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China's **Moving Population**

Christopher Pierce

Last week, I found myself sloshing through sewer-infested water up to the thighs after a deluge of rain hit a migrant community I was visiting in Shanghai. The community was tucked away in a pocket within the city and the structures of economics had forced the poorest into the lowest lying areas of the district. Migrants sat and watched as we sloshed our way past them, creating ripples that traced themselves into the migrants' homes through the open doors.

The ripples reminded me of the never-ceasing wave of events and the challenge to an individual's humanity that begins when one leaves his or her rural village of many generations to become a migrant worker in a city filled with the painstaking labor that results in any one of the many products in my home.

The steady clang, clang, clang of the migrant construction worker's hammer keeps count with the individual lives that arrive at the train stations every day, accompanied by that all too familiar smell of poverty that inevitably follows all who find themselves in the lower brackets. Yet, the migrants arrive

hopeful that moving to China's urban centers will mark a new era in the future generations of their family line. The largest flow of migration in human history is currently taking place before our eyes in China, and along with it come the complex issues and challenges associated with any migrant community of the world. Conservative estimates indicate that there are currently 150-200 million migrants in China, and a recent McKinsey report indicates (shouts, rather) that the evidence projects one billion Chinese spreading throughout urban centers by the year

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ChinaSource serves the international faith-based community by identifying critical issues, formulating strategies, convening resources and evaluating results for the promotion of responsible and effective service in China.

The purpose of the **ChinaSource** journal is to provide up-to-date and accurate analysis of the issues and opportunities facing Christians involved in China service and to provide a forum for exchanging viewpoints and discussing strategies. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of ChinaSource or its cooperating agencies.

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Urban Migrants: Building the Infrastructure

Brent Fulton, Editor

A major component and driving force of China's rapid economic development has been urbanization on a scale never seen before in human history. Yet according to the McKinsey consulting firm, the growth of China's cities to date will pale in comparison to what is yet to come. By the year 2030 it is estimated that China's urban population will reach one billion.

Visitors to China often remark at the speed with which cities, or large portions of cities, seem to suddenly appear. Pudong and Shenzhen have risen literally out of nothing to become urban showpieces and major financial centers. The "Bird's Nest" stadium that became the much heralded centerpiece of the 2008 Beijing Games was erected at unprecedented speed, along with dozens of other Olympic venues, several new subway lines and major beautification projects across the city.

None of this would be possible were it not for hundreds of millions of migrant workers streaming into China's major urban centers. They are the silent, or at least unacknowledged, partners in China's rush to lead the way in global urbanization.

Not only are these urban migrants building the infrastructure of today's and tomorrow's cities; they have become integral to the very functioning of urban life. To them are relegated jobs most city dwellers would be unwilling to take themselves. Those who make it a bit higher up the social ladder find employment in the burgeoning service industry, waiting on tables, cooking, cleaning or working in the homes of China's growing middle class. In the Pearl River and Yangtze delta regions tens of millions of young migrants labor on the world's factory floors, making the goods that have fueled China's meteoric economic growth for

the past decade. Take away the migrants and—as city dwellers are reminded every spring during Chinese New Year—the city ceases to function.

Despite their central role in creating the China of today, most urban migrants enjoy very little of the wealth and prosperity they have helped make possible for others. Their presence is, at best, tolerated by city dwellers who acknowledge the need for them yet still look upon the migrants as out-of-place peasants. Since providing needed services would legitimize their presence in the city—up until now a legal gray area—government has been loath to guarantee migrants access to proper housing, healthcare, and education. New labor laws and a willingness in some quarters to provide long-term vocational training suggest that the business sector may play a more positive role in the future, but the migrants' employers have traditionally taken little responsibility for the migrants' welfare.

Who, then, will build the social, economic, emotional and spiritual infrastructure for this significant yet extremely vulnerable segment of China's population, which in many ways represents the future of urban China? In this issue of the *ChinaSource* journal we suggest that the Body of Christ has an important role to play by standing in the gaps left by government, business and other institutions, and by calling these institutions to account. Such an investment in China's urban infrastructure today will reap long-term benefits as Christ's love is made visible in the city and as these new citizens of the city find their true identity as citizens of a city that is yet to come.

Brent Fulton, Ph.D., is the president of *ChinaSource* and the editor of the *ChinaSource* journal. ■

China's Moving Population continued from page 1

2030, of which 230 million will be new migrants. They are arriving from every corner of the country with large concentrations from provinces such as Sichuan, Anhui and Henan provinces.

While China's development is offering tremendous opportunities to those from its countryside, it also presents new challenges and uncertainties to migrants who take the risk of moving to urban centers. Since Deng Xiaoping initiated the era of opening and reform in the early 1980s, China's major urban centers have become impregnated with what some call the "new citizens"—citizens who belong to neither urban nor rural classifications. It is precisely this legal and social ambiguity that predicates the uncertainty of how migrants are positioned in Chinese society by their government and fellow citizens. Demarcated laws, which have clearly and separately governed urban and rural citizens since the inception of the People's Republic of China, have now become "gray" laws, and so it is often the personalities of local officials, rather than legislation, that determine outcomes for the migrants. We can see this playing out in the uneven and sometimes contradictory approaches different districts within a city take towards migrant education. While some migrant children are integrated into public schools, the majority are relegated to fend for themselves in shoddy, unlicensed, private schools largely run by shoddy business owners.

Largely ignored by the public and non-governmental organizations in the early stages, China's migrants and their children were brought to the forefront of national consciousness in the summer of 2006 with the sudden forced closure of over seventy unlicensed migrant schools in two districts of Beijing. The media, both locally and internationally, reacted strongly and people became aware of the plight facing migrants. Over time, a clearer picture of the migrant situation emerged. Migrant workers are an integral part of

Chinese society and fill critical existing labor gaps—they often work jobs referred to as the "three Ds": dirty, dangerous or demeaning. They sit on factory production lines, clean houses of the wealthy, operate roadside stalls peddling goods, construct buildings, collect trash and sweep the streets of populated and bustling Chinese cities. In addition, migrants and their families characteristically lack access to quality education and healthcare and face instability of residence. They often live in poverty-stricken communities that are unsanitary and overcrowded. Inevitably, children pay the highest price and are at risk of falling through the cracks of the Chinese system as they have limited access to education, no support network in the new city and parents working long hours every day. Unlicensed

Migrant workers are an integral part of Chinese society and fill critical existing labor gaps.

schools are the only option for the majority of migrant children and many of these buildings are dilapidated, overcrowded and lack clean drinking water and proper lavatories. Self-esteem issues exist as they do anywhere in the world when a people are shown they are not valued.

