Accommodating Migrants in the Post-reform Urban China: The Perspective of the Chinese Hukou System

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Abstract: One of the most dramatic social transitions in the post-reform China has been the internal migration (mainly rural to urban) which is by far the most important component of urbanization process in contemporary China. How to accommodate the increasing urban inhabitants is a challenging issue to the Chinese government. From the perspective of the Chinese Hukou system, this paper examines three social groups (local urban residents, permanent migrants and temporary migrants) and their housing choices as well as housing conditions in China’s urban areas. The results of housing policies analysis suggest that the rural-urban temporary migrants without urban household registration have the most limited housing choices to habitat in cities. Moreover, among these limited housing choices, almost none is suitable for most of them due to their poor economic conditions and the bureaucratic identity registration barriers. The double stresses (economic and spirit press) force these temporary migrants to choose to live in the informal rental housing, Chengzhongcun (Villages in Urban areas). In view of Chinese economic development and urban Hukou reform, it is unfair for Chinese government to exploit the rural-urban temporary migrants as the almost infinite supply of cheap labor but ignoring their elementary housing rights. China’s urban government should recognize the housing demand from large amount of the floating population in urban areas and make use of the functions of Chengzhongcun to solve the migrants housing problem at relatively low social cost.

Keywords: Urbanization, Migration, Migrant Housing, Hukou System

Introduction

The UNITED NATIONS defines urbanization as the movement of people from rural to urban areas with population growth of cities (Clark, 2007). Rural-urban migration is by far the most important component of urbanization process and the chief mechanism by which all major urbanization trends in the word have been initiated (Bogue and Zachariah, 1962). The direct result of people migrating from rural to urban areas is the increase of population living in cities. How to accommodate those new urban inhabitants is a challenging issue to almost every country. Many developed countries are concerned with the total supply of housing, the provision of decent accommodation, as well as the building of neighbourhood communities for the entire population at reasonable cost. Migrants’ housing accommodation would normally be taken into account when considering provision and growth of housing accommodation in cities (Headey, 1978). In contrast, with the poor economic foundation and the serious population pressure, governments of most developing countries are faced with more severe urban problems, such as the overcrowding living conditions, the proliferation of slums, and the housing shortage, mainly caused by a surge of urban population associated with rural-urban migration, sometime associated with poor
urban planning policies and practices that do not take migrant housing accommodation into consideration. (Costello, 1987)

However, due to the Household Registration or *Hukou* \(^1\) system and strict land policy, China’s urban migrant housing under rapid urbanization process is different from the expansion of squatter settlements and slums in many other developing countries. Since the 1990s, *Chengzhongcun* (literately ‘villages encircled by the city’) has been the main place which accommodates millions of rural migrants with little government resources and assistance. Some scholars deem that *Chengzhongcun* provides a feasible and mutually beneficial development of low-cost housing for migrants, which contributes to the economic and social development of local villages and that of the whole city as well (Zhang, *et al*. 2003). How to understand Chinese urban migrant housing as well as the relevant institutional environment? While some existing studies provide analysis on migration and urbanization or the urban housing problem in some major cities, (Li, 2000; 2003; Wu, 2004), some are inadequate in offering a systematic understanding on Chinese migration patterns in relation with urban living conditions and housing accommodation from the perspective of China’s *Hukou* policy. The purpose of this paper is to offer a comprehensive review and analysis of the current knowledge and understanding of the key urban migrant housing situation from the perspective of China’s dual resident identification system, the *Hukou* system. The first section of this paper will review the process of migration and urbanization in China in last several decades as well as the driving forces and institutional barriers (e.g. *Hukou*) that all migrants have to face in the process of migration. The different housing conditions and choices among three social groups (local urban residents, permanent migrants and temporary migrants) will then be discussed. Following that we then attempt to explore the housing choices of two types of migrants in China’s urban areas, considering the uneven regional development in different provinces of China. The role of urban villages (*Chengzhongcun*) in cities and the policy responses from the urban government will also be discussed. Conclusion will be summarized in the last section.

