

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reluctant and Illegal Migrants in Mao's China: Civil Defense Evacuation in the Tianjin Region, 1969–1980

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Abstract

More than 100,000 people from the city of Tianjin were evacuated to the countryside in a civil defense program during the 1970s. Many evacuees refused to submit to state migration mandates, instead sneaking back to the city illegally or petitioning to regain urban residency. City officials responded flexibly to the evacuees' pleas, sympathizing with family reunification and treating suburban districts (*jiaoku*) on the outskirts of Tianjin as a buffer zone between city and countryside. Dominated by agriculture but home to a growing number of factories, workshops, and offices during the 1970s, *jiaoku* became a solution to evacuation headaches. When compared with the recent coerced movement of hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens on national security grounds, the civil defense evacuations of the 1970s suggest that it may be misguided to think of the Mao Zedong years as a faraway time that was more radical or repressive than China today.

Keywords: Tianjin; evacuation; civil defense; migration

The standard view of internal migration in the People's Republic of China is that, by 1960, the state tightly regulated migration through the household registration (*hukou* 户口) system, locking villagers to their communes and urbanites to their work units and creating what political scientist Vivienne Shue has called a “cellular” society.¹ The most oversimplified misunderstanding of this view is that everyone in China was fixed in place during the Mao Zedong era. The *hukou* system did indeed put the party-state, rather than individuals or families, in control of migration. By prioritizing urban industrial development fueled by extracting grain from the countryside, the Maoist political economy, of which migration controls were one key part, exacerbated the rural-urban divide and made rural-urban identity the main site

¹One classic account of the imposition of migration controls through the *hukou* system is Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, “The Origins and Consequences of China's *Hukou* System,” *China Quarterly* 139 (1994), 644–68. On the concept of a cellular political economy, see Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

of social difference and discrimination in Chinese society.² But this does not mean that nobody was moving. Rural-urban difference took shape because of contact, not because of isolation. People crossed the rural-urban divide because the party-state made them move, including millions of political outcasts sent to labor reform camps or deported to villages,³ millions of teenagers sent to rural China as sent-down youth,⁴ plus millions of urban workers who relocated to hinterland factories as part of the Third Front military industrial complex.⁵

This article focuses on a smaller group of involuntary migrants during the Mao years: 106,000 civil defense evacuees who urban officials “dispersed” (*shusan* 疏散) from Tianjin to nearby villages in 1970 as China prepared for war against the Soviet Union.⁶ The evacuees’ stories show that a sizeable number of people refused to meekly submit to state migration mandates. Migrants’ resistance came from the usual push and pull factors that shape where humans choose to settle: survival strategies and a desire for family togetherness. This finding builds on Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao’s recent findings about widespread resistance against the sent-down youth program, especially among marginal urbanites who Honig and Zhao call a “sub-proletariat,” who had far less attachment or loyalty to the state” than factory workers did.⁷ Like sent-down youth, civil defense evacuees protested throughout the 1970s, via official petition channels as well as emotional street theater. In some cases, these protests persuaded city officials to restore the evacuees’ urban residency. Other people quietly snuck back into the city and found ways to survive as illegal internal migrants. The stories of individuals who moved without permission add a layer of complexity to the history of migration in China after 1949. They show that state-imposed migration controls failed to curb people’s aspirations to live and work where they wanted, together with the people who meant the most to them.

The civil defense dispersal of urban people from Tianjin was costly and disruptive. Evacuated families mostly went to villages in suburban districts (*jiaoqu* 郊区) on the outskirts of Tianjin. When the evacuees left the city, they lost urban residency and all of the benefits that came along with it, including guaranteed food rations, health care, and better schools. They became commune members holding agricultural *hukou*. Many of them did not regain legal urban residency until 1980.

Rural residence and collective farm work presented immense difficulties for displaced city dwellers, who had become accustomed to the benefits of urban life under socialism. Local officials from villages on the outskirts of Tianjin felt overburdened by the influx of evacuees. Local responses included discriminating against evacuees or simply refusing to house them. As international tensions eased and the security

²Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside in Mao’s China: Negotiating the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

³Ning Wang, *Banished to the Great Northern Wilderness: Political Exile and Re-education in Mao’s China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

⁴Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao, *Across the Great Divide: The Sent-Down Youth Movement in Mao’s China, 1968–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁵Covell F. Meyskens, *Mao’s Third Front: The Militarization of Cold War China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

⁶The figure of 106,000 evacuees is from Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei 中共天津市委, “Guanyu gonggou zhanbei shusan chengguo de tongzhi” 关于巩固战备疏散成果的通知, October 18, 1972, author’s collection (hereafter cited as AC), 1.

⁷Honig and Zhao, *Across the Great Divide*, 34.

rationale for population dispersal disappeared, displaced people from Tianjin struggled to regain urban residence.

From its inception, the population dispersal program's goals went beyond a pure civil defense response to the Cold War threat from the Soviet Union. Minimizing civilian casualties in the event of a Soviet attack was one aim of the central leaders who formulated war preparedness policy. But evacuations also served domestic policy purposes. City officials were under intense pressure to limit urban population growth, as they had been since the early 1960s; evacuating city residents dovetailed neatly with that goal. In Tianjin neighborhoods and work units, population dispersal also provided a chance to get rid of undesirable or troublesome residents and workers. Tianjin officials' efforts to keep evacuees out of the city after the war scare abated indicates that local policy aims had subsumed the civil defense aspect of population dispersal.

As Covell Meyskens shows in *Mao's Cold Front*, China's Cold War experience reshaped entire regions.⁸ Civil defense evacuations profoundly affected the suburban districts next to Tianjin. Officials and evacuees alike found that Tianjin's outskirts presented a useful buffer zone between urban and rural China that allowed each group to meet their goals. Dominated by agriculture but home to a growing number of factories, workshops, and offices during the 1970s, *jiaoqu* became a solution to evacuation headaches. City officials could settle evacuees in Tianjin's adjacent periphery without counting them as urban residents, while evacuees grudgingly accepted that proximity to city life was better than toiling in a faraway province or living illegally in Tianjin proper. Civil defense evacuations allowed city officials to functionally expand urban space into suburban districts without admitting that they were doing so.

