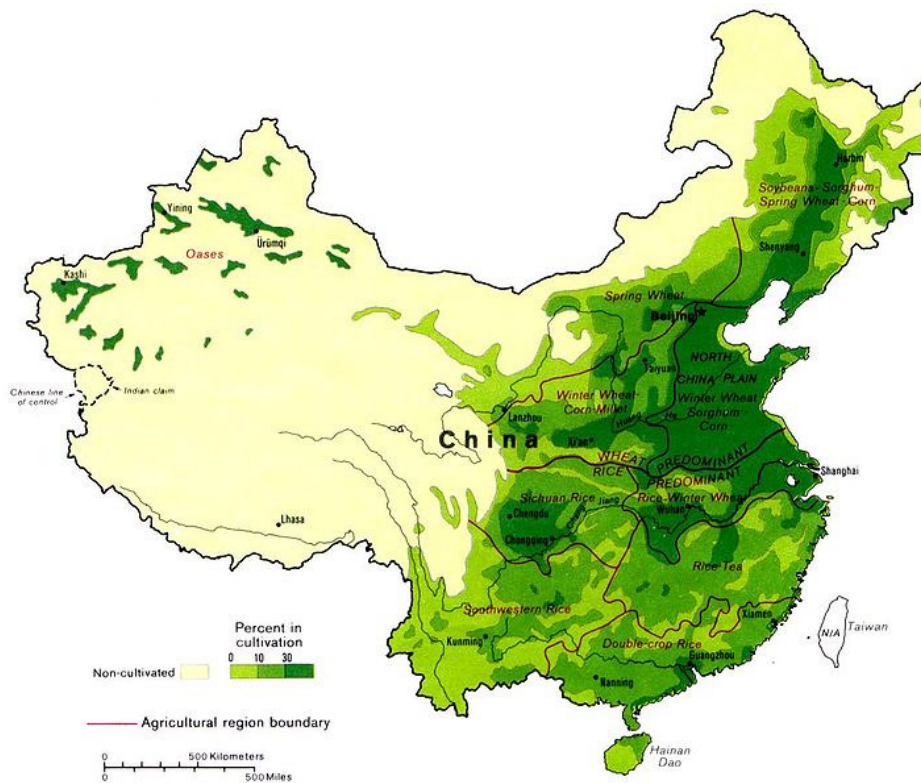


## BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO AND COMMENT ON CHINA'S GREAT UPROOTING

China's rural-to-urban migration is a major theme of the Chamber's urban development monitor page. This separate section on that theme was motivated by the current intention of the Chinese authorities to accelerate rural-to-urban migration by building new cities and encouraging rural residents to move into them. There are two reasons for this desire to achieve a more rapid rate of urbanisation. The first relates to China's agricultural sector. Although the output of that sector is the largest in the world, it is concentrated in relatively small portions of China (see, especially, the dark green areas in the map below<sup>1</sup>). The productivity of China's agricultural land is very limited in other areas and overall it is insufficient to support approximately 300 million agricultural workers at income levels that are comparable to those of urban residents. Although the rural-urban income gap has not increased substantially in recent years (refer to references cited under "Urban and Rural Inequalities" in the Chamber's urban development monitor), neither has it decreased.



**China's Agricultural Regions in 1986.**

Source: Wikipedia at:

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/04/China\\_agricultural\\_1986.jpg/724px-China\\_agricultural\\_1986.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/0/04/China_agricultural_1986.jpg/724px-China_agricultural_1986.jpg).

<sup>1</sup> Note that the original source is cited as the US Central Intelligence Agency and as such the source material consists of work prepared by an officer or employee of the United States government as part of that person's official duty, and hence cannot be subject to copyright. See "Copyright Law of the United States of America and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 the United States Code", at <http://www.copyright.gov/title17/92chap1.html#105>.

The second motivation is the desire to assist China's transition from an export-oriented growth strategy to a more balanced strategy with a greater contribution to gross domestic product from domestic consumption and a more substantial services sector. It is hoped that the newly acquired rural-to-urban migrants will seek employment in the new urban centres and will contribute significantly to increased consumption expenditure as a result of higher urban incomes. It is also hoped that these migrants will enable a stable transition by offering labour at levels that are only slightly higher than the current urban wage rates. By populating the newly constructed extensions of smaller communities in China's townships or, in some cases, "green fields" projects that are undertaken beyond the periphery of major cities,<sup>2</sup> it is hoped that lower infrastructure costs will result, compared to the cost of urban expansion and renewal in larger built-up areas.