**A Brief Review of China’s Urbanization and Migration Process**

China’s market-oriented economic reforms have driven the processes of population migration and urbanization at fast pace in the last thirty years, mainly through massive rural to urban migration and creating new urban centers. Almost at the same time, China has also experienced a fast process of urban housing commercialization (Wang and Murie, 1996). The improvement of agricultural productivity stimulated by the ‘Household responsibility system’ after 1978 has led the surplus rural labors who were encouraged to engage in other economic activities such as manufacturing, construction and retailing (Shen, 1995). By moving these surplus rural labor to the cities and export-oriented processing zones, China guaranteed an

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\(^1\) The Household Registration or *Hukou* is an identification system in which every citizen is registered at the place of his/her birth, the place to which he or she is permitted to move, or his or her mother’s place of registration. One’s *Hukou* is an identification of citizenship, and residency status for a specific place. In the pre-reform era, one’s *Hukou* status was often associated with various subsidies or other benefits provided by the government. It divides Chinese citizens into two major categories: agricultural and non-agricultural residents. People with non-agricultural *Hukou* status often enjoyed more benefits than those with agricultural status, e.g. non-agricultural residents in cities could enjoy free or cheap housing, medical services, education, and employment opportunities, while their counterparts with agricultural *Hukou* status would not normally be entitled. See Guo and Iredale (2004), Cheng and Selden (1994), and Yang (1993) and Zhang (1988) for detailed reference.
almost infinite supply of manual labor at relatively low wages for industrialists for many years, which rendered China’s economic production competitive (Chan, 2009). However, Chinese government has tried to control the trend of rural to urban migration and urban housing growth through the Hukou system, a crucial policy promulgated by 1958 Hukou regulation (Hukou dengji tiaoli) (Chan and Zhang, 1999; Wu, 1994).

It has been argued that China’s Hukou system is the main institution which classifies Chinese into two groups: agricultural population and non-agricultural population. Many scholars regard Hukou system as the major institutional obstacle which affected the fundamental aspects of life for 800 million rural residents (e.g. see Wang, 2005; Chan, 2009). Despite the continuous stringency of Hukou conversion from agricultural to non-agricultural status in the years of pre-reform, Chinese government began to experiment with the relatively loose Hukou system in some small to medium-sized cities and towns after 1978. At the inception of reform, peasants’ principal entrée into the city was via contracts between their rural units and urban state enterprises (Walder, 1989). The number of urban migrants via the traditional channel in which rural residents are recruited directly by the formal urban sector, has been increased with the expansion of the urban sector (Shen, 1995). Most of them obtained permanent Hukou after working several years in urban state enterprises. In addition, as of the start of the reform period, urban areas accepted a large number of Educated Urban Youths (Zhiqing) who have worked in countryside (Shang shan xia xiang) during the movement of the Great Culture Revolution (Wen hua da ge ming). (Chan, 2009)

Particularly, since the 1990s China has been confronted with the age of migration, mainly rural-urban temporary migration (Liang, 2001). Figure 1 plots the overall changes in urban population and the distribution of the natural increase in urban population, as well as the net migration to urban areas from 1991 to 2005. During this period, the natural increase in urban population remained stable and only accounts for a small part of the total urban population increase. By contrast, the net migration forms the main part of urban population increase every year. In particular, after 1995 the gap between natural increase of urban population and net migration to urban areas has become increasingly large. Moreover, the net migration in Figure 1 would have been even greater if the official statistics include the large amount of rural-urban temporary migrants. The current official statistics of rural-urban migration only reflect permanent migration, which involves change in one’s household registration status\(^2\).

\(^2\) More detailed discussion on permanent and temporary migration will be available in the next section.
Qualitative Analysis on Two Categories of Hukou (Migration) in Urban China

Permanent and temporary migration in China is closely associated with China’s dual Hukou system, which initially aimed at regulating and managing the flow of population from countryside to cities. If a migrant is able to officially register in the Hukou system at the place of destination, his/her migration is regarded permanent, otherwise temporary. Temporary migrants sometimes are also referred as “floating population”, who are not regarded as the official residents at the places of destination regardless of the length of residence in cities. The unique distinction between permanent and temporary migration in China has been recognized in a number of previous studies, one of which noted that:

“Permanent migrants are persons who have received official permission to change their registration from place of origin to place of destination; in contrast, temporary migrants are persons who have not changed their place of registration, even though they are living elsewhere for periods extending from a few days to several days or more” (Goldstein, 1990).

