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China's Immigrant Population

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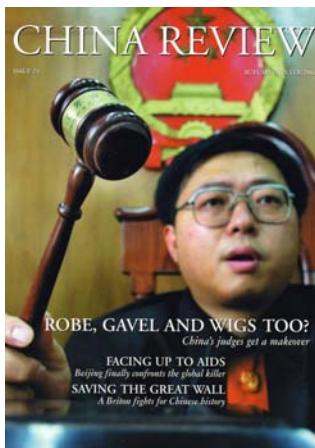
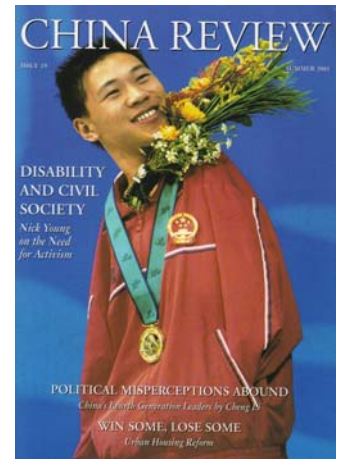
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50th and final issue of the China Review!

After 10 years of regular appearances the China Review is taking its last and final stand. We have an impressive line-up of writers, many of whom have been regular contributors. We take this opportunity to thank them and many others for their support over the last ten years of publication.

China Review is published by the Great Britain – China Centre, a publicly-funded organisation, and the time has come, sadly, when we can no longer justify the time and expense of producing a quarterly magazine. We hope you have enjoyed receiving the China Review and trust you will continue to take an interest in both the GBCC and the All Party Parliamentary China Group by visiting our websites www.gbcc.org.uk and www.apccg.org.uk.

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CHINA'S IMMIGRANT POPULATION

BY FRANK N. PIEKE

THE WORLD'S EMERGING SUPERPOWERS – China, India, Brazil, Russia – demand an increasingly prominent role in the global migration order, not only as countries of origin but also, and increasingly, as countries of destination for international migrants. The People's Republic of China is the largest and arguably most important of the twenty-first century's new superpowers. It is well-documented that China's economic development has given rise to massive flows of domestic migration and international out-migration. However, as international migration is now beginning to fill specific gaps in the labour market and foreigners are attracted by the promise of a better life, China is also rapidly becoming an important destination of immigrants.

For decades already, China has had sizeable foreign student and expatriate communities, mainly from the West, East, and Southeast Asia. However, in the past few years immigration to China has become much more diverse. Many of these new immigrants are not simply expatriates or short-term visitors, but bring or start families and expect to stay. In addition, an increasing number of Chinese return to China after study or work abroad. All are attracted by the business climate, jobs and life style that China now offers. Not only have major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou become as cosmopolitan

and culturally diverse as other major metropolitan centres around the world, but smaller, rapidly growing cities and towns like Shenzhen, Xiamen, Wenzhou, Yiwu, Shaoxing, Weihai, Nanjing and Kunming are following suit. According to United Nations data, China's stock of immigrants was projected to reach 685,800 in 2010. This is certainly a severe undercount, and a more realistic number may be around the two million mark. Despite this seemingly large number, we should bear in mind that international migrants still are only a minute fraction of China's huge population. Yet the scale and variety of immigration in China already clearly defies easy and unambiguous characterizations. Three broad and overlapping categories of immigrants can be distinguished: (1) students; (2) middle class professionals, businesspeople and traders; and (3) cross-border migrants.

Students

In addition to large numbers of short-term students of Chinese language and culture, China has also become a magnet for foreign degree students. Some of this is part of the government's "soft power" strategy, but many students from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan apply to Chinese universities also because of the combination of good-quality education, reasonable fees and



Banging the drum for Chinese education: numbers of South Korean students in China have risen sharply.

geographic proximity. The rise in foreign student numbers is by no means limited to the metropolitan areas of the coastal region. In Yunnan, the number of Vietnamese students rose from 89 in 2002 to 515 in 2006. Other sharp risers in the province included South Korea, Thailand, Laos and Burma, with a more moderate rise recorded for Americans and Japanese. Among these foreign students, the number of non-Chinese language students rose sharpest, for instance in medicine, art and business. Private universities saw an especially rapid rise in foreign student numbers.

Professionals, businesspeople and traders

The communities of middle class and elite resident foreigners in China's cities are no longer dominated by expatriate employees of foreign multinationals, international organizations, diplomatic missions and "foreign experts" hired by Chinese state enterprise organizations. Large numbers of foreigners have independently taken up long-term residence in search of local employment, cheaper living costs, or to set up their own company. In addition, we should also include in this category the very diverse group of traders from Russia, Central, South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa. To all of these foreigners, China is the land of opportunity, not just a stopover on an international career. In the eyes of many Chinese, (white) westerners are the paradigm of what are known as *yang dagong* (foreign workers). However, numerically this category of foreign residents is dominated by hundreds of thousands of middle class Taiwanese, Hong Kong Chinese, South Koreans, Japanese and Southeast Asians and of course returned Chinese students and professionals. Very prominent are also the much smaller communities of traders from Africa, South, Central and Southeast Asia, Russia and the Middle East.

