

Advocatus Diaboli: A Contrarian Stance on the Chinese policy of ‘*Hukou*’

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How does the Chinese government use the policy of *hukou* as a tool to maintain domestic stability and contribute to their continued legitimacy?

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1.0 - Introduction

“The Chinese National Bureau of Statistics estimates the number of people working outside their hometowns for at least six months was 278 million last year (2014). If they were a country, China’s migrant population would be the world’s fourth largest” (“China migration” Wildau).

Hukou is the Chinese household registration policy that ties people to receiving social welfare and services in that one registered location, meaning that whilst urbanisation has been allowed to happen, it has been made very difficult. Firstly, to briefly outline the commonly cited problems with the policy before further analysing the reasons for its continued implementation; *hukou* has created a society that ultimately contains a ‘divisive, dualistic socioeconomic structure’ where it has turned rural migrants into second class citizens who cannot easily attain the right to legally settle in cities (Chan, Household Registration System 357). This has meant that although urbanisation has occurred and people have moved from the land to the cities, they are unable to access key services provided by the government because they are not registered as a citizen in that place. This has led to the huge displacement and discrimination of one fifth of the Chinese population (“China migration” Wildau), highlighting just how relevant the *hukou* policy is in debate as decisions on this policy can directly affect millions of individuals lives and their chance for success. Whilst household systems are not perceived to be an uncommon practice throughout the world, they are rarely as discouraging of population movement as *hukou* is. Therefore, the *hukou* system raises an infinite number of questions regarding many issues related to the accessibility of services, public urban opinion of migrants and the availability of jobs within urban environments. With regards to the issues stated above, *hukou* can be perceived as a harsh Chinese state policy that is often written about by the

media and scholars in disdain and there is plenty of literature that illustrates this current discourse¹, and how discontinuation would result in benefits for both Chinese individuals in regards to their quality of life and employment prospects as well as for wider society with reference to more work incentives, better health and a smaller inequality gap. However, there has been little academic thought towards why the state continues to implement the policy with only limited reform despite many calls for its cessation (Chan, “Household Registration System” 357). Therefore, given the benefits of discontinuation, there must be an alternative reason for the continued implementation of this policy. Henceforth, this paper is going to analyse “how the Chinese government uses the policy of *hukou* as a tool to maintain domestic stability and contribute to their continued legitimacy”. By using the construction of legitimacy that states it is attained through policy performance, in China’s case based upon three factors: economic prosperity, social stability and national unity, this paper is aiming to argue that the *hukou* policy’s consequential effects, inadvertently maintains the legitimacy of the government through a number of different measures. It will therefore analyse a multitude of reasons as to why the Chinese government continues to use *hukou* in the 21st Century despite industrialisation and urbanisation known to be instrumental in establishing a sophisticated economy. Therefore, the following will be highlighting the positive consequences *hukou* grants the government, in order to effectively analyse the reasons for continued usage of the controversial policy despite the well documented negative connotations it holds. The paper will be looking at how *hukou* policy provides the Chinese government legitimacy both economically and politically and how this affects the decision to reform or abolish the policy.

¹ "The Household Registration System and Migrant Labor in China: Notes on a Debate" – Kam Wing Chan and Kovacheva et al. – “Comparing the development of free movement and social citizenship for internal migrants”

2.0 - Explaining *Hukou* - Analysing *Hukou* from a Theoretical Perspective

As this paper aims to deal with how '*hukou*' is being used as a government tool to maintain domestic stability and its contribution to continued state legitimacy, it is not within the scope of the paper to analyse all of the historical reforms that have been made to the policy since it first came into being because expansions into this would incite a whole new discussion. Therefore, it is important to note the key elements; what *hukou* essentially is, why it was originally formulated and how it is used now. Firstly, to give a historical background of *hukou* in more depth; The '*hukou*' household registration system is a policy implemented in China that prevents labour mobility by stopping individuals from receiving access to social services. Although, to be clear, urbanisation has occurred in China, it has prevented the ease of settlement and mobility through this policy.

Originally the system was created due to the heavy industrialisation happening in the country and in order to finance this expansion the state manipulated pricing by artificially allocating resources.

