eliminate” policy that the CCP developed and practiced with regard to those operating
in the private sector. It can be observed that during the whole period, the CCP never
gave up or even stepped back from this policy. On the contrary, it continuously
tightened its screws over the private sector. However, the year 1953 marked a point of
acceleration in the longer process of absorption of private enterprise into a socialist
national economy, and was a point at which the process entered its final stage.

However, the significance of the absorption of the private sector could never be
overestimated with regard to the expansion of the party-state, for this action brought
the largest proportion of the urban work force into the state sector. To express this in
another way, the lion’s share of those who were to become holders of “urban status”
belonged to this group of people, who were thus turned into “insiders” of the
party-state during the absorption of private sector, along with their dependents
(mainly descendants). Taking Shanghai as an example, the income of private
industrial firms accounted for 79.1 percent of Shanghai’s overall industrial earnings in
1949. At the end of 1952, after two years of absorption, the percentage of employees
in private industrial enterprises out of all the employees in industry in Shanghai remained 67.4 percent. At the national level, private industrial enterprises employed 1.64 million people in 1949, accounting for 54.6 percent of those employed in industry all over the country and 63.2 percent of enterprise earnings. The business share of private commercial enterprises (私营商业) was even greater than that of the private industrial firms (私营工业). Therefore it is not difficult to see how large the private sector was in 1949. Nonetheless, by 1956, the entire sector had been absorbed by the party-state, together with the millions of people who were formerly privately employed. It thus seems safe to say that the absorption of the private sector was a crucial step in the expansion of the party-state, as it is probable that the new state’s absorption of the private sector during the period from 1949 to 1956 provided a larger number of employees on the state’s payroll than those from any other sector.

4.4 Conclusion

A focus on the scale of the apparatus of the CCP-led state from 1949 to 1956, leads to the conclusion that the party-state expanded enormously, rapidly, and consistently during this period, as it continually assumed greater responsibilities and power (职权). The party-state first took over the apparatus of various enemies, mainly


50 陆和健： 《上海资本家的最后十年》，(Lu Hejian, the Last Ten Years of Shanghai Capitalists), 131.
the apparatus of the GMD’s party-state, and the economic and social organizations whose founders had come from capitalist countries. However, this is not the end of the story about the expansion of the party-state. In fact it kept expanding, as though with an insatiable appetite, as it absorbed institutions both from the public-service sector (公共服务业) and the industrial and commercial fields (工商业). The completion of the socialist reorganization of capitalist industry and commerce in 1956 can be considered as a marker of the end of the rapid and large-scale expansion of the party-state. By this point, it had reached a situation in which almost the entire wage and salary-earning urban workforce was employed in the public sector. In other words, the party-state was responsible for paying almost all urban employees. In fact, by this time the state had become the nation’s sole legal employer.

The year 1953 was not a highly significant landmark moment in the process of the expansion of the CCP state. This expansion had been well underway earlier and also continued after 1953. Moreover, the nature of the expansion, together with its dynamics and form, proceeded before and after 1953. Although the socialist transformation and the great industrialization push were indeed integral components of the expansion process, they were not basic features or turning points.

Viewed in historical perspective, the expansion of the party-state and the situation established by late 1956, by which time the absorption of all sectors in the cities was complete, were both fated at the time of the CCP’s national victory in 1949. Of course, if Mao had not pushed so hard to accelerate the process, the completion of the socialist transformation might have been delayed by several years or more. However,
it is clear that at the time of the CCP victory in 1949, an enormous expansion of the state sector had already been set in motion, leading inexorably to a situation in which all urban sectors were absorbed by the party-state.
Chapter 5  The finalization of the meaning of “urban status”

Introduction

In China during the 1950s, urban status people were insiders within the state sector, enjoying various privileges provided by the state such as secure employment, housing and health care. These privileges gave them a far higher political and social status and much more comfortable living conditions than their compatriots with rural status. For instance, they received food rations from the state during the devastating famine years from 1959 to 1962. Although the rations were far from abundant, the secure food provisions protected them from starvation. Under the circumstance that tens of millions of rural status people starved, the 30 catties of grain per month that was the standard ration for an adult male holding urban hukou status was a remarkable privilege. However, a coin has two sides. The more privileges the urban residents received from the state, the more dependent on the state they became. The state could coerce them into compliance simply by threatening to reduce or eliminate their privileges. Therefore, the state enjoyed a kind of passive coercive power over the urban population. In comparison, the population holding rural status was not under direct state control. This difference became evident later in the differences regarding implementation of the “one-child family plan” policy among the rural and urban status populations. Generally speaking, few “excess births” (超生) occurred among urban status people. Arguably, this resulted partially from the state’s passive coercive power over the urban status people. “Passive coercive power” is the power to elicit
compliance without actually meting out punishment, simply by holding the power to punish. Urban status people needed to think twice over the possible partial or full loss of privileges they had enjoyed before deciding to have an extra child. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of the “excess births” occurred among the rural-status population, who were not entitled to the privileges provided by the state and therefore had little to lose. Thus, the state had little passive coercive power over them and therefore, had no choice but to resort to active coercion, which meant meting out harsh punishments such as arrests and fines to uphold the family planning policy among the rural status population. Yet, in regard to preventing “extra births,” passive coercion is clearly much more efficient than active coercion, for the former has the ability to severely discourage people from conception while the latter is set in motion only after the conception has taken place. It is arguable that the different relationships between the state on the one hand and the rural or urban status people on the other and the ensuing different types of power the state holds upon them, namely passive coercion or active coercion, answers well the question of why most urban status people, especially those standing on higher rungs of the ladder of the differential entitlement system, compliantly abide by the “one-child” policy while large numbers of rural status people violate the policy even though they are generally permitted to have more children than their urban counterparts. Suffice it to say that the varying reactions of the rural status people and the urban status people toward the population control policy imposed by the state vividly reflect an essential difference between urban and rural status.
It is not difficult to see that “urban status” and “rural status” were socially and politically constructed rather than being there by nature. In fact, the meaning of being “rural” or “urban” was gradually created by the state in early 1950s. This chapter aims to trace the process of creating “rural status” and “urban status.” The two categories cannot be considered separately, because the creation of urban and rural status were not two parallel processes but the divergent results of one process, namely, the process of forming a patronage-dependency relationship between the state and a specific category of people. During this process, the meanings of “rural status” and “urban status” were defined simultaneously. This chapter will first deal with the issue how the party-state staffed its enormous and ever-growing apparatus. Then, it will trace how a distinctive relationship between the party-state and its “insiders” was formed. How the party-state staffed its apparatus in various ways at a very rapid pace is described, and how that during the process of the expansion of the party-state a patronage-dependency relationship was formed between the party-state and its insiders. Once the patronage-dependency relationship was formed, the construction of its meaning was finalized. Those who were within this relationship were entitled to the various benefits provided by the party-state while those who were excluded from the relationship were not entitled. The privileged insiders possessed “urban status” and the “outsiders” held “rural status.”
5.1 Staffing the growing Party-state: producing insiders

While the large party-state apparatus took on various social functions, it was necessary to recruit large numbers of people employed to operate the apparatus. How did the party-state staff its enormous and constantly growing apparatus? This section will examine the case of employment in Shanghai to illustrate the process. It traces the steps by which the party-state absorbed the urban population of Shanghai. After analyzing demographic data from the 1950s, the chapter concludes that through the expansion of the Party-state, Shanghai was turned into a habitat almost exclusively reserved for state employees and their family members.

The constituents of the Party-state before the take-over

Viewed from a macro-level, the CCP pushed the Guomindang armies out of mainland China in military campaigns that moved from north to south. Consequently, the CCP’s campaign to take over China’s cities was carried out mainly by cadres from the north. Most of the cadres who participated in the urban take-over movement remained in the cities as administrators, and were called “south-bound cadres” (nanxia ganbu 南下干部). This pattern applied to all the cities south of the Yangzi River, including Shanghai. Generally speaking, those who were (or were supposed to be) on the payroll of the CCP before the take-over in 1949 belonged to two groups, namely, the south-bound cadres and the local cadres (bendi ganbu 本地干部), who had formerly worked underground.

It should be mentioned here that a large contingent of People’s Liberation Army
forces were stationed in Shanghai and the surrounding area. There were regular
interchanges between the leaders of these armed forces and the civilian CCP members.
For example, officers who were thought to be too old for military service were
systematically turned into civilian officials at more or less equivalent ranks. Soldiers
who were demobilized were in some cases placed in secure positions in the state
sector, becoming workers in state enterprises or staff members such as chauffeurs and
janitors in government bureaus. But generally speaking, military personnel were
separated from the civil population and their registration was handled differently.
I will mainly put the military personnel aside and focus on the civil population.

The CCP gathered more than 35,000 cadres in Danyang, a small county seat in
Jiangsu province, and trained them for taking over new areas. Among them, more than
3,000 were assigned to take over Shanghai.¹ This group was the core of the new
authority in Shanghai, holding the most important positions within the party-state
apparatus and enjoying the most privileges and benefits provided by the state. To
some extent, it is not too off the mark to say that they were the real “masters” of the
new society after 1949. They played the role of social engineers receiving instructions
from planners “above” and putting them into practice across Chinese society.

The local underground cadres in Shanghai were relatively small in number and
weak in strength. Antagonism and even conflicts between south-bound cadres and
local underground cadres had already been a matter of concern for the central CCP
when the Party began to occupy new territories. Partially because of the paranoia of

¹ 蒋立: 《接管上海亲历记》, 《档案与史学》, (Jiang Li, “My personal experiences during the
takeover of Shanghai,” Archives and History, 1996, No. 6), 49-53.
leaders who insisted that south-bound cadres were more ideologically pure and reliable than the underground cadres, the Party made it clear that south-bound cadres should take the lead and local underground cadres should cooperate and assist them. This tendency locked the underground cadres throughout the newly liberated area into subordinate positions in comparison with the cadres from the old liberated areas in the new political order. Shanghai was no exception. Before the occupation of Shanghai, local underground cadres were ordered to facilitate the take-over operations and then assume auxiliary roles when the south-bound cadres arrived. Although they assumed humble positions compared to their south-bound counterparts and were more vulnerable during the political “purges” of the 1950s, they nonetheless remained part of the core group of insiders, standing on the top rungs of the social ladder in the new society.

South-bound cadres and local underground cadres formed unchallengeable new elites in the new order. The new elite groups were not very large. In Shanghai, for instance, the number of the south-bound cadres and the underground cadres could not have been greater than 10,000. The population of Shanghai at that time was slightly over five million. Therefore the ratio was about 1:500. If the new government in Shanghai was constituted solely by an elite group of 10,000 persons, then it could by no means be considered a big government, let alone an authoritarian or totalitarian

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3 I have not been able to find exact number of the underground cadres. But it is very unlikely that the underground cadres outnumbered the south-bound cadres. Therefore, I estimate that the total number of the two groups was less than 10,000.
regime. Also, if the “insiders” were constituted solely by this group 10,000 people, a
“Republic of Urbanites” could not have been established. In fact, the ranks of
“insiders” greatly expanded during and after the take-over activities.

The take-over: bringing in many new “insiders”

It would not have been possible for 10,000 CCP cadres to rule over Shanghai’s
population of five million, especially under the Communist system which took on so
many state functions and whose government was full of redundancies and
inefficiencies. In other words, the CCP had to bring in more people to work with its
cadres to carry out the functions of the state. In effect, the take-over process was not a
process of replacing former state employees with 10,000 other persons, but of adding
10,000 CCP cadres to the existing state structure. Almost all employees of the
previous state were retained in their positions and were called “retained former
personnel” (liuyong jiu renyuan 留用旧人员).

When take-over operations were launched by the CCP, officials and clerical
workers employed in the bureaucracy of the preceding state were ordered to stay on in
their positions to facilitate the take-over. After the take-over, most people in this group
were absorbed in the party-state apparatus of the CCP. There were two reasons for this
policy. First, the top leaders of the CCP considered that it would be a bad idea to
simply lay them off, for this would deny them secure incomes and cause them to feel
resentful toward the new state. For instance, Chen Yun pointed out that “if we do not
provide for these people, but simply lay them off, the local security situation will
definitely deteriorate. If they have no food to eat, they will cause harm and curse the CCP. The interests of the people will be harmed. More importantly, the CCP had just emerged from the rural base areas and moved into the cities at a rapid pace. It could not provide enough skilled cadres to replace the officials and clerks of the former government. The skills of the personnel of the former government were badly needed by the CCP. For example, there were only about eighty CCP cadres, including those who had just been released from imprisonment, who could be posted to positions in the courts of the whole Shanghai area. Therefore it was necessary to retain the people who had served in the previous judicial institutions so that the basic functions performed by these institutions could be continued.

Life was not easy for those who had served in the previous state and were retained by the CCP. To begin with, they had to endure thought-rectification and various kinds of political education. Second, most were removed from their previous positions and transferred to other positions, probably in new work units. This was how the CCP normally employed retained personnel. Third, they were very unlikely to be placed in key positions and were vulnerable to criticism during political campaigns. For instance, most targets in the Three Antis campaign were people

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5 《上海解放三十五周年文史资料纪念专辑》，上海人民出版社，(Collection of historical materials in memory of the thirty-fifth anniversary of liberating Shanghai, Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 1984),124. Cited from 范小方、常清煜：《新中国建立前后对旧政权公务人员的安置——以南京、上海为例》(Fan Xiaofang and Chang Qingyu, “Settling down the public servants of the previous state around the time of the establishment of the PRC: taking Nanjing and Shanghai as examples”).
retained from service in the former government. However, once they could survive the political campaigns and managed to stay on the positions assigned to them by the CCP, no matter how humble and powerless their positions were, such employees were members of the party-state apparatus and thus held “urban status.” Suffice it to say that the overwhelming majority of the retained officials and clerks successfully made it into the insiders’ group. To take Shanghai as an example, there were more than 49,000 officials and clerks (市政府机构职工) working in the previous government departments. Around 95 percent stayed on their positions in Shanghai and waited for the CCP to deal with them and deploy them (听候处理和录用). Eventually, the majority became cadres of the PRC after a series of party-led educational and thought-rectification activities.

The official narrative of the CCP regarding the retention of former government officials and clerks is quite self-contradictory. On the one hand, the CCP accused the GMD of employing too many people within a swollen state bureaucracy (机构臃肿，人浮于事). Yet on the other hand, CCP leaders proudly praised themselves for retaining and eventually absorbing the overwhelming majority of the employees of the former state, in addition to placing great numbers of their own cadres in government service. Considering these two factors together, it may be safely concluded that the party-state of the CCP was much larger than that of the Nationalist

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6 杨奎松: 《毛泽东与“三反”运动》，《史林》，（Yang Kuisong, “Mao Zedong and the Three Antis Campaign”, Historical Review, 2006, No.4）. 51-69. The propaganda organ of the Central CCP explicitly stated during the three-anti campaign that 99 percent of the corrupt cadres were the retained personnel who served in the previous state.

It should be emphasized that nearly 50,000 of those retained as noted above was only a small proportion of the overall retained personnel in Shanghai, for this number represented those employed in government departments only. As has been explained in Chapter 4, the take-over action of the CCP was not limited to the government sector, but covered a great variety of non-governmental institutions. This meant that the number of retained personnel in Shanghai who worked in the apparatus of the Communists and were “insiders” of the new party-state was far greater than 50,000.

The take-over operation was conducted by systems (按系统接收). When they approached Shanghai in 1949, the CCP Military Control Commission (CMC) divided the take-over operation into four parts and organized its departments accordingly. The four sections were: 1. military, 2. political, 3. financial and economic, and 4. cultural and educational (军事，政务，财经，文教). The 50,000 retained government personnel were taken into the new apparatus by the political department. Most of the other retained people were brought into the new state by the financial and economic department.

The financial and economic department of the CMC took over 411 institutions, including banks, factories and warehouses. More than 153,000 people who worked in these institutions were taken into the new state system. Because the institutions they

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8 周林：《接管上海大事记实》，上海市政协文史资料委员会：《接管上海亲历记》, (Zhou Lin, “A Truthful account of the big events in taking over Shanghai”, Personal experiences of taking over Shanghai), 24.
9 Ibid, 22.
10 Ibid, 24; and《上海劳动志》编纂委员会：《上海劳动志》, 上海社会科学院出版社, (The compiling committee, Accounts of Labour History in Shanghai, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 1998), 133.
worked for were turned into state-owned and state-run institutions (全民所有制单位), they accordingly became employees of the state and were thus on the government payroll. They formed the nucleus of the first group of “insiders” in Shanghai.

The cultural and educational department of the CMC took over far fewer retained people compared with the financial and economic department. However it also took over a great many institutions and retained a large number of employees. Detailed numbers are shown in the following table.

**Table 9. Institutions and people taken over by the Cultural and Educational Department**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sectors</th>
<th>Number of institutions</th>
<th>Number of retained employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher educational institutions</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public non-tertiary educational institutions</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>5,517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media and publishing houses</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>2,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature and arts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>600</strong></td>
<td><strong>10,855</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 周林, 《接管上海大事记实》, 上海市政协文史资料委员会: 《接管上海亲历记》, (Zhou Lin, “A Truthful account of the big events in taking over Shanghai”, Personal experiences in taking over Shanghai), 24.)

The cultural and educational department of the CMC took over 600 institutions and brought in nearly 11,000 people who previously worked in those institutions. Thus, the total number of the civilian personnel retained by the Communists in Shanghai was around 213,000.11 These people worked in institutions or units (单位)

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11 The political department brought in more than 49,000. The financial and economic department received 153,000. The cultural and educational department took over nearly 11,000. The number
owned and directly run by new government and thus became its employees. The party-state was responsible for taking care of them and their family members.

In short, the party-state included more than 220,000 “insiders” in Shanghai soon after it finished its take-over operation in mid-1949. Of these, more than 210,000 were employees of the previous state and were retained by the new state, while around 10,000 were cadres of the CCP who formed the elite group in Shanghai in the new era.

**Nationalization: consistently bringing in “insiders”**

Given that there were around five million people in Shanghai when the CCP took over the city, 220,000 “insiders” accounted for only 4.4% of the total population in the city. This was not a very large percentage. If the size of the insiders’ group had remained at this level, then the boundary between insiders and outsiders would have cut across the population of Shanghai residents. In other words, the majority of the people who lived in Shanghai would have remained outsiders. In that case, we would not have seen the huji system that actually developed.

The scope of the insiders’ category was greatly expanded in the course of large-scale nationalization operations during the following several years. The forms of nationalization operations could be divided into two types. One type was the growth of the state units, including the expansion of the existing units and the establishment of new units. Another type was the transformation of units which had not been retained by the military department is not available. But in this discussion, I leave the military personnel aside, and in any case it is unlikely that the military department of the Military-control Committee could be very large.
previously owned and run by the state into parts of the state sector. In both cases, expansion of the state sector inevitably brought more and more people into the ranks of the insiders. The further nationalization was pushed, the more “insiders” were produced. When nationalization efforts eventually succeeded in absorbing all urban institutions, it naturally meant that almost all the people who worked in these urban-based organizations were turned into insiders of the Party-state. Actually, this was what exactly happened in Shanghai and other cities in the early 1950s. With the development of nationalization campaigns, the percentage of state employees out of the total population in the cities became larger and larger. After 1956, almost every urban resident who was employed was employed by the state, for other employers were no longer allowed to continue operations. Eventually, the cities became mainly the habitat of state employees and their family members.