Furthermore, the *hukou* (residence permit) system prevents citizens from obtaining legal residence and the accompanying social benefits. The *hukou* can, and should be, scrapped, and yet in itself, is only a symbol to which many subtleties are attached. Deeply rooted discrimination associated with low socio-economic status constructs myriad invisible barriers that obstruct migrants from achieving an equal position within their own country.

There are many changing trends accompanying this massive migration in China. Now, it is not only the construction and factory workers who have entered the cities as aliens, as was the case for much of the first decade of migration. Rather, this second decade has

seen entire families arriving as a unit and settling into the migrant communities that lie unsettled on the outskirts of city centers. Previous trends also saw the development of provincial-type villages within urban centers that reflected the strong familial ties in China's culture. When employment opportunities became available, migrant workers would often notify relatives and friends from their local villages of the opportunities, therefore preserving "provincial families" within their urban migrant communities. In recent years, however, we have noticed that many migrant communities are no longer composed of provincial families but, instead, of migrants from various provinces throughout China. The result is that migrant workers now experience increased isola-

tion from their network of family and friends in their home provinces, suffer from weaker social support systems and are in need of further support in urban migrant communities. As a response to this, Compassion for Migrant Children has developed a replicable community center model and various support programs in efforts to maintain a sense of community for migrants in China

There are larger-scale trends taking place as well. The winds are gradually shifting. As China's economic development continues to evolve through new stages, factories in China are closing down in large numbers and moving to Vietnam. We will continue to see an increasing shift of migrant labor away from the manufacturing sector and towards the service industry to serve a burgeoning middle class.

It is also important to note that aside from the many commonalities that migrant communities across China share, there are also differences that distinguish migrant communities from each other. Top cities attracting migrants in-

clude Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Tianjin and Wuhan. We have found that each city has its own migrant culture that shares core issues with that of others but also takes on a life of its own. In Shenzhen for example, the migrant population is largely composed of factory workers in their early 20s, living in factory-provided housing and without children. Therefore, while there are often significant commonalities that exist among migrant issues around the country, there is also a uniqueness and complexity that keeps one from oversimplifying a response.

The ever-changing trends and characteristics of migrants can be both challenging and exciting for those attempting to provide life-changing services and programs to migrant populations. Working with migrant

The Chinese media has proved to be an increasingly powerful force in bringing migrant issues to the forefront of public consciousness.

populations (Chinese refer to migrants literally as *liudongrenkou*, the “moving population”) requires organizations to be particularly sensitive to the rapid changes of those they are serving and flexible enough to adjust their programs accordingly. China is increasingly moving in the direction of the rule of law, which could potentially offer significant benefits to migrants in areas such as education reform. While the Chinese government’s previous policies and practices regarding migrant populations have been somewhat conflicted, recent responses and initiatives are generally following a positive trajectory. Moreover, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and Chinese NGOs in particular, though still operating in a restrictive environment, are progressively playing a more important role. The Chinese media, too, has proved to be an increasingly powerful force in bringing migrant issues to the forefront of public consciousness, which is, at the

very least, stirring talk of change.

While work has begun in the last few years on migrant issues, there is still a long way to go in creating movement in this area. What is needed is not mere activity but a pragmatic solidarity with a long-term commitment since the challenges faced by migrant populations and their advocates are complex and structural in nature. A “go-it-alone” approach is simply not feasible for those invested in not only changing the current situation for a few migrants, but who also want to see future generations of migrant children born into a world in which the thought that they might be second-class citizens does not even cross their minds.

More than ever, organizations can partner together to develop holistic solutions to the very holistic issues migrants face. One immediate and

practical area that would benefit from a partnered approach is vocational skills training for migrant youth, as China will need a strong, two-pronged educational approach for their abundance of high-school aged youth. Collaboration across organizations, business and government sectors is critical. It is imperative that approaches to migrant issues include the efforts and momentum created by Chinese NGOs and migrants who organize in non-threatening, informal groups to speak their collective voice to an increasingly attentive audience. The business sector can, and should, be reminded of the god-like economic influence they hold in this society and how they might use this influence with the government to mobilize positive change. As valuable as the contributions from the nonprofit and private sector are, any approach that ignores the role China’s government will play in bringing greater benefits to the lives of its migrants will be limited.

Quality primary education for migrant children and basic healthcare for migrant families is first, and foremost, the responsibility of the government. I believe that leverage points will be found in public opinion and a more direct media, the ability of migrants to form informal groups and three-way collaborative initiatives between the nonprofit, business, and government sectors which will serve to inform and catalyze stronger and large-scale programs.

It is likely that we will not fully realize our vision to see migrants valued as equal citizens in this generation—or maybe even the next. Non-governmental organizations will need to develop ten, twenty and thirty-year strategies to effectively address these issues. Questions engaged organizations might be asking themselves are: What historical movement is taking place among the migrant population? How does the action of movement begin? Might there be an intersecting movement? Where are the leverage points within the current framework? What role will the migrants’ spirit of entrepreneurship play in their own destiny? What lessons can we learn from migrant slums around the world? How can we most effectively affect change? If all nonprofits banded together in China, we might be able to effectively provide such services to five percent of China’s 24 million migrant children. With the partnership of business, we might be able to increase that number to twenty-five percent or even more. To see change on a larger scale, it is imperative the government takes a leading role. A collaborative engagement of the government, business and nonprofit sectors would accurately reflect the responsibilities held by each to care for the vulnerable in its society.

Faith-based organizations and groups have the advantage of Jesus’ example of a preferential option for the poor. The church can choose a response that is both compassionate and intelligent as it seeks the best for those pushed to the margins, just as Jesus reserved his best for them.

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Don Picker

Educational Inequality for **Migrant Children** Perpetuates Poverty

Mary Ma

Even after thirty years of economic reform, the majority of rural migrants in China's cities are still kept out of the formal labor market and professional tracks. Most of them pick up jobs in the informal sector. Such social inequality is likely to be perpetuated given the fact that their second generation is not provided with quality education. In China, education, often considered a way of changing one's life trajectory, now only reproduces social status and reinforces class boundaries.

