

Household Registration

DONALD TSANG

Donald Tsang (Zeng Yinquan), born in 1944, became the chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2005. He succeeded Tung Chee-hwa (Dong Jianhua), who resigned during his second term in office.

Tsang came from a family of civil servants. His father was a policeman and his younger brother was the police commissioner of Hong Kong. Born and educated in Hong Kong, Tsang joined the civil service in 1967. During his decades-long service in the government, Tsang held positions in various departments, and was once in charge of the widely criticized British Nationality Selection Scheme. He became the financial secretary of the colonial government in 1995, a position he continued to hold after the handover of Hong Kong in 1997. He was praised for his competence in steering the Hong Kong economy through the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. He succeeded Anson Chan (Chenfang Ansheng) as the chief secretary when the latter resigned in 2001 because of her clash with Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa. Tsang then became the acting chief executive when Tung himself resigned in 2005. Subsequently, Tsang was formally elected uncontested by an 800-member Election Committee as the chief executive for the remaining period of Tung's incomplete term. He was elected for a "second" term in 2007.

Tsang's assumption of power signified a return of the strong influence of the civil servants in running the government. During his second term in office, he appointed mostly his former civil service colleagues to be the principal officials. In contrast to Tung Chee-hwa, Tsang has not launched ambitious social and economic programs or attempted to change the conventional mode of planning. Having served in the colonial government for decades, Tsang internalized the bureaucratic ethos of minimum government and incrementalism.

Unlike his predecessor, Tsang does not have a close relationship with the Beijing authorities. He also has no strong backing from business interests. His appointment was once seen as providing a chance for rapprochement between the government and the pro-reform parties and groups. This has proved to be unattainable as the logic of the game compels Tsang to increasingly rely on pro-Beijing loyalists and business interests in order to secure support for his policies as well as those policies imposed from Beijing.

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of new officials coming from the business sector have either run into conflicts with the bureaucratic ethos or excessively relied on their civil-service subordinates to deal with public inquests and policy debates. Worse still, bureaucratic sectionalism has increased rather than diminished, as witnessed during the epidemic of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), when ministerial secretaries valued their personal political careers more than the collective responsibility of the administration as a whole.

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HOUSEHOLD REGISTRATION

The household registration (*hukou*) system covers all residents in China. It is a major component of the Chinese socio-political structure and a key feature of Chinese social and cultural life. The *hukou* system performs crucial functions affecting China's political stability, governance, economic growth, social stratification and equality, demography, internal migration, and interregional relations.

Earlier versions of the *hukou* system can be traced to the fifth century BCE during the Warring States period. It was institutionalized and adopted with different names such as *baojia* and varying degrees of effectiveness and extensiveness as an important part of the Chinese imperial political system from the Qin dynasty (third century BCE) to the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). The Republic of China (ROC, since 1911) and the People's Republic of China (PRC, since 1949) both established a national *hukou* system. However, the *hukou* system achieved an unprecedented level of uniformity, extensiveness, effectiveness, and rigidity only in the PRC, especially after the promulgation on January 9, 1958, of the Regulation on *Hukou* Registration of the People's Republic of China. Twenty-seven years later, on September 6, 1985, Beijing adopted its Regulation on Resident's Personal Identification Card in the People's Republic of China (amended to the Law on Resident's Personal Identification Card in the People's Republic of China on June 29, 2003). These two regulations and their implementation procedures are the main legal basis for the *hukou* system. Every Chinese citizen knows the *hukou* system, yet it remains an administrative system and is not even mentioned in the PRC constitution.

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The PRC State Council and its ministries have issued numerous regulations, provisional regulations, directives, decrees, and documents that have substantiated and fine-tuned the *hukou* system. The majority of these, estimated to number over six hundred from 1958 to 2005, have been the ever-changing criteria and mechanisms for the control of internal migration, especially *qianyi* (permanent migration with *hukou* relocation). The Ministry of Public Security and the local public security bureaus and police stations are the administrators of the *hukou* system. Specialized *hukou* police officers are assigned to be in charge in each *hukou* zone: a neighborhood, street, *danwei* (work unit), or township. With the authorization of the central government, provincial and municipal governments can make and have made marginal changes and experimental modifications of the *hukou* system in their jurisdictions.

The *hukou* system requires every Chinese citizen to be officially and constantly registered with the *hukou* authority (the *hukou* police) from birth. This registration is the legal basis for the personal identification of every Chinese citizen. The categories of nonagricultural (urban) or agricultural (rural), legal address and location, affiliation (employment), and a host of other personal and family information, including religious belief and physical features, are documented and verified to become the person's permanent *hukou* record. A person's *hukou* location and categorization are determined by his or her mother's (or father's after 1998) *hukou* location and type, rather than his or her birthplace.

One cannot acquire legal permanent residence and the numerous community-based rights, opportunities, benefits, and privileges in places other than where one's *hukou* is. Only through proper authorization of the government can one permanently change one's *hukou* location and especially one's *hukou* categorization. Travelers, visitors, and temporary migrants must be registered with the *hukou* police for extended stays (longer than three days) in a locality (often through local innkeepers). For stays of longer than one month and especially when seeking local employment, a person must apply and be approved for a temporary residential permit. Violators are subject to fines, detention, forced repatriation, and criminal prosecution. *Hukou* files are now computerized and routinely used by the police for investigation, social control, and crime-fighting purposes.

