Urban Population Growth and Urbanization in China since 1949: Reconstructing a Baseline

Kam Wing Chan; Xeuqiang Xu

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1. The "Mystery" of China's Urban Population Size

China's urbanization patterns and policies since 1949 have been the focus of a good deal of attention. The main elements of this "Chinese Model" have been the massive "rustication" movements, the recruitment of large numbers of city dwellers to work in rural areas, strict controls on rural–urban migration through food rationing and household registration, and the expansion of rural employment through the development of rural industries. While controlling urban population growth has been problematic to most governments of developing countries, it has been widely accepted that China, particularly in the Maoist era, has been successful in this sphere. The "Chinese Model", therefore, may offer such countries great promise as an alternative approach.[1]

Despite a voluminous literature on China's urbanization and a tremendous increase in the amount of statistical information available in recent years – especially with the release of the 1982 Census results – the study of urban population trends continue to be plagued by definitional problems; indeed, the actual size of China's urban population remains a "demographic mystery."[2] One only needs to examine the recent and vivid account by Leo Orleans to realize the paucity of and confusion about urban population statistics appearing in both Chinese and foreign sources, and the problems in dealing with the quantitative aspects of China's urban growth.[3] For example, in mid 1982 the State Statistical Bureau (SSB) reported that the "urban" population was 138·7 million (or 13·9 per cent

1. For example, Rhoads Murphey, "Aspects of urbanisation in contemporary China: a revolutionary model," *Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 7 (1975), pp. 165–68; Reiitsu Kojima (ed.), *Chūgoku no toshika to nōson kensetsu (Urbanization and Rural Development in China)* (Tokyo: Ryukeishosha, 1978); Laurence Ma, "Counterurbanisation and rural development: the strategy of *hsia-hsiang*," *Current Scene*, Vol. 15, Nos. 8 and 9 (August–September 1977), pp. 1–11; and Murphey, *The Fading of the Maoist Vision: City and Country in China's Development* (New York: Methuen, 1980).

2. Laurence J. C. Ma, "Preliminary results of the 1982 Census in China," *Geographical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (April 1983), pp. 189–210.

3. Leo A. Orleans, "China's urban population: concepts, conglomeration and concerns," in Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress, *China Under the Four Modernisations*, Pt I (Washington D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1982), pp. 268–302. Another more recent, but unsuccessful, attempt by Orleans and Ly Burnham to solve this "riddle" came to the authors' attention just prior to preparing this article for publication ["The enigma of China's urban population," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 7 (July 1984), pp. 788–804]. Central issues like the changes in urban definition have not been resolved (compare Table 1 in their paper with Tables 3 and 5 in this article).

of the national population) for year-end 1981.[4] In December 1982 another figure of 206·6 million (20·6 per cent) was reported for mid 1982.[5] Shanghai offers another example: it is often reported that Shanghai, with a population of over 10 million, is the world's largest city;[6] but many Chinese academic writers estimate the city's population to be only five to six million.[7]

Indeed, a relatively complete set of time-series urban population statistics for the post-1960 period only appeared in 1981 in *Zhongguo shehui kexue* and later in other Chinese sources including the *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981*.[8] This series (hereafter referred to as Series A), giving the following post-1960 urban population figures (in millions): 130·7 (1960), 101·7 (1965), 102·3 (1970), 111·7 (1975), 128·6 (1979) and 138·7 (1981), has frequently been quoted in the subsequent literature.[9] Hence, an impression that China's urban population stopped growing, or actually decreased, during the 1960s and early 1970s has gained wide currency. Moreover, given that the urban rate of natural increase during this period continued to be positive, a net urban out-migration is implied, which would be consistent with the established literature emphasizing the importance of the rustication of urban youths and intellectuals in China's "anti-urban" development strategy. Moreover, many Chinese researchers also claim that there has been no obvious urbanization in the post-1949 China by comparing the "urban" percentages of 1950 (11 per cent) and 1980 (13 per cent),[10] though there are some others who hold the opposite view[11] or indicate that these urban population figures are not directly comparable due to inconsistent definitions.[12]

4. State Statistical Bureau (SSB), *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981 (TJNJ 1981) (Statistical Yearbook of China 1981)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1982), p. 89.

5. State Council Population Census Office and SSB Population Statistics Division (SCPCO and SSBPSD), *Zhongguo disanci renkou pucha de zhuyao shuzi (Important Figures from China's Third Population Census)* (Hong Kong: Jingji daobao she, 1982), p. 2.

6. See United Nations Population Division (UNPD), *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth* (New York: Department of International Economic and Social Affairs. Population Studies No. 68, 1980), p. 136.

7. See for example, Zhang Changgen, "Shanghai: Population developments since 1949," in Liu Zheng *et al., China's Population: Problems and Prospect* (Beijing: New World Press, 1980), p. 129.

8. Zhang Zehou and Chen Yuguang, "Shilun woguo renkou jiegou yu guomin jingji fanzhan de guanxi" ("On the relationship between the population structure and national economic develoment in China") *Zhongguo shehui kexue (Social Sciences in China)*, No. 4 (July 1981), pp. 29–49; *TJNJ 1981*, p. 89; and Ma Hong *et al.* (eds), *Xiandai Zhongguo jingji shidian (Dictionary of Economic Events in Modern China)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), p. 14.

9. This series was cited in J. S. Aird, "Population studies and population policy in China," *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (June 1982), p. 280, Table 2; A. J. Jowett, "The growth of China's population, 1964–1982," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 150, No. 2 (July 1984), pp. 156, Table II; Shigeru Ishikawa, "China's economic growth since 1949 – an assessment," *The China Quarterly*, No. 94 (June 1983), pp. 242–81.

10. See for example, Tian Xueyuan, *Xinshiqi renkoulun (Theory on Population of the New Era)* (Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 25; and Zhang Chunyuan *et al.* (eds.), *Renkou jingjixue (Population Economics)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1983), pp. 329–30, Table 17-3.

11. Thomas G. Rawski, *Economic Growth and Employment in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 25–28. One must, however, be aware that some of the data in his Table 2-3 are not comparable.

12. Wu Youren, "Guanyu woguo shehuizhuyi chengshihua wenti" ("Questions on China's urbanization"), in Beijing College of Economics (ed.), *Zhongguo renkou kexue lunji*

Given the importance of the subject and with the availability of more information, this article will re-explore this issue in some detail. The article is divided into two parts: the first (Sections 2 and 3) examines the urban definitions, and the relevance of various urban and quasi-urban population statistics in representing China's urban population; the second analyses the trends in urban population growth and urbanization since 1949 in general (Section 4) and during the Cultural Revolution period in particular (Section 5). Special attention is given to studying the rural-to-urban migration in 1966–76. Together these two parts will help us to place the various urban "numbers" previously published in a proper perspective so that an accurate picture of China's urbanization and urban growth can be constructed and the question of whether she has succeeded in achieving slow urban growth answered.

2. China's Urban Population Statistics

Basically, there are two types of urban place in China: the municipality (*shi*) and the town (*zhen*).[13] A large municipality, which usually also administers a number of counties (*xian*), can be further sub-divided into two parts: the City Proper (*shiqu* or *shixiaqu*) and the Suburban Counties (*jiaoxian* or *shixiaxian*). To illustrate this point better, the example of Shanghai can be used (Figure 1). The municipality is divided into: (a) City Proper – officially designated as "urban." A large part of it is built-up area; (b) Surburban Counties – a much larger area comprising 10 counties which are predominantly agricultural (Figure 2). Accordingly, the population within the municipality (Total Population of Municipality, TPM) is further classified into two parts – the Total Population of City (TPC) and the Total Population of Suburban Counties – based on "regular residence." (In the 1982 Census a regular resident (*changzhu renkou*) of a particular place is defined primarily by his/her place of residence, at least one year in length, and not by household registration.[14])

It should be noted that the TPC, however, can easily be confused with the TPM in Chinese. Though, precisely, the TPC is referred to as *shiqu zongrenkou* in Chinese writings, more often, it is also reported as *shi zongrenkou*, which is ambiguous, because in Chinese *shi* could mean either "municipality" or "city." For example, *Shanghaishi zongrenkou* could mean the total population of Shanghai *Municipality* or *City (Proper)* as

(Symposium on Chinese Population Science) (Beijing: Zhongguo xushu chubanshe, 1981), p. 96; Hu Xuwei, "Dui woguo chengzhen hua shuiping de pouxi" ("Analysis of China's urbanization level"), *Chengshi guihua (City Planning Review)*, No. 2 (1983), p. 24; and Orleans, "China's urban population."

13. For definition of urban places published in 1955, refer to State Council Legal System Bureau (ed.), *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo fagui huibian July–December, 1955 (Collection of Legal Documents of People's Republic of China, July–December, 1955)* (Beijing: Falu chubanshe, 1980), pp. 409–417; for the current one, see SCPCO and SSBPSD, *Third Population Census*, p. 2.

14. Li Chengrui, "Zong renkou pucha gongbao kan zhongguo renkou tongji shuzi de zhunquexing" ("The Chinese population as shown by the population census communiqué – some comments on the accuracy of Chinese population statistics"), *Jingji yanjiu (Economic Research)*, No. 12 (December 1982), pp. 35–37.

Figure 1: **Shanghai: Administrative Units, 1978**

▨ City Proper;	---- Boundary of County;
	-·-·-·- Boundary of Municipality.
● Seat of County Government;	

previously defined. The exact meaning, therefore, can only be discerned by
reference to the context.[15]

For the purposes of grain distribution and residence control the Chinese
household register (*hukou*) also distinguishes the "agricultural" and "non-
agricultural" population. Designation, therefore, is determined by

15. One must be particularly careful in interpreting news reports and translated materials
from China regarding terms such as "population of municipality," "population of city" and
"urban population;" news reporters and translators often use the terms interchangeably,
unaware that to the Chinese each one may have a different meaning.