One City, Two Systems

Educational policy-making for migrant children has been inconsistent in many cities. Since the '90s, the official guideline from the central government has been that "urban schools in the host city should take the primary responsibility of receiving migrant children, and urban migrant schools can function as an assisting role." However, in reality, the promise of "free compulsory education" has not been kept.

Most migrating families are uncertain about which schools their children can attend in the cities. Many had rosy expectations about their children's chances of getting into formal schools before

bringing them to the cities. However, their social networks and information channels are so limited that it is impossible for them to do any research or locate schools. Mr. Sun's entire family, including his three children and older parents, all moved to Shanghai after he settled down and took a job as a street vender. He recalled the difficulties of finding a school for his three children.

Before I came, I always assumed that Shanghai's education is certainly better than our village's. So I went straight to some public schools to inquire about admission. The teachers said that they've got too many students, no room for more. Ac-

tually these are just excuses. They just don't want our children. Then I found out that (the situation here) is not like in our hometown, where schools always accept your children. But where can my children go? They cannot be kept out of school! Later I learned that there are some special schools for migrants' children. So I sent them there, but only a year later the school was banned and demolished, which now I think is a good thing for the government to do. Those schools are simply making money not teaching.... I don't think any student coming out of them will ever make it to college.

In the early '90s, informal migrant

schools emerged in many cities as self-organized social support groups among migrants. Later on, with family migration increasing in scale, most public schools continued to keep migrant children out of their facilities. Gradually, the “hut schools” grew in size and in number, then into a “market.” Around the late ‘90s, many schools were founded as for-profit private businesses. Most founders proclaimed good will for providing “education for migrant children,” but under pressure for survival, very few schools offered quality education. When interviewed, many founders admitted that they have to run the schools at the lowest cost to make a profit. This leads to major problems similar to those that have plagued most migrant schools up to today. These include things such as under-qualified teachers and a high turnover rate, poor teaching facilities, willful management, instability of students and so on.

Mrs. Xia, an experienced middle-

months for a class to get to know a new teacher and adapt to his ways of teaching. But once they've adapted, this teacher decides to leave and another new teacher takes over; it's like forcing the children to accept another person, his personality, his ways. And this teacher could possibly be someone who has never taught before—and he or she could be totally incompetent in teaching... Even worse, the previously accumulated contacts with parents are lost. So parents also complain about the frequent change of teachers.

For a long time, the government has deferred providing quality education as a public good for migrant families; neither has it played an active role in granting private education providers legitimacy. Currently, the majority of migrant schools still operate without official licenses. Only a few schools with good connections can obtain official permits.¹ To these schools, the education bureau often sends officials only

ary education right after he graduated from primary school here. I never expected that teachers at this school would treat migrants' children so differently.

This public school sets up a separate class for all migrants' children and allows teachers to freely arrange their courses without any curriculum design. They do so because they think sooner or later these students will have to return to rural areas, and their grades are not included in the evaluation system. In some places, it is even strictly prohibited that a student from this class talk to other city students.

“Ceiling Effect”: Why Can't We Take Exams Here?

There is a “ceiling effect” for rural migrants who wish to “upgrade” their children's social status through education. Their rural *hukou* status does not ensure their rights to take the exams (for high school and college) at their place of residence. Mr. Wang, the principal of a 500-student migrant school in Shanghai, says:

These children can attend Shanghai's junior middle school (chuzhong), but not high school. If they stay, they can only go into the few private vocational schools. We have a lot of outstanding students here; some are just as excellent as local Shanghai students, but they are treated unequally. Here, sixty percent of those who finish primary school have to leave for their rural hometowns if they wish to continue studying. Back home they can be treated equally, move on to high schools, then colleges perhaps. But in Shanghai, you can only go into some vocational schools.

There are only two ways to detour around the institutional barriers of exams. One is to get a special type of Residence Permit called the “Talent-Type” (*Rencai Lei*).² Another is by marrying someone with local *hukou*, but in order to have your child go to local high schools and attend the college entrance exam, you have to wait for several years for your *hukou* status to be changed. Of

Discrimination is sometimes blatant. Some public schools enforce very strict class segregation for migrant children.

aged teacher at a Beijing migrant school, revealed that the “turnover rate among lower-grade students (first to fourth grades) is about twenty percent, which is not considered high here.” Mr. Liu (age 23) shared his observations regarding teachers' tendencies to leave within a short period of time (usually one semester or a year). Having taught at a migrant school in Beijing for a year, he describes how teachers' mobility affects the students there:

Most teachers leave because of dissatisfaction about wages. They work for several years, but the wage stays the same. They talk to the principal to ask for a higher wage, but he will not agree, so many teachers get upset. Some would rather find other kinds of jobs. This surely affects the students. Usually it takes one to two

to “inspect” or “supervise.” No direct investment or substantive assistance takes place. The unlicensed schools often face haphazard decisions of banning and demolition.

For the very small proportion of migrant children who can successfully transfer into public schools, the path is not easy either. Discrimination is sometimes blatant. Some public schools enforce very strict class segregation for migrant children. Mr. Li tells such a story. Before coming to Shanghai, he was a rural teacher, but back then he thought the city might offer better chances for him and his son. After several transfers, his son went into a public primary school, then into a public secondary school. However, he now says regretfully:

I should have sent him back for second-

all the 100 migrant families I randomly sampled and interviewed, only two were able to achieve this. Mrs. Du was able to “purchase” a Shanghai Talent-Type Residence Permit in 2002. The price was 20,000 *yuan* (about one year’s income for an average migrant household) and six months of personal networking. She now proudly foresees a bright future for her family because the way to take the college entrance exam is paved for her daughter, a hard-working student.

Migrant Youth: Identity Crisis

There is a reverse-selection process going on in migrant schools, that is, only the students who stand out and are expected to have better chances of entering college transfer back to rural schools. Usually teachers will recommend to the parents of these well-performing students that they transfer them back as early as possible so that there can be more buffer time for them to adapt to different curriculum design before exams.

With many migrant families sending their children back and putting them under the custody of teachers while they are away, there are now more and more rural boarding schools (both primary and middle schools) in rural China to accommodate this need. Mr. Han is very worried about his daughter going back to their rural village for further schooling. His main concern is that, since the child was brought up in the city, she will have a lot to overcome on her own if she goes back to a completely different setting that is rural.