The experiences of people who worked in the commercial and restaurant services sector (商业和饮食业) vividly illustrate the process of nationalization in the cities. In Shanghai in 1950, only 14,700 state sector employees worked in the commercial and restaurant services sector (商业和饮食业), while 385,900 people worked in the same field but in the private sector. In 1956, the number of state employees in this field had grown to 368,100 and the number of private sector workers in this field had fallen to

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12 The party-state became the only employer in China in the early 1950s. There were very few exceptions. Nursery maids in ordinary families were a exception, but nursery maids who were assigned to serve high-ranking officials were state employees. There were also some illegal occupations which were severely suppressed by the state. But generally speaking, all who had jobs were employees of the state. To “have a job” (有工作) in Chinese had a specific connotation. People who were self-employed, such as vendors, and ordinary domestic servants could not claim that they had jobs (有工作), because that term meant being officially employed by the state. Even temporary workers (临时工) in state enterprises could not say that they had jobs. Peasants in the countryside likewise did not have jobs (没有工作).
The change resulted mainly from the efforts of the state to nationalize all economic sectors including this field, and turned previously private practitioners into state employees all the way through the early 1950s, especially during the socialist transformation period. This is to say that there were nearly 386,000 people who made a living on the market in commercial and restaurant services (商业和饮食业) in 1950 while in 1956 most of those people had become state employees whose wages were paid by the state, even though they did the same work and served the same customers as before. In other words, the overwhelming majority of the workers in the commercial and restaurant services sector (商业和饮食业) were absorbed into the rank of insiders of the new state, which provided them with all their basic necessities as well as certain benefits and privileges.

After completion of the public-private cooperation movement in 1956, the number of employees in state-owned and state-run units in Shanghai totaled 1,728,000, accounting for 88.2% of all employees. The remaining 230,300 people were working in collective units (集体所有制单位).  


14 《上海劳动志》编纂委员会: 《上海劳动志》，上海社会科学院出版社，(Compiling committee, Accounts of Labour History in Shanghai, Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 1998), 126.
Table 10. State employees and the total population of Shanghai (1949-1958)

*Unit: 1,000 persons*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>集体所有制单位 (Collectively owned units)</th>
<th>全民所有制单位 (State-owned)</th>
<th>Population of state employees</th>
<th>Population of Shanghai</th>
<th>Ratio %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Around 220.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,029.160</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>220.6</td>
<td>241.4</td>
<td>4,927.265</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5,521.977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>326.3</td>
<td>5,726.305</td>
<td>7.22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>109.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,152.429</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>143.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,627.050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>149.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,231.027</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>230.3</td>
<td>1,728.0</td>
<td>6,349.365</td>
<td>30.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>371.2</td>
<td>1,746.6</td>
<td>6,896.948</td>
<td>30.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>305.8</td>
<td>2,232.9</td>
<td>7,508.035</td>
<td>33.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: the table above is based on a number of different sources and includes necessary revisions. First, I assume that the term 职工 (staff and workers) in the original forms refers to group of state employees. But actually the number of state employees was very likely slightly larger than the number of 职工, because cadres (干部) were usually not counted as 职工. However, the disparity should not be large enough to affect the analysis here. Second, I have cross-checked the numbers in the two forms and omitted obviously incorrect numbers and highly unlikely numbers from the diagram found in the source 《上海劳动志》. Third, the number of state employees in 1949 is based on my own calculation as explained in detail in the previous section. The number of state employees in 1950 comes from pages 346-347 and page 350 of 《上海工运志》

As may be seen from the diagram above, the percentage of state employees in Shanghai within the total population in the city shot up from 4.37 percent in 1949 to 33.81 percent in 1958. These numbers are enough to prove that urban status people in
Shanghai were mainly state employees and their family members. The reason is twofold. First, the total population of Shanghai which I have presented here included rural-status people living in the suburban areas of Shanghai, who numbered from several hundred thousand to more than one million after several counties were placed under the jurisdiction of Shanghai.\textsuperscript{15} This means that the percentage of state employees out of the urban status people was actually much higher than the numbers shown in the table above. Second, the five to seven million people who lived in Shanghai during this time were generally not single men and women; most people lived with family members including dependents such as the elderly and the young. This is to say that the percentage of state employees within the total number of working-age urban hukou holders was even higher. In addition, it is known that many families included unemployed working-age members holding urban hukou (usually married women). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the great majority of families living in Shanghai included members who were state employees. In other words, Shanghai became mainly the habitat of state employees and their family members. Only a small number of people who held urban hukou status in Shanghai did not have family members who were insiders of the party-state.

Of course, there were some families in Shanghai that did not include any members employed by the state. Generally speaking, these families formed the least privileged group in the city, receiving the least material benefits and standing in the lowest social rank. Actually, people in this situation were likely to fall into the

\textsuperscript{15} I did not find the exact numbers of urban-hukou holders or rural-hukou holders. Otherwise, the data could be more accurate and the analysis more direct. But I am confident that more accurate data would support my argument here.
category of “undesirable” residents and thus become subject to official expulsion efforts. They were constantly mobilized by the state to move out of the city and settle down elsewhere, especially in rural areas. They could also have the opportunity to be absorbed by the party-state when times were good. The existence of such families did not change the nature of the essence of urban status. First, such families were not very numerous. As the data in the diagram above demonstrates, most working-age urban hukou holders were employed in the state sector. Thus, there were not many families whose members did not include a state employee. This may be corroborated with empirical knowledge about that period. Most urban hukou families had members who “held jobs” (有工作). Second, the basic benefits and privileges of urban hukou status were provided to this group through neighbourhood committees (街道居委会). For instance, ration coupons were distributed to them even during the famine during which tens of millions people starved to death (the overwhelming majority of the victims being rural-hukou holders).

The situation that cities became the habitat mainly of state employees and their family members resulted mainly from the tendency of the new state at that time to keep enlarging itself. There was a momentum and a set of dynamics that led the new state to continuously seek expansion, employing more people and producing more goods. On the one hand, in that period the CCP leaders seemed to believe that the larger the state sector, the better. They equated the expansion of the Party-state with

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16 Refer to Chapter 3, “Expelling undesirables from the cities.”
the growth of “collective ownership” (公有) and equated “collective ownership” with socialism and communism. Thus, they constantly and intentionally sought the expansion of the state sector, which meant bringing as many as people as possible into the apparatus and agencies of the Party-state. On the other hand, the CCP propagated the belief that unemployment was a negative aspect of the old society that had resulted from exploitative social systems such as capitalism. CCP leaders made declarations claiming that they led a superior society in which every able person could make his or her contribution to society. Therefore the new authorities made strong efforts to tackle the issue of unemployment and worked toward completely eliminating the phenomenon of unemployment. Even though they were not completely successful, unemployment rates were extremely low after they took control. Thus ideological commitment helps to explain why the CCP made an effort to absorb as many urban residents as possible into its apparatus, especially during the early 1950s when both the party leaders and those under their authority were optimistic about their prospects of success in building a socialist society.

Summary

Analysis of the demographic data of Shanghai in the 1950s should demonstrate clearly to anyone, no matter what political stance or academic overview an observer

18 While creating more urban jobs through development of the economy, the CCP also locked labour into the rural sector. In addition, people shared positions. In other words, while the official employment rate was reduced, invisible unemployment (隐形失业) and underemployment (不充分就业) increased.

19 Actually the party-state kept making this effort throughout the Mao period. Even now, the remains of this tendency may be seen from time to time. Authorities in each city pursue the same aim. In order to employ more local hukou people, some local authorities adopt a discriminatory employment policy, granting local hukou holders priority in job assignments, or, in some cases, making local hukou status a prerequisite for certain positions.
happens to hold in evaluating China during the 1950s, that Shanghai was mainly
turned into a habitat for state employees and their family members with the rapid
expansion of the state sector through successive waves of social reorganization. This
fact is crucial in understanding the nature of the huji system and the problem of how it
came into being, for reasons which I will elaborate on in the following two sections.

It is unlikely that Shanghai was an exception to the general pattern of state
expansion during the early PRC period. Even though further case studies should be
carried out before a sound conclusion may be reached, I am inclined to regard the
pattern seen in Shanghai as a national one rather than a special feature of Shanghai.

5.2 Treatment (待遇): The substantial element creating differences between
insiders and outsiders

If people with rural hukou and urban hukou enjoyed the same treatment, there
would be no reason to be concerned about the huji system as a major issue. The
fundamental problem is the great difference in terms of treatment, with urban hukou
holders receiving many privileges and benefits while the rural hukou holders receive
very few. How did this situation come to be? This section aims to tackle the issue of
differential treatment. Shanghai continues to be the focus of attention. I will trace the
process through which urban-hukou holders received the various privileges and
benefits which differentiated them from their rural counterparts. Generally speaking,
during the whole history of the PRC, state employees were divided into two groups:
“cadres” and “workers” (干部编制 and 工人编制). This remains true today. The two
groups are administered separately, with the cadres managed by personnel
departments (人事部门) and workers by labour departments (劳动部门).\footnote{It is worth mentioning that “worker” here has some distinctive meaning in the contemporary Chinese context. In English, the word “worker” can refer to any person who works. But in the contemporary Chinese context, “worker” only refers to someone who is recognized by the state as a “worker”. Usually, workers are ordinary labourers in the state sector where the majority of state employees are found. Thus their status is obviously far lower than “cadre.” For instance, in factories, technicians are not “workers” but “cadres.” In universities, some staff members are “workers” and some others are “cadres”. Therefore, most units (单位) have both departments of personnel (人事科) and labour (劳动科).}

Accordingly, I will examine the treatment that cadres and workers respectively received. I contend that the privileges that the party-state provided for the insiders, who were cadres and workers, defined the meaning of being “urban” in the huji system.

**Treatment of cadres (干部待遇)**

The treatment accorded to cadres remains an extremely sensitive issue in PRC. This partly explains why there are very few papers published in China on the issue. Actually the topic is a key to understanding the function of the new CCP-led state. I argue that from the outset the CCP established a distinctive relationship with its cadres. It took unlimited responsibility for cadres in return for their unconditional compliance. Thus, while I use the term “employment” to refer to the relationship between the core insiders and the party-state, mainly because I cannot find a more accurate term in English, it is important to notice that this “employment” is very different from other types of employment. In general, employment is based by a formal or informal contract between two parties who have come to an agreement and perhaps even signed a formal document specifying the terms in various clauses. In other words, it is a limited relationship in which both sides are free to terminate the
relationship. To state this in another way, employees and employers make limited contractual commitments to one another. However, the employment relationship between cadres and the party-state under the CCP is not a relationship of this sort. The two sides make unlimited commitments to one another. While the party-led state takes responsibility to care for almost every aspect of a cadre’s life, the cadre, in return, complies entirely with the superior’s instructions and policies.

This analysis of the cadre’s position may be supported with two facts. First, in most western countries, when a person is assigned to a position in a government bureau or agency, this is described as “the person is employed by the government” (受雇于政府 or 在政府里找到一份工作). In the PRC, however, when a person gets a job within the party-state, people would never say that he or she had been “hired by the party-state” (受雇于党国 or 在党国里找到一份工作). Rather, this event is usually described as someone becoming “a person of the party-state” (变成了公家的人, 变成了国家的人). The linguistic differences accurately reflect the different nature of the employment. The Chinese phrase indicates a deeper personal affiliation. Second, the disputes between government employees and their employers is a common thing in most western countries. Strikes, protests and demonstrations are nothing new. But in the whole history of the PRC, such disputes have never occurred and are very unlikely to be seen even in the future if the political framework does not change significantly. To be sure, disputes between employees and employers demonstrate that both sides are independent and are aware of their independence. The lack of such disputes points in two directions: either the employees are well treated and have
nothing to complain about, or employees have no means of taking issue with their employers. It seems that both these possibilities are true in China. Not only have cadres been well treated by the CCP-led state, but because of their deep affiliation, they lack the resources to protest against any aspect of their treatment. In essence, the relationship is one of patronage and dependency.

In a party-state system, it does not make much sense to calculate the salary or income of cadres. The most important reason for this is that what they receive from the party-state can hardly be put categorized as “salary” or “income,” for much of what they receive cannot be measured in monetary terms. In addition, quantitative measures of their treatment vary from one period to another and from one place to the next. Also, numbers do not display differential treatment unless they are compared with those of the outsiders. Thus, I have not attempted to figure out how many products and services cadres have consumed in each period. It seems more useful to examine the distinctive relationship between the party-state (also referred to by the cadres themselves as “the Organization” 组织) and the cadres and to compare the gains of cadres with those of the ordinary people in a qualitative way. I contend that cadres have been the most privileged group in the party-state system. They have gained the most, even considering that the internal structure of the group itself is highly stratified.

Professional revolutionaries and institutional arrangements

It would be interesting and illuminating to examine how different revolutions
around the world have been financed, and how the agents of revolution have been supported materially. From the outset, the Communist revolution in China followed a Soviet Russian model in terms of funding to support revolutionary activity. Both the Bolshevik and CCP revolutions were led by professional revolutionaries. Thus, the revolutionaries had to be provided for by the revolutionary organizations. The revolutionaries in the two revolutions had no occupations other than working toward revolution—they were professional revolutionaries. As a result, they had no resources of income beyond what was provided by the revolutionary organization. This is a key issue in understanding the social changes imposed by those revolutions, simply because this feature was a strong determinant of the institutional arrangements in those societies. To be sure, once set in motion, the revolution had to support its sons and daughters, that is, the professional revolutionaries. Otherwise, the fire of revolution could hardly continue burning for long. Thus to take good care of professional revolutionaries was the first and the most fundamental step to keep a revolution moving. However, to support activists, there was no alternative but to develop institutional arrangements which would divert significant flows of resources to feed and house them. This feature was far-reaching simply because with the success of the revolution, the institutional arrangement became the core of the new social order, with other arrangements such as the legal system, political ethos and cultural tastes, adapting to fit with the revolutionaries’ institutional arrangements.

To show its institutional impact in relief, the Communist revolution in China may be compared to other revolutions which were not led by full-time activists. For
instance, in the case of the revolutionary struggle for independence of the United States, the leaders had regular occupations as lawyers and entrepreneurs. Leading the revolution was not their profession but a role assumed on a temporary basis. After the revolution had been completed and a new order was established, they generally went back to their former activities. In other words, although they founded a new state the state itself did not assume responsibility for taking good care of them and their family members. They were on their own like ordinary citizens in the country they established.

It is also worth mentioning that many early presidents of the United States ended up in poverty after retirement. The state they had once led was not obligated to provide for their needs because they had formerly served as presidents. For them, being President of the United States was more like doing other jobs, with negotiated payment and benefits. Although regulations were later established to provide support to retired presidents, this was in nature more like a social security measure than a commitment to assume unlimited responsibility. If we turn back to the Soviet Union or China or any other Communist-led country, it turns out that a similar phenomenon has never occurred. Professional revolutionaries have been well provided for by the states that their revolutions brought about, except in cases when a revolutionary organization itself happened to turn against some of its members in a “purge.”

How did this system of institutional support come about? The CCP was installed under the guidance of Communists from the Soviet Union and thus borrowed many organizational features from the latter, including the phenomenon of professional
revolutionaries. The Party called on the revolutionaries to devote all they had, including their lives, to the revolutionary cause and thus discouraged them from thinking that they and the Party were independent entities. The CCP certainly had a marked tendency to regard its cadres as tools. For a long time, it actually promoted the idea that its members should be the “screws of the revolution” (革命的螺丝钉).

The CCP’s human tools were not expected to manage their own businesses or support their families through regular occupations. The party developed a provisioning system (供给制) to support its cadres during the long struggle to pursue national power. Under this system, cadres did not need to worry about making a living or the survival of their families. Everything they needed was provided by the “organization.” Housing, clothing and food supplies were all distributed by the organization. The organization also set up institutions to provide services such as health care, education and child-caring. An observer who visited Yan’an after the Sino-Japanese war and before the civil war discovered that CCP cadres were supported by a provisioning system. He noted that their necessities, including writing paper for intellectuals and sanitary napkins for menstruating women, were all provided “publicly” (公家).

Limited mainly by the resources that the party organization had at hand, most

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21 The CCP’s first Secretary, Chen Duxiu, once tried to avoid having professional revolutionaries. He insisted that Party members should have regular occupations. However, he soon realized that this was not feasible. Therefore, he immediately abandoned his idea and followed the path of the Russian Communists, becoming a professional revolutionary.

cadres lived frugally, especially compared with the lifestyle they later enjoyed. From time to time, the fact that they did not live luxuriously during that period was used by the CCP as well as some pro-Communist observers as evidence of the virtue of the early Chinese Communist movement or of the good social order they had established.\(^23\) However, this way of understanding is problematic. To begin with, the distribution of necessities did not cover ordinary people living under the regime, but only its cadres. In other words, the boundary between insiders and outsiders was already firmly fixed. The CCP organization, which acted as a state authority in the territory under its control, did not assume responsibility equally toward insiders and outsiders in its system of distributing resources. Furthermore, the fact that most cadres were living a relatively simple life was not significant, for this was mainly the result of the scarcity of resources under the control of the organization. Despite the frugality, there were no checks and balances to prevent the CCP organization from privileging insiders over outsiders. This is to say that when there were increasingly abundant resources under the control of the organization, the gap in living conditions between insiders and outsiders would be likely to become larger and larger, if only such a mechanism of the CCP remained the same. Unfortunately, this was proved correct by the history of the PRC and led to the distinctive huji system.

In the early 1950s after the CCP won its national victory, the party transformed its provisioning system into a salary system. Cadres were paid salaries rather receiving all goods and services directly. However, the change of form did nothing to change

\(^{23}\) The CCP called on its cadres to learn from this experience and to promote the spirit of 艰苦朴素 from time to time. Currently, the Maoist leftists tended to use this point to attack Deng’s reform, arguing that corruption among cadres resulted from the reforms while they once lived a virtuous life.
the basic dynamics of the party-state system. That is, the organization, now a
party-state, distributed resources to insiders at the expense of outsiders. The problem
has continued and even worsened in recent years because of the state has gained
control of more resources while the mechanisms which prioritize insiders over
outsiders have remained unchanged. For instance, China’s Vice Minister of Hygiene
reported in 2006 that over eighty percent of the public resources allocated to medical
care in all China were used to serve cadres, especially high-ranking cadres.24

**Cadres: the most privileged group of the PRC**25

The relationship between the CCP organization and its cadres continued after the
CCP won national power. During the whole history of the PRC, being a cadre has had
far more significance than simply holding a government job. Cadres have been
unchallenged as the most privileged social group, enjoying the highest priority in
terms of acquiring privileges and benefits provided by the state.