Temporary migrants in China have to face up to many difficulties caused by the Hukou system during their movement to urban areas, such as the education of their children, the housing problem, the low-ranking occupation, and so on. Pursuing a permission of change in Hukou status at the place of destination in cities would be desired by many temporary migrants. Cheng’s study (1991) demonstrated that from Chinese peasants’ viewpoint, having a non-agricultural Hukou in city is the real standard by which to measure their actual status, benefit, and their integration to city life. In recent decades, more young people have joined...
the legion of massive temporary migrants. The data from Chinese Household Income Project 1995 demonstrated that most rural-to-urban migrants in China are younger than 36 years of age, many of whom are eager to settle down in urban areas. (Li and Zahniser, 2002) On the other side, it has been widely recognized by Chinese coastal governments that employing temporary migrants is a useful strategy to minimize production costs without the welfare cost associated with hiring of local employees. Since the 1990s, with the rapid growth and expansion in the service sector, construction sector, and other labor-intensive industries, abundant job opportunities became available in the coastal regions, where a number of special economic zones were established with an export-oriented economic development strategy. Most urban residents, however, were reluctant to take such temporary low pay jobs with harsh working condition, leaving opportunities to labor migrants from rural areas (Ma, 1999; Chen et al., 2010). To some extent, temporary rural to urban migration has become a major flow of population and an important source of cheap labor since the late 1980s (Glodstein and Goldstein, 1991).

However, with the further reform of Hukou system and the introduction of new Hukou categories, the internal stratification of permanent and temporary migration has become more complex. The new Hukou categories were mainly introduced in large cities where the demand for permanent Hukou status was high but the capacity for accepting more permanent migrants was limited. For example, in Shanghai the Lanyin (or Blue Stamp) Hukou was introduced in 1994 to attract the most desirable elements of the migrant population who have a large investment, home purchase, education and skills. (Wong and Huen, 1998; Chan and Zhang, 1999) The table 1 presents a synthesized summary of the the major differentiation between permanent and temporary migration in terms of migrants’ Hukou status, qualifications, the accessibility to urban welfare, and the possible accommodation arrangement.

Table 1: The Differentiation between Permanent Migration and Temporary Migration since the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hukou Categories</strong></th>
<th><strong>Temporary Migration (TM)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Permanent Migration (PM)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TM1: Floating people* (agriculture or non-agriculture Hukou registered at other places) with Urban Temporary Resident Certificate (TRC)</td>
<td>PM1: the regular urban Hukou</td>
<td>PM2: the blue-stamp urban Hukou (Ministry of Public Security, Circular on Implementation of Locally-valid Urban Hukou Registration, issued in August 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification</td>
<td>TM1: the valid physical examination and possession of a official TRC</td>
<td>PM1: a) the recruited university graduates, the professionals, cadres, and their spouses and dependent children who have obtained the permission from labor administrative authorities. b) In some cities, those who are below designated age, having stable job, and holding local blue-stamp Hukou over statutory years (Shenzhen 1995; Shanghai 2001) c) In some cities, those entrepreneur and their spouses having statutory investment in localities. (Beijing 2001) PM2: a) Whose who are below the designated age, having required education degree and the stable job in locality, and holding TRC over statutory years b) Owners of the private businesses or investors below legal age who granted stipulated investment or has paid rated tax over certain years. PM3: a) Rural Hukou holders who have resided in selected cities and towns for more than two years and have stable non-agricultural jobs as well as the estate property (not including leased housing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entitlement to urban welfare</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>PM1: Full PM2: Full as local regular residents except: a) In some large cities, students holding Blue-stamp Hukou is ineligible to participate in local College Entrance Examination (Such as Shanghai and Tianjin)**; b) In some large cities, ineligible to apply for civil servant recruitment exam (e.g. Tianjin). PM3: Full as regular local residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible accommodation arrangement</td>
<td>Rental accommodation for most TM, purchasing apartments in commercial housing markets for elite TM (mostly urban-to-urban TM).</td>
<td>PM1: a) Same as regular locally registered residents who not only can purchase local commodity housing or rent housing, but also can claim for the public housing provision designated for people with the low or medium income, such as: economic and comfortable housing, municipal public housing and low-rent housing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Most rural-urban temporary migrants are accommodated in *Chengzhongcun* due to lack of affordable housing available and low income. Ineligible for urban public housing provision. | b) resettled migrants due to development projects can purchase resettlement housing at subsidized price or relocated in new place to build house with government compensation.  
PM2: Usually can afford to purchase commodity housing  
PM3: Having estate property is the essential condition for the urban *Hukou* application. |