Border Clashes and War Scares, 1969–1970

In March 1969, Chinese and Soviet troops fought pitched tank, artillery, and infantry battles on Zhenbao (Damanskii) Island, a small piece of land on the Wusuli (Ussuri) River. Historian Yang Kuisong writes that China launched attacks on March 2 and March 15 to teach the Soviet Union a “bitter lesson.” After March 15, Chairman Mao Zedong quickly ordered a stop to the fighting, having staged “a controllable military conflict that would serve his larger political purposes, that is, the mobilization of the Chinese Party and people on his terms.”⁹ Mao had ordered the nation to prepare for war, but he was unprepared for what happened next. On August 13, 1969, the Soviets retaliated on the far western end of the Sino-Soviet border in Xinjiang, wiping out a Chinese patrol squadron of about thirty soldiers.¹⁰ After the Xinjiang clash, both sides recognized that widespread war might break out, and Soviet leaders put out feelers about preemptive strikes against Chinese nuclear facilities.¹¹

Anxiety about a Soviet invasion and bomb attacks led to the formation in August 1969 of a People's Air Defense Small Group led by Premier Zhou Enlai. The task force was in charge of dispersing the urban population, moving factories to remote areas, and mobilizing city residents to build air raid shelters. China's leaders took the

⁸Meyskens, *Mao's Cold Front*, 28–29.

⁹Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” *Cold War History* 1.1 (2000), 30. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals refer to a little known third battle on March 17, 1969. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 310.

¹⁰Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” 34.

¹¹MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 313.

crisis seriously. Mao was so concerned that Beijing would be attacked that he ordered central leaders to leave the capital for safer locations.¹² Many top officials expected the attack to come on October 20, 1969. That was the start date of Sino-Soviet border negotiations, which Chinese leaders assumed were a smokescreen for a massive Soviet invasion. But the day passed uneventfully, as did the early months of 1970, when Manchurian rivers froze solid, which would have facilitated large-scale ground assaults. Fears of all-out war abated.¹³ In February 1970, Zhou Enlai returned to his desk in the Zhongnanhai leadership compound for the first time since October 20, 1969,¹⁴ and in May 1970, Mao told a Soviet border negotiator that China and the Soviet Union should “only fight with words.”¹⁵

The worst of the war scare was over, but the consequences of the border clashes would reverberate well beyond 1970. According to Yang Kuisong, the Sino-Soviet battles of 1969 allowed Mao to use war preparedness as a rationale for quelling armed conflict between battling factions during the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶ While many people in China surely welcomed the restoration of order, others experienced war preparedness in a different way: as an unwanted state intrusion into their lives in the form of coerced migration. To city residents who were evacuated to the countryside, war preparedness represented state-mandated downward mobility.

How Population Dispersal Unfolded in Tianjin

During the Vietnam War, the evacuation of any Hanoi resident who was not “truly indispensable” in 1966 and again in 1972 saved many lives.¹⁷ The crucial difference between the Chinese war scare of 1969–70 and Vietnam’s wartime experience is that Hanoi was indeed severely damaged by bombing, while no bombs fell on such Chinese cities as Beijing, Shanghai, Taiyuan, Tianjin, or Xi’an. High officials fled China’s capital, university staff and their family members left Taiyuan and Xi’an for far-away cave dwellings, and more than ten thousand people evacuated from Shanghai in late 1969 and early 1970.¹⁸ But the predicted Soviet attack never came. The longer war preparations dragged on in China, the more problems arose. Evacuees had many complaints. I collected petition letters from evacuees as well as reports by their former urban workplaces. Some of these documents came from a district archive in Tianjin, others I bought from peddlers at a weekend book market. These sources reveal the difficulties evacuees experienced and the strategies they used to seek resolution to their basic

¹²Mao left for Wuhan until April 1970, while Vice-Chairman Lin Biao moved to Suzhou. Man Donghong 莽东鸿, “1969 nian de Beijing gaogan da shusan” 1969 年的北京高干大疏散, *Dangshi bolan* 2006.1, 24–27.

¹³Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 344.

¹⁴Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” 47.

¹⁵Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split*, 344.

¹⁶Yang Kuisong, “The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969,” 42.

¹⁷William S. Turley, “Urbanization in War: Hanoi, 1946–1973,” *Pacific Affairs* 48.3 (1975), 381.

¹⁸Qiao Qingmiao 乔庆淼, “Yi dangnian Shanxi daxue zhanbei shusan zhi lu” 忆当年山西大学战备疏散之路, *Tengxun wang*, November 8, 2018, <https://new.qq.com/omn/20181108/20181108A1DOT2.html?pc>; Chen Qinfu 陈钦甫, “Zhanbei shusan dao Shaanxi Changwu xian” 占被疏散到陕西长武县, *Xizang minzu daxue*, September 7, 2018, <http://web.archive.org/web/20200818233445/www.xzmu.edu.cn/getcontent?id=51228>; Song Yuanpeng 宋元鹏, ed., *Shanghai minfang zhi* 上海民防志 (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan, 2001).

problem: the party-state had forced them to move to a place where they did not want to live. Aside from illegally moving back to Tianjin, their tactics included playing up difficulties in letters to urban authorities, exaggerating or faking health problems, and making pleas based on family or domestic obligations. The tone of such appeals ranged from pathetic to rude.

After Mao ordered the nation to prepare for war in 1969, Tianjin officials jumped into action. On May 28, 1969, the city's Revolutionary Committee issued a propaganda outline explaining that the United States and the Soviet Union were working together to oppose China and warning that the USSR was the primary threat. Because Tianjin was the "gateway to the capital" and an "industrial city," the outline read, "the quality of our Tianjin's war preparations will have a big impact on China's overall war preparations."¹⁹ The first people to leave Tianjin were mostly family members of workers from rural backgrounds. This was an informal response to propaganda, not a large-scale state campaign. Population dispersal did not become systematic and widespread until March and April 1970. This was half a year after the height of the war danger, and well after Zhou Enlai deemed the situation safe enough to return to his Zhongnanhai office, but that was how long it took the bureaucracy to crank into action.