Even according to recognized treatment, cadres have received far more from the
state than the non-cadres did, let alone outsiders who held rural hukou status. Thus,
compared with non-cadres, especially outsiders, cadres lived very comfortably and
enjoyed a much higher standard of living. First, after the elimination of the private

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25 “Cadre” here refers to the formal state cadres who were paid by the state. In the literature on contemporary China, grass-root leaders such as the village heads and party secretaries are also called “cadres.” However, they are more peasants than state cadres. The distinction between the two is very clear and salient. In this discussion, “cadre” only refers to state cadres.
sector during the mid-1950s, the CCP-led state was the only legal employer which could provide secure employment. Therefore, only the insiders of the party-state could earn official or state-level salaries (国家工资). Outsiders, mainly those of rural status, did not have a chance to earn state salaries, and there were no alternatives available to them which could equal state salaries.\^26 Generally speaking, a cadre’s salary was at the highest level. As a result, cadres became a group of people who received the highest cash payment while the majority of the population received very few cash payments of any kind. What is more, cadres received a great variety of non-monetary benefits and privileges which were also out of the reach of non-cadres, especially those of rural status. A great variety of benefits such as housing, health care, retirement pensions, and education and even employment for cadres’ children were arranged partially or wholly by the state. All these non-monetary benefits and privileges were also out of the reach of those holding rural hukou. What is portrayed here is only a partial picture of the gap between ordinary cadres and those lacking insiders’ benefits. The high-ranking cadres of the party-state, such as those above the prefectural level, led far more luxurious lives than the ordinary cadres. They were provided by the party-state with all the goods they needed, as well as the services of secretaries, cooks, guards, drivers, and medical specialists.

In addition to recognized treatment, the cadres acquired wide-ranging benefits and privileges which were not recognized.\^27 Because public power is not under the

\^26 There were quite a few jobs outside the state sector in Mao’s time. For instance, nursemaids and other domestic servants always existed in cities and earned salaries paid by their employers. However neither their pay nor benefits were comparable with state salaries.

\^27 Here, I use the terms “recognized” and “unrecognized,” rather than “legal” and “illegal”. This was because there was has been no consistent rule of law in the PRC. Even the Constitution has been
supervision of ordinary people, cadres at various levels in China have all held far more power than public officials in democratic countries. Their privileges prove that, "power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Cadres at various levels in the PRC have tended to act to benefit themselves and their superiors using their unchecked and unsupervised public authority. For instance, a middle-ranking cadre in charge of education in a prefecture may lower the requirements for entrance to good schools for the children of cadres under his supervision. Moreover, cadres are even more likely to curry favour with their bosses, such as members of the Standing Committee of the CCP in a particular prefecture, by setting entry standards at even lower levels for the children and relatives of their superiors. Again, this kind of officially unrecognized treatment, which cadres receive by using public power to serve their own interests, is out of reach of those holding rural status.

It is worth mentioning that all state cadres have been urban hukou holders, no matter where they originally come from and where they are posted, no matter whether they have worked in agriculture or in other sectors. In fact, a large proportion of the cadres in the 1950s were from the countryside. This was because the CCP won the national victory based on its rural bases and then transferred large numbers of cadres from the rural bases to assume administrative authority across the entire country. Moreover, many cadres worked in the countryside and engaged in agricultural production. However, all these factors did not hinder their entitlement to various revised fundamentally several times within a short period of time. Something that was legal at one time becomes "illegal" a few years later. However, the "recognized" benefits tend to be "legal" while those that are "unrecognized" are more likely to be "illegal".

28 People trace the origin of this phrase to a letter written by Lord Acton (1834-1902) in 1887.
privileges and benefits provided by the state, access to which was denied to non-cadres, especially to those holding rural hukou status.

Summary

Thanks to the success of a revolution carried out by professional revolutionaries, China’s state cadres (国家干部) became the most privileged group in the distribution of goods and services by the state. If a person became a state cadre and was not purged by the party-state, all his or her needs thereafter were provided by the state and guaranteed with resources controlled by the state. The benefits included housing, medical care, retirement pensions, and numerous other privileges that were not recognized officially, in addition to a good salary. Because the state was the only employer which could provide such treatment, those holding rural hukou had no access to such benefits and privileges from alternative channels. Furthermore, all state cadres were granted urban hukou status by the state, excluding rural hukou holders from access to the benefits and privileges provide by the state by equating the privileges with urban hukou. Thus, the gap between state cadres, who constituted the more elite group of those holding urban hukou, and those who held rural hukou status was not only huge but also unbridgeable.

This distinctive relationship between the party-state and its cadres may be illuminated further through a comparison. In democratic countries, government employees may also be subject to layoffs, paralleling the experiences of employees in other sectors. This is because government also experience times of strained resources.
In the PRC, in contrast, the party-state controls almost everything in the country. Thus, although cruel political purges occur, cadres are never laid off. Cadres and non-cadres alike cannot imagine the possibility of layoffs in the party-state sector. Furthermore, government employees in democratic countries may resign from their positions and take up other occupations. In Mao’s China, cadres did not voluntarily leave the state sector. Even in the 1980s after the Reform and Opening policies were implemented, it seemed very strange for a cadre to resign from official service. In addition, as noted above, government employees’ protests about issues such as salaries and working condition, which are not rare in democratic countries, do not occur in the PRC. Seen in this way, it is not difficult to understand that the relationship between the party-state and its cadres in the PRC is different from that between government and government employees in democratic countries. The CCP-led state in China is highly paternalistic, monopolizing almost all resources and opportunities and generously providing patronage to its cadres. As a result, cadres and the holders of rural hukou have become extremely unequal in relation to the virtually omnipotent party-state. It is no wonder that their treatment has varied so dramatically.

**Treatment of workers (工人待遇)**

The majority of those holding urban status holders have been workers and their family members rather than cadres and their family members. The cadres constituted the more privileged group. It is a common rule in human experience that the more

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29 In this section, the term “worker” is used in the sense of status. The ordinary labourers before 1949 in Shanghai were workers in the occupational sense. But through the social reorganization policies, some were turned into “workers” under the socialist regime in the sense of status.
privileged a group is, the smaller its size. The less privileged workers and their family members formed the main body of the urban status population. In the CCP’s terminology, they were referred to as the “masses” (群众). Among the urban hukou holders, the masses (群众) outnumbered cadres (干部). But compared with the distance with the rural status people, the urban masses were far closer to the urban-status cadres. Both groups belonged to the privileged population in relation to the party-state and enjoyed a great variety of benefits provided by the state while the rural status holders were excluded from all such benefits. Like the cadres, the living of the “workers” was secured and guaranteed by the state. This section examines how this situation came into being. It argues that the former group of workers was turned into “workers” within the party-state apparatus and thus was entitled to various privileges and benefits provided by the party-state. This process lifted them above their former peers, who had been ordinary people, including peasants.

By exploring the experiences of workers in Shanghai, I show that the treatment accorded to ordinary labourers in cities was generally improved during the process of “absorption” in which they were turned from workers into state workers. They were guaranteed various privileges by the state that were denied to those who held rural status.

Salary, welfare and privileges: the treatment of urban labourers

Taking ordinary labourers in the cities as one group, the early 1950s was

30 The former “worker” in this sentence is used in an occupational sense. Anyone who works in a factory is a “worker”. The Latter “worker” in the sentence is a status term. Only those who recognized as “workers” and were entitled to the associated privileges were “workers” in this sense. In other words, factory workers might not be “workers.”
definitely a golden time. During these few years, their treatment improved greatly. The improvement was demonstrated not only by the visible gains they acquired such as salary, insurance and working conditions. More importantly, it was reflected through the formation of the relationship between this group and the party-state. Like the cadres, the “workers” which most labourers ended up as were clients in relation to the patronage of the party-state, enjoying a great variety of privileges provided by the state.

In terms of wages, the most salient feature was that before 1949 wages were mainly determined by employers independently, while after 1949 the state played an increasingly active role in setting salary levels for employers and employees alike. After the nationalization of industry and commerce was complete, a unified set of salary arrangements was instituted by the state. During this process, the salary for most employees who later became “state workers” was increased. At the same time, they received more insurance and welfare, together with lifetime job security (终身雇佣). Later, employment for their sons and daughters was also provided (安排子女就业). Thus, the gap in living standards, both in material terms and social status, between workers and the rural population was greatly enlarged. The enlargement of the gap between workers, who constituted the majority of the urban people, and their former peers, the peasants, was the most essential and final step in constructing the real meaning of urban hukou status. Arguably, the creation of a large gap in standards

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31 Before 1949, the state and sometimes the associations and guilds also played a role in setting up salary schemes. Generally speaking, however, it was the enterprises themselves that determined salaries. See 《上海劳动志》编纂委员会：《上海劳动志》，(The compiling committee, Accounts of Labour History in Shanghai, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 1998), 258.
of living between state workers and peasants was a key point in the formation of the huji system. The point is illustrated below with a look at one enterprise in Shanghai.

The Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company (南洋兄弟烟草公司) was a typical private company in China before 1949. It was established in 1905 in Hong Kong and the company moved its headquarters to Shanghai a decade later. Before the Japanese invasion, the company was controlled by the GMD state. In 1949, it was taken over by the CCP. In 1951, the company was turned into a cooperative venture (公私合营). In other words, it was absorbed by the state sector. The experiences of the firm’s workers are described to illustrate the substantial changes taking place for ordinary labourers in the 1950s.

Although a quantitative method is suitable for comparing income, the various benefits and privileges mentioned above, such as lifetime employment and the arrangement of employment for one’s descendants, cannot be measured quantitatively. Closer examination of the experiences of ordinary workers is necessary to show the dramatic elevation of living standards for ordinary workers during the 1950s.

The real wages of ordinary workers in the Nanyang Brothers Tobacco enterprise rose significantly during the 1950s. The average monthly wage of a worker was equivalent to 275 catties of rice between 1933 and 1936. From 1951 to 1956, the average month salary of a common worker was equivalent to 565 catties of rice. Figures for the period from 1937 to 1950 are not available. However, they could not

32 中国科学院上海经济研究所、上海社会科学院经济研究所编: 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》，(Chinese Academy of Science Shanghai Economy-researching center and Economy-researching center of Shanghai Academy of Social Science, Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company, Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 1958), 1-3.
33 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》，(Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 718.
be much higher than the level of 1933, simply because the entire economy staggered on the edge of collapse during this period because of the Sino-Japanese war and the ensuing civil war. For instance, the monthly salary of an ordinary worker in 1948 was equivalent to only 76 catties of rice.\footnote{Ibid, 719.}

Wage increases were just the tip of the iceberg. Most of the substantial improvements in the lives of urban labourers were non-monetary, including various welfare benefits. At Nanyang, various welfare benefits were provided to the workers and their dependents after the CCP assumed control of the enterprise. Facilities such as a day-care centre, cafeteria, clinic and social club were either established or improved in the factory in the early 1950s.\footnote{Ibid, 719.} Employees of the factory were entitled to take advantage of these facilities either at low cost or free of charge. For instance, in 1955 the factory set up a hospital together with an associated enterprise. When Chen Jingen (陈金根) and Lu Lifu (卢里富), two ordinary workers of Nangyang, underwent surgery there, their expenses of over one thousand yuan each were covered by the factory. The workers commented that they “would have died if this had happened before the Liberation!”\footnote{《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》, (Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 719.} The enterprise also provided workers with housing and commuter buses to take them to and from the factory.\footnote{Ibid, 720-721.}

Workers at Nanyang Brothers became much more secure than before 1949. If the factory halted production, they were guaranteed 80 percent of their wages. (Of course, under the command economy, factories were seldom ordered to stop functioning). All
the health care bills of workers themselves were paid by the “public” (公家), namely, the factory. The “public” also covered half the cost for workers’ dependents. The workers could also receive between 60 and 100 percent of their wages when they were unable to work because of illness, depending on their seniority (工龄). They also received retirement pensions at the rate of 60 percent of their wages. On top of all these benefits, workers could apply for various subsidies, grants and awards at the factory. In addition, the factory directly distributed relief money to workers who were suffering from “hardship.”

Perhaps the most enviable privileges given to the state workers in the 1950s were lifetime employment and the arrangement of employment for descendants. Under the socialist system established in 1950s, the workers of the state enterprises could be fired if only they were caught in criminal activities or were purged by political campaigns. The state enterprises had no incentive to lay off workers who seemed redundant because they were not efficient or profit-oriented. As a result, the workers enjoyed virtual lifetime employment, even though it was not formally guaranteed. Moreover, under such a system, the state took it as an obligation to arrange employment for new workers as workers’ children became adult, including of course the descendants of state-sector workers. For instance, in 1956 the Nanyang factory took on twenty-eight descendants of its current workers. It was more common, however, for descendants to find jobs in other working units rather than enter their

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38 Ibid, 720-721.
39 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》, (Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 720.
parents’ workplaces. 40

It is not too off the mark to say the workers in Nanyang Factory after its take-over by the CCP lived an extremely secure and comfortable life from the 1950s onward, whether compared with their previous conditions before the take-over or compared with the treatment accorded to their rural counterparts during the same years. The party-state provided them with medical care, housing, high wages, pensions, and other benefits. Although they were less privileged than cadres, such benefits were completely out of reach for hundreds of millions of rural labourers.

The remarkable elevation of living standards for Nanyang Brothers factory workers was not exceptional. Nanyang Brothers was neither a political star nor a key factory used by the party to guide the other factories. It was just a typical Chinese middle-sized light industrial enterprise employing fewer than 2,000 workers in the early 1950s. For urban residents who became “state workers” and their dependents, the 1950s was certainly a golden age. Conditions in the Nanyang Brothers factory exemplifies how their social status and material enjoyments were dramatically improved in a short period of time. However, it should be kept in mind that such a dramatic improvement in living standards was not based on a great increase of productivity brought about by revolutionary technical innovation, as occurred in the industrialized western countries, but was based on the policy preferences of an omnipresent and seemingly omnipotent party-state.

40 Ibid, 730-734.
A side event: the conflict between Liang and Mao in 1953

The skyrocketing rise in living standards for urban workers while peasants experienced stagnating conditions immediately attracted attention from educated observers. One of the direct results was the famous case of Liang Shuming’s confrontation with Mao Zedong in 1953. This case indicates that the great improvements experienced by workers at Nanyang Brothers were not exceptional but representative.

Liang Shuming (1893-1988) was a scholar who dedicated his life to philosophic reflection and rural social reconstruction. He was active in political activities. Despite his disagreement with the CCP’s doctrine of class struggle, he allied himself with the CCP in its struggle against the GMD. In September 1953, Liang gave an impromptu speech at an expanded meeting of the standing committee of the Central Committee of the CCP. He declared that the peasants were living in bitterness. When they entered the cities they were not allowed to remain; the state would send them back to the countryside. “I have been told that workers’ living standards of workers have risen rapidly while the peasants are still living a bitter life. Workers are now living in the highest level of heaven (九天) while the peasants are in the lowest hell (九地).”

Mao Zedong was incensed by Liang’s speech, accusing him of opposing the overall line of the transitional period and of thus being a counterrevolutionary of long standing. Liang stubbornly insisted that he was loyal to the CCP and that his speech...
was well-intentioned. Refusing to accept Mao’s accusation, he asked to defend himself, and this led to a face-to-face verbal argument with Mao on September 18, 1953. Not surprisingly, Mao won the argument.\(^4^2\)

The case of Liang Shuming’s disagreement with Mao indicates that in the early 1950s observers could already see that a great gap in living standards between workers and peasants had opened up since the CCP came to power. Liang did not conduct research on the issue himself. He said that he had heard about the situation from others. This suggests that the widening gap was common knowledge, at least among educated people concerned about social conditions. It is interesting to observe how Mao responded to Liang’s speech. He did not respond to Liang using factual evidence. Instead, Mao argued that a distinction should be made between policies of *da renzheng* 大仁政 and *xiao renzheng* 小仁政, meaning that major social obligations should be distinguished from those that were less significant. To take good care of the peasants was a minor concern, while taking good care of workers was the major concern. It would be helping the United States to concentrate on the minor matter of helping peasants, he argued, rather than on the *daren* (major social obligation).\(^4^3\)

Thus, Mao did not argue that the welfare gap between workers and peasants did not exist. He acknowledged that a gap had been created but argued that CCP policies favouring urban workers were politically justified.

With Mao’s easy victory over Liang Shuming and Liang’s subsequent political

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\(^4^2\) 梁漱溟，《梁漱溟自述》，河南人民出版社，(Liang Shuming, *Self-accounting of Liang Shuming*, Zhengzhou: Henan People’s Press, 2004), 146-155. Liang did not lose all of his privileges immediately. But since then, he was no longer a “Guest-of-honor (座上宾)” of the CCP. Instead, he became a target of a series of political campaigns.

\(^4^3\) 梁漱溟，《梁漱溟自述》，(Liang Shuming, *Self-accounting of Liang Shuming*), 149.
downfall, the gap between workers and peasants continued to widen over the following years. Eventually, it ended up with a situation which was later displayed in the form of the PRC’s huji system.

Workers’ feelings and behind-the-scenes costs

State workers who benefited greatly from the new order after the CCP took control had reasons to be content and appreciative in the 1950s. In July 1958, workers at Nanyang Brothers were interviewed by the authorities in their factories for the purpose of compiling a factory history. They were asked to review their family experiences and to express their feelings. Their stories were certainly highly politicized. The basic pattern of their narratives was that life before Liberation had been terribly bitter and sad while life after Liberation was the opposite. Thus, they were grateful to the CCP for bringing them happiness and were determined to work hard in return. Yet being highly politicized does not necessarily mean their narratives were nonsense. Critical reading of their testimony reveals interesting information and leads to fruitful understandings about the era.

