

CHINA RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

A new series from East View that highlights Chinese research and resources on key topics.

Rural-Urban Migration in China

As high-rises have sprung up across Chinese skylines and young people have left the countryside for economic opportunities in major cities, inequality across China's urban and rural residents has been laid bare. China's household registration, or *Hukou*, system, which designates each citizen as a rural or urban resident, governs the movement of China's populace and is at the heart of these inequalities. These designations determine a person's access to social services including education, housing, and healthcare. While the entire globe is tackling urbanization, China's policies, which directly manage people's internal movement, are enacted on a scale larger than any other nation. Any researcher studying urbanization should understand the results of China's vast experiment.

Assessing Internal Migration through CNKI

The China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) represents the gross intellectual output of China. By compiling journals, government publications, yearbooks, laws, monographic serials, and more, CNKI has built an interconnected network of databases and research resources vital to scholars. For example, China Legal Knowledge (CLKD) is a database devoted to the world of legal publications in China. **CLKD has over 4.2 million articles related to Hukou requirements, covering journal articles, laws and regulations, and cases.** These articles range from statistical analysis using the China

Migrants Dynamic Survey to personal stories of lives derailed by *Hukou* status. In late September, *Worker's Daily* reported that a pilot program for the cross-provincial administration of the *Hukou* system had begun. The pilot program unifies *Hukou* application offices for neighboring provinces (ex. Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang) so that migrants do not need to return to their home province to complete paperwork.

In addition to the legal resources available in CLKD, China Government Gazettes (CGGD) contains political newspapers, bulletins, and announcements. **The database contains over 28,000 articles about the *Hukou* system published by local government gazettes.** In one recent publication, the *Gazette of the People's Government of Henan Province* published results of a survey into



公安民警入户开展户籍核查

Image from CNKI's China Yearbooks (CYFD): "Public security police enter homes to carry out household registration verification." *Dongxiang Autonomous County Yearbook*. 2020.

municipal-level unemployment, including specific information about migrants with rural *Hukou* living in cities in Henan.

China Monographic Serials (CMSD), which provides peer-reviewed research series each published as monographs, contains almost 12,500 titles on *Hukou*, spanning crime rates, reform efforts, and social integration. **These publications tackle internal migration in the realms of economic development, public security, history, agriculture, and family planning.**

China's experiment to control population movement, as well as its repeated reforms of the system, provide lessons in equality, opportunity, and resource distribution. The future of human civilization depends on learning from these initiatives.



户籍民警上门帮老人拍证件照

(杨博思摄)

Image from CYFD: "Household registration police came to help the elderly take ID photos." *Ping Tan Yearbook*. 2016.

See the below links for further reading on internal migration in China.

- **Surprises from China's Latest Census - Center for Strategic and International Studies**
<https://www.csis.org/blogs/trustee-china-hand/surprises-chinas-latest-census>
- **China to roll out urban *hukou* welcome mat for rural residents in push for economic growth - South China Morning Post** <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3124378/china-roll-out-urban-hukou-welcome-mat-rural-residents-push>
- **In situ urbanization key to leaving no one behind - United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs**
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-104-in-situ-urbanization-key-to-leaving-no-one-behind/>
- **Rural-Urban Migration and House Prices in China - National Bureau of Economic Research**
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w28013>
- **'Reverse migration' is picking up in China as workers give up on big cities - CNBC**
<https://www.cnbc.com/2021/06/28/reverse-migration-is-picking-up-in-china-as-workers-leave-big-cities.html>
- **The gap between China's rural and urban youth is closing - The Economist**
<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2021/01/21/the-gap-between-chinas-rural-and-urban-youth-is-closing>