Officials in Tianjin had a tried and tested playbook when it came to moving people out of the city. In 1955 and 1956, as part of a broader project to make sure that cities were sites of production rather than consumption, neighborhood officials targeted beggars, rural relatives staying with family in the city, and people without regular employment, urging them to return to their home villages (*dongyuan huanxiang* 动员还乡). These efforts failed to stem the broader tide of rural people seeking jobs in the city, a group that skyrocketed in 1958 and 1959 when the Great Leap Forward's production drive led Tianjin's factories and workshops to hire whoever they could. As part of the post-Leap recovery, city bureaucrats pulled off the Great Downsizing of 1961–63, persuading, wheedling, and pushing more than two hundred thousand rural migrants back to the countryside. The home visits, persuasion meetings, standardized forms, and travel stipends that officials used in these return-to-village campaigns would come in handy in three very different waves of population movement during the 1960s and 1970s: deporting political enemies to the countryside as part of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969, mobilizing sent-down youth to settle in faraway villages in 1964 and on a much larger scale in 1969, and dispersing civil defense evacuees in 1970.²⁰

What these efforts shared were paperwork, plus city officials' tactics and targets' resistance, in a political economy that cast urban space as pure, protected space. Rural space, in contrast, was celebrated in propaganda as a revolutionary realm where city people could learn through laboring under the supervision of the poor and lower-middle peasants, but that in actuality became a dumping ground for people who lacked the connections, stubbornness, or luck that might allow them to maintain urban residency. Aside from its national security rationale, what made Tianjin's civil defense evacuations different from other attempts to push people out of the city was that it ended up relying on nearby suburbs, rather than faraway provinces, as a

¹⁹Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui zhengzhi bu 天津市革命委员会政治部, *Zhanbei jiaoyu cankao tigang* 战备教育参考提纲, May 28, 1969, AC, 1, 6.

²⁰Details about each of Tianjin's city-to-village movements are in Brown, *City Versus Countryside*. Honig and Zhao show that Shanghai officials faced similar challenges and used similar methods to carry out sent-down youth policy in the 1960s and 1970s; Honig and Zhao, *Across the Great Divide*.

compromise safety valve that allowed officials to meet their goals while also tempering evacuees' disappointment at losing the benefits of living in the city.

Responding to the national call to disperse the population in 1969 and 1970, Tianjin established a "Leading Small Group for War Preparedness and Dispersal." The everyday work of managing files and dealing with the complaints of the evacuees was taken care of by the city's "Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages Office," which was also in charge of the larger sent-down youth program. Tianjin had a dispersal quota of 600,000 people, and each urban district was responsible for evacuating a share of that number. This target appears extremely high because those categorized as evacuees included secondary school graduates who would become sent-down youth. In a speech in August 1969, a Tianjin official named Wang Yuanhe 王元和 clarified that the composition of evacuees would be more than 500,000 recent graduates plus 100,000 "people without *hukou* and idle residents."²¹ Wang did not specify where the evacuees would go, but most went to villages in the suburban districts adjacent to Tianjin. In 1970, of the 8,279 people evacuated from Heping District in the city center, 7,404 settled in the suburbs.²²

Wherever they ended up, adult urban residents who were unemployed, had irregular employment, or who worked for small collective enterprises bore the brunt of mandatory civil defense migration. They got a worse evacuation deal than displaced employees from government offices or state factories, who maintained their regular salaries. State cadres and managers would also be the first people allowed to return to their urban homes and jobs after being evacuated. More marginal evacuees were not able to easily regain urban residency. The experiences of such people, who included tailors, repairmen, artisans, the jobless, and their families, are similar to those discovered by Honig and Zhao in their study of Shanghai's Yaoshuilong slum in 1969—"a segment of the Shanghai population that to all intents and purposes was self-employed and engaged in private enterprises, albeit ones that were not particularly lucrative and offered no security and government benefits."²³ While some evacuation targets in Tianjin had become accustomed to scraping by on their own and were inclined to resist being evacuated because they had little to lose, others were often elderly, sickly, unprepared for farm work, and uninformed about when and how they could legally return to Tianjin.

The plight of evacuees highlights not only rural-urban inequality but also inequality within cities under Mao. Tianjin's evacuation policy mandated that unemployed, unmarried evacuees would receive a single cash payment of 250 yuan to help them settle in villages. Workers at collective enterprises were simply let go and given severance payments calculated on the basis of seniority. For each year they had spent on the job, they got around 80 percent of their monthly salary.²⁴ At first glance, this appeared rather generous, but it was a sudden shattering of the "iron rice bowl"—lifetime job security promised to urban workers by the socialist state—and it foreshadowed the

²¹Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui shangshan xiaxiang bangongshi 天津市革命委员会上山下乡办公室, "Gaoju Mao Zedong sixiang weida hongqi zhunbei dazhang, duoqu shangshan xiaxiang de xin shengli!" 高举毛泽东思想伟大红旗准备打仗, 夺取上山下乡的新胜利! August 22, 1969, AC, 4.

²²Hexi District Archive (hereafter abbreviated as HDA), 2-6-126C, 165-66.

²³Honig and Zhao, *Across the Great Divide*, 35.

²⁴Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui 天津市革命委员会, "Zhuanfa shangshan xiaxiang bangongshi he shi caizheng ju, Zhongguo renmin yinhang Tianjin fenheng geweihui 'Guanyu shusan renkou he shangshan xiaxiang ren yuan jingfei kaizhi de shixing yijian'" 转发上山下乡办公室和市财政局, 中国人民银行天津分行革委会 关于疏散人口和上山下乡人员经费开支的实行意见, January 2, 1970, AC.

much more widespread buyouts of the 1990s documented by such scholars as sociologist Joel Andreas.²⁵ Receiving a severance payment ended evacuees' formal ties to their urban workplaces. They were stuck in the countryside indefinitely, with no help from their former urban work units.