My friend’s son went back to a rural middle school and was teased as “Shanghai,” while he was seen as “rural” before here in Shanghai. We live in Shanghai, but are not accepted by the city. When we go back, we are not accepted by rural folks there either.

Language or dialect differences also cause difficulty for children in adapting to the local culture. An identity crisis, no sense of belonging, is a common social-psychological phenomenon for mi-

grant children. This lies at the root of many problems migrant youth face, either for those left-behind or for those who stay in the cities.

Peng, an experienced rural teacher who later taught at a migrant school in Beijing, comments: “The education some students obtained here is no better than that of their parents’ generation in rural areas. For some, it could be even worse.” This reminds me of another parent’s comment: “For some children, it’s almost like going through a second Cultural Revolution.”

Parents’ expectations decide their own aspirations for educational outcomes and career choices. When teaching at a Beijing migrant school, Mr. Zhu encountered an embarrassing and frustrating moment in class. After he scolded a student for not studying hard enough, this disrespectful student talked back to him: “You always ask us to study hard, but what’s the use of that? Only to become someone like you?” This experience made him reflect deeply on their aspirations.

Many students’ way of thinking has been influenced by their parents who do not value education and often tell that to their children. Lots of times, students ask, “What’s good about getting a college degree? We see so many college graduates now, but it’s obvious that they are starving! A college student only gets around 1000 yuan a month, but I could make several thousand without ever going to college.” They often see that those who are less-educated can become the bosses of small businesses, and they could hire many college graduates to work for them.

Low expectations for educational outcomes result directly from distortions in the segmented, urban labor market, the dominance of materialistic culture and popular consumerism. Faced with exclusive institutions, only a few rural migrants dare to imagine their second generation becoming equal citizens who can enjoy the same welfare and benefits as urban professionals. As today’s labor market is still segregated

along *hukou* lines, these migrant youth have to repeat their parents’ trajectory by entering the informal sector of the labor force.

Second-generation migrants are faced with new challenges. Unlike their parents, they have grown up in the cities, so their reference group is their urban counterparts. Returning to their rural hometown after “retirement” appeals the least to them. However, like their parents, they are no better accepted by urban society when *hukou*-based discrimination still persists in various forms in the job market. If the government does not make institutional adjustments for the welfare of this group, their chances of upward mobility are blocked by a set of “interlocking effects” such as labor market segmentation, institutional exclusion in the urban school system and limited social network resources. Behind these are deeply rooted discrimination and structural exclusion along the *hukou* line.

Endnotes

1. Beijing Xingzhi School, one of the earliest founded migrant schools in the ‘90s, got its permit only in 2003. Even this official school, with an official permit, experienced a wave of banning in 2006.

2. In Shanghai, rural migrants are no longer required to obtain a “temporary residence permit” (*zanzhuzheng*), but it is suggested that they have a “Residence Permit” (*juzhuzheng*). Legal texts say that migrants’ children can enter into urban public schools with this permit, but the reality is, they classify it into two categories, “Labor-Type” and “Talent-Type,” and the latter usually is issued to people with high qualifications who migrate from other cities; thus, its application has the college degree as the minimum requirement. “Labor-Type” category is specifically for rural migrants.

Mary Ma, a Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University, is currently doing dissertation fieldwork in Shanghai and Beijing on “Institutional Closure, Segmentation and Pathways of Assimilation: Rural Migrants in China’s Cities.” During the past year, she conducted some 140 in-depth interviews with rural migrants, migrant school teachers, public school teachers and some city administrators. ■



Don Picker

China's Marginalized **Internal Migrants**

Chuck Chan

In just 30 years, China has accomplished the urbanization process which took the Western developed countries three to four hundred years to achieve. The nation is rapidly being transformed into a modern, global community at the cost of marginalizing her internal migrants who we call the "Floating Population."¹ On the road to economic and political modernization, China has come to realize that the nation is on a path of spiritual pilgrimage as well.

The Christianization of China is, in fact, part of the modernization process—whether she admits it or not. A spiritual revival and transformation has already been taking place inside this vast country. Christianity is a major cultural development in China today. The newest estimate of the number of Christians in China is over nine percent of the population—and a majority of them are migrants.²

China's cities offer better paying jobs and opportunities for these internal rural migrants. A recent survey found that 140 million Chinese citizens are working and living in places other than their hometowns. That is more than one-tenth of China's population. What is more, it is estimated that the total mobile population, of which farmers working in cities make up the vast majority,

currently is between 200 million and 250 million. That is almost twenty percent of China's population. This mass "floating population" in China is creating many social issues which the government is ill-equipped to deal with at this moment.

Urban residents and migrants live in different worlds and different communities within the city. "Urban residents and migrant workers live segregated lives in general, and the former are not much interested in the latter," sociologists at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou said. "Less than a third of urban residents would communicate with migrant workers regularly, and more than half do not like topics about migrant workers in their daily conversation."³

Near the mega-city of Guangzhou, pressure from work and home has con-

tributed to a growing suicidal rate among migrants in the southern factory township of Dongguan. Dongguan, a manufacturing powerhouse on the Pearl River Delta, is home to about six million registered migrants. In Dongguan's 120 medical emergency centers, 552 people attempted suicide from April to September 10 of 2007. Seventy percent of them were migrants. A consultation hotline set up by the health officials there in May, 2007 has received nearly 10,000 calls, of which eighty percent were from migrants. Kong Yuxian, director of the emergency center, said:

Twenty percent of the people who have called the center said they wanted to commit suicide. The number of suicide cases in Dongguan has increased by twenty-five percent during the first half of 2007, com-

pared to the same period of last year.

Some migrants who left their hometowns in search of money in this city have struggled to find relief from the pressure they face at work. Some migrants, who tend to have little knowledge of their rights, choose to commit suicide when their wages are withheld. Most of the suicide victims are young people. They do not know how to get along with others. When they have relationship troubles, they think their whole life is over.⁴

Kong also called for more psychological services for these migrants. At present, most hospitals in Dongguan do not provide psychological treatment services. In fact, China's psychological treatment service is just at a formative stage. Kong also pleaded with employers to do more to ensure comfortable working and living conditions for migrants. "They also need to keep in contact with friends and family members to help combat loneliness while working away from home."⁵

Migrants, as "marginalized people" whose mental anguish is being acquired and developed at this time, could result in destabilization of the urbanization process. Currently, the need for psychological care for these migrants is growing, but the number of qualified counselors in China cannot match this need. Their outcry has not been heard and their pain has not been healed. China needs to address the social-infrastructure issues rather than building the hardware of modernization. Without proper justice and human rights legislation available in the cities for these migrants, they may eventually become a destabilizing force of the modernization process.