Figure 2: **Land Use of Shanghai Municipality, Early 1970s**

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	Built-up Area		Paddy/Wheat
	Newly Reclaimed Land		Cotton
	Market Gardening		Cotton/*Zaliang* *
	Paddy/Cotton Rotation		(* food crops other than rice and wheat)
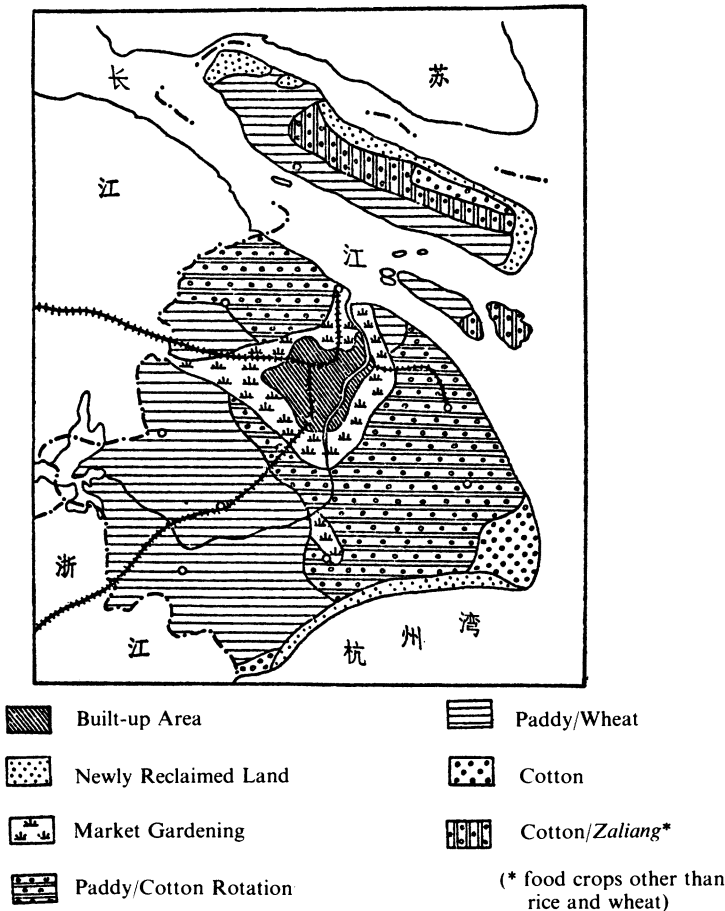
Source:
   Shang Sidi *et al., Shanghai dili qianshuo (Introduction to Geography of Shanghai)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1974), p. 108.

whether or not there is an entitlement to receive commodity food grain (*shangpinliang*) rations from the state.[16] However, this distinction may not reflect the actual nature of an individual's occupation or residential location. For example, rural commune members working in non-agricultural jobs, in the forms of contract workers (*hetong gong*), temporary workers (*linshi gong*), or in the categories of "both workers and peasants" (*yigong yinong*)[17] in urban areas, are classified under the household registration as "agricultural" population because they are still

16. Chen Dao *et al., Jingji da cidian: nongye jingji juan (Dictionary of Economics: Agricultural Economics)* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1983), pp. 127–28; Kam Wing Chan, "Zhongguo nongye renkou ji dayuejin shiqi jihuang siwan renshu" (China's agricultural population and the death toll due to famines in the Great Leap Forward Period," *Jiushi niandai (The Nineties)*, No. 179 (December 1984), pp. 101–103.
17. Discussions of these categories of people are in Ma Xia, "Guanyu zhangshixin nongye renkou liudong wenti de tansuo" ("An exploratory study on the movement of temporary agricultural population"), *Renkou yu jingji (Population and Economy)*, No. 1 (February

tied directly to the communes and as such are not eligible for commodity grain or other urban rations.

Owing to this multi-level classification, population statistics for a municipality like Shanghai are quite complicated and may be confusing. There are three seemingly valid indicators of "city population" for Shanghai: the TPM, the TPC and the NPC (Non-agricultural Population of City, defined by household classification). How they relate to each other is explained by using a Venn diagram [Figure 3].) One point to

Figure 3: **Venn Diagram Showing how the NPC, TPC and TPM for a City Relate**
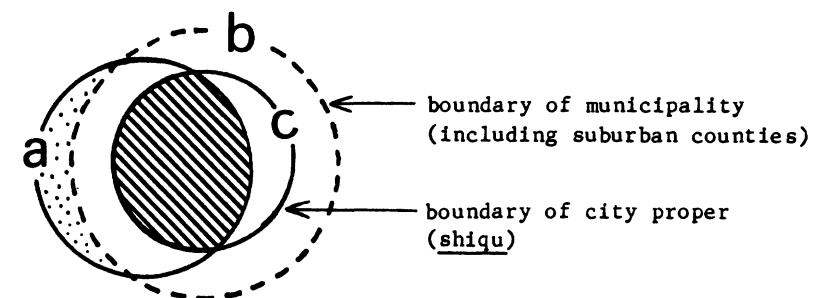
Population Classification: "a" Non-agricultural population based on household classification "b" TPM: Total Population of Municipality (including suburban county population). *not* used to define urban population [11,628,000]. "c" TPC: Total Population of City Proper (*Shiqu zongrenkou*), used to define the urban population in 1950–63, and 1982 onwards [6,134,000].

NPC: Non-agricultural Population of City (*Chengshi renkou*), narrow definition of urban population, used through 1964–81 [6,086,000].

Notes: 1. Figures in [] indicate the population of Shanghai in the corresponding categories as of the end of 1981. Source: *TJNJ 1981*, pp. 90 and 92.

2. ▓▓▓ refers to the non-agricultural population such as cadres and scientific personnel working and residing in the counties.

which we shall return in the next section is that the NPC has on many occasions been referred to as *chengshi renkou* (literally, "city population"), which is a major source of confusion. For municipalities which do not include any counties, there is no distinction, either by area or administratively, between a city and a municipality. Therefore, the population of such municipalities is only classified as agricultural and non-agricultural without the complication of the surburban counties. Likewise, nor do towns include any counties. The Total Population of Town (TPT) is classified as the Non-agricultural Population of Town (NPT) and the Agricultural Population of Town.

1984), pp. 10–13; Nicholas Lardy, *Agriculture in China's Modern Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 196–97; Marc Blecher, "Peasant labour for urban industry: temporary contract labour, urban–rural balance and class relations in a Chinese county," *World Development*, Vol. 11, No. 8 (August 1983), pp. 731–45; Yao Shimou and Wu Chucai, "Woguo nongcun renkou chengshihua de yichong teshu xingshi – shilun woguo de yinong yigcong renkou" ("A special form of urbanization of rural population in China – a comment on the population of both workers and peasants"), *Dili xuebao (Acta Geographica Sinica)*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (June 1982), pp. 155–62.

Based on the three different statistics of urban population at the individual city/town level (TPM, TPC/TPT and NPC/NPT), one can also sum up each of them to form three statistics of "urban" population at the national level: the Total Population of Municipalities and Towns, the Total Population of Cities and Towns, and the Non-agricultural Population of Cities and Towns. Their full definitions are explained in Table 1.

Table 1: **Categories of "Urban" Population at the National Aggregate Level**

Category	Abbreviations	Definitions
1. Total Population of Municipalities and Towns	TPMT	= Sum of all TPMs and TPTs (i.e. the total population living in all municipalities and towns)
2. Total Population of Cities and Towns (*shizhen zongrenkou* or *chengzhen zongrenkou*)	TPCT	= Sum of all TPCs and TPTs (i.e. the total population living in all cities and towns)
3. Non-agricultural Population of Cities and Towns (*Chengzhen feinongye renkou†*)	NPCT	= Sum of all NPCs and NPTs (i.e. the total non-agricultural population living in all cities and towns)

Other abbreviations used and their Chinese equivalents:
TPM = Total Population of Municipality;
TPC = Total Population of City (*shi zongrenkou**);
TPT = Total Population of Town (*zhen zongrenkou*);
NPC = Non-agricultural Population of City (*shi feinongye renkou†*);
NPT = Non-agricultural Population of Town (*zhen feinongye renkou†*).
Notes:
    * See also discussion in text and Fn. 15;
    † These terms have been also commonly abbreviated as *chengzhen renkou* ("population of cities and towns") without the word *feinongye*, which may easily cause confusion. One must be careful not to confuse the *chengzhen zongrenkou* (TPCT) with the *chengzhen renkou* (NPCT).
Sources:
    Prepared by the authors based on Figure 3, and Li Chengrui, "Zong renkou pucha gongbao kan Zhongguo renkou tongji shuzi de zhunquexing" ("The Chinese population as shown by the population census communiqué – some comments on the accuracy of Chinese population statistics"), *Jingji yanjiu* (*Economic Research*), No. 12 (December 1982), pp. 28–38; and SCPCO and SSBPSD, *Zhongguo disanci renkou pucha de zhuyao shuzi (Important Figures from China's Third Population Census)* (Hong Kong: Jingji daobaoshe, 1982), p. 2.

3. Defining China's Urban Population

"Urban" population generally refers to the resident population of urban areas, officially designated by the country under study. Because there are no universally acceptable urban criteria which can be applied to countries of different cultures and economic backgrounds, researchers accept as "urban" those areas officially demarcated by individual countries, unless the general principle of non-agricultural predominance of

urban areas is at variance.[18] As the urban and rural boundary in reality is more a matter of gradation than of a distinct dichotomy, it is almost unavoidable in many developing countries that a small proportion of agricultural population, which is usually involved in market gardening and residing in the outer part of the urban areas but sharing the urban facilities, has to be included as part of the urban population.[19] This sets out the general principle for defining urban population in China in the following discussion.