Sources: based on Chan and Zhang (1999), and Ministry of Public Security, various government documents from Beijing, Tianjin Shanghai, etc., Shenzhen (1995).

Notes:
* Floating population is a term used to describe those who have left their places of official *Hukou* registration but have not registered elsewhere. (Goldstein and Guo, 1992; Chan, et al. 1999)
** See the report that the students holding blue-stamp *Hukou* were ineligible to participate in local College Entrance Examination in some big cities, such as Tianjin (2009 No. 6 Document from Education Administration Office, Tianjin).

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**Accommodating of Two Categories of Migrants in Urban China**

One of basic functions of city is to provide citizens who are living in the city with safe and proper housing accommodation. However, the rapid urban growth in many countries at the stage of industrialisation and urbanisation would lead to the rapid increase of urban population at the same time. How to accommodate the increasing urban members is an unavoidable issue for many countries, especially those developing countries where urbanization occurred at a pace that is faster than the increase of urban infrastructure. The experience of more developed countries suggests that the main task of governments is to keep the proper proportion of public and private housing sectors and gradually upgrade the housing of lower-income households and migrant families (Doling, 1997). In contrast, most developing nations are characterized by high rates of urban population growth, heavy rural-to-urban migration, and by a rapid expansion of urban slum and squatter communities (Costello, 1987). Stren’s (1990) study summarized this shift of developing countries: the role of housing development policy has undergone three main phases, from an emphasis on state-built public housing, through an aided self-help phase, to the present phase, during which the concern has shifted to the proper ‘management’ of services and infrastructure and most new urban members migrated from rural areas habit in self-help slum and squatters. In addition, “Site and Service” was led by the World Bank urban-project to provide assistance by urban government to upgrade the “management” of service and infrastructure in urban slums and squatters in some developing countries.

As the largest developing country, China is a distinctive case of rapid urban housing development and transformation in a short period of time under the background of unique migration pattern and land tenure and housing provision policies. Before the Reform and
Opening-up Policy in 1978, urban housing provision was a part of the socialist welfare system. The state-owned enterprise (SOE) often acts as the unit welfare housing developer. Although the housing provision system in the pre-reform era seemed to be similar to the welfare housing provision system in some developed countries, they are fundamentally different. In the developed countries with welfare housing accommodation provision, the major sources of financing for municipal/public housing activities are from taxes, fees and government grants. All citizens are eligible for the basic housing if they belong to low-income population (Kenna, 2005). In contrast, China’s welfare housing system before 1978 was an outcome of the centrally-planned economic system servicing for industrialization and urban-centred development policies. While urban citizens holding official urban Hukou registration were eligible for the welfare housing provision, vast majority of rural residents with agricultural Hukou registration were ineligible for public housing provision. They were entitled, however, a small plot of land on which a residential property could be built without any financial support from public sources.