Wu Sanmei (吴三妹) was a woman cigarette wrapper (包烟女工) at the Nanyang Brothers factory. Her testimony was recorded as follows:

I came from a poor peasant family that rented land from landlords… I started to work as a labourer when I was nine years old… I worked for more than ten hours a day but could only earn 0.1 yuan daily… When I worked at Nanyang, my month salary could buy slightly more than 120 catties of rice. We could only afford to eat vegetables to stave off hunger… The years of anti-Japanese resistance were even more
bitter. My husband and I were jobless because the factories were closed…My husband died in hunger and illness. I gave birth to a baby girl, but had no choice but to send her to an orphanage and to work as wet nurse (奶妈) to support my two sons…Later, I returned to work at Nanyang. I had to work double shifts (两班) so that we could eat some rice and wheat…Our living was greatly improved in the years after Liberation. My debts of several hundred yuan have been cleared up. In 1952, we bought a radio set…In 1956, my eldest son was introduced by the government to work in the Third Branch of the Shanghai Iron and Steel Mill (上钢三厂)...My younger son was admitted by the Third Branch of the Shanghai Iron and Steel Mill to be a third-class locksmith with the help of my eldest son (三级钳工)... We three family members are all working now, and the monthly family income is over 160 yuan. We eat meat every day and on the weekends, we go out to have fun and see films. 44

Chen Wancai (陈万才) was a male cigarette cutter (切烟男工) in the Nanyang Brothers factory. Here is his testimony:

I came to Shanghai with my mother when I was 17 years old. We begged along the way… I entered Nanyang to be a small worker (小工) when I was 22. Small workers were always being bullied. Our family had just enough rice to fill our bellies (勉强吃饱饭), along with a few pickles. We could not afford side dishes (菜). Our lives during the war were even less secure… In early 1947, I entered Nanyang to do various kinds of work… In 1948, inflation was uncontrollable… To make things worse, I was the only person in employment at the time. My elder son was laid off and did not find another job until August 1948. My daughter-in-law worked as a maid and my younger son polished leather shoes (擦皮鞋) on the streets…In that dark society, it was really difficult for poor people like us to survive…Soon after Liberation, Nanyang was struggling. We were told that the factory could only last six months and thus were very worried that it might be closed. The government then secured the factory and we felt safe. In 1950, I was elected as People’s Representative

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44 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》, (Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 729-731.
of our district. In 1951, I was sent to rest in a resort in Hangzhou, where I had never been. In July 1952, we moved to Chaoyang new Village (朝杨新村). There is indoor plumbing and the light is wonderful. There is a garden in front of the apartment building…My elder son was transferred to a wool weaving factory (毛纺厂) as a clerk... My second son was enrolled by the Nanjing Engineering College in 1955, thanks to the “colleges opening door for workers and peasants” policy of the Party. There are nine members in my family. My elder son and I are working. Our monthly income is more than 130 yuan. Our living is good and we often eat fish and beef. I have poor health. Doctors prescribe tonics for me free of charge. My wife was very sick last year. According to the policy, half of her medical expenses are covered. How could all this have been possible in the past?45

Li Wenying (李文英) was a woman worker who had retired from the Nanyang factory in 1958. She reviewed her experience in this way:

I entered Nanyang in 1923 when I was sixteen…We started at six in the morning and worked all day through to ten or eleven at night. We only worked half a day in slack seasons. In some times, we did not have work to do and received no wages at all…My husband was a fisherman in our original village in Zhenjiang (镇江). I introduced him to enter Nanyang and his monthly salary was 30 yuan…I gave birth to eleven children but only two survived. The others all succumbed at the ages of two or three because of poor nutrition…In the wake of August thirteenth, the workers requested that operations be suspended but the capitalists disagreed, saying that the Japanese would not invade. The Japanese came and we fled in a hurry, taking nothing with us…We lived in Zhenjiang for more than a year, jobless. Then, we returned to Shanghai and eked out a living…In 1946, my husband died. I returned to Nanyang after learning that the factory had reopened. But life was still harsh. We lived on various cheap foods and very little cloth…I borrowed money from the factory to pay tuition fees for my son. Soon after Liberation, my two nephews appeared. They had joined the Communist revolution during the war against Japan. My son was recommended by

45 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》，(Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 731-732.
my nephew to the Zhang Huabang Ship Repairing Factory (张华浜船舶修理厂) to be an apprentice. He is now working in the engine department... My daughter entered the Fifth Factory of Yong’an (永安五厂) in 1954...Our lives were greatly improved after Liberation. In the past, I always ate carrots, but now, I eat ribs. In 1954, I moved to the Nanyang Apartments (南阳公寓), thanks to the care of the factory. It is a four-storey apartment building. In the past, I lived in an attic. How could they be compared! ... I suffer from hypertension and thus often fainted at work. The organization (组织) has taken care of me and allowed me to retire...My monthly pension is over 30 yuan. The monthly wages of my son and my daughter bring our total family income above 150 yuan. How can current living conditions be compared to those of the past?46

There is no reason to doubt the basic factual details of these personal accounts or the family histories provided by these three workers at the Nanyang Factory, even though they were framed to display the greatness and glory of the CCP. It seems that these vivid and detailed descriptions of personal lives were true and accurate, and that workers’ gratitude to the CCP at the time of the interview was sincere.

It is ironic that workers at the Nanyang Factory might not have considered how their happiness was gained at the expense of people who shared their rural origins. First, as may be seen from their testimonies, all three migrated to Shanghai and the two women clearly stated that they came from rural backgrounds. They were able to enter the city of Shanghai without any official interference. Chen Wancai even arrived in Shanghai after begging for help during the journey. Second, they could find jobs in factories without difficulty and could easily bring in others to join the factory’s workforce. For instance, Li Wenyi introduced her husband to the Nanyang Factory.

46 《南洋兄弟烟草公司史料》(Historical materials of Nanyang Brothers Tobacco company), 732-734.
Though it is known that sometimes people had to pay bribes to a “Number One” or the head of a secret society to land factory jobs, contracts were then established between the factories and the workers. In other words, the various factories had the right to decide whom to hire. Thus, there were many chances for people from the rural areas out of Shanghai to join the city’s industrial workforce. Simply put, the doors of Shanghai were open to almost everyone before the CCP assumed control, including the rural poor. However, during the process of nationalizing urban enterprises in the 1950s, the city’s doors were almost completely closed. In the testimonies quoted above, all three interviewees mentioned employment for their children. Officials’ arrangements along with insiders’ introductions played the main role in placing their children in jobs. Wu Sanmei’s elder son was assigned to the Third Branch of the Shanghai Iron and Steel Mill by the government, and then brought in his younger brother. Chen Waicai’s elder son was transferred by the government to the woolen weaving mill. Li Wenying’s son was recommended to a factory by her nephew, who appears to have been a communist cadre. Needless to say, all the offspring of the three interviewees were employed in the state sector, as non-state sectors were being eliminated at the time. It is also obvious that they were entitled to a variety of benefits from their work units, such as housing and the medical care for which their parents were so grateful.

Another side of the positive picture is that the people who were in the same situation as the three interviewees at the time they migrated to Shanghai were no longer able to enter the cities as the three workers had done earlier. People who
migrated to Shanghai without official authorization were treated as “blind migrants,” detained and then returned to their rural homes, as described in Chapter 3. Labour recruitment and job allocations were now monopolized by the state, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Factories and other enterprises which had formerly taken in large numbers of unskilled workers from rural areas outside Shanghai, could no longer hire employees independently but were reliant on official allocations of labour. The government assumed responsibility for providing jobs to the adult offspring of urban residents, including the sons and daughters of the three interviewees. Thus, the government tried very hard to keep migrants out. Factories owned and operated by the party-state did not need to worry about costs and thus had very few incentives to replace costly employees with poor migrants from the rural areas who would have been willing to work for far lower wages.

The gains enjoyed by Shanghai’s urban workers during the 1950s were based on depriving the rural poor of opportunities to compete for employment in the cities. The CCP-led state closed the doors of the city to the rural poor, locking them in poverty while at the same time providing those who lived behind the closed doors with a wide variety of valuable benefits. The privileges of the insiders, namely those who held urban hukou, were generated from the dramatic differences between the two groups’ living standards and life chances. Although further investigation is needed, it seems that China’s other cities also became closed.
5.3 College graduates were taken (bao xialai, 包下来):  

A case showing the expansion of the state and the creation of urban status  

An effective way to observe the thirst of the CCP-led state for human resources and the methods it adopted to meet this need is to examine the distinctive and long-lasting system of assigning college graduates to positions that was established during the 1950s. Generally speaking, immediately after winning national victory, the CCP took in (bao xialai 包下来) all college graduates and assigned them to various positions in the Party-state. Most of those who graduated from colleges and universities during this period ended up living their whole lives within the state sector.  

The ambitious and large-scale social reorganization programs launched by the CCP after winning national victory required an enormous supply of human resources at a time when the supply of such resources was limited. For instance, in 1951 the number of graduates from higher-level educational institutions all over the country was only one-tenth the number required by the Party-state. The top CCP leaders soon became aware of the shortfall. At a meeting on higher education in June 1950, Zhou Enlai stated that skilled personnel were required in the fields of economic construction, national defense, and consolidation of the new state, and that the lack of human resources had become one of the party’s most difficult problems.  

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these circumstances, the CCP adopted a policy of “taking in all college graduates.”

In order to meet its urgent need for personnel, the CCP took action to employ college graduates within its organization. A national-level “job-assigning committee for graduates from higher educational institutions in the summer of 1950” (一九五零年暑期高等学校毕业生工作分配委员会) was set up to conduct the mission of assigning jobs to graduates.49 In 1951, the State Council (政务院) decided that those who graduated that summer from higher educational institutions all over the country would be assigned to positions centrally.50 In October 1951, the State Council issued Decisions on reforming the educational system (Guanyu gaige xuezhi de guiding《关于改革学制的规定》), explicitly establishing the principle that graduates from all higher educational institutions should be assigned jobs by the government.51 From then on, it became a way of life in China that all college graduates were taken in by the party-state and assigned to positions. This phenomenon changed only in the 1990s, when the state sector could no longer absorb the large number of graduates produced every year.

The policy was well implemented in reality. It was estimated that at least 85 percent of China’s new college graduates were assigned jobs in 1950 and 1951, when

the assignment system had not yet been fully set up.\(^{52}\) After 1952, the percentage could only be far higher, as the party-state gained increasing control over Chinese society as a whole, and punishments for those who did not comply with the job-assignment system became harsher. In 1950 and 1951, the CCP tried to persuade college graduates to obey yet also emphasized that those who did not comply should not be coerced if they insisted on finding jobs on their own. The relatively tolerant policy gradually changed after 1952. In 1957, the State Council issued a regulation stipulating that “All graduates in urgently needed majors must accept assigned positions. Those few graduates in other majors who disobey may receive their diplomas… and be allowed to find jobs on their own. However, government bureaus, enterprises, schools and other organizations can only accept graduates assigned by the government and are not permitted to accept those seeking jobs on their own.”\(^{53}\) In the period when virtually the entire private sector was eliminated, this regulation meant that there was almost no way for graduates to disobey the job-assignment system, if such people even existed at all. Thus the party-state successfully “took in” (\textit{baoxialai} 包下来) college graduates soon after the CCP won national victory.

Where did the graduates go? It is clear that nearly all were assigned to positions within the Party-state apparatus and thus were on the state payroll. The CCP assigned a few college graduates to the private sector before it was totally eliminated, but the number and percentage were very small. In 1953, for instance 184 college graduates


were assigned to the private sector, accounting for 0.6 percent of all graduates that year. Therefore it is reasonable to say that the Party-state took in the college graduates and used them to staff its rapidly growing apparatus. The supplies of college graduates were far from sufficient to meet the urgent need for personnel. Therefore, from time to time, the CCP ordered third-year students to graduate in advance in order to make a greater number available for assignment to positions. For instance, in 1952, the then third-year and fourth-year students majoring in Journalism at Fudan University were ordered to graduate together and they all, more than 150 in total, were assigned to the Xinhua News Agency (xinhuashe, 新华社), which was the mouthpiece (houshe 喉舌) of the CCP, to meet its urgent need for personnel following a sudden and rapid expansion.

While the CCP began to implement the policy of taking in all college graduates, it emphasized that the main aim of the policy was to change the phenomenon of “graduation followed by unemployment” (biye ji shiye 毕业即失业) that existed under Guomindang rule. The CCP argued that the GMD had no concern for the well-being of college graduates and that those miserable days had gone forever with the fall of the GMD. It argued that the CCP, totally unlike the former regime, cared about college graduates and thus assigned jobs to all of them so that both the country

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and the graduates could benefit.\textsuperscript{56} This was of course a clever propaganda strategy. Even though we do not know how effective such rhetoric was at that time, it seems reasonable to assume that it had a positive effect. It seems likely that many graduating students were partially or wholly persuaded and acted accordingly. However, from the viewpoint of a professional historian half a century later, the CCP’s claim that it cared more about college graduates than the GMD is not very convincing.

It does not make much sense to argue that one particular political-military group (\textit{zhengjun jitian} 政治军事集团) cares about college graduates more than a rival group. The GMD also needed human resources, and requisitioned college students during the war against Japan, when their skills were badly needed.\textsuperscript{57} However, the GMD took them in just as temporary helpers rather than as permanent members of their apparatus. After a period of time, the requisitioned students went back to their normal lives. Why did the GMD not systematically take in well-educated youths as the CCP did later? My theory is that the GMD-led state did not have as many positions available for college students and graduates, even though it also needed the service of the well-educated youths. This was fundamentally because the GMD lacked the material resources needed to “raise” or support (\textit{yanghuo} 养活) them. The CCP, in contrast, succeeded both in generating enough material resources to support them and in creating enough permanent positions within the party-state apparatus in which

to place them, in addition to inventing appealing ideas to serve as psychological encouragement. This helps to understand the result of the conflict between CCP and GMD.

In short, its need for human resources moved the CCP toward the policy of “taking in college graduates” and the party leaders successfully implemented this policy. Soon after the CCP took national power, college graduates all over the country were directed to staff the rapidly-growing Party-state apparatus. If we compare this phenomenon with the perhaps exaggerated picture of the fate of graduates in China before 1949, namely one of “unemployment following graduation,” we can imagine the remarkably rapid expansion of the CCP-led state sector.

5.4 Conclusion

If an observer were to learn that almost all the victims who died during the great famine of 1958 to 1962 were rural residents while the urban residents were well protected by the state, he or she might ask, “Why did the state value urban residents more than rural residents?” This question seems reasonable. Yet such a reasonable question is also confusing. This part of the dissertation (made up of the present chapter and the preceding chapter) has provided a new viewpoint to think about a confusing phenomenon.

The reasonable question abovementioned contains a premise, which is that the urban residents and the rural residents should be equal in front of the state and thus should be equally valued and protected. However, the premise has been proved
ungrounded by these two chapters. During the first several years of its rule, the apparatus of the CCP’s party-state expanded tremendously in urban areas, absorbing almost all institutions in the cities and taking in people who worked in those institutions as insiders of the party-state. Meanwhile, the CCP made serious efforts to move various kinds of undesirable people out of the cities and to close the doors of the city on unwanted migrants from the rural areas. In so doing, the CCP turned the cities into the habitat mainly of employees of the party-state and their dependents. To be sure, there must have been a few families who managed to stay in the cities without any family members being employed by the party-state. However, the number of such families could not be large enough to change the general picture. This is to say that almost all urban residents were turned into insiders of the party-state. Thus, the relationship between them and the state was very different from that between rural residents and the state. Seen in this way, it is easy to answer why the state valued the urban residents more. They were more valued not because they by chance resided in cities but because they were insiders entitled to the benefits provided by their patron, the CCP-led state.

The employees of the party-state were placed in two categories, namely the cadres and the masses (干部、群众). The status of cadres was much higher than that of the masses. But even the ordinary masses, such as ordinary workers in state factories, received a great variety of benefits such as housing, medical care, and pensions. As this chapter demonstrates, the lives of ordinary insiders of the party-state were greatly improved in the 1950s. The benefits enjoyed by cadres could only have been much
greater than those received by the masses. The outsiders’ group, which consisted mainly of rural residents, was simply shut out of the cities and deprived of access to the various benefits provided to insiders. Consequently, a significant gap was created between insiders and outsiders. Arguably, this was the essential part of the creation of the huji system.
Chapter 6  Creating rural status and maintaining the fault-line

This dissertation so far has outlined most of the steps through which the huji system was set up, and Chapter 5 in particular has elaborated on the formation of the urban status. In this chapter, I will first explore how the other category in the huji system, namely rural status, was constructed. Then, I will examine how the boundary between the two groups was maintained. The overarching argument is that, like insider status, rural status was also created by the state through the waves of campaigns that occurred during the 1950s, and that the boundary line between the rural status population and the minority holding urban status was drawn and maintained by the state through a series of systematic and institutional mechanisms. These mechanisms included the policy of maternal generational succession, the “urban status first” employment practices, and official regulation of shifts in status. Placed in juxtaposition with the preceding chapter on the creation of urban status, this examination presents a comprehensive picture of the formation of the huji system.

Overall, the analysis shows that the huji system was a completely new thing created by the state in the 1950s during the process in which the CCP was striving to establish a great new society.

6.1  Creating rural status

This section provides an overview of the process of creating rural status. As examined in the previous chapter, the significance of urban hukou was gradually
constructed through a series of campaigns. In other words, urban status was not innate or a matter of birthplace but was created by the state. The same was true of rural status. The meaning of rural hukou was also gradually constructed by the state. Being rural in China before 1949 definitely did not have the same meaning that rural hukou status did later in the PRC. The meaning of rural status was built up through a process during which the state deprived the rural population of rights while giving them almost nothing in return. During the period when the people who were later categorized as “rural” were deprived of a variety of rights, their urban counterparts were consistently provided with benefits by the state.

To begin with, rural people lost their rights to the ownership of land. Seen from the viewpoint of the peasants in general, the Land Reform which re-distributed around forty percent of the arable land in China to poor peasants and landless peasants was nothing more than a trap. The peasants were encouraged to support the causes of the CCP by providing it with manpower and materials, with the prospect of getting some land from those categorized as landlords. However, after the CCP defeated the GMD and assumed national power, it turned out that all the peasants (including those who were given some land during the Land Reform) lost their ownership of land to the state or the state-controlled collective (集体). To some extent, it is safe to say the peasants were tricked by the CCP as the party manipulated and used them. Moreover, the extremely powerful party-state apparatus which penetrated to the lowest level of the rural society with the collaboration of the majority of the peasant population, proved to be so lethal that there was no chance for the peasants to resist it at all. With
the completion of the socialist transformation of agriculture in 1956, no one of rural status could claim individual ownership of agricultural land. This remains the case today. Their lack of ownership rights is the basis of the phenomenon of “coerced expropriation” (强征) of land that is so prevalent today, becoming a major cause of social discontent and social unrest.

After 1956, rural people also lost the rights to dispose of the fruits of their labour. From the completion of collectivization and throughout Mao’s era, these belonged to the collectives rather than individuals. Individual labourers were provided with wages in the form of foodstuffs distributed by the collectives, but these were barely adequate for their subsistence and that of their dependents. Even if they had surplus produce, which was very unlikely, they could not easily sell it, for free markets for the most part had been eliminated by the state.

Third, China’s rural population lost the freedom to migrate, especially to cities. From the beginning of its take-over of the cities, the CCP took measures to scale down the urban population by moving those deemed undesirable to the countryside. Not surprisingly, it also began to discourage rural-to-urban migration. Even though there were many people who managed to migrate from the countryside to the cities during the first half of the 1950s, mechanisms to check the rural-to-urban migration were gradually put in place, and over time these proved to be very effective. Not only was rural-to-urban migration strictly controlled by the state, but rural-to-rural migration was also placed under strict regulations. In reality, most rural people were locked in their native villages, lacking the freedom to migrate no matter what their
intended destination. The lack of freedom of migration was highlighted during the
great famine that resulted from the Great Leap Forward (GLF). After the state
authorities expropriated excessive amounts of food supplies from the rural areas,
peasants were locked into their villages. Many deaths resulted. If the peasants had not
been deprived of their freedom of movement, there would have certainly been fewer
casualties.¹ For thousands of years of history during which many famines had
occurred, China’s peasants had never been subject to such disadvantageous
circumstances.