   Total Population of Municipality (TPM). Suburban counties under municipal administration have never been officially designated as urban areas. As already illustrated in Figure 2, the suburban counties are essentially rural.[20] Therefore, it is inappropriate to accept the TPM, which includes suburban counties, as an indicator of urban population. Nor is it correct to suggest that Chinese municipalities (with counties) are statistically comparable to the SMSAs (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas) of the United States.[21] At the present stage of China's economic development, in terms of the non-agricultural activities and commuting pattern, the suburban counties of a large Chinese municipality could hardly be compared to the suburban areas of an SMSA. Moreover, these suburban counties are neither part of the labour market nor of the commuting zone of the urban core (City Proper), which is an important criterion, apart from non-agricultural predominance, for defining metropolitan areas in most western countries.[22] Therefore, these municipalities function as urban-centred planning units rather than urban units *per se*. To take the TPM as a measure of "urban" population will artificially exaggerate China's urban population.[23]

   Furthermore, there is no definite functional criterion determining how many counties should be included in the municipal jurisdiction of each

18. In countries where urban designation may not imply non-agricultural predominance, an additional explicit criterion of economic activities may have to be introduced. See UNPD, *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth*, p. 9. This is not very relevant to China where the criterion of non-agricultural predominance in economic activities must be met for most urban designations.

19. For example, the percentage of urban labour force engaged in agriculture ranged from 11·3% to 22·8% during 1950–71 in Nicaragua, Peru, Romania and Turkey. *Ibid*. pp. 9 and 74. Most of these urban farmers are found in small and medium cities and towns.

20. Other studies also confirm the same point, see Alan L. Eyre, "Shanghai – world's second city?" *Professional Geographer*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January 1971), pp. 28–30; and Norman A. Chance, *China's Urban Village: Life in a Beijing Commune* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), Chap. 2. Indeed, the surburban counties are often referred to as *nongcun* (rural villages).

21. See, for example, Morris B. Ullman, *Cities of Mainland China: 1953 and 1958* (Washington, D.C. US Department of Commerce, International Reports Series P-95, No. 59, 1961), p. 4.

22. Peter G. Goheen, "Metropolitan area definition: a re-evaluation of concept and statistical practice," in Larry S. Bourne (ed.), *Internal Structure of City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 47–58; and James W. Simmons and Larry S. Bourne, "Defining urban places: differing concepts of the urban system," in Bourne and Simmons (eds.), *Systems of Cities: Readings on Structure, Growth, and Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 28–41.

23. According to this definition, which has been used in many UN studies, China's urban population would have totalled 167 million (22% of the nation's total) and 195 million (23%) in 1970 and 1975, respectively. UNPD, *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth*, p. 136.

city in China. For example, at the end of 1981, municipalities like Shanghai, Hangzhou and Lhasa, were each administering seven to 10 counties, while those like Nanjing, Wuhan, Harbin and Fuzhou, three at most.[24] Thus, the TPM statistics are not comparable in a functional sense. Moreover, the comparability of the TPMs is further weakened by frequent boundary changes in the municipalities, involving the addition and deletion of counties. Inevitably this causes artificial "increases" or "decreases" in the total size of population under municipal jurisdiction. As a consequence of the re-implementation in 1981 of the policy of putting neighbouring counties under municipal administration (*shiguanxian*) in order to promote economic and administrative integration of the urban and rural sectors,[25] the TPM of any given municipality could increase by millions overnight.[26]

Total Population of City/Town (TPC/TPT), and Non-agricultural Population of City/Town (NPC/NPT). In China the TPC/TPT includes a portion of residents who are classified as "agricultural" by household registration, but who actually are employed in non-agricultural jobs, working as contract workers, as temporary workers, and in those categories called "both workers and peasants" in industry, construction, transport and services;[27] some are the spouses of urban residents residing in urban areas but do not qualify as "non-agricultural" (*hukou*); the remainder specialize in market gardening catering for the urban market. In general, their lifestyle is also very "urban," and, in a functional sense, they are part of the urban population.[28] Hence, the TPC/TPT represents the *de facto* urban population figure (including *all* the regular residents in the designated urban areas), whereas the NPC/NPT (defined by the non-agricultural *hukou* registrations) – excluding the above categories quasi-non-agricultural population in urban areas – only represents the number of the *de jure* urban residents eligible for urban rations. For the purpose of studying actual urban population growth, the TPC/TPT formulation would seem to be a more representative one. In the same vein, the TPCT is seen as a more useful indicator of the urban population than the NPCT.

Hence, among the three apparently representative indicators of urban population – the TPMT, TPCT and NPCT, – the TPCT, as an aggregate,

24. Ministry of Domestic Affairs, *Zhongguo xingzheng quhua jiance (A Handbook of Administrative Districts in China)* (Beijing: Ditu chubanshe, 1982).
25. This programme was first initiated in the late 1950s. A renewed emphasis has been made since the early 1980s. *Mingbao (Ming Pao*, Hong Kong), 1 January 1983, p. 5. At the end of 1981, only 56 municipalities, out of a total of 230, included one or more counties under their administration. This number has increased to 121, out of a total of 286, in 1984. *Dagongbao (Ta Kung Pao*, American ed.), 21 March 1984, p. 1.
26. An example one may use to illustrate this is the case of Chongqing. This municipality covered an area of 9,800 sq. km., and had a population of 6·4 million, before the *shiguanxian* programme was implemented in April 1983. After that, however, with the inclusion of 11 counties and another small city, the total municipal area expanded to 22,909 sq. km., and the municipal population to 13 million, to become China's largest "city" by TPM. See "The nation's largest city," in *Dagongbao* (American ed.), 21 March 1984, p. 1.
27. This does not imply that *all* temporary and contract workers will be counted as part of the TPCT. Only those who are regular residents of urban areas will be counted.
28. Zhang Tingwei, "Dui chengshihua fazhan dongli de tantao" ("Discussion on the driving force of urbanization"), *Chengshi guihua*, No. 5 (1983), pp. 59–60; Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level," pp. 25–26; see also *supra* fn. 17.

is demonstrably the most useful, the one which comes closest to what would be considered urban in other countries. This, however, does not mean that the TPCT statistics are unproblematic: their accuracy is affected by the difficulties in implementing the official urban criteria in some areas, and by the incomplete coverage of enumeration. However, it seems that the latter problem is not unique to the Chinese system: underestimation of urban population due to incomplete coverage occurs in many other systems.[29] Unrecorded urban residents are mostly "illegal" and "semi-illegal" migrants from the countryside, such as rusticated urban youths drifting back to cities without authorization, and, generally, peasants staying in urban areas for various reasons but without proper work or residence permits. Though the exact size of this group, commonly known as the "black" households (heihu), is hard to ascertain and probably always will be, it is suspected that it has increased since the early 1960s when the government began to implement strict controls on urban in-migration. In any case, as an approximation of the total number of residents in all urban areas in China, the TPCT is still the preferred indicator to the NPCT.

Definitions of Urban Places. Another closely related issue is the definition of urban places, on which the various "urban" populations are based. Some writers believe that the changing definition of this term is the main cause of the inconsistencies in Chinese urban demographic data.[30] According to our survey, however, this appears to be of small consequence.

When China released the 1953 Census count, which included the number of urban places and the size of the urban population, there was no clear indication of the urban criteria used by the authorities in demarcating urban areas. But the fact that there were 920 towns each with a population of less than 2,000[31] indicates that the minimum population size for urban designation was below 2,000. A set of revised criteria for urban designation was announced in 1955[32] and an accompanying note by the State Statistical Bureau suggested that these criteria closely approximated those used in 1953 with some amendments, mostly concerning small towns. The 1955 criteria for town designations were (i) seats of county governments; and (ii) settlements reaching a population size of 2,000 of whom at least 50 per cent were non-agricultural.[33] As only a small number of the 920 towns with a population below 2,000 reported in 1953 were seats of county government, or had grown to a size of 2,000 in 1955, the majority were denied town status in the mid 1950s, following the

29. Owing to the incompleteness of enumeration, most national census figures underestimate the number of urban residents by about 5 to 10%.
30. Orleans, "China's urban population," pp. 273–77; and J. Aird, "Population studies and population policy in China," pp. 279–82.
31. State Council (ed.), *Collection of Legal Documents, 1955,* p. 413.
32. Reproduced in *ibid.* pp. 409–417.
33. The 1955 urban criteria also made provision for a special urban category called "urban-type residential areas" *(chengshi xing juminqu),* which mainly referred to sites of institutions and enterprises and their residential areas whose number of regular residents was between 1,000 and 2,000, of whom 75% were "non-agricultural." This type of urban settlement, however, was not granted "town" status.

implementation of the 1955 definition.[34] Settlements with population size over 2,000 (probably between 2,000 and 3,000) might also be excluded if they did not meet the criterion of non-agricultural predominance.

Another revision of these criteria took place at the end of 1963 when the economy was undergoing "re-adjustment." Again, this change involved the definition of town; that of city remained basically unchanged.[35] The previous condition designating seats of county governments as towns was withdrawn. Furthermore, for a settlement to be officially designated as a town, a slightly higher standard was required (the minimum population size was raised to 2,500 and the non-agricultural proportion to 75 per cent).[36] A minor "tightening" of town designations also took place in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, probably due to the "leftist" policy of cutting down the number of towns, which still prevailed in 1976–77, and as a measure to remedy some of the previous mis-designations in 1980–82 when China was in the process of preparing her third census. However, there was no change in the urban criteria of 1964.[37]

The tightening of urban criteria and designations led to an overall decrease in the number of towns, as is reflected in Table 2. The most drastic of these reductions occurred in 1953–56 and 1963–64, consistent with the major changes in the town designation criteria we have identified.[38] Despite the glaring reduction in the number of towns since 1953 its effect on the total size of urban population has been less than many people had imagined. Almost all these changes involved the lowest layer of the urban hierarchy – towns of the size range of 500 to 3,000. If we assume quite generously that, on average, each of them has a population of 2,000, and 2,700 of them have been re-classified since 1953, the total size of the urban population re-classified will be 5·4 million, which is about four per cent of the total urban population reported for 1964, or less than one percentage point of the urbanization level (measured by the percentage of national population living in urban areas) in the same year.[39]

The above thus shows that in comparison with the urban criteria used in 1953, those used in later years became increasingly more restrictive. In other words, the later criteria of urban designation tend to under-estimate the size of the urban population under 1953 definition. But for the purposes of analysing the macro-picture of China's urban population

34. See State Council (ed.), *Collection of Legal Documents, 1955*, p. 413. Some of these small settlements were, instead, reclassified as "urban-type residential areas." However, they probably remained in the "urban" category.

35. Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level," p. 25.