Urbanization, industrial revolution and scientific progress are the products of social transformation. At the very core of this social transformation, the key is the transformation of people's way of life and changes in their social status. This transformation needs to be an improvement of their quality of life. Hopefully, millions upon millions of farmers turned workers will improve themselves while they are also changing

the rural areas, cities and, in turn, the country, in the great process of modernization and urbanization.⁶

Migrants, as opposed to an anthropological peoples group, are composed of various functional people groups such as factory workers, service industry workers, construction workers, young professionals and university students. They are a massive mobile, floating population. Because this population is mobile, it can be dynamic. The value system of the cities is being spread and is transforming rural areas and minority people groups. Because it is functional, it is also temporal. Migrant communities have a limited time period when they share a common function together. Due to this, a functional community is becoming more dynamic. It may include people

As far as the gospel is concerned, these migrants go back home during the holidays and evangelize their entire villages.

from various people groups, and their influence and value systems may spread to the whole nation as they are dispersed in different directions.

As far as the gospel is concerned, these migrants go back home during the holidays and evangelize their entire villages. One of our staff members, Joshua, who is a Zhuang from the Guangxi Province mountainous area, goes back to his village every year to share the gospel with the Zhuang people. He can preach to them in their own language.⁷

Joyce, one of our staff members in China, is another example. She left her home town in Henan Province in 1994. At that time she was only 16 years old—the legal age for young people to start working in China. She came to the city in order to get a job to support her family. Someone introduced her to work in a factory in Dongguan, a factory town in the southern province of Guangdong. Unfortunately, this factory has been involved in some illegal activities. The boss only provided food and a place for the workers to stay inside the

factory without paying them any salary. He even locked them up inside the factory to make sure no one could run away. While Joyce was working there, someone introduced her to Jesus and she accepted Christ. She then prayed and asked God to help her to get out. One evening, in the middle of the night, she climbed up the wall to run away from the factory—and she made it! She was so joyful that she could finally leave that place. After a while, she found another factory and worked as a temporary worker. This time the factory owner did not provide any place for her to stay; however, she met someone who was working in a nearby theater. He granted her permission to sleep inside the theater at night while she worked at the factory during the day.

Though she has gone through a lot of difficulties in her life, God was preparing Joyce to become an urban evangelist. She graduated from our Mission Bible School in 2003 and in 2004, she joined our ministry team. She has one brother and one sister, and both have believed in Christ because she shared the gospel with them; however her parents are not yet believers. She continues to lead city youth groups in the city of Guangzhou up to the present.⁸

Endnotes:

1. Carin Zissis in Wikipedia.
2. *Dawn of Asia*, Spring, 2008 (published by Pacific Rim Foundation, Limited).
3. *China Daily*, Dec. 18, 2007.
4. *China Daily*, Sept. 19, 2007.
5. Ibid
6. *China Daily*, Oct. 1, 2007.
7. *Dawn of Asia*, Spring, 2007 (published by Pacific Rim Foundation, Limited).
8. *Dawn of Asia*, Spring 2008 (published by Pacific Rim Foundation, Limited).

Chuck Chan is the CEO of Pacific Rim Foundation, Limited in Hong Kong and Chairman of Pac Rim Foundation (USA). ■

Hearing the **Different Voices** in Urban China

Brad Burgess

China is a complex place. For people outside this ancient land, “the Chinese” are one people, just like “the English” or “the Brazilians.” After living in China for years, it becomes apparent that the Chinese are a wide variety of people—56 ethnicities in all and thousands of dialects that are completely incomprehensible from each other. Indeed, the regional differences between the people are striking. Everything from cuisine, tea varieties, superstitions, languages, bone structure and appearance varies from place to place. These differences can be a source of beauty and

derstand migrants. Although they make up at least one-third of the urban population, they keep themselves distant and do not spend much time or thought upon them. Likewise, migrants often perceive urbanites as conceited. Naturally, this is just from my experience and what I have heard. Yet, this illustrates the power of ignorance and misunderstanding within today’s China.

Moving into the City

There are several different types or categories of migrants. In Beijing, where I live, the most common are the low-level wage workers. This group in-

The Chinese are a wide variety of people—56 ethnicities in all and thousands of dialects that are completely incomprehensible from each other.

fascination. We have seen how China’s leadership wished to showcase this diversity during the Olympics opening ceremony, highlighting the costumes of the different ethnicities, all as a part of a unified China.

However, these differences can also be a cause of fear, misunderstanding, anger and division. These manifest themselves clearly in the way Chinese people perceive other Chinese from different regions. For example, in Guangzhou—where petty crime is relatively high—migrants are blamed by urban residents for having property stolen. In rich and modern Shanghai, migrants are laughed at and looked down upon for their lack of social manners, poor driving skills and general backwardness. In Beijing, urbanites simply do not un-

cludes the cleaning ladies, men who work on construction sites, massage girls and others. There are also higher skilled migrants, such as hair stylists. Next, there are entrepreneurs, such as people who open small clothing outlets.

The types of migrants we read about mostly in the news are those wage workers on the construction sites. Responsible for building the cities, these men are easily the focus of the journalists’ lens because of their poor working conditions and contribution to urban society, which is often unrecognized by the larger public.

There are two people, from the “low-level” wage workers that I come into contact with on a regular basis that I would like to illustrate here.



The Cleaning Lady and the Bike Guard

Aunt Zhang comes to our house every Sunday. She works at a local cleaning agency, cleaning three to four apartments and office buildings daily. Each one takes two to three hours. She is happy to come to our place on Sunday because we pay a premium and give her leftovers. Her normal rate is twelve *renminbi* per hour, or less than two dollars per hour. Even at this rate, she is happy to clean all day and is able to save several hundred dollars a month. She is saving to help put her daughter through university later. From Sichuan province in the southwest—the province that suffered the catastrophic earthquake recently—her daughter, a future English major, wants to know what it is like outside China. Ever the opportunist, Aunt Zhang is curious about what kind of living I make and what kind of living my wife (a Chinese married to a foreigner) makes. I am often surprised by the candor of some of the modest Chinese. Inquiring of one’s salary is not at all inappropriate, and I tell her openly. She does not just want to save up for her daughter’s tuition; she wants to store up wisdom and insights about what her daughter’s future life might look like. One day, perhaps her daughter can live in a place like this and hire a cleaning lady like her every week. I facilitate the process by giving gifts of music, magazines and other items that might encourage her daughter in her studies. I am impressed by the clear

humility of Aunt Zhang, and at the same time, her opportunism when given the right time to ask questions and express herself.