Compared with their urban counterparts whose living standards were greatly
improved, the lives of most rural people did not improve much during the 1950s. If
their conditions during the famine following the GLF are taken into account, it must
be concluded that they did not fare better than their predecessors in imperial times or
the republican era. In exchange for giving up rights to the state, the rural people did
not receive the benefits which were granted to those who held urban status, such as
pensions, medical care, and housing. In a word, they were subordinated to the status
of serfdom, deprived of almost everything yet entitled to almost nothing. This was
how the significance of being a “rural hukou” holder (or having rural status) was
created. Again, it can be seen that such meanings were constructed by the state
authorities based on the relationship between themselves and the majority of the
population. Although rural people existed long before the national victory of the CCP
in China, the distinctive rural status that is a feature of the society of the PRC was

¹ Amartya Sen, Poverty and Famines: An essay on entitlement and deprivation, New York: Oxford
University Press, 1981. Also see Sen, “Entitlements and the Chinese Famine,” Food Policy, vol.15,
iss.3, 1990: 261-263.
created through a process and the implementation of a set of policies, some of which aimed directly at re-organizing society and political economy, while others had strong indirect effects on China’s social structure.

6.2 Maintaining the fault-line

If there had been no threshold between insiders and outsiders in the early PRC period, there would have been no way to maintain the differences between the two groups. In other words, once the significant differential entitlements between the two groups are defined, there must be a mechanism to maintain the differences. The greater the differences are, the more rigid a mechanism is required. Such a mechanism must perform two basic functions. First, it must establish a rule to categorize the newly born, labeling them as either insiders or outsiders. Second, it must regulate the flow between the two groups, mainly to prevent the majority of the un-entitled outsiders from entering the entitled group. This section deals with such a mechanism.

Generational succession: labeling the newly-arrived

To ensure the sustainability of the whole system, it was necessary for the state to establish a rule to place additions to the population in suitable positions within the huji system, namely, by assigning them either rural status or urban status. The state resorted to a modified traditional method to solve this problem. This was generational succession (世袭) but from the maternal line. Thus newborn children inherited the
status of their mothers.²

During the construction of the categories of rural status and urban status, the differences between the two groups became larger and larger. What is more, the differences became increasingly entrenched. Therefore it was important to decide who belonged to which group. The labels of adults could be determined mainly by whether they were recognized members of the state sector. However, with regard to the standard for their children, both already born and as-yet unborn, it was not practical to delay categorization until they reached adulthood. Once they were born into the insider-versus-outsider social structure it was necessary to define their status. Thus the dramatic differences in entitlements also applied to children. For instance, after the national policy of “unified purchases and unified sales of foodstuffs” was instituted in 1953, children with urban status were entitled to food provided by the state while their rural counterparts lacked this entitlement. It seems that because children could not be placed into categories by their working units, generational succession was the only choice. The children of insiders were granted urban status and those of outsiders fell into the rural status category. It is ironic that the CCP, while furiously attacking Chinese political and social traditions, resorted to one of the most traditional and inequitable features of imperial dynastic rule to establish its rule governing the distribution of benefits: succession of status by blood. The only remaining issue to be settled was from which parent a child would inherit its status.

² It is interesting that I could not find any legal documents prescribing this rule. But “newly-born babies inherit huji status from mothers” has been common knowledge in PRC. Because it is unclear how this practice was initiated and then implemented all over the country, it might be worthwhile to examine this question further as well as study how the population reacted to the practice.
For thousands of years, the patrilineal principle prevailed in China and most people inherited their identities from the father’s side. The CCP was also an organization with a strong character of male dominance. Up to the present, there has been no woman among the standing members of its Politbureau. In the 1950s, the whole country was still under the domination of men. Therefore it is noteworthy that the CCP stipulated that status should pass down the maternal line.

It seems that the main reason why hukou status was inherited from the maternal line was that the state needed to keep the number of “insiders” as small as possible. The state was responsible for providing various necessities to its insiders. Too many insiders could become a heavy burden for the state, at a time when its resources remained limited, despite the fact that it had begun to squeeze resources from the outsiders. Since the prevailing marriage pattern was that men would usually marry women whose social standing was lower than their own, there were many male insiders who married female outsiders, and a comparatively small number of female insiders who married male outsiders. Thus there were numerous children born of the first pattern of marriage. By instituting the rule of inheritance of status through maternal succession, the state could minimize the costs of supporting the children of those who were entitled to the benefits that it distributed to insiders. According to the rule of maternal succession, only children born to women holding urban status could be entitled to various benefits provided by the state by birth. If the rule had been one of paternal succession or dual succession, the number of children entitled to benefits would naturally have been greater. Therefore it is clear why maternal succession
became the rule. It was a short-cut restricting the number of those who were insiders by birth, so that the burden assumed by the state could be minimized accordingly.

With the establishment of the rule that people inherit hukou status from their mothers, a great potential threat to the sustainability of the huji system was defused. Newly-born people could be easily labeled as “rural” or “urban” by the state, for the rule was simple and clear and could be easily executed.

**Regulating the inter-flow between the two groups**

To ensure that the huji system would continue to function, establishing the rule to label newly-born people was only one of the prerequisites. A system to regulate the inter-flow between the two groups was also necessary. The CCP met this prerequisite through employment practices which gave the insiders categorical preference over the outsiders for positions within the party-state apparatus. At the same time, the employment system instituted a means of official control over formal changes in status, particularly over the shift from rural to urban status.

**Employment practices**

The overall principle of employment procedures was that positions within the party-state would be assigned to urban hukou holders to the maximum possible extent. Outsiders were brought into these positions as permanent or temporary workers only
if no suitable insiders could be found or under other very specific conditions. This principle of employment benefited those who held urban status, particularly non-adult descendants, for they were protected from the competition that they would have faced from large numbers of their peers of rural status, competition which would definitely have taken place if systematic hiring procedures had not existed.

Why did the CCP institute such an inequitable system of employment arrangements, despite its declared intention to establish a socialist society in which everyone would be equal? It seems that pragmatic principles can always overrule ideological nobility and idealism. This principle holds true for the CCP. As discussed in the previous chapter, the insiders were given many more benefits by the state than they should have received in a system that was not yet communist. In other words, it was expensive to support the insiders. The more insiders there were, the heavier the burden on the shoulders of the party-state. Thus, it was crucial to make the rank of insiders as small as possible. Supposing that the positions of the party-state apparatus were open to everybody, in that case there would definitely have been many outsiders entering the insiders’ club and bringing in their dependents. While the urban status candidates who failed to obtain those jobs would have continued to live on resources provided the party-state, the number of insiders would have swelled quickly and even pushed the system to the brink of collapse.

For instance, as shown in the previous chapter, those who worked in the state

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3 This principle is my own generalization based on common knowledge. It is unlikely that such a generalization appeared in official documents. Certain situations could result in hiring rural status people. For instance, when agricultural land was appropriated from a village to build a factory, the factory would take in some persons from the village as workers. This would usually result in the status shift from “rural” to “urban” for the resourceful and lucky ones.
sector enjoyed the benefit of full reimbursement of their medical expenses, and their dependents were entitled to fifty percent reimbursements of such costs. Suppose that a position in a work unit was available and there were two candidates for the job, one holding rural status whose parents were both rural and another holding urban status whose parents were both urban as well. In this situation, the state would definitely benefit economically from choosing the person who held urban status. The calculation was simple. If the rural status person were employed, the state would have to provide 100 percent of the person’s medical care and possibly also pay for 50 percent of the medical care of his or her possibly numerous dependents if the person were successful in winning urban status for such dependents. If an urban status person were chosen for this position, the state would only need to increase his medical care entitlement from 50 percent to 100 percent of the cost. In other words, it was much less expensive for the party-state to staff its positions with those who already held urban status.

Such employment arrangements also had something to do with certain remarkable beliefs held by the CCP leaders at that time. They seemed to believe that their system, which they called a socialist system, was better than other systems (mainly the capitalist system) and that one symptom of this superiority was that there was little or no unemployment in their system. What is more, they seemed to believe that the countryside could absorb unlimited amounts of labour—thus no matter how many people were in the countryside unemployment would never exist there. Given this assumption, they were obligated to provide employment to the urban population. Otherwise, there would be a conspicuous phenomenon of urban unemployment which
would seem to disprove the superiority of the socialist system.

The absence of international and domestic pressure also contributed to the installment of such unfair employment practices. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a great wave of “civil rights movements” in the western world. However, under Mao’s leadership, China disengaged from with the western world and presented China as an alternative which challenged western civilization. As a result, international pressure on the CCP was lacking while it installed and operated the huji system. In fact international observers have never clearly understood the huji system. Even today, when many practices and policies in China are subject to sharp criticism overseas, particularly when human rights issues are involved, there has been only very limited and partial discussion of the huji system. In a party-state system where the CCP has monopolized almost every resource including the media and intelligence work, domestic pressure has had almost no chance to emerge, either in recent years or during the early PRC period. Consequently, the CCP overtly propagated its system of priorities in employment practices and urged institutions at all levels to implement the system. It seems there were no voices criticizing the obvious unfairness of the system, or even doubting its legitimacy.

How was such an employment arrangement put into practice? There must have been some associated institutional structures. Otherwise, it would not have been possible for the state to monitor every work unit to ensure that making sure that recruiting practices conformed to the principle of giving priority to those who held urban status. The CCP achieved this by depriving the right to recruit new members
from individual work units and placing the recruitment and assignment of new
workers under strict planning by specified government agencies.

Again taking Shanghai as an example, there was no central planning in the
recruitment of labour before the CCP took control. Enterprises and other institutions
recruited employees on their own, mainly through introductions made by incumbent
employees or through professional human resource agents, or via the enterprise
owners’ own social networks. Generally speaking, the state kept its hands off hiring
by enterprises and other institutions. These practices of recruiting new employees
made it possible for people from the countryside and from the agricultural sector to
join Shanghai’s industrial workforce. However, these practices were soon regulated
by the CCP after it took control of the city. In August 1950, the Shanghai Bureau of
Labour (上海市劳动局) set up a Department of Labour Introduction (劳动介绍所).
This event marked the beginning of state control over employment in Shanghai. To be
sure, the state’s intervention was extended in a gradual fashion although the direction
was clear and consistent. On the outset, institutions which needed employees could
ask the Department of Labour Introduction to recruit on their behalf. They were also
permitted to recruit directly on their own if they reported to the Department afterward.
In August 1952, even before the beginning of the program of socialist transformation,
the state arbitrarily took over recruiting authority from all institutions, including those
in the private sector which were no yet nationalized at the time. The central
government stipulated that all recruitment of workers must be conducted by the
Labour Bureaus (劳动部门) and that it was not permissible for institutions to recruit
employees on their own without the permission of the Labour Bureaus.\textsuperscript{4} With the development of nationalization campaigns, authority over hiring was further concentrated in the hands of the party-state through its management of the Labour Bureau system. From that time onward and until the Reform and Opening period, the state closely controlled job assignments. With this function in its hands, the state put its “urban status people first” policy into practice quite efficiently. In records from most years of the 1950s, it is common to encounter government documents reiterating the monopoly of the state in employment arrangements. For instance, the news organ of the Central CCP stated that “all units requiring employees, such as enterprises, public service agencies, government bureaus, military units, organizations and schools, are categorically forbidden to hire workers or temporary workers on their own. The workers or temporary workers required must be assigned by local labour bureaus through unified adjustment or recruitment.”\textsuperscript{5} This institutional structure made it quite convenient for the state to institute a policy of giving priority to those who held urban status.

The procedures for handling the assignment of employment positions instituted during the 1950s became a key component of the set of benefits and privileges enjoyed by the urban status population. Those who inherited urban status from parents who were employed in the state sector, were much more likely to become employees

\textsuperscript{4} 《上海劳动志》编纂委员会: 《上海劳动志》, (The compiling committee, Accounts of Labour History in Shanghai, Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Science Press, 1998), 156-157.

in the state sector themselves than were those holding rural status. The monopoly of recruitment authority by the state and the policy of giving priority in job assignments to urban status people were two essential pillars of the huji system. Without such mechanisms, the huji system could not have continued to function. The latter mechanism secured the boundary between insiders and outsiders, ensuring that insiders would be advantaged in entering the state sector and the government bureaucracy in particular. In this way, the insiders’ world became a self-contained sphere. Outsiders were only able to gain access to the privileges distributed within that sphere when the authorities judged that certain individuals were eligible for admission. Such lucky hand-picked individuals would be transformed from outsiders to insiders.

To sum up, the practice of giving categorical priority to urban status people in recruitment for employment positions within the state sector was probably the most important mechanism in demarcating and maintaining the boundary line between rural status and urban status.

**Status shifts**

In the preceding sections, I have examined the rule of succession to urban status which categorized new additions to the population and the employment practices that caused the ranks of the insiders group to become a self-contained sphere. However, the self-sufficiency of the group was never complete. In fact, the huji system contains mechanisms permitting changes in status for certain individuals. In this section I
discuss how all changes in status, whether from rural to urban or from urban to rural status, were regulated by the state. No individuals or organizations could affect such changes without state involvement and authorization.

Not surprisingly, virtually all changes in status were from rural to urban, for people want better lives. There were several paths through which people holding rural status could gain urban status.\(^6\)

Gaining entry to higher education (shengxue 升学) was apparently the path along which most rural people succeeded in gaining urban status. For rural status youth, the educational path was probably the most reliable way to escape from inferior status. Once a rural youth was enrolled by a qualified educational institution as a full-time student, his or her status was automatically changed. In the early 1950s, all educational institutions were nationalized by the CCP, and no private educational institutions existed for the duration of the Mao period. However, the term “qualified educational institutions” referred only to “institutions providing final-stage education” whose graduates would be assigned positions in the state sector, such as vocational schools at the secondary level (中专 and 中技) and post-secondary institutions such as colleges and universities. For a long period, the opportunity for higher education was the most available and fair path along which rural status youth could move into the insiders’ sphere. Other paths were either difficult to access or required special resources possessed by very few youth holding rural status. If they excelled in their schoolwork and examinations, these young people could enter qualified educational

institutions. Although the competition was fierce and only a tiny percentage of candidates could succeed, the examinations regulating entry to such educational institutions were quite fair for the examination-takers. Furthermore, the educational path led most rural hukou holders not only to acquire urban status but to gain entry to the higher ranks of the urban status group: many of them became cadres rather than workers.

Another path travelled from rural to urban status was labour recruitment (zhaogong 招工). Occasionally, an individual holding rural status was recruited by the state as a “formal worker” (正式工). The person’s status would then be changed to urban. However, this channel was a narrow one, and could lead only to the lower level of urban status. Because the state gave urban status people categorical priority in hiring, very few rural status people had opportunities to be recruited as workers in the state sector.

Another path to advancement from rural to urban status was through “shifting occupations” (zhuanye 转业). This path was open to a few people of rural status who were enlisted by the armed forces and promoted to a certain level. Following their military service, these people would be rewarded with urban status and assigned jobs in the state sector. However, to join the army did not necessarily lead to a status shift and job assignment. In fact, the overwhelming majority of men and women in military service who were of rural status origins were demobilized (复员) following their terms of service. Opportunities for promotion and a subsequent change to urban status were very limited. Also, this path led only to workers’ status rather than the rank of
cadre.

The path of promotion for cadres (tīgān 提干) was even narrower. It was followed only by a few fortunate grass-roots-level cadres such as village heads or party secretaries in production brigades who succeeded in gaining promotion to positions at the township level. This promotion changed their status from rural to urban. The number who succeeded in changing their status in this way was very small.

Appropriation of land (zhēngdì 征地) was one other path from rural to urban status. If a patch of land was appropriated by the state, the status of those who had formerly lived on that land would be changed from rural to urban.

The paths described above were channels through which a person holding rural status person could change his or her status into urban status as an individual. It was also possible for rural status people to make a status shift through others. The main forms were marriage (huānhūn 婚姻) and living as dependents (tóukāo 投靠). If a rural status person married an urban status person or had no other choice but to live with an urban status relative or friend as a dependent, then he or she might receive urban status if certain criteria were met. Usually, however, the criteria were difficult to meet and the quota (it was the quota officially set by the state, for example, a certain city could approve no more than a certain number rural-to-urban status shift in a year) for a shift of this sort was very scarce. Therefore only a small number of rural hukou holders succeeded in changing their status on the basis of marriage to or dependence on persons holding urban status.
The significance of the channels through which rural status could be changed to urban status was that they relieved the pressure of discontent among the group that was deprived and oppressed by the huji system. It was as though people confined in a dark room directed their efforts into escaping through a few narrow windows, rather than attempting to smash the solid walls. This aspect of the huji system contributed to its stability, giving it more flexibility and resilience than other systems of institutionalized discrimination. A system of discrimination and deprivation based on racially-defined terms, for instance, lacks such regular channels for advancement to higher status, even though a few persons whose skin colour characterizes them as inferior might become exceptions to the system’s rules.

Even though almost all status shifts were in the rural-urban direction, there were also cases of changes from urban to rural status. Such changes were usually imposed by the state as a form of punishment. Criminals and victims of political purges sometimes lost their urban status. For instance, Wu Ningkun (巫宁坤, b. 1921), who was a patriotic specialist in English-language literature, was deprived of urban status during the Cultural Revolution. In my discussion in Chapter 3 on purification of the urban population, I mentioned that Shanghai transferred suspected criminals out of the city. Presumably, some members of this group lost their urban status.

The most significant type of movement from urban to rural status occurred when about twenty-one million urban status youths were sent to the countryside to “join production and settle down” during the Cultural Revolution period. *Luohu*

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(落户) literally means to “settle” or “land the hukou.” This is to say that tens of millions of urban status youths were turned into holders of rural hukou during those years. Although the rustication campaign was accompanied by idealistic ideological rhetoric, a more substantial motivation was that the state faced a shortfall of job opportunities for young adult insiders. The assignment of jobs to urban status youths had been the common practice for more than a decade when the rustication campaign began and had been understood as part of the normal state of affairs. When the number of new adults holding urban status grew more rapidly than the number of jobs created in the planned economy dominated by heavy industries in which labour intensity was low, the party-state was faced with a choice between leaving a large cohort of urban status youth in a “waiting for work” category, or sending them to the countryside and changing their status. After the authorities chose the latter, sending many urban status youths to the countryside, there were no reports of labour shortages in the cities, reflecting the employment shortfall that had existed. Although the rusticated youths were generally successful later on in returning to the cities (返城) after Mao’s death and in regaining their urban status, this does not change the fact that huku status could be changed from urban to rural and that tens of millions of people experienced this change.