36. The State Council issued a set of revised criteria for defining towns in 1964 stipulating that a "town" was a settlement (i) with a population of more than 3,000 of whom more than 70% were "non-agricultural," or (ii) with a population of 2,500 to 3,000 of whom more than 85% were "non-agricultural." See *ibid.* The widely quoted definition of urban places in *TJNJ 1981*, p. 495, which only specifies (i) above represents a partial description of the criteria which have been used since 1964.

37. SCPCO and SSBPSD, *China's Third Population Census*, p. 2.

38. Of course, there are also some "movements" between the two categories of "cities" and "towns." Towns might expand to become cities, and cities might decline to become towns.

39. Calculated from 1964 data reported in SCPCO and SSBPSD, *China's Third Population Census*, p. 1.

Table 2: **Number of Cities and Towns Officially Designated, 1952–82**

Year	Cities	Towns	All
1952	159*	n.a.	n.a.
1953	166‡	5,402†	5,568
1956	n.a.	3,672†	n.a.
1957	176*	3,621†	3,797
1963	n.a.	4,032‡‡	over 4,000††
1964	168§§	3,148§§	3,316
1976	189‖‖	3,261	3,450‖‖
1979	191‡	n.a.	n.a.
1980	223§	2,874§	3,097
1981	229‖	2,843¶	3,072
1982	236**	2,664**	2,900

Notes:
   n.a. not available.
Sources:
   * SSB, *Weida de shinian (The Ten Great Years)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1959), p. 11.
   † Morris B. Ullman, *Cities of Mainland China: 1953 and 1958*, p. 3.
   ‡ Zhu Zhuo, "Shilun woguo renkou heli fenbu wenti" ("On the rational distribution of the Chinese population"), *Renkou yanjiu*, No. 3 (October 1980), p. 12.
   § Ma Hong (ed.), *Xiandai Zhongguo jingji shidian*, p. 425.
   ‖ SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981*, p. 91.
   ¶ Zheng Zhonghan, "On small towns," *Social Sciences in China*, No. 4 (1984), fn. 1.
   ** SCPCO and SSBPSD, *Third Population Census*, p. 2.
   †† Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level," p. 25.
   ‡‡ Unpublished data, Zhongshan University.
   §§ *Renkou pucha qiansuo (A Brief Discussion of Population Censuses)*(Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1982), p. 25.
   ‖‖ Yang Deqing (ed.), *Renkouxue gailun (Theories on Demographic Science)* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 71.

growth, this does not seem to pose any great problem. In general, the official criteria for urban designations so far used have been relatively consistent, particularly regarding the cities and larger towns where over 95 per cent of the urban population are to be found.

   Finally, although the urban criteria published appear to be quite consistent, the actual demarcation of the urban boundaries might not strictly follow them. This has happened in a few localities like Zibo and Liupanshui where large areas of farm lands and farm population are included in the urban jurisdiction,[40] and a number of rural towns where

   40. Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level," p. 24; and Wu Youren and Zhuang Linde, "Guanyu woguo chengshi jiaoqu fanwei de wenti" ("Questions on the boundary of urban suburbs"), in Geographical Society of China (ed.), *Gongye buju yu chengshi guihua (Industrial Location and City Planning)* (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1981), pp. 144–49.

the geographical boundaries are not well-defined.[41] However, according to Hu Xuwei, one of the deputy editors-in-chief of *Jingji dili* (*Economic Geography*), the upward counting of urban population due to these is offset by roughly the same amount of people who reside in settlements which have already met the criteria of urban designation but not yet been so classified.[42] Thus, on balance, the TPCT figure would still represent the total urban size of China.

Definitions of Urban Population. As we shall demonstrate, confusion arising from the changing definitions of *urban population*, rather than those of *urban places*, led to the inconsistencies referred to in Section 1. In China there are two ways of calculating "urban" population,[43] but only one of them is used officially by the State Statistical Bureau at any one time.

Between the years 1949 and 1963 the TPCT was used to define "urban" population. A change in the definition took place in 1963/64, later explained in *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981* when it first released the official urban data, which resulted in the adoption of a narrower definition – the NPCT – as the "urban" population.[44] This explains why the NPCT has also been used by the Chinese as *chengzhen renkou* ("population of cities and towns").[45] Such a change occurred at more or less the same time when the criteria for the designation of urban places was also under revision. The precise reason for this change has not been made clear. Nor was the change widely known inside China; indeed, confusion over these two definitions was still found in Chinese publications as recently as 1982 and 1983.[46] Perhaps the use of the NPCT as "city and town population" was not just a simple matter of convenience;[47] it did help urban governments to determine the respective size of the *de jure* urban population eligible for rations under their jurisdiction,[48] which was more pressing and important in the early 1960s, when the experience of

41. For example, see Wang Shiqing and Qi Hanbing, "Xianzhen guihua zhong jige wenti de fujian" ("Some preliminary views on planning of county towns"), *Chengxiang jianshe (Urban and Rural Construction)*, No. 7 (July 1983), pp. 6–8.

42. There are more than 300 county towns (*xian zhen*) which, though they have attained the conditions suitable for urban designation, are still excluded from the urban category. See Li Mengbai "Woguo chengzhen fazhan de zhanwan" ("Prospect of urban development in China"), *Chengxiang jianshe*, No. 12 (December 1983), p. 17; also Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level."

43. Li Chengrui, "The Chinese population," pp. 31–32.

44. See the Explanatory Notes of *TJNJ 1981*, p. 495. A recent confirmation of the above is in Hu Kaihua and Chen Wei, "Woguo chengzhen renkou tongji de youguan wenti" ("Questions related to China's urban population statistics"), *Renkou yu jingji*, No. 3 (June 1984), pp. 39–42 and 24.

45. Li Chengrui, "The Chinese population," pp. 31–32.

46. Examples of the NPCT and the TPCT not being differentiated can be found in Ma Hong *et al.*, *Dictionary of Economic Events*, p. 14; and Zhang Chunyuan *et al.* (eds), *Renkou jingjixue (Population Economics)* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanxue, 1983), p. 330.

47. In fact, the definition of urban population based on a *de jure* criterion is not particularly unique to the Chinese case; the same thing is found in the USSR, see Cecil Houston, "Administrative control of migration to Moscow, 1959–75," *The Canadian Geographer*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1979), pp. 32–44.

48. By defining the urban population on a narrower population base, the state would apparently reduce its moral, if not financial, commitment of providing rations and services to urban residents without non-agricultural household status.

pervasive shortage of food in cities was still remembered, than was an accurate definition of urban population, which would have been of value only to demographers, urban geographers and urban planners, a virtually non-existent group at that time.

Another change of definition occurred in 1982, when the urban population reverted to the TPCT, probably because of the many problems associated with using the NPCT to represent the urban population. For example, in the post-1976 period when city planning grew in importance, urban infrastructural facilities planned on the NPCT figures were inadequate measures of the urban demand; moreover, the NPCT is not internationally comparable.[49] The TPCT was used in reporting the urban population figures in the 1982 Census, and it has since then been increasingly used to represent the urban population.[50] In summary, the statistics that have been used to define "urban" population in different periods by the statistical authorities are: 1949–63 TPCT; 1964–81 NPCT; and 1982 to the present TPCT.

4. *Trends of Urban Population Growth and Urbanization, 1949–82*

It will be argued in this section that the "mystery" surrounding China's urban population total is caused by a misunderstanding about how urban population statistics have been defined in China and by the changes in the official definition of "urban." This is owing, in part, to the failure of most Chinese writers and statistical publications to recognize or make known these changes before 1982, and, in part, to other researchers, who have used the statistics published since 1982, being insufficiently aware of all the definitional complexities.[51]

Based on the different definitions identified in Section 3, we are able to construct a baseline for China's urban population by piecing together previously released, but undifferentiated, "urban" population statistics from various sources and reclassifying them according to the NPCT and TPCT. (See Table 3.) From Table 3 it can be seen that the difference between the two "urban" population aggregates – the TPCT and NPCT – can be as large as 60 million, as in the case of 1982. This also explains why

49. Hu Xuwei, "Analysis of China's urbanization level," pp. 23–26; Wu Yuren, "Questions on China's urbanization," p. 96; and Zhang Tingwei, "The driving force of urbanization," p. 59.

50. For example, Shanghai's population in 1982 was reported by residence (city proper/suburban counties) instead of the conventional household classification (agricultural/non-agricultural) in Academy of Social Science, Shanghai, *Shanghai jingji (Economy of Shanghai)* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983), p. 1,237; and SCPCO and SSBPD, *10 Percent Sampling Tabulation on the 1982 Population Census of the People's Republic of China* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1983). There are, however, still some cases where the NPCT/non-NPCT division is used as an approximation of the urban/rural dichotomy, particularly in social and economic surveys.

51. This change in definition was made known by the statistical authorities in 1982 (see *supra* fn. 44) and other subsequent publications. Some authors, writing after 1982, including those who cited figures from the *TJNJ 1981*, were either unaware of the change or incorrectly interpreted it. Examples of these include John Aird, "The preliminary results of China's 1982 Census," *CQ*, No. 96 (December 1983), pp. 613–40; Jowett, "The growth of China's population," p. 156; and Orleans and Burnham, "The enigma," p. 790.

Table 3: **Urban Population* and Non-agricultural Population of Cities and Towns (NPCT), 1949–82** (millions)

Year End	Urban Pop. (TPCT)	NPCT	National Pop.	% of National Pop.		Sources
	I	II	III	I/III × 100	II/III × 100	
1949	57·650		541·670	10·6		(1) (2)
1950	61·690		551·960	11·1		(2)
1951	66·320		563·000	11·8		(2)
1952	71·630		574·820	12·5		(1) (2)
1953[m]	75·260[a]		580·600	13·0		(1)
1953	77·670		587·960	13·2		(2)
1954	81·550		601·720	13·6		(2)
1955	82·850		614·650	13·5		(2)
1956	89·150		627·800	14·2		(2)
1957	99·490		646·530	15·4		(1)
1960	130·730		660·250	19·8	16·8	(3)
1964[m]	127·103	97·910	691·220[b]	18·4	14·2	(1) (4)
1965		101·700	725·380		14·0	(1)
1970		100·750	825·420		12·2	(5)
1975		111·710	919·700		12·1	(5)
1978		119·940	958·090		12·5	(1)
1979		128·620	970·920		13·2	(5)
1980		134·130	982·550		13·7	(6)
1981		138·700	996·220		13·9	(1)
1982[m]	206·589	146·570	1003·937[b]	20·6	14·6	(4) (7)

Notes:
    * Based on the Total Population of Cities and Towns (TPCT).
    m Mid-year.
    a The first figure reported in 1953 Census was 77·257. SSB (1982) has adjusted this to 75·260.
    b These are census figures known to exclude the military, which numbered 4·2 million in mid 1982. It is likely that the military is also excluded in the figures for 1970–81, but is included for 1949–60 and 1965.