With the implementation of the Reform and Opening-up Policy in 1978, the surplus rural labour were released by the de-collectivization program and increasing number of surplus rural labour started to seek non-farming opportunities in cities. This was so called the starting point of the age of migration in contemporary China (Liang, 2001). As already discussed in the section of China’s migration and urbanization, the main source of rural-urban migrants is temporary and low-income rural surplus labour who are often referred as “floating population”. How to accommodate the massive and increasing number of floating population has become a serious challenge for China’s city governments and urban planners. In a long period, the main participants of Chinese migration, temporary migrants from rural areas without official household registration modification, have been excluded from the local urban commodity housing market due to their poor financial capability and non-local Hukou status. (Chen et al., 2010) With the implementation of a market-oriented reform on urban housing system, the principal channel for most Chinese urban population to obtain housing accommodation is urban commodity housing market. In order to deal with the remaining excessive demand for housing from increasing urban population, China has commenced to establish a reformed public housing system since the 1990’s. However, the eligibility of public housing provision is only limited to those urban residents who hold official urban Hukou registration. Temporary migrants are ineligible for the urban public housing assistance. The Table 2 outlines the possible housing choices of rural-urban temporary migrants and urban residents holding urban Hukou since the 1990s.
Table 2: The Possible Housing Choices of Temporary Migrants and Urban Residents since the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th>Temporary Migrants without Local Urban Hukou</th>
<th>Urban Residents Holding Local Urban Hukou (Including Permanent Migrants who Registered Locally)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commodity residential housing</td>
<td>Eligible, but not qualify for local bank mortgage loan in some large cities, such as Beijing.</td>
<td>Eligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental housing</td>
<td>Eligible</td>
<td>Eligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economically affordable house (Jingji Shiyongfang)</td>
<td>Ineligible</td>
<td>Eligible, but except urban citizens holding communitive Hukou (Jiti Hukou)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-rent housing</td>
<td>Ineligible</td>
<td>Only for local residents with lowest incomes, living on government allowances, or with per capita living area smaller than certain standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public rental housing (Gonggong Zulinfang)**</td>
<td>Only eligible in some cities, such as: Shenzhen and Dalian.</td>
<td>Eligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resettlement housing***</td>
<td>Ineligible</td>
<td>Only for local residents being relocated from areas undergoing development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: based on (Wu, 2003), (Huang, 2003), and various government documents from Shenzhen, Dalian, Shanghai, Beijing, etc.

Notes:
*Economic and comfortable housing is a kind of welfare housing which can be purchased by local urban residents at subsidized prices.
**Public letting housing is a public housing category which is particularly rental to the following urban population: migrants without local Hukou, local residents who can not afford Jingjishiyongfang and ineligible for Low-rent housing. The rent of Public Letting Housing is higher than that of Low-rent Housing.
***Resettlement house can be purchased at subsidized price.

The Table 2 above suggests that those permanent migrants to urban areas holding official urban Hukou have broader choices to obtain their housing accommodation. However, rural-urban migrants without urban Hukou status only have much limited housing choices to reside in cities. Moreover, among these limited choices, almost none is ideal for temporary migrants. Urban commodity housing is perhaps the only channel available for temporary migrants to obtain property ownership. However, due to excessively high urban housing price, most rural-urban migrants can not afford to purchase commodity house in large cities. A number of recent studies (Lau and Li, 2005), revealed that even local residents feel difficulty in affording urban commodity house in Beijing and Shanghai and other large cities. Moreover, in many large cities, it is impossible for rural-urban migrants to apply for local bank mortgages.
without local urban *Hukou*, which also restricted migrants’ access to housing marketing. (Chen *et al.*, 2010)

Under this institutional environment, rental housing seems to be the best housing choice for migrants without local *Hukou*. However, rental housing in large cities is complicated involving a variety of housing types. Although legal rental housing managed by housing agents is available for temporary migrants, the process of complex application often prevents many migrants without local *Hukou* from applying. The pre-condition of these legal rental housing requires Official Residence Permit which have to be renewed each year for fee in local public security bureau. Zhao’s study (2002) showed that migrants have to spend a considerable amount of money for various certificates and employment permit. The economic and mental stresses resulted from going through these bureaucratic administrative procedures often force temporary migrants to avoid the registration with the local public security bureau and choose to live in the informal rental housing accommodation, such as *Chengzhongcun* (villages in urban areas).