Whether the direction of a shift in status was from rural or urban status, it was the state which designated individuals’ status and carried out the changes. No person could decide independently to move from one category to the other. Consequently the categories of rural and urban in the huku system had little to do with the phenomenon
of identity. Identity is primarily a matter of how people see themselves and the categories or groups to which they feel they themselves to belong. In contrast, self-perception is irrelevant in the huji system of the PRC. Only the state’s categorization matters. If the state decided to turn an urban status-holder into a person of rural status, the person would no longer hold urban status no matter what identity he or she held. This principle also holds true for changes of status in the opposite direction.

On the basis of the analysis presented above, it is not difficult to conclude that the meanings of both rural and urban status in the huji system were created by the state through the implementation of a set of social and economic policies during the 1950s. The fault line between rural status and urban status was drawn and maintained single-handedly by the state. Simply put, the state divided the entire population of China into two unequal groups and maintained the systematic inequality between the two groups through a set of mechanisms. Not surprisingly, the criteria according to which the state would decide whether or not a person was entitled to the benefits and privileges that it provided were none other than proofs of whether or not the individual was an insider. I will elaborate on this issue in the following section.

6.3 Boundary-crossing lives

The “rural” and “urban” categories of the huji system in PRC are mostly understood as residential and/or occupational terms, even in academic publications. Therefore, in papers and monographs on the huji issue, the rural versus urban
dichotomy is usually equated with geographical and occupational distinctions, such as distinctions between the countryside and the cities, rural areas and urban areas and agricultural versus non-agricultural employment. As I have explained briefly in the Introduction, this is a serious misunderstanding. To be sure, huji status has some connections with residential location and occupation. However, after the formation of the huji system and until today, the fault line between rural and urban status in the huji system has never been congruent with the boundary between the countryside and the cities, or between agriculture and the non-agricultural sectors. It is true that the overwhelming majority of the urban status population lives in cities and works in non-agricultural sectors, and also that overwhelming majority of the rural status population lives in the countryside and works in agriculture. Yet there are also many rural status people who do not live in the countryside or work in agriculture, along with many urban status people who do not live in cities or work in non-agricultural sectors. I refer to these phenomena as “boundary-crossing lives”. This boundary refers to the position generally assumed to mark the distinction between urban and rural status. The phenomenon of boundary-crossing lives shows that the conventionally imagined line is not correctly drawn.

To examine boundary-crossing lives is useful for clarifying where the fault line between rural and urban status in the huji system really lies. To push the analysis a step further on this basis, identifying the actual position of the fault line can be helpful in understanding the dynamics and nature of the huji system.
Rural status people in non-agricultural sectors in cities

Since the 1950s and until today, there have always been many people holding rural hukou living in cities and working in non-agricultural sectors. This phenomenon has gained more attention since the 1980s mainly because of the rapid increase in their numbers. Hundreds of millions of rural hukou holders are in this situation. Every year during the Spring Festival period, their travels homeward and back place great pressure on China’s national transportation system. This group of people also attracts attention in various academic disciplines both within China and abroad. The collective term for this group is “peasant worker” (民工). Because this study focuses on the formation of the huji system during the 1950s, I will not discuss the details of peasant workers experiences during the past thirty years. What is worth mentioning here is that the phenomenon of “peasant workers” did not emerge after Deng Xiaoping’s reforms began. In Mao’s China as well there were people in the same circumstances. The difference is that they were not called “peasant workers” but usually “temporary workers” (临时工). It should be mentioned here that people who held urban status might also fall into the category of “temporary worker.” However, most “temporary workers” were held rural status.

Positions as “temporary workers” positions were not available to rural hukou holders in general. Urban status people enjoyed priority in recruitment for these jobs and suburban areas received most of the opportunities. For instance, the Central Government stipulated that “Temporary workers (including porters and nursemaids) should be recruited in cities first (尽先在城市中招收). If they must be recruited from
the countryside, the proper way of recruiting will be to sign contracts with agricultural
collectives (农业生产合作社) in adjacent rural areas. After fulfillment of their
contracts, the work units that have used the temporary workers are responsible for
sending them directly back to their places of origin.”

To be sure, there was almost no opportunity for the average person holding rural hukou in a remote area to become a “temporary worker” in a city.

**Why was there a “temporary worker” phenomenon?**

The term “temporary worker” (临时工) is rather misleading. Like a number of other peculiar Chinese terms, such as “stepping down from one’s post” (xiagang 下岗, which is actually being laid off) and “waiting for employment” (daiye 待业, which is actually being unemployed), the term is a euphemism. Workers were not categorized as “temporary” because their positions were temporary or short-term in nature. Actually, many such positions were very secure and many such workers held their positions for many years. In other words, the positions that “temporary workers” filled were in many cases long-term stable positions.

The main reason for the nationwide phenomenon of “temporary worker” was that the state sector needed more workers than it had resources to support in regular positions. For instance, when a position in the state sector became available, the authorities could choose to hire either a “formal worker” (正式工) to fill the position

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of the person, for the worker would either be or would become an urban hukou holder and would thus be entitled to the various benefits and privileges enjoyed by other formal workers. If a “temporary worker” holding a rural hukou was used to fill the position, the cost would be much lower, for the “temporary worker” was not eligible for the same set of benefits and privileges. Moreover, basic wages were lower for temporary workers than for regular workers. The wages paid to a “temporary worker” might even be less than half those received by formal worker with the same level of seniority.

Another possible reason why the state-sector authorities preferred, or at least did not avoid hiring “temporary workers” was that they were generally more compliant than workers who enjoyed full benefits. Under the system established by the CCP, formal workers enjoyed de facto life-time employment. Even if they performed poorly in their positions, it was extremely difficult for the leaders of their units to fire them. Therefore, formal workers who were not seeking promotion or other advantages could afford to disobey their superiors in the workplace in small matters and even in more serious matters. The superior of a recalcitrant or incompetent worker often had no choice but to tolerate the person. In contrast, temporary workers were fully subordinate to their superiors in the work unit, and could be fired at any time. It is not surprising that they usually worked harder and were more obedient than formal workers.

The “temporary worker” phenomenon could not have existed if everyone had
refused employment on such terms. Naturally, however, workers holding rural hukou were willing to take “temporary” positions, simply because being a “temporary worker” could lead to a much better life than agricultural work would make possible, despite the fact that their wages were significantly lower than those of regular workers performing the same duties. In other words, the great gap between the urban and rural status populations in living conditions that the state had created made “temporary workers’” positions very desirable for most rural status people, while also remaining out of reach for most.

**Urban status people in the countryside and even in agriculture**

As described in the preceding section, a large number of people who held rural status lived in cities and worked in non-agricultural sectors during the Mao period. The reverse is also true. Since the beginning of the huji system and up to the present, there have been many people who hold urban status yet live in the countryside and have even worked in agriculture.

**Urban status people in the countryside**

Since the beginning of the PRC, there were a great many urban status people (party-state employees and their family members which later became urban-hukou holders) working in the countryside. With the passage of time and the swelling of the party-state, this group became larger and larger. I will briefly examine the reasons for this phenomenon and the general outline of this group.

The twentieth century witnessed a fundamental transition in terms of governance
and the aggressive penetration of the state down to the grassroots level of Chinese society, including rural society. During many centuries of imperial history until the late Qing period, China was an agrarian empire in which state authority floated somewhere above the county level. Below the county level, society was basically self-governing, led by local elites who were not incumbent government officials. Even in the early decades of the nineteenth century when the population had greatly increased to almost 400 million, doubling from its size near the beginning of the seventeenth century, the total number of government officials was about the same as it had been before the population growth spurt. In general, the succession of governments in imperial China were all “small governments” taking limited responsibility for the direction of economic affairs and consuming a limited share of the empire’s total wealth.

However, from the late Qing period to the present, state penetration into local society has been a salient trend. Until the end of the Qing period in 1912, the state remained above the county level, although it took on a few new functions such as policing and new-style education. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Republic of China was partly successful in establishing a state presence at the district level (区级), which was below the county level. The CCP pushed even further, establishing party cells and government agencies in the villages.

The penetration of state into society naturally means the expansion of the state, because its extension to lower levels requires that it employ more and more people to staff more numerous offices across the country. Although the Guomindang-led
government eventually set up party cells and government bureaus at the district level, the scale of this state presence at the district level remained limited. There were not many full-time officials in the district offices. Likewise, the Guomindang’s representatives at the county level were also rather few.

The result of the civil war between the forces of the CCP and the Guomindang (1946-1969) was partly determined by their differing capacities in the extraction of resources. After defeating the Guomindang-led armies, the CCP leaders set up a more solid party-state apparatus at the sub-county level. Compared with the former presence of the Guomindang party-state, the CCP’s apparatus was many times larger, with many more bureaus and many more cadres performing functions that had not been performed by officials of the former government.\(^9\)

On the one hand, the new state built by the CCP continually expanded the number of its bureaus, setting up more and more organs at various levels including the district level. On the other hand, people had no path of upward mobility other than becoming state employees, given that the former channels for mobility, such as running businesses or migrating to the cities, were blocked in the 1950s.\(^10\) The outcome was that the state acquired large numbers of employees at the district level, who mainly lived in the countryside. Like other cadres, these employees held “urban” status, even

\(^9\) The scale of the governments at various levels in the PRC has been larger than that of their counterparts in the Republic of China. In China today, both the CCP and the ordinary people regard the large number of cadres as a tricky problem that the country is facing. For instance, a typical country in Hunan province supports more than 11,000 cadres at present. See Feng Junqi, “Cadres of Zhong County”, PhD Dissertation, Department of Sociology, Beijing University, 2010, 45; 171. It is unimaginable that any previous government in China could have been represented by so many officials in one ordinary county.

\(^10\) Feng Junqi, “Cadres of Zhong County”, PhD Dissertation of Department of Sociology in Beijing University, 2010, 27; 37. Feng’s interviewees who are cadres confessed that they had desperately pursued educational advancement simply in order to become cadres and live more comfortably.
if they had never lived in cities. To be sure, numerically they were a small minority group in the local community where the overwhelming majority was categorized as rural. Thus, these urban status people were extremely privileged and envied. For instance, Professor Jin Yan, a well-known scholar of post-Communist Eastern Europe, vividly recalled how she felt in rural Gansu when observing the striking differences in quality of life between the urban status workers and those who held rural status at a local food supply station (粮站). As a rusticated youth who had lost her urban status, she suffered from hunger while the workers were enjoying delicious food.\footnote{金雁:《在陇西的日子》, (Jin Yan, “Those days in Western Gansu”), <http://www.21ccom.net/articles/ljjs/lccz/article_2011090244575.html#goodfb83392> (accessed on February 8, 2012).}

Most of the grassroots-level cadres have lived in the countryside. Some live in towns which are too small to be classified as cities, and many live in villages. For instance, the state-employed elementary-school teachers working in villages mainly live in the same villages. It is noteworthy that many members of this group originate in the localities where they work or in neighbouring areas. They have risen from their formal rural status through education or promotion. Their residence in the countryside does not affect their urban status. They are paid by the state and are thus entitled to a standard set of benefits and privileges such as pensions, medical care, and housing.

**Formal employees of state farms**

China’s state farm system provides another ideal perspective through which to observe the nature and mechanisms of the huji institution. Compared with either agricultural cooperatives or family plots, state farms are generally much larger in
scope and more advanced in technology and mechanization level. Such large tracts of land could not be located in urban areas. Although state farms usually engage in a certain amount of non-agricultural production, such as the processing of raw materials, in most cases, agricultural production is overwhelmingly the main activity of state farms. However, while state farms thus belong to the agricultural sector, if considered in relation to the huiji system they are actually part of the “urban” sector. This is because all formal employees of state farms, despite working in agriculture and living in the countryside, hold urban status. The state farms are analogous to work units in the industrial sector, providing their employees the same privileges and benefits that factories provide. All formal employees are either cadres (国家干部) or workers (工人, and in the case of state farms are called “agricultural workers”, 农业工人). Cadres and workers on state farms hold the same status as their counterparts in state factories, enjoying various benefits and enjoying much higher living standards than rural hukou holders.

Inspired by Marxism, the CCP proclaimed state ownership (全民所有制) to be best and most advanced ultimate type of ownership, and the principle applied to agriculture along with other modes of production. Therefore, the CCP promoted state-operated farms in the belief that this form of agricultural production would greatly increase agricultural production and facilitate the transition to communism. This vision naturally led to the situation described in an official document, that “the land and all other assets of state farms belong to the state… all the income earned by of state farms also belongs to the state, …all the members of state farms are either
workers or clerical personnel (工人和职员), receiving wages and salaries based on their attitude, skills and contributions…state farms are the same as state factories, established on the principle of socialist entrepreneurship… The labourers are no longer peasants. They are agricultural workers and part of the proletarian class”

Thus the state farms definitely followed the same principles of ownership and operation as state factories. They were part of the party-state apparatus and their formal members were state-sector insiders.

The scale of state farms varies from case to case. Large state farms are usually home to thousands or even tens of thousands of people and set up a great variety of administrative and logistical departments such as schools and hospitals. Some even operate their own police forces and judicial courts. In the following part, I will use the state farms at Changde (常德) Prefecture in Hunan Province as an example to explain how the institution functions.

First, allocation of labour to a state farm is conducted by the government, just as to state-owned factories. The Changde state farm was originally based on small-scale state farms established by provincial authorities before 1949. The retainers (people who worked on the farm and were retained by the new CCP-led government) and cadres sent to Changde in 1949 and 1950 by the new CCP-led state were among the first members of the farm. From that time onward, new members were continually

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13 The reason why the state farms in this region have been chosen is that an informative work exists: “国营农场志”. Although some features may vary from one state farm to another, there are also many features which are very similar among state farms. Issues such as recruitment and rewarding discussed here are universal in China.

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sent to the farm by the government. For instance, more than 1,200 people were assigned to the farm in 1955, over 1,600 in 1956 and about 2,000 in 1958.

Recruitment varied over the years. Sometimes demobilized soldiers were assigned to the state farm. At other times rusticated urban youth or workers who had been laid off from urban work units arrived to settle down at the Changde farm. Workers were also chosen from among peasants living in the surrounding area, in the form of “recruiting workers” (招工) discussed earlier in this chapter as one of the ways in which rural status can be changed to urban status. The employees of the state farm grew quickly from 14 in 1950 to more than 8,000 in 1958. During the first half of the 1960s, the number was around 13,000. From 1979 to 1988, the number rose from 44,399 to 47,730. The growth resulted mainly from increases in three groups of people: children who grew up on the farm and became formal members automatically, graduates from colleges and vocational schools (大中专毕业生) who were assigned to the farm, and demobilized soldiers who were assigned to the farm. The expansion of the Changde state farm followed the pattern of the expansion of the Chinese party-state discussed in preceding chapters.14

Formal members of state farms enjoy various benefits and privileges such as salaries, health care and retirement stipends, just as their counterparts in state factories do. Though the system of wages and salaries has changed over time, its key components were constant. Members of state farms earned regular incomes paid by

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the government following an officially-defined standard scale.\textsuperscript{15} Being on the state-sector payroll sharply differentiated state farm workers from peasants. It also allowed state farms workers to live more comfortable lives than peasants who often performed similar or more demanding physical labour. Like workers in state factories, formal employees on state farms were entitled to medical care and pensions. As the Changde state farm stipulated, “All cadres and workers as well as those who have retired (所有干部职工及离退休人员) are entitled to reimbursement of medical care expenses by the state farm, except for the registration fee (挂号费)…medical care expenses for members’ first children are also fully reimbursed by the state farm.\textsuperscript{16} As the farm also stated “National retirement arrangements apply to all formal employees of the state farm. (农场干部职工实行离休制度)…and retired members enjoy treatment stipulated by the state (享受国家规定的离退休待遇).”\textsuperscript{17}

Simply put, the state farms were the equivalent of state factories in terms of their relationship with the party-state. They belonged to the state sector and therefore their regular employees and cadres have had the status of party-state insiders who are entitled to the privileges and benefits provided by the state. State farms workers are primarily engaged in agricultural production and live in the countryside. However, they hold “non-agricultural” hukou, which means they are urban status.

\textsuperscript{15} After the Reform and Opening, some state farms stopped paying wages to members but promoted the household responsibility system. See 《常德地区志·国营农场志》编写组: 《常德地区志·国营农场志》, (The compiling team, \textit{Local History of Changde: History of State Farms}), 217-222.
\textsuperscript{16}《常德地区志·国营农场志》编写组: 《常德地区志·国营农场志》, (The compiling team, \textit{Local History of Changde: History of State Farms}), 224-225.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 225.
A short summary on “boundary-crossing lives”

It is not difficult to conclude from the cases of “boundary-crossing lives” that the “rural” or “urban” categories of the huji system are neither residential nor occupational concepts. Living in cities or working full-time in non-agricultural sectors does not guarantee urban status in the huji system. On the contrary, certain people who live in the countryside or work in agriculture also hold urban status in the system, and many who live and work in cities hold rural status. Thus, a person’s huji status is determined not by his or her occupation or place of residence, but by whether or not the state recognizes the person as an entitled member of the state sector. The entitled members are also referred to as “insiders” in this study. If a person is recognized as a member of the state sector, he or she holds urban status in the huji system. If a person is not recognized as a member of the state sector, he or she has rural status even if he or she resides in a city and is employed in non-agricultural work. Formal recognition of insider status is granted to individuals when they become regular employees in the state sector, and recognition is passed down to insiders’ children and grandchildren.

6.4 Chapter Conclusion

As may be concluded from the analysis in this chapter, “rural” status was also created by the state during the 1950s through implementation of a series of social policies. Although “peasants” had existed for millennia in China, a new category of peasant was created from scratch rather than inherited from tradition. After creating “urban status” and “rural status,” the PRC state established mechanisms to maintain
the differences between the two groups. These mechanisms included the policy of maternal succession of status in categorizing children, and priority for people of urban status in entering the state sector, causing the urban status group to become quite self-contained. At the same time, state authorities closely regulated changes of status from one category to the other. There were no unregulated flows between the two groups. In short, the PRC state created “rural status” and “urban status” and labeled the whole population with these two tags. Thereafter, state authorities regulated the differences between the two groups and thus maintained the operation of the huji system.

China’s huji system cannot be correctly understood without taking the party-state system into account. Agriculture and non-agricultural activities, along with villages and cities, all existed in China long ago. The categories of “rural” and “urban” in the huji system became significant only after the party-state took shape and set out to reorganize society and reshape the national economy. Social status in China has been directly determined by the relationship between individuals and the state, rather than through residential or occupational concepts as before 1949. Without the formation of the CCP’s party-state which took over almost all urban institutions in cities and thus became the only employer, there would be no “urban status” and “rural status” in the sense that they now exist.
Chapter 7  Conclusions and comments

After a long intellectual adventure, both exciting and tiring, it is time to review and discuss the main findings of this investigation on the origins of the huji system of the People’s Republic of China. The main contributions of this study illuminate the nature and the formation of the huji system. The following sections will first summarize these findings and will then address several fascinating questions that arise from the implications of the findings.