Sources:
    (1) SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1981 (Statistical Yearbook of China 1981)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1982), p. 89.
    (2) *Tongji Gongzuo (Statistical Work)*, No. 11 (June 1957), p. 24.
    (3) Zhang Zehou and Chen Yuguang, "On the relationship between the population structure and national economic development in China," *Social Sciences in China*, No. 4 (1981), pp. 73.
    (4) SCPCO and SSBPSD, *Zhongguo disanci renkou pucha de zhuyao shuzi (Important Figures from China's Third Population Census)* (Hong Kong: Jingji daobaoshe, 1982), p. 2.
    (5) Ma Hong (ed.), *Xiandai Zhongguo jingji shidian (Dictionary of Economic Events in Modern China)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982), p. 14.
    (6) *Zhongguo jingji nianjian* Editing Committee, *Zhongguo jingji nianjian 1982 (Yearbook of Chinese Economy 1982)* (Beijing: Jingji guanli zazhi chubanshe, 1982), p. VIII-3.
    (7) Yao Shimou, "Some development problems in the large cities of China," lecture presented at Michigan State University, February 1984.

Table 4: Urban Population and Urbanization Level: China and Other Countries, 1950–80

Countries	Urban Population			Urbanization Level		
	1950	1980	Av. Annual Growth Rate (%)	1950	1980	Av. Annual Rate of Urbanization (%)
	(millions)			(% urban)		
China	61·69	206·59*	+3·9†	11·1	20·6*	2·0†
India	59·25	154·52	+3·2	16·8	22·3	0·9
Indonesia	9·36	31·29	+4·1	12·4	20·2	1·6
Nigeria	3·60	14·81	+4·1	10·5	20·4	2·2
Brazil	19·06	82·17	+5·0	36·0	65·0	2·0
USSR	100·00‡	166·20	+2·4§	48·0‡	63·0	1·3§
USA	97·61	167·05	+1·8	64·1	73·7	0·5
All developing Countries Excluding China						
	213·83	741·76	+4·2	19·6	32·6	1·7
All Developed Countries						
	448·93	834·40	+2·1	52·5	70·2	1·0
World	724·45	1,767·56	+3·0	29·0	39·9	1·1

Notes:

* 1982 figure; † 1950–82;

† 1959 figure; § 1959–80.

Average Annual Growth Rate: computed by use of a compound interest formula.

Average Annual Rate of Urbanization: defined as the difference between the annual growth rate of urban population (RU) and the average annual growth rate of national population (RN), i.e. RU − RN. Alternatively, it can be approximated from:

$[n\sqrt{UP(t+n)/UP(t)} - 1] \times 100$, where UP(t) and UP(t + n) are the percentage of urban population at year t and year t + n respectively. n is the number of years between t and t + n. For a detailed discussion of this, refer to UNPD, *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth,* p. 34.

Urban Population: defined by the population residing in urban areas officially designated by their respective countries.

Sources:

China: computed from Table 3; USSR: USSR State Statistical Administration, *Narodnoe khoziaistvi SSSR 1922–1982: Iubileinyo statisticheskii ezhegodnik (The National Economy of the USSR: the Jubilee Statistical Yearbook)* (Moskva: Finansyi Statistik, 1982), p. 9; USA: US Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1982–83* (Washington, D.C., 1982), p. 21; Other Countries: UNPD, *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth,* p. 136; The figures for the world's total have been adjusted by applying more updated data for China.

such a large "inconsistency" exists in reports on the 1981–82 "urban" population discussed in Section 1. A comparison of the urban population figures in Table 3 and the widely-cited Series A indicates that the latter consists of two distinct series, divided by a hidden discontinuity in 1963–64. Using Series A, that is comparing the NPCT of the 1970s with the TPCT of the 1950s and early 1960s, would understate the post-1964 urban population growth.

Our re-interpreted urban population figures indicate that China's urban population was 206·6 million in 1982, which makes her the country with the largest urban population in the world.[52] Yet, even with such a large urban population, China remains one of the least urbanized countries. The urbanization level of China (around 21 per cent) is relatively low by international standards (Table 4); lower than the world's average, it is close to those of India, Indonesia and Nigeria.

The increase of urban population between 1949–82 was quite significant (154 million, or 4·7 million per year). The growth would be even larger if the urban population were defined by the 1953 urban criteria.[53] Like many developing countries the average annual urban growth rate is high (about 4·0 per cent), much faster than the average annual growth rate of her national population of the same period (1·92 per cent). A comparison with other populous developing countries shows that the long-term growth rate of urban population of China is lower than that of Brazil, but close to that of Indonesia and Nigeria, and much faster than that of India (Table 4).[54] Similarly, in terms of the rate of urbanization – the difference between the growth rates of urban population and of national population – China ranks second, slightly behind Nigeria. Indeed, China's rates of urban population growth and urbanization over the last three decades are comparable to those found in other populous developing countries. It should, however, be noted that these average rates mask enormous variations in different periods, as will be examined below.

5. Urban Growth and Rural/Urban Migrations During 1966–76

Probably owing to the well-publicized rustication movements (*xiafang* and *shangshan xiaxiang*) in this period, coupled with the official pronouncement of a strict ban on rural-to-urban migration in the early 1960s, and of the definitional problems associated with China's urban population statistics examined in previous sections, it had been assumed that the

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52. The urban population of the USA and the USSR was about 149 million (1980) and 173 million (1982), respectively. See US Bureau of Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1982–83* (Washington, D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 21; and USSR State Statistical Administration, *Narodnoe khoziaistvi SSSR 1922–1982: Iubileinyo statisticheskii ezhegodnik (The National Economy of the USSR: the Jubilee Statistical Yearbook)* (Moskva: Finansy i Statistik, 1982), p. 9.

53. There is another possible reason for underestimating the actual urban size in the post-1964 period in comparison with the pre-1964 one caused by a change in the enumeration criterion in the 1964 Census. Refer to the discussion in Section 5.

54. A note of caution is necessary here. Statistics in Table 4 are based on estimates from each country and hence are subject to variation in both definition and accuracy. But in general, they are still indicative of the long-term urban trends.

urban population had stopped growing or actually decreased.[55] Moreover, the urban exodus caused by rustication has been emphasized in the literature to the extent that rural-to-urban migration is treated as insignificant.[56] These assumptions, however, need to be reassessed in the light of the revised interpretation of urban statistics and the new information available.

An evaluation of these assumptions would be impossible without detailed demographic data for 1966–76, which, with the timely release of information contained in the State Statistical Bureau, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983*,[57] are now available. Of particular interest is a set of urban population data defined by *shizhen zongrenkou* (all regular residents within urban districts), which is equivalent to the TPCT used in this article. We are not in the best position to judge the accuracy of this set of presumably retrospective data; but an article commenting in general on the statistics for the "10-year internal chaos period" (1967–76) presented in that yearbook, explains how statistics for the period were gathered. The author, Li Chengrui, the head of the State Statistical Bureau, suggests that the data are generally reliable.[58] Furthermore, a comparison of the figures we have compiled in Table 3 with those presented in the State Statistical Bureau's own series indicates that the two sets of data are for the most part consistent with each other (Table 5).[59] This also suggests that our interpretation concerning the change in definition of urban population made above in Section 4 is correct.

Figure 4 presents the general trend of urban population growth based on this new series, along with the NPCT we have compiled. One can observe from this set of data that there were great fluctuations in urban growth between 1949 and 1982: there was rapid growth in the 1950s and in the late 1970s to early 1980s, an absolute decline in the early 1960s, and moderate growth between 1966 and 1976. In absolute terms, the urban population increase during the Cultural Revolution period was much more sizeable than that implied in the figures of Series A. For example, whilst data of Series A show an urban population increase of about 10 million between 1965 and 1975, the new State Statistical Bureau series indicates that the increase for the same period is nearly 30 million (Table 5).

55. Refer to the discussion in Section 1. Pi-chao Chen, "Overurbanisation, rustication of urban-educated youths, and politics of rural transformation," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (April 1972), pp. 373–74, also cites statements indicating that the Chinese Goverment may have hoped to stabilize the urban population at 110 million during the mid 1960s.

56. For example, see Reiitsu Kojima, "Shakaishugi kensetsu to toshika" ("Socialist development and urbanization"), in Kojima (ed.), *Chūgoku no toshika to nōson kensetsu*, pp. 19–22; Laurence Ma, "Anti-urbanism in China," *Proceedings of Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 8 (1976), pp. 114–18; Charles P. Cell, "The urban–rural contradiction in the Maoist era: the pattern of deurbanisation in China," *Comparative Urban Research*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1980), pp. 48–69; Ishikawa, "China's economic growth since 1949," pp. 250–51.

57. SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983 (TJNJ 1983) (Statistical Yearbook of China 1983)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1983), pp. 103–105.

58. Li Chengrui, "Shinian neiluan qijian woguo jingji qingkuang fenxi – jianlun zheyi qijian tongji shuzi de kekaoxing" ("An analysis of China's economy in the ten-year internal-chaos period and comments on the reliability of statistics of this period"), *Jingji yanyiu*, No. 1 (1984), pp. 23–31.

59. Some of the minor differences in the 1950s' figures are presumably due to the retrospective adjustments of the previous data by the SSB.