Due to this the state had to 'create a system which blocked free flows of resources (including labour) between the industry and agriculture' to 'maintain an artificial imbalance'. *Hukou* became one of the key methods used to control labour movement (Chan and Zhang, 819). The majority merely understand it to be a population control policy that determines urban or rural status to all citizens. However, *Hukou* began as a dual classification system; the first classification is the '*hukou suozaidi*' (the location) which is primarily based upon place of permanent residence (Chan and Zhang, 821). This 'local hukou' is what defines the rights you have in the economic and social spheres. Secondly is the '*hukou leibie*' describing the type. In China either agricultural/non-agricultural *hukou*. This one is usually considered to be more divisive than the first because it is the one that prevents movement from rural to urban areas and decides privileges and entitlements depending on individual classification.

Both classifications are transferred at birth from the mother, and any change to individual status has to seek approval from government first and in the case of a rural to urban shift, this is not granted

easily (Chan and Zhang, 822). However since these origins of *hukou*, and whilst there is still much criticism surrounding the policy in general in regards to the issues stated previously such as the creation of a segregated society and preventing , there have been many reforms made to try and rectify the issues it creates and whilst this paper will not analyse these reforms, the most recent position of hukou is that whilst it is still defined by two dimensions (type and location) an increasing amount of power is being devolved to local governments to define what their individual hukou laws are (Song 203) and as time goes by reform policies come into existence that softens the overall policy. For instance, Shanghai introduced the policy that regardless of the parent's type of hukou, all children born in Shanghai will be given non-agricultural hukou which aims to ensure their access to social services. Given the knowledge of where the policy of hukou originates and what position it is in now, it is clearly visible that the policy has developed severely as time has gone by and as is necessary. However, it is also clearly visible that hukou was not proposed to be solely used as a migration control tool, that stops labour mobility, although this has been an outcome. It was one of many policies that contributed to form a web of control (Chan and Zhang, 830) spanning a number of different aspects of society including the control of the movement of resources (including labour) to ensure that the economy did not falter during the years of China's fast paced industrialisation firstly by keeping labour in balance with the flow of other resources and secondly by ensuring urbanisation did not peak prematurely and slow down too quickly, *hukou* enabled the government to draw out economic growth to last a longer length of time than it would otherwise have done.

China has undertaken mass urbanisation in the last few decades and the aptly named 'New Urbanisation Policy 2014 - 2020' is the governments new way to respond to criticism to the outdated hukou policy and try to resolve many of the issues that the previous policy was influencing - at the forefront; inequality between the urban and rural classes (Wang et al, 2015). The new plan described in a press conference was presented with having four tasks with five reforms. They

summarised that the main emphasis of this plan was to go into settling the migrated agricultural population, optimise urbanisation and increase the sustainability of cities in order to achieve a cohesive developed rural and urban society (Xu et al. 2014). The five reforms that will enable this to happen include managing the population, controlling land resources, secure funding, building urban housing and protecting the environment to create a sustainable urbanising society (Xu et al. 2014). Having extensively analysed the new plan the authors have given a concise summary of the aims of the plan and the potential issues that may arise as a result of it. The new plan does try to provide an answer to reduce the inequality by providing a comprehensive system to process migrant applications to move from rural to urban hukou (Wang et al, 2015). In fact, they plan to increase the urbanisation level from 52.6% in 2012 to 60% in 2020 (this includes non hukou holders- and they plan to raise the percentage of urban hukou holders from 35.3% to 45% (Ernst and Young Global Ltd 3). However, movement of people will still be very strictly controlled by the government as it will only be easier to attain urban hukou when choosing to move to a smaller city or town rather than the already existing mega cities of Shanghai and Beijing (over 10m population). This policy objective is to ensure that the government can still control the creation of cities. Linking this in with the city imaging discussed by Wong and Liu this proves that despite the reformations to the hukou policy, the government remains keen to ensure that the population urbanises in the way that the government wants them too - by building up smaller cities and avoiding the creation of the urban sprawl that is all too common in the USA (Wong and Liu 3) by continuing to make it difficult to gain urban citizenship in already mega-cities where urban diseases are already issues that need to be resolved such as pollution levels and traffic congestion (Wang et al. 282).

In order to relate this paper and the continued importance of 'hukou' to the continuation of state legitimacy in China, there needs to be a theoretical framework of legitimacy applied in order to analyse the policy accordingly. The basic definition of legitimacy, given by the Encyclopaedia Britannica refers to "popular acceptance of a government, political regime, or system of

governance” (“Legitimacy” Britannica Academic). To give further insight to this definition; since Locke began to change minds about the source legitimacy from the ‘divine right’ to the consent of the people (Dogan 116), legitimacy has been a much debated topic. Max Weber is a well-regarded scholar on the topic and commonly referred to when researching within legitimacy. He developed a typology of forms of legitimacy, differentiating traditional, charismatic and legal-rational types. To briefly describe each legitimacy that Weber sets out in his typology;

Traditional legitimacy is the idea of authority and power through traditional means for example the ‘divine right of kings’ and the idea of leadership through traditional societal customs, this kind of legitimacy can be seen through monarchies and theocracies (Weber 331-334). In China’s case, this sort of legitimacy would have been applicable prior to the revolution, during the existence of the dynasties.

