

MIGRANTS BELEAGER THE CAPITAL

JOBSEEKERS FROM ALL OVER COUNTRY FLOCK TO BEIJING

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China is slowly turning from a rural to an urban society. According to estimates from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, about 63% or 756 million of the 1,2 billion Chinese is still tilling his farmland, but this number is decreasing quickly. About 200 million Chinese are roaming the countryside looking for jobs. Some of them find employment in one of the hundreds of thousands of rural enterprises, but many take the train to search for jobs in the cities.

(Door Jan van der Made)

BEIJING (CER) "The people from Beijing? we hate them. They are arrogant and treat us as dirt. We rather work for the foreigners here". Miss Li, a small woman with a round face and shining eyes is from Anhui province and works as a maid for a couple. The man is a factoryworker and the woman owns her own taxi. Li, who arrived in Beijing two years ago earns about four times as much as she did in Anhui, where she worked in the peasanthouse of her parents. But she plans to go back to Anhui soon and build her own house. Not in the countryside, but in one of the big cities.

Most of the time, rural jobseekers end up at construction-sites or do other manual jobs. Says Victor Yuan, director of Horizon, an independent research organisation that recently completed a study on the subject: "the people from Zhejiang, we call them China's jews, because of their incredible capacity of making trade. Those from Anhui are known as the "Philippina's", because they mainly end up being baomu, maids, taking care of the children and doing the household of rich Beijing-people. And the migrants from Henan we call the "Turks", because they collect garbage and do cleaning jobs".

Although all Chinese citizens, the reaction of the Beijing city government towards the newcomers is as rigid as the one of some western nations towards foreigners looking for jobs. On July 15, new rules were imposed to stem the continuing flow of migrants. From that date on, they are forced to register and carry a residence permit. "At this moment, one out of every three inhabitants of Beijing comes from the countryside", according to Victor Yuan.

VIOLENT CRIME

Police and authorities are worried because recent figures indicate that crime in China's capital is on the rise. "Many of the migrants don't find jobs", says Yuan. "They have to eat and sneak into the city to make a quick buck by robbing people". Violent crime rose 30% in the last year, according to the *Beijing ribao* (Beijing Daily), the capital's hardline newspaper, which blames the migrants for it. China's family planners are equally worried: "if nobody registers, you cannot count them, let alone control the children they produce", according to a spokeswoman of the Ministry of Health. There are thought to be tens of thousands of these unregistered, "black" children living in Beijing.

The migration towards the cities started in the early '80s when Beijing appointed four districts outside the city center where free markets were to be allowed: Chaoyang, Haidian, Fengtai and Shijingshan. Farmers who came to trade their goods soon discovered that it was easier to stay in the capital and find a job there. After fifteen years enclaves have grown, and in some cases they became virtually independent villages. Chaoyang has its "Henan village", house to migrants from the province of the same name. Haidian is home to people from Anhui and in Fengtai is the spectacular "Zhejiang village" where, thanks to the loose control of the Fengtai district authorities, Zhejiang people can run their own hospitals, schools and pedicab service.

To foreigners, the increasing flow of migrants has some obvious effects. The amount of potential buyers of consumergoods (icecream, washingpowder and small household equipment) is growing month by month. Many migrants also provide an endless source of cheap labour. Not only in the field of construction, but also in jobs which require office-skills, which could be used by joint-venture companies. "Many of the young people had more then average education in the small cities. They are the first ones to refuse working on the land", according to Victor Yuan. "It's China's talents which is pulling to the cities en masse. And they are willing to work for any price".

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