By spring 1971, after spending a year in villages outside of Tianjin, many evacuees needed assistance. Some openly complained, "village life is arduous and our income is less than in the city." In 1971, because there were no new evacuations and some temporary workers in the city had received coveted permanent urban jobs, evacuees said that they regretted moving to villages and complained that they should not have been sent away in the first place.²⁶ Of the fifty-eight urban families who settled in one village near Tianjin, twenty owed the village a total of almost 3,500 yuan. This was because they had not earned enough work points to cover the grain distributed to each commune member at harvest time. It did not help that the evacuees received only 60 to 70 percent of the work points that other villagers earned for completing the same tasks.²⁷ Villagers justified this lower compensation by emphasizing the burden posed by the urban newcomers. They said that the evacuees were "robbing work points" and "seizing the rice bowl." Villagers called the newcomers "foreigners" and "rejects," and dubbed the evacuees' living quarters the "rejects' courtyard."²⁸

Discriminatory treatment spurred evacuees to write letters of complaint and to return to the city without permission. The end of the Sino-Soviet war scare was followed by the warming of Sino-American relations and the shocking death of Vice-Chairman Lin Biao in 1971. This meant that there was no pressing security rationale for keeping people out of the city. By fall 1972, Tianjin authorities finally adjusted policy toward some evacuees. State officials who had been evacuated were allowed to return to their original work units. Managerial staff received jobs and non-agricultural status in suburban districts. Most evacuees were less fortunate. They were told to remain in villages. The Tianjin party committee acknowledged that the international environment had changed, but cautioned:

We cannot get carried away. We must remain constantly vigilant, and should not be confused by temporary, surface-level warming. Dispersing the urban population is an important part of preparing against invasion. It was not only necessary in the past, but will be necessary in the future for a rather long time. It should also be recognized that cities are densely populated and have limited space, while the countryside is vast and in urgent need of scientific and technological development. Therefore, dispersing the population is totally necessary for transforming the city, strengthening villages, and building socialism.²⁹

Clearly, the civil defense rationale for population dispersal had been replaced by the domestic policy goal of "building socialism." Unwillingness to roll back the population

²⁵Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁶HDA, 2-6-126C, 91.

²⁷HDA, 2-6-126C, 92. Sent-down youth also struggled to earn work points for agricultural work, not only because the work was difficult and unfamiliar, but because villagers calculated and awarded points in discussion meetings that disadvantaged outsiders. See Honig and Zhao, *Across the Great Divide*.

²⁸HDA, 2-6-126C, 93.

²⁹Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei, "Guanyu gonggu zhanbei shusan chengguo de tongzhi," 2.

dispersal program meant that many evacuees stayed in villages until the late 1970s or even 1980, when post-Cultural Revolution reforms finally allowed people uprooted by state-mandated migration to return to their homes. Some people, however, were unwilling to wait that long.

Protesting Population Dispersal

Hao Zhenping, his wife Wang Huili, and four of their children were sent from Tianjin to a nearby village south of the city in May 1970.³⁰ Hao, a forty-five-year-old temporary worker, and Wang, a housewife, were exactly the type of “non-essential” urban population targeted for evacuation during the war scare. Although Wang had suffered from tuberculosis, she was able to do housework in the village and care for her seven-year-old son while her husband and four teenaged daughters worked in the fields. For the first year in the village, life was fine. The Hao family earned fifty kilos of paddy rice and three hundred yuan at harvest time.

In 1971, the family became unhappy when they learned that some temporary workers in Tianjin had received regular urban employment and that there were no new evacuees leaving the city. As Honig and Zhao have shown, when in February 1971 the National Planning Conference allowed 1.5 million new factory jobs annually, sent-down youth mobilization became difficult and youth in villages tried to regain urban residency.³¹ This same context affected Tianjin’s evacuation work and prompted people like Hao and Wang to protest. The family asked village officials for permission to move back to Tianjin on the grounds that Hao was mentally ill, his wife had tuberculosis, and three of the children had lung and liver ailments. Village, commune, and suburban officials all approved this request. But when Wang traveled to Tianjin to ask about the application, officials from her original urban district told her that the family was not allowed to return.

For the next five months, officials in the city did not hear from the family, but in late 1971 Wang brought five of her children to the municipal Revolutionary Committee’s Office of Letters and Visits. This was the highest level of the city bureaucracy to which Tianjin residents could petition. Wang was pleased with the result of this meeting. A clerk listened attentively to her story and wrote an official stamped letter of introduction asking her urban district to help solve her problem. Ten days later, a district official gave her a similar letter requesting that the local Up to the Mountains, Down to the Villages office, along with the neighborhood committee that had originally evacuated her family, investigate her case.

Wang misunderstood her interactions with municipal and district officials. She thought that the polite reception and official envelopes had restored her family’s urban residency. She failed to realize that the two letters were merely pushing her appeal down to the bottom of the bureaucratic ladder, where it would be denied. Four additional visits to the city Revolutionary Committee’s reception office failed. In April 1972, the family tore down their house in the suburbs and carted their belongings back to Tianjin, storing them at a relative’s home. For forty-three days the family lived at the neighborhood office, refusing to leave unless their urban residency was restored. When they were finally forcibly returned to the village, the wife and one daughter were nowhere to be found—it turned out that Wang and the daughter had gone to her native village in Henan province. The next day, Mr. Hao and the four

³⁰To protect the privacy of individual evacuees, I have changed their names. HDA, 2-6-126C, 73–77.

³¹Honig and Zhao, *Across the Great Divide*, 61.

other children reappeared in the city, this time at the gates of the city Revolutionary Committee. They unfurled sleeping mats there and caused such a stir that a crowd gathered, blocking traffic and forcing cyclists to dismount and detour. The next day, Hao and his children were sent to a detention center.

According to a district report, Mr. Hao was an honest man from a poor peasant background. Hao himself was willing to return to the countryside after receiving promises of welfare stipends and reimbursement for medical expenses. His problem, according to the Tianjin officials who investigated his case, was that he “feared his wife and children.” His two eldest daughters laid waste to the detention center, crying and cursing, pounding on doors and windows, poking their fingers in electrical outlets (in what a local official called staged suicide attempts), and threatening to appeal to party center and to tell foreigners about their case unless they were allowed to settle in Tianjin permanently. The office proposed sending Hao and his two youngest children back to the south suburbs, while keeping the two troublesome older daughters in custody.