Charismatic Legitimacy is the notion of legitimacy formation from mostly high charismatic, personable qualities - this would include leaders that have managed to take power and sway the population into believing in their often radical ideas (Weber 334 -339). This charismatic legitimacy is illustrated in China by Mao’s revolutionary leadership and to this day Mao holds considerable power as a figurehead and has massive amounts of respect from the Chinese people. Another example is seen in Russia with the Lenin leadership of the Soviet Union. Charismatic legitimacy was mostly a feature of authoritarian states rather than that of democratic ones.

The third type; Rational-Legal legitimacy can also be used to describe Chinese legitimacy.

Described as the idea that legitimacy is formed through the governmental institutions and their ability to enforce law and order through the laws that they created but is reliant in the public’s trust that the organisation will not abuse its power (Weber 329 - 331). When looking at Chinese state legitimacy, the transformation from Maoism to Deng ideology is described as routinisation of charisma and based off of “Weberian sociology” (Laliberté and Lanteigne 3). However, Chinese legitimacy can also be looked at from a rational-legal perspective as well because of the trust that

the Chinese people have in the government to not abuse its power and provide good policies that will benefit the majority.

However, although Weber's framework is useful to demonstrate the basis for most legitimacy frameworks, and despite the continued use of Weber's theories in society to analyse legitimacy worldwide today there is much scepticism about their ability to illustrate 21st Century political systems and their legitimacy, because the world political order and China's political order has developed much further than where it was during the time Weber was writing in. In particular, Dogan argues that Weber's theories are mostly outdated now because most countries employ some mixed form of legitimacy (Dogan 118). He states that 'three quarters of all countries...are not covered by the Weberian typology' (Dogan 118). He also stresses the fact that "Legitimacy runs the scale from complete acclaim to complete rejection...ranging all the way from support, consent, compliance through decline, erosion and loss" (Hertz in Dogan 119) however because Chinese legitimacy debate covers a vast spectrum, it is not within the scope of this paper to argue where exactly Chinese government legitimacy is positioned upon that scale, it will work on the basis of agreement that the government does hold a considerable amount of legitimacy based upon the visible general stability and limited unrest of society.

Legitimacy is consistently being redefined in China as their governmental regime is currently in uncharted waters as by this point most autocratic regimes have faltered and collapsed. Scholars have yet to come up with a theory that visualises the type of legitimacy China theoretically employs. Whilst it remains arguable how legitimate they are, the point stands that there is limited amounts of unrest and are very few demonstrations on the mainland, therefore demonstrating that there must be at least an amount of underlying legitimacy. Under the current formation of legitimacy in China as defined earlier in this paper; legitimacy occurs under the conditions of good performance in the dimensions of economic prosperity, social stability and national unity. In this case the arguments presented in this paper do theoretically help the government to achieve good

performance rates in these areas. However according to relevant media debate on this topic the qualities that define legitimacy in China currently is thought to be shifting to performance in socio-political sphere where civil rights reform would gain considerable support (Zhang 2016). When and if this redefinition occurs (it is still mostly in media debate) then the government would need to explore new ways to firmly entrench its legitimacy and will definitely need to think about abolishing *hukou* to maintain legitimacy in order to improve social welfare as *hukou* is not a system that encourages this.

However, the theory that this paper will use to determine what legitimacy is will be defined by the correlation of legitimacy and effectiveness and loosely based on Scharpf's theory of input and output legitimacy. This is the idea that output legitimacy is the effectiveness of policy outcome for people and input legitimacy is the responsiveness to citizen concerns as a result of political participation (Scharpf 2). Although political participation levels in China are low because of the mainly authoritarian regime in power, arguably Chinese legitimacy is highly influenced by the effectiveness and success rate of their policies. In a more Chinese context, it is often argued that China adopts a policy of performance legitimacy; if the government achieves its concrete goals it draws up and is able to quickly adapt to problems that arise then it is able to retain its legitimacy (Zhu 123). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Chinese regime bases its legitimacy on economic growth, the improvement of living standards and the maintenance of stability (Laliberté and Lanteigne 4) and they stress that the dimensions that China uses are economic prosperity, social stability and national unity. For the purpose of this paper, this is the basis of legitimacy that will be used throughout.