Largely operating in secrecy, the PRC *hukou* system performs three central functions. First, it is the basis for resource allocation and subsidization for selected groups of the population (mainly the residents of major urban centers). This function has shaped much of Chinese economic development since the mid-twentieth century by politically affecting the movement of capital and human resources. Second, the *hukou* system allows the government to control

and regulate internal migration. The basic principles of PRC migration control have been to restrict rural-to-urban and small-city-to-large-city migration but encourage migration in the reverse direction. The scale of China's urbanization, as a consequence, is relatively small and its pace is slow compared to China's economic development level. China's urban slums are also smaller and less serious than those in many other developing nations, such as Brazil or India. Third, the *hukou* system has the less well-known but powerful role of managing the so-called targeted people (*zhongdian renkou*). Based on the *hukou* files, the police maintain a confidential list of selected segments of the population in each community to be specially monitored and controlled. This has contributed significantly to the political stability of China's one-party authoritarian regime.

The *hukou* system has also contributed to China's rapid industrialization and economic growth, which features sectoral and regional unevenness without serious problems of sociopolitical instability and urban poverty. However, the system has many negative implications. A major consequence of the *hukou* system has been China's strikingly rigid and clear-cut rural-urban division. For most of PRC history, the majority of the Chinese population—the rural residents—have been excluded and openly discriminated against under the *hukou* system. There are only a few limited ways (such as entering a state-run college or becoming a state employee or a military officer) for a rural resident to become a privileged urban *hukou* holder. The much smaller urban population (only 14 to 26 percent of the total population) has had qualitatively much better access to economic and social opportunities and benefits, and has also dominated PRC politics. To a lesser extent, urban residents in smaller cities and remote regions have also been excluded from the life of major urban centers or regions more favored by the government in terms of investment, subsidies, or policy flexibility. Outsiders and temporary residents are treated differently and often openly discriminated against in just about every aspect of their lives. Enormous regional disparities and gaps are therefore created and maintained.

During the reform era that started in 1978, the *hukou* system demonstrated both significant changes and remarkable continuities. Its basic structure and leading functions largely remained intact thirty years later. The system continues to register and identify the 1.3 billion Chinese by their administratively determined location and categories. People with different *hukou* locations and types continue to be treated differently and to have different social status and economic opportunities. However, the administration of the *hukou* system has become more localized and relaxed. The enforcement of the system has become less intrusive and also less effective. Forced repatriation and the associated abuses of *hukou*-less unregistered migrants (*mangliu*), for example, have slowed or even stopped since 2004. Internal migration, still regulated by the *hukou* system, has developed

Household Responsibility System (baogan daohu)

considerably as the rich and the talented and skilled have acquired substantial nationwide mobility. Rural residents with appropriate income and housing that meet the locally set “entry conditions” can now easily become urban residents in small cities and towns. Temporary residential permits have allowed more than one hundred million rural residents to work and live in the cities for extended periods. *Hukou*-based biased resource allocation is still important, but many of the old exclusive subsidies for urban consumers have shrunk or even disappeared, replaced by market-based resource allocation. Other reform efforts have further obscured, both cosmetically and substantively, the divisiveness and the offensiveness of the *hukou* system.

Despite an increase in criticism based on ethics concerns, and despite the continuing reform efforts needed by the new market economy, China’s *hukou* system is likely to remain omnipresent and powerful, albeit with adaptation and adjustment, for the foreseeable future. It will continue to be a key aspect of statecraft for the Chinese government and an important factor in China’s sociopolitical organization, population control, economic development, and social and spatial stratification.

SEE ALSO *Corruption; Labor: Market; Migrant Workers; Political Control since 1949; Social Welfare; Unit (danwei)*.

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HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM (BAOGAN DAOHU)

The term *household responsibility system* refers to an agricultural-management system in which individual households in rural China take responsibility for agricultural production while maintaining the system of collective ownership of land and other major means of farm production.

ORIGINS

Some areas experimented with the household responsibility system in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in southern provinces such as Zhejiang and Anhui. In the more permis-

sive atmosphere of the late 1970s, this system was revived in Anhui and later spread to the rest of the country.

The household responsibility system is one form of the responsibility system in agriculture that emerged in the late 1970s in China. Other forms of the responsibility system include the work-group responsibility system (where production responsibility is devolved from the production team to the work group) and the individual-farmer responsibility system (where output quotas are fixed for an individual farmworker).

TWO VARIANTS

The household responsibility system has two variants. The first is *baochan daohu*, that is, assignment of responsibility for production to the household. Under this system, agricultural production was contracted to individual households and the output was shared among the state, the collective, and the household. Feixi County in Anhui, which implemented this system in 1978, was the first county to do so. With the support of the provincial party secretary, Wan Li, this system soon spread to other poor counties in Anhui. By June 1981, 19.9 percent of production teams in rural China had adopted this system.

The second variant of the household responsibility system is *baogan daohu* (or *da baogan*), that is, assumption of total responsibility by the household. The eighteen households in the Xiaogang Production Team in Liyuan Commune in Fengyang County in Anhui Province were the first in the post-Mao period to adopt such a system, which they did in the spring of 1978 in secrecy, in fear of political reprisals. Under this system, the household rents land from the production team and retains all its produce after paying taxes and selling its grain to the state under a system of unified purchase and after handing over to the team its share of collective accumulation and welfare funds, as well as other levies.

By the end of 1982, 89.7 percent of all production teams in China had adopted one of the variants of the household responsibility system. Because of its simplicity, *baogan daohu* became the dominant form in later years. Initially, the household was allowed to rent the land for a period of fifteen years. But according to the Land Contract Law in Rural Areas of the People’s Republic of China, which was approved by the National People’s Congress on August 29, 2002, and went into effect on March 1, 2003, the term of contract for arable land was revised to thirty years, from thirty to fifty years for grassland, and from thirty to seventy years (or longer in some cases) for forestland.

VILLAGE COMMITTEES

Production teams, along with people’s communes, were disbanded in the 1980s and were replaced by popularly elected village committees. The village committee is responsible for