

STATE WITHIN A STATE

**Fifty years of the Chinese
hukou system**

HUKOU / HUJI system (户口/户籍制度)



Chinese household registration policy, based on separation of the population classified as 'agricultural' from the 'non-agricultural'.

GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUKOU SYSTEM

1) BEFORE 1949:

- 'well-field' and 'xiangsui' systems (Zhou dynasty)
- 'baojia' system (Song dynasty),
- 'lijia' system (Ming dynasty)

FUNCTIONS: fighting with unrestrained migration, tax collection and crime prevention; mutual control and collective responsibility; uncontrolled migration considered as a threat to public order

2) PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA (SINCE 1949):

- **1951** - Contemporary Regulations on Hukou in the Cities, extended to rural areas in 1955
- **1958 - Hukou Law of the People's Republic of China**; restrictions for those who wanted to settle down in urban areas and the borderland
- **1958-60** – 'Great Leap Forward' – intensive population movements, followed by strengthening of the hukou system
- **1966-1976** – 'Cultural Revolution' – massive population movements, both spontaneous and forced

- **1978** – start of the economic reform - decollectivisation and elimination of rural communes leaves the countryside with a labour surplus of 220 million; liberalization of the hukou system; developing coastal provinces of China (mainly Special Economic Zones) attract millions of workers from inland regions.
- **1984** – liberalization of hukou; holders of the agricultural hukou status allowed to settle down in 60,000 towns, provided that they could afford their own food; they don't have access to any social benefits; the system of food rationing abolished in 1987.
- **1985** – introduction of ID cards (*shenfenzheng* 身份证), which became the only documents required during trips across the country.
- **End of the 1980s** - overpopulation of some cities and regions, many municipalities require fees from migrants; the newcomers receive 'blue-stamp' hukou and access to some of the social benefits; the fees officially banned in 2001.
- **Middle of the 1990s – until now** – series of pilot programs, abolishing hukou restrictions in different parts of China
- **2001** – Government's announcement of abolishment of hukou within the subsequent 5 years; the goal wasn't accomplished.
- **2003** - 'Regulations concerning the Help and Dealing with Vagrants and Beggars in Urban Areas' – as a result of the case of Sun Zhigang; abolishment of previous recommendations to arrest and expel from the cities migrants who didn't have necessary permits.

FUNCTIONS OF THE HUKOU SYSTEM

- **INFORMATION** – hukou as a source of information on citizens' lives and activities
- **SOCIAL CONTROL** – hukou as a tool of isolating groups and individuals constituting hazard to the state's stability
- **MIGRATION CONTROL** – hukou as a tool of preventing overpopulation and excessive growth of the cities
- **ECONOMIC** – hukou as one of the elements of centrally-planned economy and the collective system of production
- **ALLOCATIVE** – hukou as one of the tools of distribution of social guarantees

STATE BENEFITS

Holders of non-agricultural hukou:

- Employment
- Accommodation
- Food rations (until 1987)
- Retirement pensions
- Migration facility
- Facilitated access to health care and education

Holders of agricultural hukou:

- Access to arable land
- The right to possess more than 1 child

METHODS OF CHANGING THE HUKOU STATUS INTO THE NON-AGRICULTURAL

- EDUCATION
 - JOB
- SERVICE IN THE ARMY
- MEMBERSHIP IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY
 - URBANIZATION
- FORCIBLE RESETTLEMENTS
 - FAMILY SITUATION
 - 'DINGTI' POLICY

EFFECTS OF THE HUKOU SYSTEM

- SPATIAL DISPROPORTIONS IN: **EDUCATION, LABOR MARKET, HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL CARE SYSTEMS**
- LIMITATION OF **URBANIZATION** PROCESSES
- RESTRICTION OF **SOCIAL MOBILITY**
- SLOWING DOWN **CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC UNIFICATION** OF THE COUNTRY (ONLY HALF OF THE POPULATION CAN UNDERSTAND THE OFFICIAL, NATIONAL SPEECH, *'PUTONGHUA'*)
- INDIRECTLY – HUKOU SYSTEM AND ITS NEGATIVE OUTCOMES MIGHT STIMULATE THE ALREADY NUMEROUS CASES OF **SOCIAL UNREST**.