Using the paper of Tai-Chee Wong and Ran Liu who have analysed the theory of urbanisation in a Chinese context, they argue for the Lefebvrian idea of the 'right to the city' first presented in 1996. Combined with Leary's idea of urbanisation as an outcome and a process they concluded that in the context of China the migrant workers that construct the city should be allowed residency within that

city. However, under current hukou law this is not possible because of the strict migration rulings. In contrast they also introduce the notion of ‘city imaging’ which presents some reasoning as to why the Chinese government would want to maintain the hukou policy despite the majority considering it to be ‘outdated’ (Richburg, 2010). City imaging is essentially where the state plans out what the intended city will look like. In China this is a huge market, this can be seen from the vast amount of ghost cities that have sprung up pre-empting the increase in urban population. City formation in China is a huge issue because of its view of the creation of a city as a state planned event rather than a natural result of the movement and settlement of people (Wong and Liu, 3). Therefore, if there are adverse side effects to the creation of a city - for example slum formation which has proven to be a big problem for many late developing countries in Latin America and Africa, China views this as government failure rather than as a part of development (Wong and Liu, 3). China sees the creation of competitive, wealthy and aesthetically pleasing cities part of its responsibility as the government, even if this means causing inequality between rural and urban citizens and keeping these two groups metaphorically separated. Therefore, it is clear that the control of population and as the key driver of this, ‘*hukou*’ remains a key Chinese policy where one can still see a huge influence of the state in society through their aim to create ‘perfect’ cities. Despite one of China’s key policy objectives being poverty alleviation and the creation of equality for all citizens, there are also other factors that the government needs to fulfil including growth and state ownership. Achieving all three simultaneously is considered to be virtually impossible (Wu and Yao, 2015); therefore, up until now there has been trade-offs and it has thus far been equality that has suffered because growth and state ownership were deemed more important by the government. So the implementation of the hukou system has meant that there has been a continuous inequality that has only been exacerbated and made more visible by the movement of migrants to cities and the creation of ‘underclass citizens’ (Chan 2011). However, it is important to note that the pursuit of equality may no longer be as desired, given the view of economist Thomas Piketty in “*Capital in the 21st Century*”; Piketty argues that high levels of inequality are the natural state of

modern economies (Piketty, 12). Although this has been disputed by the recent book by Branko Milanovic who argues that inequality comes in ‘Kuznets’s waves’ and that it works in cycles (The Economist, 2016) both of these approaches to inequality argue that inequality is at sometimes unavoidable in the state of the modern economy. Therefore, the fact that China has levels of inequality shows that it is a modern economy in the 21st Century, just like any other ‘sophisticated economy’ such as the USA or countries in Western Europe. Hence, equality may be impossible to achieve and therefore does not contribute to legitimacy as much as other dimensions and therefore the direct segregating effects of *hukou* should not affect the Chinese states legitimacy. Given the recentness of the Milanovic book, this paper will be working from the viewpoint of Piketty and arguing that at this point in modernity, inequality is an expected part of an economy.

3.0 - Economic Arguments

This chapter is going to look further in depth at the economic reasons for the implementation of the hukou policy. It will look at arguments such as the Lewis Turning Point, urbanisation as an asset for economic growth, becoming more interdependent with the world markets and the benefits of *hukou* for food security. Much of the literature writing on ‘hukou’ cites economic reasons as to why the policy needs to be abolished to allow for the greater mobility of labour. This section will analyse why there are also economic reasons that show how ‘hukou’ is helpful to the government economically and provides them with stronger legitimacy based on the continuation of the economic prosperity dimension explained in the previous section.

Firstly, to look at the broader concept of urbanisation creating higher rates of economic growth.

This is a contested topic especially in recent years as new data has been brought into the public eye.

However, statistically, sophisticated economies such as those of Europe and North America have an