Figure 4: **Urban Population of China, 1949–82**
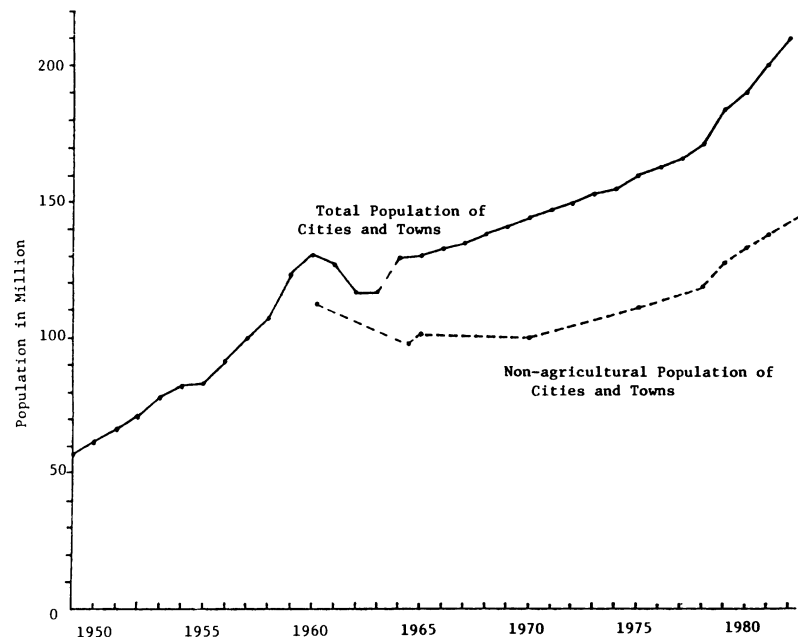
Sources:
    Table 3; and SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983 (Statistical Yearbook of China 1983)*
    (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1983), p. 103.

A detailed inspection of the TPCT trend in Figure 4 and Table 5 shows
an abnormal urban population growth in 1964, which is suspected to be a
statistical phenomenon caused by the different enumeration method used
and the retrospective adjustment made in the 1964 Census.[60] This,
however, should not affect the intra-period comparison of the urban

60. In fact, one would note on inspection of the TPCT data three periods when the level of
urban growth suddenly changed, in 1955, 1960–63 and in 1964. While the drop in urban
growth in 1955 is likely to be caused mainly by the revision of urban criteria, and the trough
of the early 1960s is definitely a result of the decline in urban increase rate and of the then
massive resettlement of urban people, the precipitous increase of 13 million within one single
year of 1964 is likely to be a statistical phenomenon. Much of this "abnormal" growth
occurred in the first half of 1964, as shown in the mid 1964 figure (127·1 million). One
suspects that this anomaly was caused by:
    (i) *The retrospective inclusion in the 1964 Census of urban residents not counted or registered
in any previous enumerations.* Incomplete population registration in 1960–63 would be likely
in time of massive migration. Indirect evidence of this is found in *Renkou pucha qiansuo (A
Brief Discussion of Population Censuses)* (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 1982), pp.
46–47;
    (ii) *The change of criterion in classifying "regular" residents.* Before 1964 a migrant would
be included in the regular resident population of the "destination" place irrespective of his
length of stay there; as from mid 1964 (the Second Census) the new enumeration method
required a migrant to have stayed in the "destination" place for at least one year for such
inclusion, otherwise he would still be counted as a member of the population of his former
residence. (See *ibid.* p. 47.) The new enumeration method will *shift* (or delay) the effect of net
migration on the urban size by one year compared to the previous method. In a situation
experiencing net urban *out-migration*, as was in 1964, the urban population size calculated by
the new method would tend to "overcount" the urban size when compared to statistics based
on the previous method, resulting in an abnormal growth.

Table 5: **Urban Population (TPCT), 1949–82**

End Year	Urban Population (million)	As % of National Population	Annual (mill.)	Increase (%)
1949	57·65 (57·65)	10·6 (10·6)		
1950	61·69 (61·69)	11·2 (11·1)	4·04	7·0
1951	66·32 (66·32)	11·8 (11·8)	4·63	7·5
1952	71·63 (71·63)	12·5 (12·5)	5·31	8·0
1953	78·26 (77·67)	13·3 (13·2)	6·63	9·3
1954	82·49 (81·55)	13·7 (13·6)	4·23	5·4
1955	82·85 (82·85)	13·5 (13·5)	0·36	0·4
1956	91·85 (89·15)	14·6 (14·2)	9·00	10·9
1957	99·49 (99·49)	15·4 (15·4)	7·64	8·3
1958	107·21	16·2	7·72	7·8
1959	123·71	18·2	16·50	15·4
1960	130·73 (130·73)	19·7 (19·8)	7·02	5·7
1961	127·07	19·3	−3·66	−2·8
1962	116·59	17·3	−10·48	−8·2
1963	116·46	16·8	−0·13	0·1
1964	129·50 (127·10ᵐ)	18·4 (18·4ᵐ)	13·04*	11·2*
1965	130·45	18·0	0·95	0·7
1966	133·13	17·9	2·68	2·1
1967	135·48	17·7	2·35	1·8
1968	138·38	17·6	2·90	2·1
1969	141·17	17·5	2·79	2·0
1970	144·24	17·4	3·07	2·2
1971	147·11	17·3	2·87	2·0
1972	149·35	17·1	2·24	1·5
1973	153·45	17·2	4·10	2·7
1974	155·95	17·2	2·50	1·6
1975	160·30	17·3	4·35	2·8
1976	163·41	17·4	3·11	1·9
1977	166·69	17·6	3·28	2·0
1978	172·45	17·9	5·76	3·5
1979	184·95	19·0	12·50	7·2
1980	191·40	19·4	6·45	3·5
1981	201·71	20·2	10·31	5·4
1982	211·54 (206·59ᵐ)	20·8 (20·6ᵐ)	9·83	4·9
Average Annual Increase			4·66	4·0

Notes: All the population figures include the military.
  * Refer to the discussion in text.
  m Mid-year; ()TPCT figures compiled in Table 3.

Source:
  SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983*, p. 103.

population growth in the post-1964 era as the post-1964 method is internally consistent: the analysis of urban growth in 1966–76 will not be affected. There is, however, a slight "under-counting" of the urban

population of the 1970s and 1980s in comparison with the pre-1964 TPCT statistics.[61]

Furthermore, with the availability of more information about the natural increase rates for cities, an estimation of the net rural–urban migration during 1966–76 (the Cultural Revolution decade), a period generally believed to be marked by *net* urban *out-migration*, also becomes possible. Detailed migration statistics and *urban* natural increase rates are still unavailable, but as presented in Table 6, the upper bounds of the average annual urban rate of natural increase between 1966 and 1976 can be estimated from the available natural increase rates for *shi* (cities) for 1966 and 1971–76, supplemented by other information. In this table two versions of the average rate of natural increase for *shi* between 1967 and 1970 have been presented, one of which (Version B) has deliberately chosen a high value in order to take account of a probable rise in the rate of natural increase due to a relaxation of birth controls caused by the chaos of the Cultural Revolutions. In the absence of specific rates for *zhen* (towns) located in counties, we have estimated them by using either the rates for counties or for the nation as a whole. This is likely to overstate the overall urban rates of natural increase and, hence, underestimate the net urban in-migration determined by the "Residual Method" used in Table 7 because the natural increase rates for towns would most likely be lower than those for counties or for the nation. Despite this, computations in Table 7 still show that the *net* urban in-migration (urban in-migration *less* urban out-migration) in these years was still positive, amounting to between two and four million,[62] or between 7 and 12 per cent of the urban growth in the same period.

It is possible, however, that the over-estimation of natural increase rate and understatement of rural–urban migration might be offset by the understatement of natural increase rate due to the differential understatement of birth and death registrations. Based on Coale's estimates, the reported national natural increase is computed to be undercounted by about 8 per cent for the 1966–76 period.[63] Birth and death registrations may have been more accurate in urban areas, and the urban rates of natural increase were also lower, so we expect the undercounting to be lower. Again, if we assume a fairly high understatement percentage for urban areas (say, 6 per cent) and adjust the urban rate of natural increase accordingly, it would appear that the average annual urban rate of natural

61. In a more general case of net urban *in-migration*, the post-1964 calculation method (see footnote above) would tend to "undercount" the urban size in comparison with the pre-1964 one. Over the long term, however, this discrepancy will diminish to an insignificant level.

62. This net in-migration figure calculated here also includes net population gain or loss due to urban reclassification, the extent of which cannot be gauged from the existing information. The figure, however, excludes illegal and semi-legal urban in-migration, which would most probably have increased since the early 1960s.

63. Based on Ansley J. Coale, *Rapid Population Change in China, 1952–1982* (Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1984), pp. 28 and 69, the completeness of birth registration in China averaged about 91% for 1966–76 while death registration averaged about 84% over the same period. When applied against 1966–76 vital rates in *TJNJ 1983*, p. 105, these figures would yield an undercounting percentage of about 8% in the reported national rate of natural increase for this period.

Table 6: **Estimates of the Upper Bounds of Average Annual Urban Rates of Natural Increase, 1966–76**

Year, i	Annual Rates of Natural Increase (%)		
	Cities (rc)	Towns* (rt)	Urban (Cities and Towns) (ru)
1966	1·526	2·724	
1967		2·553	
1968	Version A†: 1·60	2·738	
1969	Version B†: 2·00	2·608	
1970		2·583	Not
1971	1·595	2·429	Available
1972	1·401	2·326	
1973	1·239	2·203	
1974	0·926	1·860	
1975	0·932	1·658	
1976	0·652	1·350	
Average Annual Rate, 1966–76‡	A B 1·333 1·478	2·275	A B 1·653§ 1·749§
Percentage of Urban Population‖	66	34	100

Notes and Sources:
  * In the absence of specific rates for towns, those for counties (1966, and 1971–76) and for the nation (1967–70) are used. *Source:* SSB, *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 1983*, p. 105. Obviously, these rates will be higher than the actual rates for towns. Thus, they would represent the upper bounds rather than the actual rates.
  † Version A assumes that the rc of 1967–70 follows those of 1966 and 1971, whereas Version B assumes that there would be an increase in the rc due to a relaxation of birth controls caused by chaos in cities.
  ‡ This is the "geometric mean" of all the respective annual rates. It is computed by:

$$\left[\sqrt[n]{\prod_{i=1966}^{1976} \left(1 + \frac{r_i}{100}\right)} - 1 \right] \times 100,$$

where r_i = annual rate of natural increase in year i.
  § Calculated by multiplying the average rc and rt by weights derived from the proportion of each group.
  ‖ Estimated from 1973 data in Zhongshan University, *Chengshi guihui yuanli cankao ziliao (Reference Materials for the Principles of City Planning)* (unpub., 1981), p. 67. The respective proportions reported in 1982 census are 70% (cities) and 30% (towns), see SCPCO and SSBPD, *Third Population Census*, pp. 14–15.

increase would be very close to, but still less than, the average annual urban population growth rate.[64] Since all these adjustments tend to place the urban rate of natural increase on the high side, we can confidently conclude that the actual gross urban out-migration cannot exceed the.