Aunt Wu is a bit different. Bold from day one, she is over fifty, short and portly, always wearing large sunglasses and a smile. She guards the bikes outside the office where I work. Usually rushing into work every morning after locking up and passing her my daily fee, I emerged from the office recently just before midnight. It was one of those rare days when it rained all day and I feared a wet ride home, dragging out an impossibly long day. Standing alone on the wet sidewalk, I was touched when I saw my moped covered with a collection of tarps and garbage bags with stones keeping them in place. As I rode up the next morning, Aunt Wu moved another bike to give me room for my big moped, just like she always does.

She actually spent five *renminbi* of her own money to buy me a full cover for my moped. She charges one-tenth of that price to guard a bike all day, just to provide some context for her investment. I express my appreciation to her and she wags it off as saying it is just “her job.”

“You are great, Aunt Wu. Why do you offer such great service?”

“Hey! This is my job! Do you know what? I have been interviewed by newspaper journalists and even been on television!”

“You’re kidding. How long have you been guarding bikes here?”

“Five years.”

I felt really guilty for some reason, and thought I should give her a tip. China is not a tipping culture, and I rarely feel guilty. But, it just seemed strange that there was this elderly woman guarding bikes for pennies with an amazing customer service attitude and ready smile.

She proudly refused my tip adamantly with a frown. I found other ways to reward her, such as with gifts of fruit and snacks from Starbucks. Through time, I have also found out

just how strong her opinions are concerning China’s public policy. An ever-optimistic person, she has no qualms about discussing some of China’s woes with me—particularly because I am a foreigner, and she finds it her job to educate me about the way things are.

Aunt Wu is also from Sichuan, close to the earthquake devastation. She talks about her family and home and how the earthquake was particularly unlucky, as everyone’s homes were reduced to rubble. She does not know what her family will do, but luckily everyone was safe. Strangely, she does not seem too depressed. Her optimism steers her forward and allows her to see the brighter side of life.

The Olympics Provide a Chance for Change

These past few months have been an incredibly tough time for China as people have been waiting and preparing for years in nervous expectation for the Olympics that recently finished. The Chinese are somewhat superstitious, with a stronger than usual belief in “fate” and “fortune.” More than a few people I know wonder what the signs of this year bode for China. First, the protests in Tibet, then the ambushing of their Olympic pride as it made its way around the world—then, a mind-blowing earthquake shaking the foundations of their hearts. This is not turning out to be an easy—or auspicious—year for anybody.

But, the Olympics were an undeniable success. The Games also drew a spotlight upon the lives of the migrants here in Beijing. Hopefully, the event will continue to improve their situation over the long term. I know this city needs more people like Aunt Wu and Aunt Zhang—and their husbands and families.

Brad Burgess is a public relations consultant and freelance writer. He has been based in China for over six years and is fluent in Mandarin. He can be reached at burgess.brad@gmail.com ■

Core Commitments for Serving among China’s Urban Migrants

Earlier this year representatives of migrant works in six Chinese cities gathered to assess the needs of migrants and explore opportunities for future collaboration. Types of service represented included after-school programs for migrant children, outreach to factory workers, healthcare, family counseling, migrant school teacher training and advocacy on behalf of migrants. Together these leaders expressed their commitment to the following:

- **Quality education** for migrant children (including vocational skills training)
- **Increased sustainable employment** for migrants
- **Increased access to healthcare** for migrants
- **Increased evangelism and discipleship** among the migrants
- **Increased migrant participation in services** to the migrants
- **Increased partnering with the government** in serving the migrants
- **Increased legal and social status** for migrants
- **Improving the health** of migrant families
- **Building community** among the migrants

Everyone is **Not Local**

Jonathan Li

Having been away for some years, I tried to settle down again in Beijing. I took with me my Malaysian-born wife, who speaks Chinese with a different accent, and tried to make her feel at home. When she got her first job in a small private company, I addressed her concern over communication with “local” people by saying: “Don’t worry about people not understanding your Chinese. They can’t understand each other either. Here, everyone is not local.” I said this because I almost always find seven out of ten people on the street speaking with a dialect different from that of Beijing’s. The official Chinese labeling of mi-

grants in Beijing was “peasant workers,” but now it is “people coming to Beijing for jobs.”

grants! There are about fifty people like you around. A subcontractor from the construction sector, or a “broker” from the service sector will walk over. You have a short conversation, mainly about the monthly pay rate and other “benefits” like room and board. Feel OK? You go with him. There are two possible directions.

Construction sector: Here you are directed to a “dorm” in a suburban area where buses are available to get to the construction site. You are given a uniform and a helmet. You are fed with rice and steamed bread and a dish cooked right on site. You sit on the sidewalk during lunch break or linger in a shopping mall if you are lucky

enough to have one nearby. After work, you will cram back into the bus. A shower before you go to bed? Usually not. That is why you are smelly the next morning. The stain on your uniform will remain. After all, why bother when it will get dirty again anyway. Month end salary payment? Sorry, year end please. You don’t really need money now, do you?

shop, or a street cleaner in uniform. Beyond that, how about a security guard? You have to be male but do not have to be strong or with a military background. At the next higher level, you could be a salesperson for a real estate or automobile agent. These better choices may guarantee you a steady source of monthly income to cover your rent. Yes, you rent a room with friends or colleagues of the same background.

The Truly Free Labor Market

The word “free” means no restrictions; when you finish farm work, have the luxury of time and believe in the financial myth of leaving your hometown, with an affordable train ticket, you can just come. At a walking distance from the Beijing railway station there is a road junction where you can unload your luggage and stop for a while, not to have a rest but for job

Service sector: The worst job in this sector could be issuing leaflets to passers-by or attaching flyers to the poles along the sides of the street. You may play hide-in-seek with a special task force from the municipal government intended to deal with illegal advertisements. The better choices are to be a waiter, waitress or assistant in the kitchen of a restaurant, assistant in a barber’s

If you are reasonably presentable, you may work for one of the top banks in the country—but not on their official payroll. You are paid via a labor force agency. If you are well educated, having a master’s degree, sooner or later you will be encouraged by family or friends to take the adventure of your life, to apply for a really good job, where you can be paid decently and enjoy full benefits like social security, unemployment insurance, health insurance, housing provision and a pension plan. The younger, service-oriented, better educated migrants are rapidly becoming the new Beijingers.