urbanised population of 80% (UN 1). Urbanisation and socio-economic growth have long been considered to have a relation. As there is increased urbanisation, city creation also increases which increases development not just for the city itself but also for the surrounding rural areas because of much more investment in the area which will improve social services and infrastructure (UN 3). Whilst urbanisation is considered vital to sustain economic growth, managing urbanisation is also considered very important to encourage this growth (Annez and Buckley 1). There is also the viewpoint that whilst there is some relationship between urbanisation and economic development, there is a limitation on that link as it is not so when looking at the link between the rate of urbanisation and growth (Chen et al 2014). Due to the established link between economic growth and urbanisation, many developing countries have implemented fast programmes of urbanisation to try and stimulate their economic growth (Chen et al 2014). However, the findings of Annez and Buckley suggest that urbanisation can cause tensions and the managing policies that are put in place can affect multiple facets of society (Annez and Buckley 32). In the context of Chinese urbanisation, this reasoning that the speed of urbanisation and even the idea of fast urbanisation can cause considerable tension forms a basis even now for the continued governmental reliance on 'hukou'. Despite urbanisation having occurred in China, 'Hukou' allows them to manage the mobility of labour in the country to a greater extent and the urbanisation rate to ensure that it is not happening at such a level that could be detrimental for the government and the economy. Although *hukou* is relatively unable to halt the movement of labour, it will prevent even more movement than that which already occurs and through the prevention of complete integration and assimilation in cities, through the stigma attached to migrants (Chen 1) and their inability to access social services, helping the government to maintain legitimacy and control. The New Urbanisation Policy also helps them to introduce slight reforms to aid the growing economy but also restrict it from happening too quickly. By continuing to implement the '*hukou*' policy, this ultimate economic control gives the government the ability to continue to aim for economic prosperity which as defined as a dimension of legitimacy, ultimately results in improving and maintaining their legitimacy.

This section is now going to explain and analyse the Lewis Turning Point (LTP) and its contextual relationship in China. The LTP was first developed in 1954 by Arthur Lewis when he was looking at development economic models. The basic concept for the theory is that where there is excess labour in a low productivity sector in an economy, wage levels in high productivity sectors are influenced by that of wages in low productivity sectors as the labour moves from low to high productivity sectors (Lewis in Das and N'Diaye 3). In the context of China, the low productivity sector is agriculture and the high productivity sector is industry, in this sense, as the surplus labour moves from the agricultural sector to the industry and excess labour reaches zero, this is the Lewis Turning Point. When there is no longer a surplus labour, wages begin to increase because according to the law of supply and demand, when there is less supply, the price to demand increases. From the perspective of the Chinese government, if they were to abandon 'hukou' the surplus of labour would run out on an accelerated timespan, also potentially taking from the productive agricultural labour, and lead to more expensive labour quicker which could have potentially devastating effects on their overall economic growth. As previously discussed, China's domestic crop produce is more expensive than comparative imports and this would begin to translate into other goods and services as well. China's products would become less competitive on the world markets and could hurt the growth of the economy. This provides reasoning for the idea that the Chinese government wants to keep an exploitable work force who generally complete the 'dirty, dangerous and demeaning jobs' (Sheng 352) in order to keep China as the 'manufacturing powerhouse' of the world (Chan 2011). The conclusion that China can only avoid the LTP for another decade or so (Das and N'Diaye 1) has also proved useful for analysis of China's policy reforms in recent years. If they are going to try and postpone the arrival of the LTP for as long as possible then they will need to find surplus labour to provide more supply and lower wages again. However, the only way to do this is to reform 'hukou' to give more people and easier and more legal opportunity to move to the industrial sector; which through the New Urbanisation Plan 2014-2020 they are attempting to mobilise more people towards new cities. Failing this, they need to

increase the birth rate so that there is an increase in the population and a larger supply of labour; which they have also done through reforming the One Child Policy so urban citizens can have two children now instead of one (Buckley 2015). For the reason of delaying the LTP, China has reformed 'hukou' and continues to aid economic growth and avoid the negative consequences of having no surplus labour, however they have not abolished the policy because they still use it as a policy that determines food security and for regime survival. Although hukou reform can delay the LTP and in the meantime provide the government with continued legitimacy; rather than reforming hukou, China needs to consider reforming its growth model so they can receive productivity gains within urban areas rather than just from the redistribution of labour ("End of the Migrant Miracle" Wildau).

Thirdly, although in the past few decades China has become increasingly interdependent in the world markets and more active in institutions and the global order, it also recognises its history and the sheer size of the country and the population resulting in a government highly aware of its agricultural self-reliance and ability to provide for its population without having to rely on importation. It would not be possible to have to rely on food imports with the sheer size of the Chinese population (Terrill 296-7). Having an unmanaged population movement from the rural areas to the cities would mean that food production would significantly decrease because of less people working agriculturally and would thus make China more dependent on external sources of food which is undesirable and almost impossible from the viewpoint of the Chinese state. Although it is vital to recognise that there have been significant improvements to technology production and therefore require less labourers than previous to this, evidence suggests that labour shortages are still very relevant to the food production industry and does present a problem to the increased production of rice that needs to reflect their population increases (Global Rice Science Partnership "Production Constraints"). To enhance this point of the desirability for food security for China, despite domestic production of grain being much costlier, China is pushing for increased domestic