The process of China's great uprooting will be observed closely by both developing countries and the more advanced countries, but for different reasons. The former will be interested in knowing if an authoritarian regime can succeed in achieving the objectives more easily than less authoritarian regimes experienced in the recent past. The advanced countries will watch closely to determine if the combined effect of social and economic costs exceed the desired benefits to both China and the world. Western nations that continue to be sceptical of the future of China's one-party political system will also view the process under their standard governance rubric. That is, they will evaluate whether the process either confirms or denies their current scepticism. The Chinese authorities seem eager to show that they can achieve their desired result, and that adds considerable interest particularly during a period in which most Western governments show great reluctance in attempting anything that is even slightly new or different.

To comment briefly on the first two of the set of articles that are *The New York Times* promised, the main issues are clearly stated. For example, it is entirely appropriate to highlight the key element of extremely rapid rates of change. The multiple shifts from Mao Zedong's rural communes to a family-responsibility system with small rural land holdings and village enterprises to large-scale farming with less than a third of the current agricultural workforce, and the remaining two-thirds fending for themselves in urban areas, is occurring within the life-time of Chinese who are now aged 35 years or more. That is unprecedented.

It is also appropriate to underscore the lack of education, training and general adaptability of rural villagers in seeking and obtaining employment in urban areas. Additional adult training facilities are likely to be needed. Similarly, the social dislocation from open rural living to much more constrained high-rise apartment blocks may require increased reliance

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Lanzhou Xinqu (or Lanzhou New Area) lies about an hour by motor car from Lanzhou, the capital of Gansu Province, and is being constructed on farmland. This case differs somewhat from the more typical "new townships" in that the future growth of Lanzhou is constrained by its position along the flood plain of the Yellow River, with steep hills on either side and a meandering growth-path either upstream or downstream of its present location. As a result, some provincial government offices will be moved to Lanzhou Xinqu and it will also contain a high-tech research centre known as "Wisdom Valley." Refer to Tom Phillips, "From Sand to Skyscrapers: Inside China's Newest City as 400 Million Move to Towns," *The Telegraph*, 17 July 2013. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10123620/From-sand-to-skyscrapers-Inside-Chinas-newest-city-as-400-million-move-to-towns.html>.

on non-government organisations to establish and maintain social networks within these high-density urban communities to offset the sense of identity-loss. New pastimes must be developed for the older migrants and China's social welfare system, with its family registration system (*hukou*), will be placed under additional strain.<sup>3</sup>

The second article in the series brings out the increased employment generated by the manufacture of household goods for the new urban dwellers. These are being paid for from the compensation they received from the government in reclaiming their village land.<sup>4</sup> The author's use of family case studies is informative and the accompanying photographs and videos add detail. We cannot know what type of articles will subsequently appear, but we can be certain that articles will appear and that they will be followed by more comprehensive scholarly investigations. At least some of these will be cited and commented upon in this monitor.

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*An earlier version of this introduction was amended as a result of comments received after the first version appeared. These comments gave rise to a slightly altered text and to footnotes numbered 2 and 3.*

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<sup>3</sup> Social problems arising from this uprooting may not be as great as some observers are predicting. For most villagers the uprooting is not entirely new. Relatively few rural villages in China have remained unaffected by the migration pattern that has been emerging since the first special economic zones were established in the early 1980s. Moreover, the increased availability of the Internet to rural areas is leading to an information explosion that allows the newly uprooted villagers to learn from the experiences of others.

<sup>4</sup> As noted elsewhere in this urban development monitor, village land was officially passed to village ownership when the communes were broken up, with the capital equipment that was previously under the control of the commune passed to township and village enterprises. Rural land thus remains collectively owned by the residents of each village. Urban land is state owned. This speeded the transition from commune to the household responsibility system, but it was achieved without a formal legal basis for changing from one jurisdiction (rural) to another (municipal). The property rights of village land therefore remain ambiguous. Refer to Fulong Wu, Fangzhu Zhang and Chris Webster, "Informality and Development and Demolition of Urban Villages in the Chinese Peri-Urban Area", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 10 (August 2013), pp. 1919–1934). Available for purchase at: <http://usj.sagepub.com/content/current>.