Is there any chance for workers in

the construction sector to enjoy any of the benefits above? Not likely. Corners are cut wherever possible. After all, if you are “unemployed” you can go back to your hometown; you would never dream of having your own home here on your monthly income.

Nevertheless, in a free market like this, migrants are willing to weigh the risks against the rewards—a day’s wage here is higher than a week’s back home, a week’s wage is higher than a month’s. Money aside, their need for family life cannot be satisfied immediately. Construction workers who are married have to leave their wives and children at home. Those in the service sector, who are usually younger and better paid, will consider bringing their families with them to Beijing. Then come the problems of having children here, bringing them up and their schooling. The list goes on.

Migrants are both creating demand while supplying demand that comes from both Beijingers and themselves. This is a snowball, making Beijing “a land full of gold,” where “nothing is impossible.” Thus, we see the birth and growth of another megacity with breathtaking speed and mind-boggling dimensions. Optimism is the major theme of the day

Beijinger’s Ambivalence

Walking down the street, riding the bus, taking the subway, I hear many different ways of speaking Chinese, some of which sound nothing like Mandarin. There is a sensation of being overwhelmed which could also be due to the volume of those speaking, and the fact that they speak all the time—and talk about every detail of their work and lives. The physical closeness is even more unbearable, not only because I have gotten used to more personal space elsewhere, but because of the body odor.

We do not like to have so many of them around, yet we have become dependent on them—and cannot live without them. Without them, the wholesale market for food and clothing would run out of business leaving us at the mercy of Carrefour, Wal-Mart, Tes-

co or something similar. During the Olympics, we tasted a bit of life without some of the migrants—the street food vendors. How could I forget to include them in the service sector? Well, not only were they forced to leave, but also the interior decorator of my modest house, someone from a farm in Henan Province, had to leave. He was not allowed to come back until the end of September after the Paralympics closed. The same fate befell even the builders of the Bird’s Nest! Yet, without migrants’ talents to build, renovate and decorate, Beijingers would not enjoy new houses, new roads, new Olympic Greens—new everything. Beijingers are spoiled by endless fashion updates at an unreasonably cheap cost. Without the migrants in the coastal, manufacturing cities, and the migrants here to bring in the goods, our obsession for something new cannot develop very extensively.

A Brighter Future for All

Who are the Beijingers? The answer is pretty simple: those whose ID number begins with “11.” I have kept this obvious secret to the end, feeling reluctant to talk about *hukou*—the household registration system. The basic rule is that a new-born baby will follow the registration status of the mother. If the mother has her registration record in a police office in Beijing, so will the baby. The migrant construction workers, all of whom are male, will not have their babies registered as Beijingers unless they marry a female registered in Beijing. Without the registered status of a Beijinger, a new-born baby will not enjoy the same benefits—especially in terms of schooling.

So, this *hukou* system effectively segregates urban dwellers from peasants when the former, who have benefits and privileges, are fed and provided for by the latter, who have few benefits and no privileges. This will not work any more when migrants have permeated every part of city life. Already the government is urging schools to grant equal access to newborn babies from migrants, no matter what kind of registration status

they have. The same government running the *hukou* is now proposing “basic medical service for all.” “All” includes those having registration status and migrants living in Beijing for more than six months. It is a step in the right direction, at least. The ideal of “one world, one dream” should, at least, start with “one country, one status.” That will make a bright future for all.

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China’s Moving Population

continued from page 4.

Their existing networks and awareness that action accompanies faith can be used to effectively meet the needs of migrants in communities throughout China.

As I was in the hotel shower scrubbing off the grime that accompanied me back from the thigh-high slosh through sewer-infested water in the Shanghai migrant community, I cheerfully thought of how grateful I was to have a clean hotel room to come back to after the day’s ordeal. Then I remembered that for the migrants themselves, it was not just a foray, but they were at that very moment considering how they were going to sleep in a few feet of water in the dark that night.

I believe the challenges facing migrants living in the world’s slums are of such a scale that it may require a radical response of those willing to sacrifice to see change brought about; those who are willing to give up the comforts of life to understand how they might better serve migrants and their families, to sleep in the water if need be, and to never, never, never quit. Migrants around the world hunger and thirst for a just system that rightfully responds to their contributions and values the dignity of their lives. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their time is coming.

Christopher Pierce (pseudonym) is involved with ministry to migrants in major urban areas in China.

Will the Boat Sink the Water?

Will the Boat Sink the Water?: The Life of China's Peasants by Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao. Public Affairs Ltd, 2006, 219 pp. ISBN: 13-978-1-58648-418-7; ISBN:10-1-58648-418-4; First Edition, soft cover.

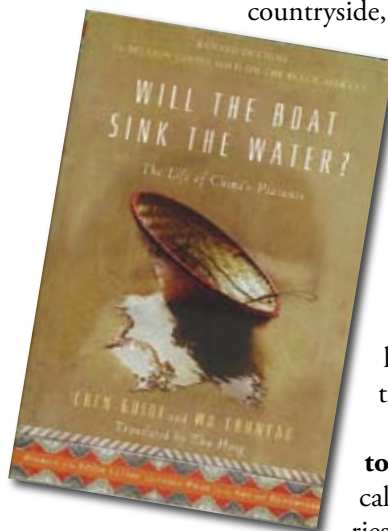
Reviewed by Brad Burgess

As I draft this review, I sit in the center of Beijing the day before the closing ceremony of the 2008 Olympics. Getting caught up in Olympic fervor in Beijing is not optional; it just happens. As the world's spotlight shines upon this city of nearly 17 million, stories of all different shades and tastes have emerged in the world media, both positive and negative. Beijing is home to nearly five million migrants, or in official Chinese language, the "floating population." Because so many of the Olympic's venues were built by these migrants, hundreds of news stories have emerged, focusing upon their lives and personal perspectives of the Olympics. Especially, because many migrants had been asked to go home to take a break just prior to the Olympics, foreign journalists have a sudden renewed interest in covering their stories.