The village to which the Hao family evacuated was close enough to Tianjin that they could come and go quickly. As soon as they were sent back to the village, it was easy to immediately return to the city to continue their appeals. The family’s case would have had a better chance if they had continued to emphasize their health problems and not complained loudly about the unfairness of other temporary workers getting urban jobs and avoiding evacuation. This more fundamental complaint may have been valid, but the timing of it raised suspicion that their illnesses were faked, as did their vigorous travel and protest activities.

Illegal Migration

Another type of resistance to state-mandated migration resulted in more favorable results for the evacuees and their families: moving without permission. The most extreme example of successfully evading migration controls that I am aware of is Xu Hongci, a “rightist” who repeatedly escaped from high-security labor camps, only to be caught, before finally fleeing from Yunnan to Mongolia in 1972. Xu was not an evacuee himself, but his journey took him through Tianjin and his story illustrates the obstacles that evacuees faced when they tried to migrate illegally. Looking back on his and others’ failed attempts to escape prison, Xu summarized what he had learned:

First, escapees had lacked money and grain ration coupons, and had not carried authoritative identification and travel documents. Second, they had sought shelter and/or food from ordinary people. Third, the time span between their escape and its discovery had been too short, allowing search dogs to pick up the scent. Fourth, they had kept to main roads, and been caught at bus stations or river crossings.³²

Xu saved up money and national grain tickets that his mother sent him from Shanghai. He stashed Yunnanese cakes and scraped his prisoner number off of his clothes. He forged three blank travel permits. On August 7, 1972, he took advantage of a blackout to climb over an electric fence. He walked for miles, sleeping out in the open and fooling local militia members with his first fake travel document. His second forged permit allowed him to board a train to Shanghai, but when he tried to buy a ticket to

³²Xu Hongci, *No Wall Too High: One Man’s Daring Escape from Mao’s Darkest Prison*, trans. and ed. Erling Hoh (New York: Sarah Crichton Books, 2017), 239.

Beijing, the ticket seller would not give him a ticket because his documentation only allowed him to go to Shanghai. Xu then filled out his final fake travel permit, got a ticket to Tianjin from a different clerk, and eventually crossed the Mongolian border on foot.

Unlike Xu Hongci, evacuees from Tianjin did not have to worry about search dogs, but they did have to consider questions of money, grain, documentation, and arousing the suspicions of ordinary people as well as security officials. A forty-nine-year-old electrician named Yao made a less dramatic escape than Xu did. According to the Heping District Repair Company, Yao “understood the need for war preparedness dispersal” when he moved to a village near Tianjin in July 1970.³³ At first, villagers welcomed Yao’s technical skills. He repaired an electric water pump and mentored two village apprentices. Things turned sour quickly. Yao was too hard on his apprentices, which angered village officials. As soon as the novices were able to make basic repairs on their own, Yao was assigned to shovel pig manure.

Yao was outraged by this assignment. It was taboo for Yao, a member of China’s Muslim Hui ethnic minority, to come into contact with pigs. Village cadres declined to take Yao off manure duty, so he refused to work. His three family members in the village were also unable to avoid pigs. At the village store, clerks held pork in one hand while handing items to the Hui family with the other. The family pointed out the problem, but storekeepers ignored them. In August 1972, Yao and his family left the village without permission and migrated back to Tianjin.

Yao’s strategy differed from the Hao family’s noisy protest. Yao quietly took matters into his own hands while awaiting the resolution of his case. He asked his previous employer to restore his original job. In the meantime, he gathered wood and built a small shelter in Tianjin. He also set up a bicycle repair stand at the city’s west train station. Yao’s son worked next to him selling flatcakes. They earned two to three yuan every day. If Yao had never been evacuated from the city, he would have remained an electrician and probably would not have had to become an entrepreneurial bicycle mechanic. A chain of events beginning with Sino-Soviet battles on the Ussuri River in 1969 had led him to establish a business well before such private market activities were approved by the Chinese state.

Surviving in Tianjin without urban residency papers was difficult, but not impossible. Yao and his family managed to do it for almost a year. Then city commerce inspectors confiscated his bicycle tools because he had no permit to operate as a mechanic. Next, authorities at the repair company where Yao used to work stepped in, contacting a Muslim-majority village in the north suburbs to see if he could be relocated there. The village’s response was, “since the evacuations began, no one has entered our village.” In other words, no outsiders were welcome. The original village that had forced Yao to shovel pig manure did not want him either. Once again, Yao requested his old job back. If that was not possible, he wanted work in a suburban factory. He also asked that his Hui lifestyle be respected. In 1975, almost five years after being evacuated from Tianjin, he was assigned to a factory job in the west suburbs.

Until his tools were confiscated, Yao’s self-sufficiency had served him well during his illicit stay in Tianjin. He was also wise to propose the compromise solution of a suburban factory job. In the suburbs, he would receive a regular salary and benefits, while city authorities could say that they had successfully limited the urban population. The city’s outskirts had become a buffer zone acceptable to urban officials and evacuees alike. Yao was less likely to face religious intolerance in a factory than in a village, where as an

³³Heping qu xiupai gongsi 和平区汽配公司 dossier, June 20, 1973, AC.

urban Hui, he was a double outsider. His Hui identity probably helped his cause with city officials. They may have been more energetic in arranging factory work for him because they were sensitive to charges of ignoring party policy toward national minorities.

While the Hui man's troubles related to his ethnic background, his former coworker, an evacuee named Zhang, had problems with his health and his badly behaved son. After spending a year in a village not far from Tianjin, fifty-year-old Zhang claimed that he had suffered a stroke that paralyzed half his body.³⁴ Because neither he nor his sickly wife could do farm work, they relied on village welfare funds each month. Zhang asked his former city workplace for reimbursement of medical expenses. Officials explained that because he had already received a severance payment upon leaving Tianjin, the repair collective could not help him.

Then village officials threatened to cancel Zhang's welfare stipend unless his twenty-two-year-old son improved his behavior. The son often skipped farm work and snuck back into the city. He hung out with thugs and got into fights. Realizing that his welfare payment was going to be cut off, Zhang moved back to Tianjin in March 1972 with his family and all of their belongings. He said, "I would rather die than return to the village, because my livelihood is not guaranteed there and they do not take care of medical treatment." Zhang stayed at his mother-in-law's house and survived by collecting and reselling wastepaper, which earned him almost two yuan every day. Without urban residency, Zhang could not legally obtain grain in the city. He commuted to the village once a month to pick up his grain rations.