7.1 The nature of the huji system: a differential entitlements system

Misunderstandings about the nature and their problems

The nature of the huji system has not been well understood even in academic circles. Scholars have tended to conceptualize the system from the viewpoint of economic sectors or geographical locations. Analyzed through the methods of social science, the huji issue appears to be essentially a problem of imbalanced development, either imbalance between the agricultural sector and the non-agricultural sectors or imbalance between rural areas and urban areas. However, as demonstrated in the introductory discussion of terminology and elsewhere in the preceding chapters, these understandings are problematic. Imbalances between the rural and urban areas and between agriculture and non-agriculture are symptoms or consequences of the huji system rather than part of its mechanism. Another type of analysis has been presented by scholars who have contended that the huji system of the PRC is continuation in intensified form of the huji system that existed in imperial China. But as a matter of
fact, in the history of imperial China there was never a system which divided the whole population into two groups, one of which was entitled to the privileges provided by the state while the other was excluded. A huji system like that of the PRC did not exist in traditional China. As may be seen in the chapters on the creation of “urban status,” the huji system in PRC was constructed through a series of social reorganization projects launched by the CCP in the 1940s and 1950s, and was completed in the latter half of the 1950s.

A common misunderstanding is to take the huji system as a simple migration-control mechanism restricting rural-urban migration. This misunderstanding is shared by many scholars and is still common now, especially by authors who were trained in the PRC. In fact the control of rural-to-urban migration is not the core of the huji system, but one of the most salient consequences of the system. It is not the control of migration that has placed the rural population in an underclass status. Actually, the huji system controls urban-to-rural migration and urban-to-urban migration as well as rural-to-urban migration. In other words, neither rural nor urban hukou holders enjoy full freedom of migration. However, urban hukou holders are not relegated to an underclass as a consequence of strict limitations on their freedom of migration. Thus, it fails to hit the nail on the head to emphasize the control of rural-urban migration when analyzing the huji system of the PRC. The point here is that the control of rural-to-urban migration or the violation of the freedom of migration of rural people.

did not necessarily lead to the underclass status of the rural people. The cause and effect relationship is just the opposite. In fact because the rural population had already been placed in an underclass status during a series of social reorganization efforts, it was necessary to institute controls on rural-to-urban migration, for otherwise the underclass would have flooded the habitat of the privileged group.

The huji system is neither a problem of imbalanced development, nor a path-dependent continuation of traditional governance. Nor is it a migration-control system. In essence it is a system of differential entitlements, marking the varying positions held by individuals in a social system controlled by a party-state regime. In other words, it is an issue of insiders versus outsiders, or members versus non-members, in a nation ruled by a party-state. In fact, there are more than the two positions named “rural” and “urban.” These two categories are just the most basic ones, demarcating the included from the excluded group. Within the “urban” category itself, there is also a more complex system of differential entitlements marking hierarchical levels of entitlements. First, there is variation between cities on different rungs of the administrative ladder in the value of entitlements provided to people who hold urban hukou status in those cities. For instance, the urban hukou holders of provincial cities enjoy more valuable entitlements than those of prefectural cities. Second, among the urban status people residing in a particular city, cadres are entitled to many more benefits than workers.
The party-state system inevitably leads to a differential entitlement system

During the Russian Revolution, Lenin (1870-1924) issued his famous “April Theses” in 1917, in which he proposed the soviet control of production and distribution. This proposal was turned into reality in Russia. This idea was then embedded into the ideology and became one of the key elements of “socialism” on the Soviet model. With the spread of socialism in the first half of the twentieth century and the formation of a socialist camp in the middle of the century, many countries put the idea into practice. Nationalization of private business and Collectivization of agrarian land took place in almost every communist-led country. The communist parties in those countries took over the ownership of the means of production and also assumed control of production processes, resulting in public ownership (公有制) and the command economy (命令经济) accordingly.

Once production was taken over, communist party organizations had to take on the task of distributing goods and services, for people who were deprived of ownership of products could no longer trade with others to meet their needs on the market as they did before. Then, how could these communist party-led organizations distribute products? It was very unlikely that they could distribute products on the egalitarian basis. On the one hand, the people who made up the party had their self-interests. For instance, in every communist-led country, leaders who claimed to be serving the people have always led lives of remarkable luxury that has been completely out of reach of the ordinary people whom they allegedly serve.

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other hand, each communist party in power established priorities in distribution that would in theory contribute to a momentum of positive development. For example, each distributed the lion’s share of resources to the military sector and heavy industry, arguing that this would best serve the interests of the people in the long term. Not surprisingly, a system of differential entitlements was unavoidable in such circumstances. In other words, communist parties found it necessary to designate some people as entitled to the goods that they controlled while excluding others.

This case study focusing on China argues that the huji system of the PRC resulted from the installation of the CCP’s party-state system during the 1950s. It does not prove that the findings of this project can be applied to other countries led by communist or socialist parties. Although I speculate that similar processes and outcome are likely to have taken place in those countries, further studies are necessary to substantiate the speculation. I hope that such studies will be carried out by scholars in the future.

7.2 The construction of the huji system: Derived from the Party-state system

The steps in construction of the huji system

The huji system examined in this project was created for the most part during the 1950s rather than being inherited from the past. Although institutions called huji existed in imperial China and in the Republican period (1912-1949), in those earlier periods huji institutions functioned mainly for registration purposes, similar to the

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3 Kam Wing Chan has pointed out the pervasiveness of such systems in other Communist countries. He writes that “a broader survey reveals that a similar system existed or still exists in other (former) communist countries”. See Kam Wing Chan, “The Chinese Hukou System at 50.” Eurasian Geography and Economics, Vol. 50, Issue 2, 2009: 197-221; 199.
record-keeping which exists in almost every literate society. The huji system that this
project examines is completely different from the system inherited from history.
Rather than a system of registration, it is a differential entitlement system established
by a party-state regime. The party-state was itself a new phenomenon in human
history. The world had never witnessed such party-states until the twentieth century.
These self-appointed bodies control almost all the resources in a country and penetrate
deeply into the cells of society. Therefore it is problematic to assume that the two huji
systems are the same thing or that the huji system of the PRC developed as a
continuation and intensification of the former huji system.4

The formation of the huji system was a gradual process. It became an enormous
system reaching almost each and every person in the PRC and therefore could not be
established overnight. To begin with, it was necessary to terminate the phenomenon of
amphibiousness which had been common before the CCP assumed national power.
Without depriving the formerly amphibious population of its amphibious status it
would not have been possible to establish a system of differential entitlements. The
Land Reform and Collectivization campaigns urbanized the amphibious population
and put an end to the possibility of being amphibious. Second, the great expansion of
the party-state absorbed almost all urban institutions, while at the same time the state
sector took on responsibility for virtually each and every working person in the cities
together with their descendants. The expansion of the party-state was not limited to
the cities but occurred in the countryside as well. The result of the expansion in both

4 This viewpoint was explicitly expressed by Cheng Tiejun. See Cheng, “Dialectics of control: the
household registration (hukou) system in contemporary China,” PhD dissertation, State University of
cities and the countryside was that a substantial proportion of the whole population became “people of the party-state” (党国的人 or 公家人). These state-sector employees were entitled to benefits provided by the state such as medical care, food provisions, housing allocations, and retirement stipends. Certain benefits were extended to the dependents of party-state employees at the same time. Meanwhile, those who did not become “people of the party-state” were denied access to the various benefits. Through this process, rural status and urban status were created.

Third, the party-state succeeded in installing a mechanism to maintain the differences between the two categories. The party-state established its rule of maternal succession and its policy of giving urban status people first priority in staffing the party-state. These were two pillars supporting and sustaining the huji system.

The state also opened narrow channels that permitted individuals holding rural status to gain urban status, and resorted to the change of status from urban to rural for use as a severe punishment. Flows between the two categories were strictly regulated by the party-state. These three steps put the huji system firmly in place and enabled it to function. Of course, these three steps—terminating amphibiousness, creating “insiders” through the expansion of the party-state, and maintaining the differences between insiders and outsiders—have been discussed in a logical sequence rather than in temporal order. Actually, the steps were made simultaneously from the time the CCP took power to the mid-1950s. However, if we examine the huji system from a functional perspective, these three steps explain the formation of the system well.
The shortcomings of previous scholarship

The complicated process of the formation of the huji system has not been fully described by other scholars. They have assumed that the huji system was uniform during the entire decade of the 1950s and have accordingly developed a narrative of its establishment. Two documents have been identified as marking the “alpha” and the “omega” of the huji system. The former is the Temporary Regulations on Management of Urban Hukou, issued by the Ministry of Public Security in July 1951. The latter is the Regulations on Hukou Registration of the PRC, passed by the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress in January 1958. Although this narrative is popular in non-scholarly publications, it is problematic in two significant ways. First, logically it is unconvincing to think that an all-embracing system which involved almost everyone in the country could be easily laid out in two short documents. Second, and more importantly, the hukou or huji institution in the two documents had completely different meanings.

The “urban hukou” that the 1951 document refers to is roughly the traditional term, simply signifying that a person was a legal resident in a particular city. It did not contain the entitlements to benefits and privileges provided by the party-state. At that time, the expansion of the party-state was not yet in full swing and urban status had not been fully created. As used in the document, the term “urban hukou” did not imply that various benefits were provided or guaranteed by the state. Thus, it was not the extremely valuable “urban status” of later years. Because holding “urban hukou”

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in 1951 was not associated with benefits such as health care and pensions provided by the state, it was not very difficult for individuals to apply for “urban hukou” at the time, provided that they or those on whom they depended were legally employed (正当职业) in cities.

During the early 1950s, when the huji system had begun to take shape, people remained unaware of the connections between “urban status” and the valuable benefits provided by the state. This could be seen from Chen Sihe’s family story. Chen Sihe is now a well-known professor in Department of Chinese Literature at Fudan University. During the 1950s, his father was a remarkably competent manager in a well-known restaurant in Shanghai called the Great East Asian Restaurant. In 1954, when the CCP leaders decided to establish an upscale restaurant in Xi’an, Chen’s father was invited to work there. The senior Mr Chen went to Xi’an voluntarily and without hesitation. Chen Sihe commented that “people of my father’s generation held the pre-1950s conception of residency and believed that it would be easy to travel back and forth to Shanghai. It had been common for men to work in other places and to leave their wives and children in Shanghai, or for men to work in Shanghai and to leave wives and children in the countryside. They did not have the sense that they could not come back once they left the city.” Eventually, the senior Mr Chen fell ill and died in Xi’an, after years of futile efforts to reunite with his family in Shanghai.6

The passages in the 1951 document that refer to “urban hukou” do not imply that urban resident status carried any benefits provided or guaranteed by the state. It was no more than an everyday registration practice which did not seem to be very important. People did not regard it as a valuable thing. At least, it is safe to say that the Chen family, as well as many other families in 1954, did not know how precious Shanghai urban hukou status would become, because such a concept (the meaning of “urban status”) had not existed earlier.

Unlike the term hukou in the 1951 document, hukou as used in the 1958 document referred to the same phenomenon that this project examines, meaning a status associated with all the privileges and benefits provided by the state. By the time of the 1958 document, the system of differential entitlements had been established. The party-state system was firmly entrenched, dividing the whole population into entitled and un-entitled groups to the benefits provided by the party-state. This is demonstrated by the fact that almost all the victims of starvation in the Great Leap Famine that set in after 1958 held rural hukou status. Because those holding urban hukou were entitled to food provisions by the state, they survived the famine even though they experienced food shortages. Rural hukou holders were not entitled to the benefit of food rations and consequently tens of millions died of starvation and of illnesses related to under-nourishment. This sharp contrast shows the strength of huji status and also reflects the true meaning of the term huji in the 1958 document.

As explained above, the term hukou as used in the document of 1951 and the term huji in the document of 1958 did not have the same meaning—they were two
different things. Seen in this way, the narrative in which these two documents mark the beginning and the endpoint of the formation of the huji system lacks foundation. To be sure, such an enormous system affecting almost every person’s daily life could not have been installed by a couple of regulations. The significance of the two documents has been greatly overestimated. The document of 1951 actually had very little to do with the huji system and the 1958 document was little more than a recognition or legal sanction (法律固定) of the huji system which had been put in place by that time. As this dissertation has revealed, the real formation process was much more complicated and was completed through a series of social reorganization projects which fundamentally changed the social structure of China as a whole, as has been revealed by this dissertation.

**Shortcomings of the “Big Push Theory”**

A standard interpretation of the formation of the huji system in the PRC may be summarized as the “Big Push Theory.”7 This theory argues that in order to finance large-scale industrialization efforts, the CCP had no alternative but to set up a system which squeezed resources from the agricultural sector and directed them into investment in the industrial sector. Although there were certainly close connections between the formation of the huji system and economic policy during the early PRC period, this study suggests that there are certain weaknesses in the “big push” interpretation.

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The theory that the huji system was set up to support a big push toward industrialization does not explain well why the living standard of workers and peasants had diverged so significantly before 1953 when the large-scale industrialization efforts were launched in a nation-wide Five Year Plan. As mentioned in Chapter 5, the large gap of living conditions between workers and peasants had been observed by people like Liang Shuming in 1953. Mao did not refute the existence of a significant gap, even when he was pushing very hard to persecute Liang. By that time, the First Five Year Plan had just been launched. During the first few years of the history of the PRC period the industrialization program was more moderate. The CCP officially referred to the period as an “era of recovery for the national economy” (国民经济恢复时期). Therefore the explanation that the big push toward industrialization resulted in the huji system places the effect before the cause.

The emphasis on the big push toward industrialization in interpretation of the huji system encounters another difficulty in explaining how the huji system survived after the reform policies implemented under Deng Xiaoping. According to that theory, the push of the state transferred too many resources from agriculture to industry and thus caused the extremely poverty of rural people. Logically speaking, if the push dissolved while nothing else stepped in to replace the role of the pushing hand of the state, resource-distribution should shift from extreme imbalance back toward normalcy and the great gaps in living standards between rural people and urban people should be narrowed accordingly. Deng’s reform was, to some extent, a reaction against the Maoist industrialization program. If the big push was the cause of the huji
system, then the system should have gradually faded away after the push dissolved. However, what is observed is that the inequality brought about by the huji system is still very tenacious, if not becoming larger. The big push theory does not respond to this phenomenon very well.

In addition, the big push theory presumes that the huji system was purposefully devised and installed by the CCP to achieve some political and economic goals. As I have pointed out in many places in this dissertation, we should not assume that the leadership of the CCP had such a clear vision of a China that would be “one country, two societies” when they assumed control in 1950s. For instance, there is no evidence that the leaders of the CCP understood clearly that Land Reform would bring to an end the old “amphibious” way of life and that the ending of the “amphibious” existence would facilitate the establishment of the huji system. This study has led to the conclusion that the huji system was not consciously devised and purposefully pursued by the CCP leadership. Rather, it appears that the huji system emerged as the by-product of a series of social and political campaigns.

Even if there had been no big push toward industrialization early in the PRC period, striking differences between insiders and outsiders would nevertheless have emerged in a society in which a party-state monopolized almost all resources, as discussed above in the section titled “The party-state system inevitably leads to a differential entitlement system.”
7.3 Some interesting questions at issue

The huji system and social control (社会控制)

A well-accepted idea about the huji system is that it has served as a mechanism of social control. Many historians discussing the system have used the term “social control” without providing a precise definition.\(^8\) It seems that they refer to the control of the state over individuals in particular and over society in general. This definition applies mainly to modern undemocratic countries where strong and aggressive states take the control. If we accept this implicit meaning, then there are indeed certain connections between the huji system and social control. At least, the huji system reveals detailed information about each and every household. Thanks to the availability of this information, society becomes virtually transparent to the state authorities. In addition, the huji system has greatly restricted migration by individuals. Less fluidity usually means that a population is more static and thus easier for the state to control.

It should also be noted that what could be described as oppressive control over individuals and the society by a penetrating and aggressive state is universal among modern undemocratic countries. Thus, if we understand “social control” in this sense, the huji system is a cog in a huge machine. Actually in these countries almost all institutions, such as educational and judicial systems, serve the state by controlling

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\(^8\) For instance, in a recently published paper by Wang Haiguang, there was no discussion on the definition of “social control.” See 王海光: 《从政治控制到社会控制: 中国城乡二元户籍制度的建立——对中国当代户籍制度的历史渊源和形成建立过程的考察》, (Wang Haiguang, “From political control to social control: the establishment of the huji system in PRC—an examination on its historical evolution and the formation process”). Many other papers share this problem, especially papers by scholars based in the PRC published in Chinese.
individuals and social groups. Since almost every system can provide service to the state in controlling society, it does not make much sense to argue that the huji system is a system of “social control” (社会控制机制). Seen in this way, almost every system in modern undemocratic countries could be considered part of a system of “social control.”

Also, “social control” in this sense does not necessarily mean dividing the whole population into two unequal groups with regard to entitlements to benefits provided by the state. A repressive state aims to control the thoughts, actions and even migration of the subject population. But dividing the population into two unequal groups does not necessarily help the state in establishing or solidifying its control over the society. In other words, strict “social control” by the state does not have much to do with dividing people into two differential entitlement categories. For instance, Taiwan under the rule of Chiang Kai-shek was for years a repressive regime, with the state aggressively controlling its population and exerting its power with particular vigilance against suspected communists and others viewed as threats to order and control. Nonetheless, the people of Taiwan were not divided into two categories, each receiving different entitlements to benefits provided by the state. Strict “social control” without a differential entitlement system is quite common in countries controlled by right-wing dictatorial leaders. Seen in this way, it is therefore not very illuminating to regard the huji system as a “social control” system.

“Social control” as a sociological term means something very different from the definition above. It refers to “the forces and processes that encourage conformity,
including self-control, informal control, and formal control.”⁹ This definition may be applied to every society, including societies without a dictatorial state or even no state at all. The opposite of this “social control” is nonconformity and deviance, ranging from disregard for conventional norms to violation of the law. Defined in this way, “social control” has almost nothing to do with a system which divides the population into two unequal categories.

In conclusion, if we define “social control” as “restricting the freedom of thought and migration of individuals” or “monitoring the actions of individuals,” the huji system enables a certain degree of social control but in itself is not a system or mechanism of social control. If we define the term social control in precise sociological terms, it would mean “the forces and processes that encourage conformity, including self-control, informal control, and formal control.”¹⁰ In this sense, the huji system has very little to do with social control. No matter how “social control” is defined, it is problematic to say that huji system is a “social control” mechanism, for it was not installed for that purpose. Nor did it end up producing such results.

What was the role of Soviet Union in the making of the huji system?