production and looking to reduce reliance on grain imports as the beginning of the 13th five-year plan comes into existence (Wu 2015). While it is by no means self-sufficient to the extent it does not need to rely on imports at all, self-reliance within the sector of food security certainly seems to have a continued importance to the state. To show this in figures, in 2014 China's grain production was estimated at 766 million tonnes which is astonishingly close to their peak of 777 million in 1998 (Wu 2015) which is remarkable for a country that has developed such a relationship with the international markets in the global political economy. According to the data provided by the Food Security Portal, China's overall rice production has significantly increased in a year (not an anomaly, in 2009 it increased again to 196,681,170 MT), they are exporting less and importing less proving that they want to be more reliant on their own food industry (see figure 1). An article from People's Daily in mainland China also stated that developing an over-reliance on global markets for grain would put security at tremendous risk (People's Daily in Wu 2015) showing that food security remains a very sensitive issue in China to the government even in the 21st Century in an post-Mao era and in a time when they operate an open economy. As a policy, hukou does enable them to ensure that they can protect their citizens from any issues that could potentially arise that would mean they need to be self-reliant on their own produce. By aiding an active policy for food production, *hukou* inadvertently provides increased legitimacy upon the basis of economic prosperity and national unity. In this way, having people working agriculturally and in rural areas rather than an 80% urbanised population ensures that they are able to feed their population. This strong desire by the government is also evident when knowing that domestic production has actually become more expensive yet there remains an insistence on buying domestically (Wu 2015). Whilst China may not be completely economically self-reliant now, it maintains the most important part of the "zi li geng sheng" policy (that pre reform China abided by) is that they remain in control of their own affairs, goals and decisions (Tisdell 12). This shows that again despite a globalising world, China still aims for sovereignty and the ability to provide for their own if required.

To summarise this chapter, hukou provides the government ways to ensure urbanisation does not happen too fast and cause tensions within society that could cause societal instability whilst also advocating for slow urbanisation to enhance economic growth. It also gives them the power to protect citizens by providing food security by keeping an agricultural population. Additionally, it means that they can manipulate the movement of the population as it desires to best postpone the negative consequences for economic growth of the Lewis Turning Point. In general, it enables the government to manipulate their economy for the overall 'national interest' with the best intentions for the majority of the people. In terms of them being able to use hukou as a tool to implement continued legitimacy; the policy is effective in ensuring the success of economic growth, food security and general stability of society and is therefore very effective. Drawing of the success that hukou helps give economic prosperity and social stability, the government have a significant pool of support that they can use to implement more unpopular policies and the shortcomings of these such policies (Dogan 123). In this sense although hukou is a controversial policy, it does have the advantage of producing assets for the state, through the improvement of the economic growth and stability dimensions that help overall governmental legitimacy. In the long run with a government that is in general very effective especially economically, they will remain legitimate because of the ability of the people to tolerate some policy (in this instance the immediate effects of *hukou*) shortcomings.

4.0 - Political Arguments

In this chapter, the primary focus will be on analysing the multiple reasons for the continued implementation of 'hukou' by the Chinese government from a political standpoint. 'Hukou' is a policy that although can be expressed in simple terms, is a complex concept used as a government tool to control a number of aspects of society including population control but also beyond it.

Urbanisation is commonly seen as a desirable process by many developing governments in order to help improve the economy, social development and environmental protection' (UN 3). However, this paper is going to argue that the opposite is in fact true and the correct management of urbanisation policies is the best way to aid political stability and as an expansion create economic and social development. The UN recommends several policies that governments should implement when focusing on urbanisation. The first being that these policies should share the benefits of urban growth equitably and sustainably, encompassing expanding infrastructure, ensuring equal access to services and reducing slums (UN 17). Arguably China has been working on improving infrastructure for the entire country. In 2008, the government put aside 1.5 trillion RMB to focus on public infrastructure (KPMG 2) and as of January 2016, the railway map of China's connections looks like this (Figure 2). Although this picture shows an intense difference in the quantity of railways in the East and the West, this is because the Western side of the country is actually largely uninhabited. This shows China also desiring greater expansion of urbanisation policies. However, management of urbanisation is required to ensure it occurs at a reasonable rate and without risk to the Communist regime. Additionally, the NUP is preventing the creation of slums by the way it allocates urban hukou to medium and small size cities. The state should manage the spatial distribution of the population so that it is balanced which will help to avoid slum formation and urban diseases (UN 17) which the 'hukou' policy also supplies the answer for through the use of incentives e.g access to services by moving to small or medium sized cities and by incentivising the reasons to stay rural by abolishing land taxes and subsidising rural areas (Wallace iv). By conforming to the suggestions that the UN makes in urbanisation, with China's NUP, this will help maintain its legitimacy not only domestically but internationally as well because of the compliance with international institutions ideals.