Zhang had more success as a paper recycler than as a farmer. In fact, his neighbors reported that he seemed to have made a miraculous recovery from his stroke. Zhang's file includes testimony from two of his neighbors. They told local officials, "Zhang limps like he is disabled in the lane, but once he gets out on the street he walks normally and uses his hands normally. He even rides a bicycle nimbly." His neighbors added that Zhang drank two ounces of hard liquor every day.

Three months after Zhang returned to Tianjin, his exasperated former supervisors at the Hexi machine repair collective sent a report about Zhang to their superiors. "We have tried to help and educate Zhang and mobilized him to return to the village many times," the report reads. "We have no way to continue working on this family. We ask company leaders to investigate and take care of it." Zhang's urban residency was finally restored in 1978. We do not know where he was and what he was doing between 1972 and 1978, but it is entirely possible that he continued to recycle wastepaper in the city for six years while living with his mother-in-law. His neighbors' testimony suggests that his stroke may have been staged or that he exaggerated the extent of his illness. This was a more effective strategy than noisy protests. Unlike families that appealed and petitioned full-time, Zhang stealthily achieved his goal of migrating back to Tianjin two years after being evacuated.

At some point after 1974, the repair collective where Zhang used to work investigated how its evacuated former employees were illicitly supporting themselves in Tianjin.³⁵ Of the thirteen families who had returned to the city without permission, seven of them relied on the salaries of children or spouses. One peddled stinky tofu, another sold goods on the black market, and others did private tailoring of clothes.

³⁴Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier June 4, 1972, AC.

³⁵Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, "Gongsi suoshu danwei shusan daoliu hu qingkuang biao" 公司所属单位疏散倒流户情况表, undated, but based on context, definitely after 1974, AC.

These activities not only subverted war preparedness policy, they undermined the household registration system and flouted prohibitions against private profit-making. Evacuees who encountered trouble in villages voted with their feet and found ways to survive in the city. Top-down studies of the *hukou* system assume that if an individual had a rural residency permit during the Mao era, it was impossible to live and eat in a city. Sources about reluctant evacuees show that illegal urban residence was not entirely uncommon. It required stealth, family support, and entrepreneurial creativity.

Fixing bicycles, collecting wastepaper, and grilling tofu were all subversive survival strategies that former evacuees hid from urban authorities. This type of underground lifestyle, however, was risky and difficult to maintain. Evacuees would have preferred steady work and legal urban residency, and many of them pursued a dual strategy of petitioning for the restoration of urban status and jobs while making an illicit living on the side. How did evacuees try to persuade urban authorities to let them back into the city?

Making the Case for a Return to the City

One evacuee in his fifties, a tailor named Wen, described his severe difficulties with farm work. In 1974, Wen sent a letter to his former workplace. He explained:

Since I had never done heavy labor, when I worked in the fields I felt exhausted. After a couple of weeks I suffered back pain. Because I had no salary after going to the village, I had to keep working even though my back hurt. I endured for three months and my back was killing me. It ached so bad when I slept that I could not even turn over.³⁶

Wen, noting that a doctor had diagnosed a lumbar strain, lamented his inability to do agricultural work. He wrote, “My heart is filled with pain. I’m so anxious that I wept my heart out several times, causing my eye illness to flare up and my eyesight to deteriorate. Now I always see a small black shadow in front of me.” Evacuation to a village had been so tough on tailor Wen that he claimed that he was crying himself blind.

Wen’s eye problems turned out to be more of a threat to his livelihood than the lumbar strain. Two years after going to a village, he returned to Tianjin and did private sewing work. He requested urban residency and said he could live at his daughter’s house in Tianjin. His appeal was denied. At the age of fifty, Wen had tried to do farm work for the first time in his life. The effort defeated him. But playing up the difficulties of village labor and complaining about disparities in medical coverage between city and village were unlikely to elicit a positive response from his former employer. Evacuees were supposed to work hard and make sacrifices in villages. If they got hurt they could expect the same welfare benefits as other rural residents. In other words, not much. Wen and other evacuees were accustomed to better treatment in the city. He preferred to live as an underground city resident making an illegal living.

While Wen’s appeal was pathetic, another evacuee was forceful to the point of rudeness. Unlike the other families discussed so far, all of whom went to villages near Tianjin, a thirty-two-year-old man named Li and his family of eight returned to his ancestral home in Shandong Province in December 1969.³⁷ This was months before

³⁶Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, letter dated October 7, 1974, AC.

³⁷Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, letter from Li to Tianjin shi geming weiyuanhui, September 10, 1974, AC; report by repair company cadre titled “Guanyu yuan jinshupin she sheyuan XXX shusan qingkuang” 关于原金属品社社员 XXX 疏散情况, September 27, 1974, AC.

widespread evacuations from Tianjin. Apparently when Li's father heard the news about war preparations, he urged the entire family to leave immediately. Because Tianjin had no clear policy about how to handle evacuees in December, Li's work unit, a district metalworking cooperative, continued to issue his monthly salary. In early 1970, after the city issued guidelines on the treatment of displaced families, Li was dismissed and given a one-time severance payment. Before his evacuation from Tianjin, Li had received regular welfare payments. Sometimes, unwilling to wait until payday, he carried his sick father on his back and went to pick up the money early.

This kind of bold public display foreshadowed how Li would react to difficulties in the countryside. He had relied on government assistance when he lived in Tianjin, and he expected more of the same in Shandong. Li was disappointed. In 1974, Li sent a letter to the Tianjin Revolutionary Committee, opening with a quote from Chairman Mao and warning, "Leading comrades at all levels: In fully executing your duties, it is absolutely forbidden to be careless." The gist of Li's letter was that he was the only able-bodied laborer in his large family, they were having difficulties making ends meet, and nobody in the village was helping them. Local authorities told him he was Tianjin's problem. But Tianjin was hundreds of miles away and his work unit had cut all ties with him.