In discussion on the huji system of the PRC, the influence of the Soviet Union is always an interesting topic. Did China take a page from the book of Soviet Union? If so, what exactly was the role of Soviet Union in this issue? Scholars have argued

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¹⁰ Ibid.
that the huji system in PRC was modeled partly on the residence registration system of the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{11} As far as I can see, however, the huji system was not a revolutionary goal consciously pursued by the CCP. It was largely the byproduct of a series of social reorganization projects. For instance, if the CCP wished to gain the support of the peasant population, it had no choice but to deprive “amphibious” people of their property in the countryside. What the CCP was concerned about was whether or not it could establish its rigorous control in the rural areas. As for the elimination of the rural-urban amphibious phenomenon, it is likely that the CCP leaders did not know clearly its indications and significance. It is unlikely that they intentionally pursued a goal such as the elimination of people who lived on both sides of the rural-urban boundary. In other words, the final byproduct which overshadowed those main products lay over the horizon for policy-makers when they made decisions that eventually led to the formation of the huji system. Also, it could be seen that there was clearly a wave of internal momentum leading toward the creation of the huji system. Therefore, the CCP did not need to intentionally follow suit from the Soviet Union, as they did in various other specific projects such as setting up specialized colleges and providing security and medical care for high-ranking party leaders.

The formation of the huji system during the early years of the PRC certainly took place during a period of pervasive influence from the Soviet Union. Until the break-down of close ties between China and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s, the entire Chinese communist movement was constantly under the influence, and

sometimes the direct guidance, of the Soviet Union. Even after relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated, Chinese communism continued to be strongly influenced by the Soviet model. The influences were so deeply embedded in patterns of thought and action, that they could not be eliminated even though the student eventually turned its back against the teacher. Indeed, the student struggled against the teacher using ideas that the teacher had taught. However, it seems unlikely that the CCP leaders invited Soviet experts to teach them or advise them specifically on how to install a huji system. This investigation has not uncovered evidence that the CCP intentionally imitated the internal passport system of the Soviet Union in setting up the huji system. Therefore it seems that the influence of the Soviet Union on the Chinese Communist movement should not be overestimated. Specifically on the formation of the huji system in PRC, its influence was perhaps indirect and less significant than has often been assumed. However it should be emphasized that more research has to be done before a definite conclusion can be drawn.

**Why did a “peasant revolution” create a “urban public goods regime”?**

The interpretation that this research has provided on the construction of the huji system helps to explain more fully a strange phenomenon in the history of PRC. After examining the huji system, Dorothy Solinger stated that the PRC was an “urban public goods regime.” However, it is common knowledge that the Communist revolution in China was mainly a peasant revolution. It was peasants rather than

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workers who filled the ranks of the revolutionaries and contributed the greater part of
the material resources as well as the manpower that assured national victory for the
CCP in 1949. Also, the leaders of the CCP were mainly sons of peasants rather than
workers and they did not deny that they were “sons of peasants.” Then why did a
peasant revolution led by sons of peasants and mainly supported and waged by
peasants, result in a “republic of urbanites” regime which has severely discriminated
against and harshly exploited peasants from the very outset and throughout its
existence up to the present?¹³

To understand these contradictory phenomena it is necessary to re-think the
meaning of “peasant revolution.” To be sure, the communist revolution in China was
mainly fought and funded by peasants and led mainly by those from peasant
backgrounds. Therefore it is reasonable to call the revolution a “peasants’ revolution”
because of these circumstances. However, the victory of the “peasants’ revolution”
did not guarantee that the new CCP-led state would serve the interests of peasants.
Historical hindsight shows that instead of serving peasants’ interests, the CCP
revolutionaries formed a self-interested “political-military-economic group”, whose
relationship with peasants and other groups was mainly predatory. The revolutionaries
siphoned off resources from various groups to feed themselves when it was necessary,
feasible, and in their interests to do so. The interests of the “insiders” of the

¹³ These questions continue to preoccupy China specialists. Joseph Fewsmith, for instance, asked such
questions recently in an interview, published in 《领导者》(Leaders) on the 30th anniversary of the
issuing of 《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议》 (“Resolution on Certain Questions in the
History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China”). See《领导者》, (Leaders,
on Dec. 5, 2011).
“political-military-economic group” which established a new state after winning national victory, and the interests of peasants diverged from the outset. Once a son or daughter of a peasant joined the group of new rulers and was accepted as a full-time professional revolutionary, his or her well-being, including material benefits, status, and self-esteem, were all provided and supported by distributions from the ruling group. Well-being had almost nothing to do with whether or not a person’s parents had engaged in farming activity. In fact, once a person became an “insider” of the new ruling group, he or she was no longer a peasant.

The interests of the CCP revolutionaries as they won and consolidated their victory were not necessarily contrary to those of the peasants. Actually, at some point, the two interests converged. For instance, during the Land Reform campaign, the “group-state” and the peasants were allies against the same enemy. The enemy was identified as the “haves” in rural society. At one point there were shared goals and gains for both the revolutionaries and the peasants, for the former gained power as well as a greater chance for national victory and the latter received land. However, their fundamental interests then diverged. The conflict of the two interests could be best reflected in the Great Famine lasting from 1958 to 1962, in which the survival of the “insiders” of the new state was assured at the expense of peasants’ lives and the idealistic ambitions of the new ruling group were pursued despite the costs to the majority of the population which had not been brought under the ruling group’s welfare umbrella.

In short, perhaps the contradiction between a “peasant revolution” and an “urban
public goods regime” might be reconciled if we define a revolution mainly led and 
fought by peasants as a “peasant revolution” without assuming that “peasant 
revolution” will necessarily serve the interest of peasants. There is scope for further 
study of this intriguing contradiction.

Can the current reforms end the huji system?

There have been many papers discussing how and why the current huji system 
should be reformed. Such papers are being now produced in large numbers every year. 
Although historical research is usually not aimed at providing policy suggestions, in 
some cases, especially projects in recent history, the findings of historical 
investigation may contain implications for policy-making,

Given the consensus among scholars and Chinese officials in favour of reform of 
the huji system as it operates today, there is no longer any need to argue for reforms. 
The issue now is the reform should proceed. Thorough examination of the formation 
leads to the conclusion that reform will be difficult. Because China’s huji system is so 
closely tied from the party-state, it might prove to be inextricable from the current 
organization of state and society. In other words, the huji system might perhaps be 
dismantled only if only the current regime loses control. Once a party-state controls a 
great deal of resources and the way it manages resources is beyond the control of 
those who have been excluded from the benefits, there is no way to prevent the 
regime from continuing to distribute the resources at its disposal in a manner that 
favours the insiders. Insiders and the outsiders will continue to be subject to a
differential entitlement system, and these differential entitlements are precisely the essence of the huji system. Even if the term “huji” were to fall into disuse, the differential entitlement would continue to exist along with the current party-state system. Therefore claims that the huji system will be demolished under the current political framework are no more than misleading rhetoric or naïve hopes.\footnote{From time to time, the Chinese media issue reports that such and such place has “abolished huji”. For instance, Hunan province stopped differentiating between “rural hukou” and “non-rural hukou” status in 2003. Taiyuan in Shanxi Province and Qingdao in Shandong province followed suit in 2007. In recent years, more and more places have claimed to have “abolished the differences in huji” (取消城乡户籍差别). However, putting an end to the registration of “hukou nature” (户口性质), namely, rural hukou or urban hukou, does not necessarily mean the achievement of equal entitlements among the people. Actually, the differential entitlements have remained in place after reforms in those places. For a comprehensive discussion, see Kam Wing Chan and Will Buckingham, “Is China Abolishing the Hukou System?” \textit{The China Quarterly}, No. 195, September 2008: 582-606.}

Perhaps the only means to achieve a thorough dismantling of China’s huji system would be to dismantle the current party-state regime. This would require placing state authority under the monitoring of the people as a whole so that it could not be used solely to benefit a specific group. In addition, the size of the state should be dramatically scaled down to a reasonable level.\footnote{Chinese leftists may criticize this point by accusing the author of taking the situations of western countries as “normal” and thus to regard China as “abnormal”. Putting aside ideological debates, it is a fact the state sector in China is extremely large compared to other countries in the world today. There is no reason to think that China needs a much larger state sector than other countries.} Ideally, all members of the national population should be equal in front of the state and entitled to benefits provided by the state. Significant progress along these lines seems unlikely to occur in the near future, unfortunately. In order to make progress, however, inequality between individuals in relation to the state and the benefits provided by it should at least not be further entrenched and rigidified. This more limited progress might prove more attainable if the nature of the huji system as a system of differential entitlements were more widely and clearly understood.
Is the gap caused by the huji system widening or shrinking?

Currently, there is heated debate among scholars on whether the social-economic gaps between rural-hukou holders and urban-hukou holders are now shrinking. Some scholars argue that the gaps are becoming less significant. To support their view, they point to the fact that very few commodities continue to be subject to rationing and that all basic necessities therefore are readily available to rural hukou holders as well as those who hold urban hukou status. They also point out that rural hukou holders are enjoying greater freedom in migration and more and more of them are settling permanently in urban areas. Those who disagree turn to both common sense and statistical data to refute this optimistic view of current trends.\(^\text{16}\) Without seeking a full resolution of the debate, I would like to suggest that we should be more aware of the real object of our discussion. When discussing the question of whether the gap between the “rural” and the “urban” is widening or narrowing, we must first clarify where the real boundary between “rural” and “urban” lies.

The post-Mao reforms expelled certain urban hukou holders from the bandwagon of state-distributed entitlements. The experiences of millions of laid-off workers from state enterprises since the 1990s exemplify those who fell off the bandwagon. They were no longer assured of the privileges and benefits of the party-state that they had formerly received. Employment is no longer assigned to them by the state and many

\(^{16}\) Such a heated debate took place on a session at the 2011 Melbourne Conference on China (University of Melbourne, August 6, 2011). A researcher from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, Zhang Zhanxin, gave a presentation on “The decline of the rural-urban divide and the diminishing significance of hukou.” His arguments came under strong criticism from other participants in the session.
other benefits such as medical care, housing, and education for their children have also dwindled or disappeared. In the meantime, rural hukou holders have gained greater freedom and opportunities during the past thirty years, mainly as a consequence of the lifting of regulatory controls by the state and the reduction of the state’s dominance over the economic sphere. Migrants from rural areas have been able to work in cities in foreign and private enterprises for higher wages than they could formerly earn. Those with means have gained access to health care, housing and education for their children provided by the market rather than the state. An observer considering those who have lost their status as “insiders” along with “outsiders” who have recently become better-off might naturally reach the conclusion that the gap between rural hukou holders and urban hukou holders has narrowed.

However, if we adopt a broader perspective and take into account those who have maintained their status as insiders in the state sector, we might reach a different conclusion. Urban hukou holders have continued to benefit as insiders during the reform period, receiving various benefits and privileges from the state as they did before. However the value of the benefits they receive has increased enormously during the reform period, and some, in addition, have even taken advantage of the new opportunities to turn their access to “public power” into forms of monopoly power in markets or to pursue private profits in other ways. There are many examples of individuals and families that have been very successful in these activities, accumulating great wealth. The leading cadres (领导干部) at various levels and ordinary “public servants” (公务员) exemplify these urban hukou holders.
Conspicuous Chinese consumers at home and abroad largely belong to this segment of the urban status population. Their disproportionate success during the reform period has become a major source of popular discontent. The opportunities for personal enrichment that “public service” provides are reflected in the fact that millions of graduates from universities and colleges compete intensely for administrative positions in the state sector at its various levels. If we compare this group of urban hukou holders with rural hukou holders, chances are that the overall gap in privilege has widened and continues to widen.

Indications that the gap in privilege continues to widen call into question generalizations about current trends. Therefore the first step in the debate should be to clarify where the relevant boundary lies. Suffice it to say that the “insider versus outsider” pattern of inequality is still functioning and that the basic mechanism has not changed. Seen in this way, the essential dynamics of the huji system are still alive in China. Furthermore, it is likely that the gap is widening rather than narrowing, for the wealth controlled by the state is growing greater in absolute terms and the state is not checked by wider society in directing allocations of the resources at its disposal. If the mechanisms of distribution continue to function essentially unchanged, then insiders may be expected to become even more privileged than before relative to the outsiders. Therefore, even though the outsiders, who are mainly those who hold rural

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17 For instance, the foreign exchange reserve of the Chinese government was more than three trillion US dollars at the end of 2011. See “国家历年外汇储备” (Foreign Exchange Reserve of the Past Years) on the webpage of State Administration of Foreign Exchange. (accessed on April 14, 2012). This was unimaginable for the Chinese government in the 1950s.
hukou, have also become somewhat better-off, the gap might has widened rather than narrowed. This question has been addressed by some scholars but the categories are not clearly defined.¹⁸

Fundamentally speaking, the primary reason why this debate about current trends arose among academics lies in the confusing fact that after three decades of dramatic reforms, some urban hukou holders have lost their status as insiders of the party-state, while nonetheless continuing to hold urban hukou.

**Why do the rural status people not resist?**

By identifying more precisely the nature of the huji system, it becomes possible to understand a striking phenomenon related to the huji system of the PRC. It is a plain fact that the huji system straightforwardly discriminates in various ways against those who hold rural status. However, to this day the voices of the oppressed have hardly been heard and actions to fight against this system by the group that has suffered systematic injustice have not occurred. It is ironic that opposition against the system has arisen mainly within the privileged group, namely the urban status people, such as professors, journalists and a few government officials. This seems a strange phenomenon considering the social movements that have campaigned against forms of systematic social discrimination in other parts of the world. No matter where such campaigns have taken place, oppressed groups have usually been active participants.

For instance, in struggles against racial discrimination in the United States and South

Africa, blacks have been active both in theoretical debates and concrete actions. Also, there were leading figures of the oppressed group, such as Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) in the United States and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (b. 1918) in South Africa. Then, why have the people of China who have so long been relegated to inferior rural status kept silent under such brutal discrimination and oppression? Why has this group not expressed its discontent and produced leading advocates?

Without undertaking an in-depth examination, I can suggest one answer to this interesting question. The nature of the huji system determines that it can absorb and dissolve much of the opposition from the oppressed group. Firstly, because it is a differential entitlement system, the ranks of the privileged group are always open to members of the group that is discriminated against. Almost anyone, theoretically speaking, has the opportunity to join the privileged group. To be sure, the urban status population increased from less than 10 percent of the whole population in the 1950s to almost 45 percent today. Therefore, members of the group that is discriminated against are more willing to join the privileged group of this system than to fight against it. For instance, I grew up with rural status but was never told by my family members that I should try to fight against this system. In fact I did not learn how discriminatory it was until I had the opportunity to change my status. Instead, I was continually urged by my parents and grandparents to study hard so that I could enter a college or university and eventually became an urban hukou holder, and they did not mention that my chances of academic success were low because of my rural status and the urban bias of university entrance quotas. In contrast, other discriminatory
systems tend to lack opportunities for a shift in status. For instance, strictly
maintained racial systems do not allow underprivileged blacks to join the privileged
white group. Therefore, such systems are less able to absorb potential opposition, and
their rigidity makes them fragile.

In addition to the availability of opportunities to join the privileged group, the
differential entitlement system has a mechanism to continuously absorb members of
the oppressed group who would otherwise be the ones most likely to turn into activists
campaigning against the system. There are several regular paths for rural hukou
holders to join the privileged group, such as education, promotion (提干) and
marriage. Higher educational institutions and the various vocational schools which
allow their graduates to gain urban status have continued to enroll the most talented
members from the group subject to discrimination, through an excruciatingly
competitive process. During the 1990s, the state opened a door for wealthy rural
hukou holders to join the urban status group if they invested certain amounts of
money in the cities through purchasing real estate. In this way, many of the most
economically successful members among the rural hukou holders have been absorbed
by the privileged group. Moreover, throughout the entire PRC period, there have
always been legal and illegal loopholes allowing members of intellectual, economic or
political elites holding rural status people to join the privileged group. This
mechanism has continuously diverted what might otherwise have been oppositional
energies from within the under-privileged population. An effective large-scale
resistance campaign would require a group of people to mobilize, coordinate and
guide it. Thus it is not surprising that there is so little resistance activity among those who hold rural hukou status.

Within a system of differential entitlements led by the state, the ranks of the privileged group can expand only if the state is able to generate sufficient resources to provide for new entrants and is willing to admit them. When the state allows the size of the privileged group to expand, resistance from the oppressed group is greatly reduced. By this means the system is strengthened compared to other discriminatory systems, such as racial segregation regimes, that maintain barriers preventing almost all members of the oppressed group from joining the ranks of the privileged group.

**Implications of this project for understanding PRC**

The findings of this project contribute to scholarly and popular understanding of the history of the PRC in general and the history of Mao’s China in particular. They have indicated that China during the Mao period was by no means an egalitarian society and the official line emphasizing the importance of a “worker-peasant alliance” (工农联盟) was little more than rhetoric. It is commonly accepted that the Chinese society was very egalitarian under Mao’s leadership while the Reform and Opening program initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has created great social inequalities. Given the growing gap between rich and poor during the past decade and the prevalence of various popular and academic leftist ideas, this idea has become conventional wisdom, especially among members of younger generations who did not

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experience the Mao years personally. In recent years, idealization of the Mao era as one of social equality has even contributed to the resurgence of a new cult of Mao. However, this research reveals that such a rosy picture of the early years of the PRC is mythical. To be sure, great inequalities did not exist within particular groups during the Mao period. For instance, inequality was not striking when one particular state worker was compared with another or one farmer was compared with a neighbor in the same locality. Many people felt themselves to be equally privileged in comparison to others because they were locked in small social communities such as work units and their everyday encounters were mainly with those who shared their status. However, it is inaccurate to think that equality existed between the urban hukou holders and the rural hukou holders, or between cadres and workers. In fact, the degree of inequality between the “insiders” and the “outsiders,” which was gradually set up by Mao’s state, was extreme in human history. Furthermore, the nature of the inequalities has proved to be rigid and resilient as well as unjust.

An “alliance between workers and peasants” has been officially touted as the political and social foundation of the PRC. This study reveals an acclaimed foundation to be, ironically and paradoxically, a great lack of foundation. In fact the relationship between workers and peasants during Mao’s era was the opposite of an alliance. Instead of building an alliance, the new regime created a new antagonism between the two groups. The antagonism between the two groups of people has developed into something that has never been so intense in Chinese or world history. The overwhelming majority of workers was employed in the state sectors and
received the benefits provided to those holding urban hukou. Almost all peasants held rural hukou. The great gap between the two groups determined that there was no common ground for an alliance between workers and peasants. The privileged life of workers was based on the condition that peasants were not allowed to compete with them for the jobs provided by the party-state.

Seen from the viewpoint of how the party-state has maintained the default line between insiders and outsiders, the reforms led by Deng Xiaoping did not constitute a rupture but a continuation of the systems established under Mao. The pattern of “insiders versus outsiders” has been maintained. The state continues to provide various privileges and benefits for its insiders while at the same time preventing outsiders from gaining access to those benefits. Even though the position of the default-line has shifted somewhat and a portion of the former insider population has lost its privileges, the core features and mechanisms of the patterns of inequality are still in place today.
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