Many groups of immigrants who share a common background tend to concentrate in one particular city or neighbourhood and specialize in a particular type of employment or business. The group of foreign traders that are by far the best researched are the Africans in Guangzhou, partially because of the visibility of what is locally known as "Chocolate City" and partially also as a

corollary of the recent interest in the connections between China and Africa, including Chinese migration to the continent. Starting with a few enterprising students some fifteen years ago, currently about 30,000 Africans operate in Guangzhou purchasing manufactured goods for export. Many of these traders have become long-term residents of China, often with families; quite a few of them have become very wealthy. Others operate more in the margin, searching for the deal that will make them rich too, often residing in China illegally or shuttling back and forth between China and Africa on tourist visas.

Cross-border migrants

China's international borders no longer divide and separate. They are becoming part of larger cross-border regions defined by complex relationships of co-ethnicity, religion, legal trade and illegal smuggling, marriage, employment, study, immigration and emigration, crime and (particularly in the case of Xinjiang) terrorism. North Korea provides perhaps the clearest example. The famine in the late 1990s led to a flood of immigrants from North Korea into China. The PRC government has treated illegal Koreans with little sympathy. In 2002, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reported massive roundups, detentions and repatriations of North Koreans, and a crackdown on religious and human rights groups that assisted them. The issue is made more complex because of the large ethnically Korean population that lives in China just across the border from North Korea. Many North Koreans were taken into rural Korean households and even irregularly registered as members of these households by the local authorities.

"Fortune seekers" and problems of immigration

Neatly dividing foreign immigrants into the categories such as "students", "traders", "businesspeople", "professionals" and "cross-border migrants" hardly covers the reality on the ground in China. Migrants are highly enterprising and proactive in exploring the opportunities that China has to offer, and there is very considerable overlap and spillover between all of these categories as a result. From the perspective of the Chinese authorities, the dynamic nature of migration has created a further category of immigrant that does not come to China for bona fide business, study, or employment, but opportunistically in search of wealth or survival. Such "fortune seekers" (*taojinzhe*, literally "gold panners"), do not bring any skills or capital to China. They come to China not to contribute to its modernization, but merely to take advantage of its new prosperity.

In fact, of course, almost every group of immigrants in China is internally stratified, having both highly successful professionals and businesspeople and more marginal groups without formal jobs or fully registered businesses. New immigrants rely on their own resources and personal contacts, causing the growth of



An African woman sells traditional African wares at an Expo event in Wuhan

residentially concentrated urban “villages” (*cun*) or “towns” (*cheng*) of foreigners, such as the Burmese and Vietnamese in Guangxi and the South Koreans in Beijing. Here we see the beginnings of the “ethnic enclave” pattern of immigrant settlement found among many immigrant groups the world over, where the institutional infrastructure and employment offered by a co-ethnic community provides new arrivals with the chance to get established and ultimately become successful too.

Chinese studies often conclude that fortune seekers do not deserve the courtesies extended to foreigners, but should rather be considered part of the “floating population” of rural-urban migrants. Increasingly, the problem of the “foreign blind flow” (*waiguo mangliu*) is directly connected with that of the “three illegalities” (*san fei*) of illegal entry, illegal residence and illegal work. Moreover, the three illegalities and the foreign floating population are often discussed together with many other much more serious problems, including terrorism, organized and petty crime, drinking, drugs and violence, prostitution and unemployment, a list that is depressingly similar to observations on immigration in western countries.

Yet most authors also agree that the lack of compliance with China’s regulations regarding foreign entry, employment and residence should be separated from more serious law enforcement issues. The illegality of many foreigners in China often has to do more with the lack of appropriate regulation, the continued restrictions on travel and other activities by foreigners, and a general lack of expertise and coordination within those branches of the administration that are responsible for foreigners. Even many professional and business migrants, the kind of people China says it wants, either often have no choice but to bend the rules in order to live and work in China, or else

have little incentive to comply with the regulations.

China still does not possess the regulatory framework and administrative capacity to fully deal with large-scale immigration. Currently, the trend is towards a more integrated approach that facilitates the entry and stay of foreigners. The recognition that foreigners are there to stay also comes with the necessity to cater to their needs, such as education for their children and the right to profess their religion in churches, mosques, or temples. However, the normalization of immigration also means that, increasingly, foreign residents are only entitled to the rights that Chinese citizens enjoy as well, and should no longer get privileged treatment.

Yet in certain respects, the normalization of immigration will continue to be less than straightforward as it touches on some politically very sensitive issues. In these areas, foreigners are still treated on the basis of the old exclusionary discourse as carriers of subversive influences (or “spiritual pollution” in the CCP’s own terminology) that may harm Chinese society and even the rule of the Communist Party. In addition, as we have seen, a new perception is emerging that not all of immigration is necessarily a good thing. The growth of a “foreign floating population” is considered a burden on Chinese society, while immigration is also associated with terrorism, subversive activities and international organized crime. As a result, an increasing emphasis on control and national security in addition to service and equal treatment is to be expected in immigration management.

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