  64. Adding 6% to the higher version of the average annual rate of natural increase (1·75) yields a rate of 1·86, which is still lower than the average annual growth rate of urban population (1·88).

Table 7: **Estimates of Components of Urban Growth, 1966–76***

	Average Annual Rate (%)	Components of Urban Growth (%)	(million)
(a) *Version A†*			
Urban Natural Increase	1·65 (1)	87·8 (4)	29·0 (6)
Net Urban In-migration	0·23 (2)	12·2 (5)	4·0 (7)
(b) *Version B†*			
Urban Natural Increase	1·75 (1)	93·1 (4)	30·7 (6)
Net Urban In-migration	0·14 (2)	6·9 (5)	2·3 (7)
Urban Population Growth	1·88 (3)	100·0	33·0 (8)

Notes and Sources:
    * The period is from end-year 1965 to end-year 1976. The methodology used here is the "Residual Method." See UNPD, *Pattern of Urban and Rural Population Growth*, pp. 22–27. Urban growth is disaggregated into two components: urban natural increase and net urban in-migration. The latter also includes net population gain/loss due to urban reclassification.
    † Refer to note † in Table 6.
    (1) refers to Table 6;
    (2) = (3)−(1)
        i.e. rate of net urban = rate of urban − rate of urban
            in-migration   pop. growth   natural increase
    (3) calculated from Table 5;
    (4) = (1)/(3) × 100;
    (5) = (2)/(3) × 100;
    (6) = (1)/(3) × (8);
    (7) = (2)/(3) × (8);
    (8) calculated from Table 5.

gross urban in-migration: the resulting actual net urban in-migration would be positive, but its volume small. It also follows that the widely held impression of the predominance of urban out-migration between 1966 and 1976 is erroneous. A more balanced view perhaps should point out the probable different patterns within the years 1966 and 1976: there was net urban out-migration between 1966 and 1969 but net in-migration between 1970 and 1976.[65]

While the amount of *net* urban in-migration between 1966 and 1976 might be limited, that of the *gross* urban in-migration was not. According to the figure reported by Wu Yuren, an eminent analyst of urbanization in China, close to 30 million urban people were resettled in the countryside during this period.[66] Given that the computed net urban in-migration is non-negative, this would imply that the total urban in-migration must exceed or equal 30 million. It may require some explanation as to why and

65. One also suspects that out-migration occurred mostly in large cities and in-migration in smaller urban places.
66. This total includes the resettlement of 17 million urban youths in the countryside through *shangshan xiaxiang*. The remaining 13 million include the number of relocated urban workers and intellectuals, and their families through *xiafang*. See Wu Youren, "Questions on China's urbanization," p. 97. Similar evidence is found in Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, *Zhongguo chengzhen de jiuye he gongzi (Employment and Wage in Urban China)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 6; Orleans, "China's urban population," pp. 279–83; and *Beijing Review*, Vol. 25, No. 39 (27 September 1982), p. 20.

how such a massive in-migration of over 30 million people was possible between 1966 and 1976, a period when migration controls were reportedly very stringent, and quasi-compulsory movements to resettle urban youths and intellectuals in the countryside were in force.

In China, as in many other developing countries, the wide gap in real income between peasants and non-agricultural workers will always be a major incentive for agriculturalists to become urban workers. As far as we know, there are several ways whereby rural–urban migration, defined to be the change of one's residence from rural areas to cities or towns, is possible. The first way is through the conversion of household registration from agricultural to non-agricultural status.[67] This usually occurs when peasants formally join the state or urban collective sectors by enrolling in colleges and universities, and, more importantly, through civilian job recruitment (*zhaogong*) and army recruitment (*canjun*). The *zhaogong* is, however, strictly controlled by the state because this is usually the largest source of agricultural to non-agricultural conversions, and, because the state has to subsidize the households registered as non-agricultural in terms of food, housing, medical care and fuel. Nevertheless, the state has apparently encountered many difficulties in controlling this flow of people, as is reflected in the frequent issuing of directives on the problem.[68] It is also reported in one of these directives that during the Cultural Revolution decade large numbers of people were recruited from rural areas by "going through the back door."[69]

The other form of rural–urban migration is through the employment of rural residents in the urban areas as "temporary" workers, contract workers or in the category of "both worker and peasants" in both the state and collective sectors. The system of temporary and contract workers was initiated in the early 1960s and has probably been expanded since then because of its popularity and attractiveness to industrial managers, urban administrators, peasants and rural cadres.[70] Although temporary and contract workers are employed in state-owned enterprises, these forms of employment differ from permanent state non-agricultural employment since they enable state enterprises to meet seasonal demands, or to evade state control on the size of their labour force, and to pay wages lower than those specified on state wage scales.[71] Peasants working in any of these categories are not considered permanent state or urban em-

67. Lardy, *Agriculture in China's Development*, pp. 196–97; and Yu Hongjun and Ning Yuemin, *Chengshi dili gailun (Theories of Urban Geography)* (Hefei: Anhui keji chubanshe, 1983), pp. 155–56.

68. Examples are: State Council, "Directive on the strict control of the flow of rural labour force into cities to work and the conversion of agricultural population into non-agricultural population," *Guowuyuan gongbao* (10 February 1982), pp. 885–87; and "Directive on the strict forbidding unhealthy tendencies in the work of recruiting and assigning state workers and staff," *ibid.* 10 June 1982, pp. 339–42.

69. State Council, "Directive on the strict forbidding unhealthy tendencies," *ibid.* pp. 339–42.

70. A detailed explanation of these is found in Blecher, "Peasants labour for urban industry."

71. *Ibid.*; John Emerson, "The labor force of China 1957–80," in US Congress, *China Under the Four Modernisations*, Pt. I, pp. 224–67; Lardy, *Agriculture in China's Development*, pp. 196–97; and Chance, *China's Urban Villages*, pp. 51–54.

ployees, and thus are not eligible for rationed food and other subsidies, but they might receive higher earnings (than those they would otherwise receive working as farmers) and other benefits.[72] Moreover, not all the "temporary" workers are that temporary; according to Blecher's study of the Shulu County, most contract workers there had been thus employed for many years.[73]

The so-called "both workers and peasants" are, however, found in commune- and brigade-run enterprises, mostly in small rural towns. The size of this category has expanded quite rapidly since the early 1970s with the development of rural industries. This group, however, has maintained its "agricultural" household registration status and, again, are not eligible for rations and subsidies available to the non-agricultural households.

As pointed out earlier, even though some of these "transitional" populations are regular residents of the urban areas according to the definition used in the censuses, and hence part of the TPCT, they are not considered part of the non-agricultural population (NPCT) in official statistical accounting. When one recalls that the Chinese system of internal migration controls is largely implemented through the prevention of unauthorized conversion of registration status, and the official definition of "urban" population (which was also the target of control) between 1964 and 1981 was defined by the NPCT, it can be deduced that the movement of the above categories of "peasants" was relatively unrestricted.[74] According to reported figures in 1980 there were 9·3 million peasants working in state-owned enterprises in the categories of non-permanent employment, and about 50 million in the category of "both worker and peasant."[75] The number of people in these categories has probably increased quite rapidly since the early 1960s for the reasons discussed above.

Therefore, through these means, about 13 to 14 million rural labourers who were recruited to work in the urban areas during the period between 1966 and 1976 became regular urban residents.[76] To this must be added an unknown number of dependants, returned urban youths and intellectuals previouly rusticated,[77] and migrant peasants working as "both workers and peasants" and staying in towns. Hence, it should come as no

72. A portion of their salaries, however, has to be handed over to the production teams to which these temporary and contract workers belong. In addition to other possible benefits such as free housing and learning of skills, there is also a likelihood that they might one day be granted regular worker (non-agricultural household) status. See Blecher, "Peasants labour for urban industry"; and Ma Xia, "An exploratory study."

73. Blecher, "Peasants labour for urban industry."

74. There are some close parallels here with the problem of "temporary" and "permanent" residence status in the Soviet cities and the associated statistical accounting problems. See C. Houston, "Administrative control of migration to Moscow, 1959–75," pp. 32–44.

75. Ma Xia, "An exploratory study," and State Council, "Directive on the strict control of the flow," *Guowuyuan gongbao* (10 February 1982), p. 885.

76. This has been widely reported in Chinese media; see Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, *Employment and Wage*, pp. 6–7; and also *Beijing Review*, Vol. 25, No. 39 (27 September 1982), p. 20.

77. Rusticated urban youths legally began to flow back to cities since 1974 under various names, see Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, *ibid.* p. 7; also Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountain and Down to the Village* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), Chap. 6.

surprise that the volume of gross rural-to-urban migration might well exceed 30 million between 1966 and 1976.

Furthermore, as revealed by the available NPCT and TPCT statistics presented in Table 8, the absolute increase and the growth rate of the urban "agricultural" population were much higher than those of the "non-agricultural" population between 1965 and 1975. These huge differences in growth and the growth rate were caused by a higher rate of natural increase of the "agricultural" population but, more importantly, also by a much larger amount of net urban in-migration of the "agricultural" population in this period.[78] In other words, the rural-to-urban migration of those not involving any conversion of household registration from agricultural to non-agricultural status was the more important form of rural–urban demographic transfer. Perhaps this was a more feasible rural–urban migration option for the majority of the peasants, given the difficulties of conversion of household status.