Indeed, one of the issues concerning migrants—or, rural Chinese—today in China is a lack of information. Outsiders simply do not know where to turn for reliable and consistent information. Most of the information about modern China focuses upon the urban areas. When outsiders want to learn about rural people and activity in China, they typically rely on foreign news reports, which are often negative, or domestic news reports, which are not very in-

depth. This dilemma leads to a superficial and unbalanced understanding of situations that are far from our own lives.

Hence, while in-depth analysis focusing on the "human" story is lacking, certain books stand out as key points of reference. *Will the Boat Sink the Water?: The Life of China's Peasants* is one such masterpiece that enjoys the status of being banned in China. According to the authors, Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao, in



As an eye-opening exposé of corruption, scandal and injustice in China's countryside, it is certainly understandable why the book drew attention from the public and the leadership.

the preface, a mere two months after being published in China in December 2003, the books were removed from the shelves and banned. Indeed, part of the scandal and popularity could be due to what the authors say: "City people know about as much about the peasants as they know about the man on the moon" (XI, preface). As an eye-opening exposé of corruption, scandal and injustice in China's countryside—all while naming names—it is certainly understandable why the book drew attention from the public and the leadership. The authors have both enjoyed glory and suffered for their work. They have been interviewed by countless Chinese media as well as foreign media. On the other hand, they have been sued by one of the

officials they criticize in the book and persecuted.

The authors, both from the poor countryside, present six stories from

Chen Guidi's home province, Anhui. Anhui is one of China's poorest provinces and an especially rich source of migrant work for China's richest nearby city, Shanghai. Although separate, the six brief stories all have some undergirding themes in common.

The rural poor reacting to unfair taxation. Thematically, most of these brief stories are related to poor villagers reacting and fighting unjust taxation. Much of the research taken for this book was done during a time when China's central government, the State Council, was taking formal measures to relieve the peasants' "burden of excessive taxation." China's cen-

tral government has for quite a long time noticed the plight of the urban-rural gap in living standards. Systemically, China's government can be commended for taking steps to improve and relieve the tax burdens borne by the rural people. The problem lies not in the law, but in the implementation. Throughout the book, the source of tension came from "the most educated" peasants who learned that the taxes they paid were illegal and excessive. Typically, these peasants would refuse to pay, citing the new national laws. Local leadership would arrest or abuse these people on trumped-up charges, which would escalate the problem, creating rifts between the villagers and the local leadership.

Fighting city hall. In several cases,

the rural victims of abuse and excessive taxation would take the cases into their own hands after being snubbed by their own local authorities. Typically, after being brushed off by the local party leadership, peasants would go the next step up to the township or county official—who may have been informed ahead of time. Either this more senior official would believe the story of the official below, or would be working with him to maintain the status quo. In some cases, some peasants went all the way to Beijing to plead with the senior leadership about their plight. Perhaps surprisingly, they would get a listening ear from someone at the top, who would issue a demand for those lower down the chain of command to take care of the problem. However, upon return to the hometown, often the demands would be ignored and the peasants would be further harassed for going over the local leaders' heads. This issue leads into the third theme below.

Unprecedented bureaucracy. In modern China, it is often understood by scholars that it is not that China lacks law but that it lacks systematic accountability and an ability to carry out regulations and policies that are created from upper government. Interestingly, in addition to reporting stories of personal triumphs and failures of peasants, the authors engage the reader in an analysis of the systemic problems in China concerning administration. For example, they researched over 200 countries and learned that “twenty-five countries have two levels of government—sixty-seven countries, including the United States of America, Japan, Canada and Australia, have three layers of government—but our country (China) has set up five layers of government: central, provincial, municipal, county, township” (page 173). Additionally, the level of government employees at the county and township levels “increased by a factor of ten” (page 172) throughout the 1980s into the 1990s. In essence, the very structure of China’s government bureaucracy makes it very difficult to “streamline” policy and get things done

efficiently and in a fashion that central government wishes. This dynamic was played out throughout the book. Therefore, no matter what the good intentions of the central government, ensuring follow-up is highly difficult.

A Meritocracy?

The final story “A Search for a Way Out” was very interesting in that it highlighted how officials are rewarded by meeting certain quotas. Looking closer, this merit-based approach to government promotions encourages corrupt officials to cook the books and falsify how much the land under their rule is producing. The reason this is so critical is that this leads to inflated taxes for those districts, based according to assumed higher production. Therefore, an area could actually be very poor. On the books, it is considered better than reality and therefore taxed at a higher rate, which gets borne by the peasants. Meanwhile, the official responsible for fudging the figures is praised and rewarded for increasing productivity. The illustration here is refreshing in how one man “fought the system” and decided to report the figures truthfully and faced much criticism from his colleagues. He simply could not allow the peasants to bear more pressure. In the end, he was rewarded for his honesty by an equally just senior official that was moved by his truthfulness.

These “novellas” of the difficulties peasants face in agriculture and poor rural parts of China are not as depressing as it may seem. They are certainly enlightening, and the reader easily sympathizes with the peasants, feeling righteous anger with the rampant corruption and inefficient system. But, these are also tales of the triumph and strength of will—of down-trodden people fighting what seem to be insurmountable battles with those in power and many of them winning.

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INTERCESSORY notes

please pray

1. **That agencies, organizations and individuals** working to better the situations of China’s migrants will have wisdom and resources to work effectively.
2. **For those in the Chinese government** that deal with the challenging situation of migrants and the tremendous social difficulties it creates.
3. **That God’s grace, blessing and knowledge of himself would be given** to the millions of migrants and their children who daily face difficult living circumstances.
4. **For understanding and patience** on the part of long-time city dwellers who are dealing with the influx of rural migrants in their cities.
5. That in a great, complex social situation **God’s name would be lifted up and glorified.**

Coming Soon!

New Web Site

Migrant Resource Network www.mrn-china.org

The **Migrant Resource Network** web site is a collaborative knowledge platform for organizations working with migrants. A source of relevant information for those attempting to better the lives of migrants in China, it includes sharing of resources such as:

- overview of the issues
- news articles
- research
- reports
- government laws and policies
- open-source models
- who's doing what

A searchable database, the **Migrant Resource Network** web site will enable organizations to be more collaborative and effective in their work with migrants.



An initiative of Compassion for Migrant Children
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