Villages in urban areas stem from the former rural villages which have been surrounded by city districts with the fast urbanization process and creation of new spatial urban landscapes. In many large Chinese cities, these villages in urban areas (*Chengzhongcun*) are the main settlement locations for most temporary migrants who are virtually excluded from the urban housing market, commercial marketing or public provision. China’s *Chengzhongcun*, to certain extent, is similar to the self-established housing communities associated with the formation of slums and squatter settlements in other many developing countries. They are both the main settlements of low-income migrants in large cities and have problems of poor housing standards and lack of sufficient community infrastructure.

However, China’s *Chengzhongcun* differs from the self-established housing communities in other developing countries in two principle ways. First, urban villages in China are closely related to the rural-urban dichotomy in land policy and housing provision which are determined by dual *Hukou* system (Zhang, *et al.*, 2003). This means that China’s temporary migrants are excluded from the legal urban housing system by not only their poor financial conditions but also the institutional restrains against population floating to big cities. Second, unlike the self-established housing communities in other developing countries built by migrants themselves, China’s *Chengzhongcun* is mainly constructed by the native residents living in urban villages who have access to housing land (*Zhaijidi*) (Wong and Zhao, 1999). In addition, many urban villages in Chinese cities are under administration of local government in one way or other, even though in many cases with insufficient resources and poor management. (Zhang *et al.*, 2003) There is an interesting mutual-benefitings system in China’s urban villages. On the one side, *Chengzhongcun* are attractive for temporary migrants looking for cheap accommodation. On the other side, the rental income benefits the native residents whose farmland has already taken from them due to urban expansion or re-development. To some extent, *Chengzhongcun* have contributed significantly to Chinese urbanization by not only meeting the housing demand of temporary migrants but also by providing the native landless farmers with steady rental income.

**The Urban Government’s Response to Migrant Housing**

Migrants usually have to adjust to the new environment when they migrate to new locations. To many migrants, they would expect that government could take responsibility to help them
to adapt to the new living surroundings and find the proper accommodation in destination areas. However, many governments in China’s urban areas have not considered migrant housing as their own problems and therefore have not placed solving migrant housing problem on their agenda in the past three decades. As demonstrated in Table 2, China’s migrant housing choices are limited if migrants have no official local urban Hukou. There are a number of factors contributing to the deficiency of migrants housing policies in China. First, China’s urban governments have utilized the Hukou system as an institutional barrier to restrict over-size rural migrants floating to urban areas in last three decades. Even now permanent migration to large cities in China is still under the strict control. Second, migrant housing problem is mainly serious in large cities of China. With gradual relaxation of Hukou policy and urban commodity housing reform, it is not difficult for migrants to obtain urban Hukou in moderate and small cities and towns, and in many cases, they could also purchase commodity housing in these cities. In addition, the commercialization of municipal and work-unit (Danwei) public housing since the 1990s has supplied local commodity housing market with plenty of low-priced second-hand housing in those moderate and small cities of China. Migrants therefore in these places are relatively easy to purchase or rent housing accommodation in local urban housing market. This partially explains why many moderate and small cities and towns do not have Chenagzhongcun (villages surrounded by urban areas). In addition, China’s urban local governments often argue that they have no responsibility to supply migrants with basic housing accommodation, because most of them already are entitled to a plot of free land (Zhaijidi) on which they could build residential housing as a condition of their agricultural Hukou registration.

Due to the deficiency of migrant housing policies in many big cities of China over a long period of time, Chengzhongcun became notable migrant enclaves in the post reform period. To some extent, while urban villages have helped urban governments relieve the housing pressure of temporary migrants by providing cheap accommodation, it often regarded as a place associated with many social problems by urban governments. From the viewpoint of Chinese governments, Chengzhongcun is the symbol of the social disorder, urban criminal hotbed, messy living environment, and deterioration of city landscape. (Zhang, et al., 2003) The common strategy of these urban governments is to demolish and redevelop Chengzhongcun with the market operation of real estate development companies. However, the results of these redevelopment projects only produce the new expensive urban commodity housing which most migrants, even many local urban residents can not afford. It can not provide the feasible solution on the existence of Chengzhongcun, because those migrant tenants in demolished Chengzhongcun will look for the cheap accommodation in other more remote villages around urban centers, which results the relocation of urban villages to other places.