“Extent and distribution of urbanisation is a key factor in assessing the stability of an autocratic regime” (Wallace 11). Wallace also contends that countries that have a higher percentage of urban

population are more likely to see a government collapse than countries that have a lower rate of urban population because of empowerment, which would provide a strong motivation to China as to restrict urbanisation and keep *hukou* in place for as long as it can and also provides reasoning as to why the reforms made are so gradual. Alongside this reformation of hukou policy under the NUP which should help to aid the compliance and competency of the policy with international organisations; the mere existence of hukou helps to provide stability for the government and the political system because such faster paced urbanisation processes generally lead to government instability, through the creation of higher levels of fractionalisation because of limited integration in communities between the migrants and urban people (Annett 2000). Fractionalisation is not in the interest of the Chinese state as it could cause tensions and unrest because of segregation, but it is also not in the national or the international interest because political instability in China could cause large setbacks to economic development (Annett 2000). This would be harmful to the Chinese and the world because product prices would increase and firms may have to spend more to move production lines because of political instability. This would be likely to cause undesirable costs to companies too. In terms of legitimacy, as stated previously, it is defined predominantly by the sustainability of economic growth and social stability and with the abolishment of 'hukou', and no policy in place to manage population movement, fractionalisation could occur and result in social instability and delays to economic growth, which through the definition of Chinese legitimacy, would both be more harmful to the maintenance of legitimacy than the continued implementation of hukou. This being said, whilst the government clearly wants to avoid higher fractionalisation, the hukou policy has not managed to achieve a high rate of deterrence and has thus already created a huge community of agricultural migrants living on city peripheries who already mix with urban type hukou people, therefore the extent by which hukou manages to prevent fractionalisation is arguable. However, despite this, although abolishing the hukou system and giving rural hukou holders rights would be the humane action to take, it would also portray an acceptance on a legal level that could stir up unrest within cities because of the viewpoints of urban citizens towards

migrants and that they are essentially responsible for all social afflictions (Windrow and Guha 15) which could be the root cause of increased fractionalisation resulting in overall political instability. In an effort to better portray how fractionalisation could occur in China through the abolishment of *hukou*, it is wise to briefly compare the Chinese *hukou* system with the European Union (EU). Contrasting to China, countries within the EU have freedom of movement, the right to live and work in other EU countries. If the state were to abolish *hukou*, within China, citizens would have the right to move to any area they desired without any threat to their access to social services. However, it is crucial to note that within the EU this freedom of movement has created unrest and right wing protests and movements in many countries where people feel plagued by immigration, for instance UKIP in the UK, and neo Nazism in Greece. When the governments are unable to curb migration crises, citizens lose faith in them and turn elsewhere for direction showing an increase in fractionalisation rates which would be likely to also happen in China without *hukou* in place. In this way, by having a firmer grasp on the population movement than the state would without *hukou* gives the government more legitimacy through political stability than they would otherwise receive.

As the Chinese governments legitimacy is regularly speculated upon internally and externally, the current time will not be one where they choose to deregulate. They want to continue to appear strong to their people and to foreigners in order to avoid conflict and mutiny; it would therefore be an unwise policy decision to reform quickly, especially where *hukou* is concerned because of greater risks to fractionalisation that results from unmanaged population movement, and the direct effects that it has on the dimensions of economic prosperity, social stability and national unity that as defined earlier contribute to Chinese performance legitimacy. In addition to this legitimacy crisis, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has become increasingly ideological under the profound leadership of Xi Jinping and has also invoked a growing support for both Mao and Confucius factions so it is becoming increasingly vital for the CCP to maintain its legitimacy somehow and show its strength in the face of adversity (Zhang 2016). In this sense therefore; their main goal is

regime survival. This is considered to be more important to the state than any of their economic outcomes (Panda 2014). At this sensitive time, it is important for the CCP to perform well economically and politically so that doubt does not form amongst the people and decrease the CCPs legitimacy. Due to this never wavering policy, it stands to reason that there will only be gradual *hukou* reforms as to not emit weakness and to avoid the splintering of political stability. Based on this ideological surge in China, the government in recent times has developed an adaptable attitude to solve problems (Zhu 124) in order to keep their legitimacy intact through the performance indications of economic development, social stability and national unity.