Li also quoted Chairman Mao about the importance of paying attention to the masses' problems. He argued that Tianjin's Revolutionary Committee must help his family and demanded,

To see if you can solve [our problems], answer the following questions:

1. Is population dispersal following Chairman Mao's orders, and is it correct to return to a village for agricultural production?
2. Is population dispersal the call of the city Revolutionary Committee or the call of party center?
3. Which level of leadership should handle economic and other difficulties?
4. Is it correct for the local government to ignore me and make me seek out my original work unit?
5. If both the local government and my original work unit ignore me, what level should I go to?

Li concluded, "If you do not respond, my family of eight will return to Tianjin to have the city government make arrangements for us." Li had positioned himself as a committed Maoist in questioning whether the evacuations were legitimate. He insinuated that Tianjin authorities might not be following Mao's wishes. This threatening tone was counterproductive, because Li was counting on Tianjin officials to intervene on his behalf.

Li's letter had the same fate as most correspondence processed by the Tianjin Revolutionary Committee's Office of Letters and Visits. It was forwarded to a local district reception office, which passed it along to Li's original work unit. There, investigation revealed that Li was doing private ironwork in his village, earning two to three yuan every day. Like Yao the bicycle repairman and tailor Wen, in the absence of government action, Li was quietly helping himself. His former work unit recommended postponing a decision on his case pending further investigation. We do not know how long this process took. Nor do we know whether anyone ever answered Li's five tough questions about the legitimacy of population dispersal policy. All we know from his file is that by June 1980, Li had regained his city job and his entire family had their urban residency

restored. This late date leads me to conclude that Li's brazen tone and point-by-point demands had not convinced city officials to handle his case with any sense of urgency.

Li probably would have got his job back sooner had he brought his entire family back to Tianjin without asking for permission, or if he had proposed moving to a suburban district adjacent to the city. That was what a man named Hong did in 1974. Hong and his wife and five children were evacuated neither to the suburbs nor to their ancestral home. More like sent-down youth, they went to a faraway village in Inner Mongolia. There, they lived in a cave and suffered from hunger and illness.³⁸ Hong blamed his wife's arthritis and his thirteen-year-old daughter's epilepsy on the harsh northern climate. Thanks to a slight loosening in policy in April 1973, one of several attempts during the 1970s to redress Cultural Revolution excesses, Hong's situation changed.³⁹ The new line was that under special circumstances, evacuees who had gone to other provinces could return to Tianjin. This opening did not apply to people sent to villages on the outskirts of Tianjin.⁴⁰

In February 1974, Hong received official approval to return to his job as a machine repairman in Tianjin. His family, however, was ordered to stay in Inner Mongolia. Hong's epileptic daughter was unable to attend school there because of her frequent seizures. She told her father, "I can't wait to return to Tianjin to get treatment for my illness! After I get better I won't be ignorant anymore. I can go to school and read Chairman Mao's books!" Hong refused to leave her behind. At the end of the month, he brought his entire family back with him to Tianjin. They moved in with a relative who lived in a suburban village and asked for the restoration of their urban residence permits. Officials at his work unit told him that "returning to Tianjin early was a mistake" and "instructed him about the harmfulness of what he had done."⁴¹ Because their household registration was still officially in Inner Mongolia, his family received no grain rations and his children could not attend school.

Hong was adamant that his only choice was to bring his family back to Tianjin. He wrote:

Some people say, "your family members should not have returned!" I tell you sincerely: Inner Mongolia is another province,⁴² on the border, thousands of miles away. If I were to move back to Tianjin by my myself, would I be free of worries? How could my family survive without my labor power? How could I not worry about my wife and daughter's illnesses? Am I supposed to not worry about the cave during the rainy season? ... Are they supposed to live that way?!

³⁸Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, letter from Hong to "leading comrades" at the repair company, August 9, 1974, AC.

³⁹Redress and, eventually, rehabilitation and compensation continued quietly through the late 1970s and early 1980s, and was often referred to by the euphemism "fixing policy" (*luoshi zhengce* 落实政策). See Jeremy Brown, "A Policeman, His Gun, and an Alleged Rape: Competing Appeals for Justice in Tianjin, 1966–1979," in *Victims, Perpetrators, and the Role of Law in Maoist China: A Case Study Approach*, edited by Daniel Leese and Puck Engman (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 127–49.

⁴⁰Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei, "Guanyu tuoshan jiejie jigong zhengce xingwen de tongzhi" 关于妥善解决几个政策性问题的通知, April 25, 1973, 4, AC.

⁴¹Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, draft letter from what appears to be a lower-level work unit cadre to Heping qu xiupei gongsi, November 10, 1974.

⁴²Inner Mongolia was in fact an autonomous region, not a province, but in informal conversations and correspondence, many people in the People's Republic refer to autonomous regions as provinces, tacitly admitting that autonomy is a myth.

Apparently moved by Hong's plea, urban officials agreed that his family was not supposed to live that way. There was no discussion of sending the family back to Inner Mongolia. Instead, Hong's work unit suggested transferring him to a suburban factory and settling his family in the suburbs. An official wrote, "This will keep the number of urban *hukou* from increasing, will resolve the family's practical circumstances, and will also help fill the need for workers [in the suburban factory]." The suburbs were an acceptable compromise for Hong and the functionary in charge of handling his appeal. Not surprisingly, the bureaucrat did not mention national security. The prospect of war with the Soviet Union had started the Hong family's difficult journey from Tianjin to Inner Mongolia and back, but by 1974 civil defense was a less compelling rationale for managing migration.

Hong's indignant righteousness about protecting his suffering family resonated with urban officials, who admonished him but then tried to solve his problems. The key was that living on the outskirts of Tianjin seemed attractive to the Li family after their ordeal in Inner Mongolia. Families who were initially evacuated to villages near Tianjin had a different perspective. They demanded jobs and legal residence in Tianjin proper, and they were close enough to the city to either become full-time petitioners or to make ends meet illegally.