The possible resolution is that urban governments should recognize the housing demand from the large amount of floating population in urban areas and take efforts to supply the basic and affordable accommodation to low income migrants. The rigid institutional barriers and exclusion only lead to the more serious issues of floating population management. The public rental housing policy was already implemented gradually in some big cities, such as: Shenzhen and Dalian. However, the public housing provision is far from the actual housing demand from low-income temporary migrants, especially those from rural background. More importantly, urban government should review and make use of the functions of Chengzhongcun to solve the migrants housing problem at the low social cost. Chinese authorities
of large city governance may need to be careful about the social impact of the strategy of Chengzhongcun redevelopment. The urban government strategy for Chengzhongcun may need to shift to the proper “management” of community service and the improvement of infrastructure in these migrant enclaves. However, it is admitted that solving migrant housing problem is not straightforward, as it is closely associated with other public assistance and provision, such as minimum living allowance and basic pension medical insurance.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to review the current knowledge and understanding of issues related to migrant housing accommodation when China is experiencing rapid urbanization and massive migration in the past three decades. It is commonly accepted that rural-urban migration has been one of the dominant dynamics of rapid urbanization in China (in addition to expansion of urban boundaries and creation of new urban centres). However, the scale of urban population has still been controlled by the government with the stringent administrative measure, Hukou system. The definition of urban population in China is closely related to the urban household registration (Hukou) system and only includes those who are locally registered urban residents in defining urban population. This is different from the situation in other countries which usually adopt the territorial principle to define urban population.

This paper has explored the migration patterns in China, with a special focus on the two categories of migrants: permanent and temporary migrants. The paper has demonstrated the major differentiations of these two categories of migrants in term of their qualifications, accessibility to urban welfare, possible accommodation availability and Hukou categories. Chinese government understood these clear disparities and has often regarded temporary rural migrants as the major mechanism of population re-distribution and the cheap labor supply for its industrialization and exporting industry in recent decades.

It is under this background that for a long time Chinese government has not concerned about how to accommodate the increasing number of temporary migrants in urban areas seriously. This paper has discussed the regional difference of migrant housing in large cites as well as moderate and small cities and towns. It suggests that, compared with those living in large Chinese cities, those temporary migrants in moderate and small cities and towns enjoy relatively easy access to the local housing markets, either through purchase of commodity housing or through rental market. This is also why many moderate and small cities and towns do not have visible clustered migrant-concentrated communities around areas of Chengzhongcun. In contrast, temporary migrants floating in large cities do not have readily available or affordable access to local commodity housing market, either through purchase or rental markets. The double stresses from the lack of urban household registration status and poor financial capacity have forced many temporary migrants to choose to live in the informal rental housing communities, many of which are located in the areas of Chengzhongcun.

It has been argued that a significant proportion of China’s recent economic growth have been contributed by the shift of labour from rural to urban areas (Cai, 1999). However, the government needs to be aware that the supply of cheap labour in the form of rural-to-urban migrants are not unlimited and migrants too have right to basic and affordable housing accommodation in cities, in which they have made significant contribution to all important aspects of urban development. The recent problems of labour shortage in a number of coastal
cities demonstrate this point. (Shao et al., 2007) The possible solution for Chinese government is to encourage public debate on the issue and to take migrants into account of urban planning, including public housing planning and development. Public housing policy should be adopted to supply public rental or affordable housing for low-income households, including both local urban residents and migrants. More importantly, when granting re-development of Chengzhongcun communities, the authorities in large cities need to be mindful of the social impact on the communities as well as migrants, many of whom rely on the affordable accommodation available in those Chengzhongcun communities. Urban government should perhaps make better use of Chengzhongcun to solve some migrants housing problems at low cost to the communities and local governments.

References


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