Table 8: **Growth of "Agricultural" and "Non-agricultural" Population in Urban Areas, 1960–80** (in millions)

| | Population Residing in Urban Areas | | |
Year	"Non-agricultural" (NPCT)*	"Agricultural"*	Total (TPCT)
1965	101·70	28·75	130·45
1970	100·75	43·49	144·24
1975	111·71	48·59	160·30
1980	134·13	57·27	191·40
1965–75:			
Absolute Increase			
(million)	10·01	19·84	29·85
Annual Growth			
Rate (%)	0·94	5·39	2·08

Notes:
  * Based on household classification. For definitions, refer to discussion in Section 2.
Sources:
  Table 3 and Table 5.

Based on the above, one can also comment, albeit tentatively, on another important, though from the point of this article, tangential issue – the distribution of growth by city (town) size. China has a policy of controlling the growth of large urban places and of developing medium and small ones.[79] Given that in general, medium and small settlements

78. Wu Yuren and Zhuang Linde, "Questions on the boundary of urban suburbs," p. 146. Natural increase was not likely the sole contributor of a rapid annual population growth rate as high as 5%; a large part of this growth rate must be attributed to in-migration.
79. The definition of various urban size categories is in City Planning Regulations, Art. 2, reproduced in Xinhua yuebao (New China Monthly) (1984), No. 1, pp. 84–86. The policy

have a much higher proportion of "agricultural" population than do the larger cities,[80] and given that the "agricultural" population also has had a higher population growth rate, it can be deduced that the general growth rates of the smaller settlements would be higher than those of the larger ones. Moreover, based on an examination of urban "non-agricultural" population (NPC and NPT) data, the smaller settlements appeared to be growing faster in the 1970s.[81] Faster population growth in these settlements was mainly concentrated on the industrial cities (*shi*) ranging in size from 50,000 to 800,000 inhabitants, largely a result of the state's heavy industrial investment in the interior regions. Many small rural market towns (*zhen*), like those cited by Fei Xiaotong in his study of small towns in Wujiang County, declined and suffered seriously from depopulation due to the restrictions on trading, such as the closing down of rural free markets, which are the economic base of these towns.[82] Therefore, while the issue is too complex to be treated adequately here, it appears that the results of the policy of developing the medium and small settlements are mixed.

The urbanization level during the period between 1966 and 1976 was rather stable at around 17–18 per cent. Demographically this stability was caused by the generally low urban rate of natural increase and not by *net* out-migration from urban areas. Therefore, except for the re-adjustment period of 1961 to 1963, when there was a real net urban out-migration in the wake of the failure of the Great Leap Forward, it is difficult to accept the general observation that there was a "deurbanization" trend in the 1960s and 1970s resulting from a net out-migration from cities.[83]

Although rural-to-urban migration in 1966–76 had not been completely arrested, it is fair to say that the relatively moderate urban growth of that period – the calculated average annual urban population growth rate is about 2 per cent, fairly remarkable by Third World standards[84] – did partly reflect the effect of the various counter-urban growth policies and partly the low urban rate of natural increase. However, while these policies, including the rustication, which was carried out with both persuasion and coercion, helped to bring about this result, the social costs should also be considered. Apparently, the rustication of youths and

favouring smaller settlements has been the official guidelines for locating new industries since the late 1950s. Developing small urban places was made official urban policy in 1980. See Buck, "Policies favouring the growth of smaller urban places," Laurence Ma and Edward Hanten (eds.), *Urban Development in China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), pp. 123–24; and *Renmin ribao*, 16 October 1980, p. 1.

80. According to *TJNJ 1981*, p. 92, the NPC/TPC ratio for cities with NPC over one million was 0·81, and for those between 0·5 to one million, it was 0·71 (1981 end-year). The overall NPCT/TPCT ratio for all cities and towns was 0·71 in mid 1982 (computed from Table 3).

81. Xu Xueqiang, "Trends and changes of the urban system in China," *Third World Planning Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (February 1984), pp. 47–59.

82. Fei Xiatong, "Xian chengzhen da wenti" ("Small towns, a big issue"), *Liaowang (Lookout)*, No. 2–5 (16–30 January 1984).

83. Refer to *supra* fn. 56.

84. The average annual urban population growth rates for India and Brazil between 1960 and 1975 were 3·4% and 4·8%, respectively (computed from UNPD, *Patterns of Urban and Rural Population Growth*, Table 48).

intellectuals has brought about a series of undesirable consequences not only to themselves, but also to the nation as a whole.[85] The restrictions imposed on the conversion of household status (from agricultural to non-agricultural), which helped to discourage rural-to-urban migration, was also generally regressive: it served to prevent the existing privileges enjoyed by the relatively well-off urban elite from being shared with the less privileged rural masses, and took away their chance of upward social mobility through, for instance, enrolling in better urban schools and of escaping famines, which still occur in China's countryside.[86]

Furthermore, it is also questionable whether the various types of quasi-involuntary *xiaxiang* and *xiafang* programmes could have been implemented for long other than during the "Three Difficult Years" of the early 1960s when the whole country suffered from economic depression, or during the "Ten Years of Chaos" of the Cultural Revolution. The low urban growth of 1966–76 was immediately offset by a phenomenally high one in the post-1977 era, with an annual growth rate averaging about 5 per cent,[87] resulting in an average annual urban growth rate of about 4 per cent for the whole post-1949 period. It is quite obvious that the modest urban growth of 1966–76 was achieved at high economic and human costs. Given the importance of the rustication movement in China's urbanization process, it certainly deserves further examination and re-evaluation in the future in the light of new information on this topic and our revised understanding of the urban trends in this period.

6. Conclusion

This article seeks to contribute to an understanding of urban growth and urbanization in post-1949 China by investigating the "mystery" of the size of China's urban population and its growth. We have provided a systematic and detailed review of the rather complicated Chinese system of urban demographic statistics. This article has also demonstrated that a number of significant "inconsistencies" in China's urban population size are explainable; indeed, many of them are created by the lack of information or by a failure to appreciate the different ways China's "urban" populations are classified and defined, particularly regarding the categorization of the "agricultural" population residing in areas under urban administration.

By studying the statistics, and the changes in the definitions of urban places and of urban population, we have also established that the Total

85. Some of these problems are discussed in John P. Emerson, "Urban school-leavers and unemployment in China,"*CQ*, Vol. 93 (March 1983), pp. 1–16; Feng Lanrui and Zhao Lukuan, *Employment and Wage*, pp. 6–7; and Feng Haohua, "Dui Qinghai yimin yu kenhuang de lishi kaocha" ("An historical survey of the migration to, and opening up of Qinghai"), *Jingji yanjiu*, No. 3 (May 1983), pp. 52–57.
86. Of course, in certain periods like the early 1960s the availability of surplus grain from rural areas for the urban population might act as an effective constraint on the increase of the urban population, see Ishikawa, "China's economic growth since 1949," p. 257.
87. Computed from 1978–82, *TJNJ 1983*, p. 103. This sudden rebound of urban growth rate was caused by the return of urban people previously rusticated. This suggests that the rustication movement only delayed, rather than actually reduced, the urban population growth.

Population of Cities and Towns (TPCT), defined as the total number of regular residents in all designated urban places, is the most relevant measure of the statistical indicators available of China's total urban population. Although factors such as the changing criteria of urban places and the changing methods of enumerating regular residents will affect the comparability of the TPCT data, the problems they raise appear to be of only secondary importance for the purpose of studying China's macro urban growth trends.

More importantly, by identifying a shift in the official definition of urban population in 1963–64 we have also pointed out that the commonly cited set of urban population statistics, Series A, in fact consists of two different time-series. This differentiation has great significance in explaining the apparent "slow" urban growth in the post-1964 period. Based on this we have reclassified the known urban data and have reconstructed a baseline of China's urban population between 1949 and 1982. (Our findings have since been confirmed by the more recent writings from China.) Furthermore, we observe that China has had a much larger urban population and faster urban growth than many people were previously led to believe. China's average annual urban population growth rate between 1949 and 1982 is, in fact, close to those of other developing countries like Nigeria, Indonesia and India.

Further analyses into the growth patterns between 1966 and 1976 suggest that in contrast to the general impression hitherto conveyed this period also experienced substantial urban population growth – mainly attributable to urban natural increase – though the growth was lower than that in the 1950s. The urban exodus induced by rustication was massive, but was offset by equally sizeable cityward migration. As a result, the net effect of urban–rural migration on the urban population size was small. A large number of rural-to-urban migrants during this period were temporary workers, contract workers and those designated "both workers and peasants," drawn from the countryside and allowed to stay in urban areas. These people, however, were not granted full urban resident status, which determined the supply of urban rations and other benefits, and were not recorded in the previous narrowly defined urban statistics. Because of this extensive urban in-migration, our study suggests that China did not reach a stage of stable urban population size between 1966 and 1976, nor did it experience any significant net urban out-migration taking the period as a whole.

One can easily see that all these definitional complexities will have important implications for future research on China's demography, urbanization, urban planning and many other related areas: it is believed that such an understanding is helpful, if not essential, to anyone who wishes to tap the past fragmented pieces of urban demographic information, as well as the more complete and recent ones. A full evaluation of the Chinese urbanization model, however, would have to include, in addition to an analysis of urban trends and rural-to-urban migration presented in this article, assessments of other aspects of urbanization in China, namely, the differential growth of large, medium and small

settlements; the impact of the rustication movements and the development of rural industries; the relationship between urbanization and economic development, and so forth. Though some of these have been touched upon in passing, to examine all of these fully would have taken us way beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say, our previous understanding of China's urban population statistics and, hence, her growth trends and migration patterns in the 1960s and 1970s has been rather inadequate. As a result, the presumed Chinese success of low or "zero" urban growth in the Maoist period (which has been shown here to be premised on misunderstood statistics) needs to be thoroughly reassessed.