Conclusion: Forcible Migration as Relatively Flexible and Humane During the 1970S

The population dispersals of 1970 had the unintended consequence of giving urban evacuees a clear appreciation of China's rural-urban gap. They had lost the concrete benefits of city life. Migrating to the countryside for civil defense purposes meant an end to regular salaries, welfare benefits that made up the difference when times got tough, guaranteed grain, and dependable access to health care and medicine. Many of evacuees' appeals mentioned rural deficiencies in these areas. More generally, evacuees complained that village life was arduous and inconvenient. Farm work was exhausting—it caused back pain. Other letters noted that buying supplies or fetching water required unbearably long hikes and heavy lifting.⁴³ Rural people did not complain to the government about such hardships, they took them for granted. But evacuees fixated on these aspects of rural-urban difference and were disappointed when city standards were not maintained in the countryside. They grudgingly acknowledged that suburban districts close to Tianjin were a poor but acceptable second choice.

The only reason we know about the people mentioned in this article is that they were problem cases. They broke rules, wrote letters, visited government offices, and left a paper trail. But were they representative of most evacuees? Are we getting an inaccurate picture because the written record is disproportionately skewed toward troublemakers? Based on official surveys, we can speculate that roughly half of evacuees faced serious problems in villages. Seventeen of the thirty families who were evacuated from the Heping Number Four Tailoring Workshop were either doing fine or had not been heard from. The thirteen other families had problems including unfairly low work points, shoddy housing, and a woman who became so distraught by her family's poverty in the countryside that she pierced her abdomen with a heated chopstick until it hit

⁴³Handwritten letter from ZH, twenty-two-year-old male, to his mother's work unit, November 16, 1979, AC.

her liver. She survived.⁴⁴ At the Number Two Tailoring Workshop, twelve out of twenty-four evacuated families had no problems or unknown circumstances, nine families had major problems, and three others had problems that had shown improvement.⁴⁵

Oral history interviews help to balance the written record. One man named Chen was five years old when his family was evacuated in 1970. He grew up in a village south of Tianjin until 1980, when his family moved back to the city.⁴⁶ Chen's father volunteered to leave Tianjin when urban authorities announced the population dispersal program. The father enjoyed village life. Chen's mother constantly complained about his father's decision. She said that living in the village was bitter, and she resented accounting practices that gave outsiders fewer work points for equal labor. Chen's family faced the widespread problem of unfairly low work points, but this did not motivate them to petition authorities or to return to Tianjin without permission. In fact, Chen told me that he never left the village between 1970 and 1980, and he only remembered his father leaving once or twice to visit relatives in Tianjin.

Chen did not notice bitterness or difficulties. He called the village a land of plenty and has fond memories of going fishing, digging for crabs, and playing "catch the spy" with his village friends. The night before his family moved back to Tianjin, his village classmates and teacher bid him farewell by sleeping over at his house. When he started classes at a Tianjin high school, he had a tough adjustment. Students there made fun of his village accent and called him a "little hick." Migrating away from Tianjin during the 1970s put Chen's childhood on a different trajectory than the one it would have followed had his family remained in the city. But it was not a traumatic path for Chen, and it is one that he still values to this day. "I really cherish the memory" of living in the village, Chen told me. "All the youth were together and happy. My personality was established there in the village: being genuine and treating people honestly."

Swedish scholar Michael Schoenhals has offered an alternative interpretation of China's 1965–1976 period: not as the Cultural Revolution, but instead, as "Mao's domestic war on revisionism." This violent struggle for the survival of Chinese socialism had no fixed timetable or end date. Some even speculated that it might take one hundred years.⁴⁷ The war preparedness evacuations that began after the Sino-Soviet clashes of 1969 had the same problem: they required a permanent state of high alert. This time, the threat of war came not from domestic enemies but from the Soviets—international "revisionists" on China's northern border. At the height of the war scare, at least 106,000 people left Tianjin for the countryside. But there was no end in sight. This exasperated evacuees who, if they had the time or inclination to consider international affairs, would have correctly sensed that their relocation to a village was no longer justified on national defense grounds.

The problem for Tianjin authorities was that undoing evacuations was tantamount to repudiating the Cultural Revolution itself. Only Mao Zedong could announce the end of hostilities and declare victory. As long as Mao was alive, Tianjin officials were

⁴⁴Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, Heping qu di si caifeng chejian 和平区第四裁缝车间, "Congye renyan shusan qingkuang diaocha biao" 从业人员疏散情况调查表, June 30, 1972, AC.

⁴⁵Heping qu xiupei gongsi dossier, Heping qu di er caifeng chejian 和平区第二裁缝车间, "Congye renyan shusan qingkuang diaocha biao" 从业人员疏散情况调查表, June 28, 1972, AC.

⁴⁶Author interview.

⁴⁷Michael Schoenhals, "The Global War on Terrorism as Meta-Narrative: An Alternative Reading of Recent Chinese History," *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 8.2 (2008), 179–201.

unwilling to preempt him, but they were more than willing to take advantage of the population dispersal program to pursue their own local goals, including limiting the urban population. Many unhappy evacuees pushed back. Their illicit migration and private money-making presaged trends that would become much more common in the late 1970s and early 1980s, eventually garnering official approval and becoming hallmarks of China's reform era. The impulse to move to a better place, whether for economic opportunities or family unity, remained alive through the Mao years. State controls on migration during the 1970s were not as insurmountable as they appeared on paper.

When compared with the coerced movement of hundreds of thousands of Chinese citizens to internment centers in Xinjiang between 2017 and the present—in a state-mandated campaign justified on national security and anti-terrorism grounds—the way that Tianjin residents and local officials handled civil defense evacuations in the 1970s seems relatively humane and flexible. Instead of strictly prohibiting family contacts and punishing even minor signs of Islamic practices, as security officers in Xinjiang have recently done, local authorities in Tianjin looked favorably on evacuees' strategies to keep their families together and sympathized with a Hui man's complaints that villagers were not respecting his religion. Instead of being moved from internment camps to forced labor facilities, as Uyghur and other Muslim detainees have in the past several years, evacuees from Tianjin during the 1970s could settle in suburban villages close to the city, creating a buffer zone that contributed to Tianjin's expansion in the following decades. This comparison suggests that top Communist Party leaders today continue to see forced population movement as a solution to perceived security threats. It also suggests that it may be misguided to think of the Mao Zedong years as a faraway time that was more radical or repressive than China under Xi Jinping's leadership.