In addition to this, the scope of state activities can be placed on a “spectrum that stretches from necessary and important to merely desirable and optional” (Fukuyama 10). This presents the idea that states need to prioritise their activities and that providing for instance public order and defence from external invasion is considered by the state to be more important than free higher education and health insurance for instance (Fukuyama 10). In relation to China this is very well connected to the case of ‘hukou’. For China it is considered to be more important to provide citizens with economic development, social stability and generally improving living standards rather than to allow a high labour mobility rate, which could have direct effects that would destabilise the government, counteracting the identified more important activities, coinciding with the dimensions that help constitute the Chinese definition of legitimacy. If these are effective then, again, hukou is in the government’s view doing its intended job.

Whilst the common theme of the discourse surrounding hukou is its creation of an ‘apartheid like system’ within society with the implementation of a set urban-rural society, the government sees the ability to sustain both levels of society in an orderly manner as an economic and political protection policy to reduce fractionalisation of society and therefore ensure regime survival even amongst the growing voices within China that appear to be in an increasingly ideological stance. The

government needs to be able to prove that they are still the only party that has the legitimacy and authority to rule over China.

5.0 - Socio-Political Arguments

This chapter is going to look at some of the social reasons for the Chinese government's continued use of 'Hukou'. Maintaining social stability as well as political stability has been continuously mentioned as one of the ways that the Chinese government can maintain their continued legitimacy so keeping stability within society is very important not only to the people but also to the government.

The city, as defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica is the name given to some urban communities due to either a legal or conventional distinction that separates the community from that of a town or village ("City" Britannica). In China there are two types of urban places; cities and officially designated towns. Only the central government has the designation power to define as such.

However, in general a city contains a population greater than 100,000 (Wu and Gaubatz 5). Due to the city designation authority that the government holds, it shows that in relation to other urbanised countries, the Chinese government sees city creation as a state job rather than a natural course of settlement and thus see bad city planning as a government failure and therefore something that can be avoided (Wong and Liu 3). Hukou therefore enables the government to ensure that these failures are limited by manipulating the population flow to an extent so that they can restrict urban disease formation such as traffic congestion and environmental air pollution. Although these are still a problem today, they would have been much worse, with higher rates of urbanisation. Prior to the NUP the government could with more ease control the population in cities becoming too large.

With the implementation of the NUP that will enable agricultural hukou type people to more easily obtain legal access to live in second and third tier cities, the government is attempting to avert the unnecessary build-up of these issues when there exists a vast amount of smaller cities that could use

with a higher population to reach its optimisation performance level. To look at this point through an economic lens it would be the comparison of the theory of economies of scale. A business gets larger and as a result can produce for cheaper until it reaches a point of economies of scale when production is at its peak and then once past this point, the business is operating past its peak and it is generally too large and production costs begin to rise forming a system of diseconomies of scale. Cities can be put upon this scale too. There is an optimum population level which is the point of economies of scale but once past this point, there becomes diseconomies of scale as the population of the city becomes too large, unsustainable and forms urban diseases. If the government were to fail at the creation of a city, this could hurt economic growth and therefore would be detrimental to their legitimacy.

Local governments are instrumental to making hukou reform and vital to discuss when talking about urbanisation issues. Since the 1980s 'hukou' power was devolved from the central to local government levels (Song 203) which means that hukou laws differ from place to place. This paper has mainly focused on the standard hukou without looking at the individual laws provincial and city governments have put in place that adapts the hukou laws for that particular areas as that would be too much to delve into². However, it is useful to note that these reforms are for the most part made on a local scale and that therefore it is not just the central government refusing to change the system. Part of the reason that local governments may decide not to make reforms is based on the current funding situation. The central government focused on the economic development of China but left the task of poverty alleviation to the local governments (Chang 603). However, because all the tax goes to the central government, the local governments, especially from rural areas and inland cities, are left with very little sources of income and historically have resorted to unsustainable methods of locating income. Methods that have been employed include land sales; unsustainable due to the limited amount of land and the number of times you can sell it, and

² Such as these presented on this website: "Recent Chinese Hukou Reforms." *Congressional Executive Commission on China*. CECC, n.d. Web. 29 May 2016.

borrowing money from banks in the form of UIDs which means that local government debt is reaching an unsustainable level (KPMG 3). This form of obtaining money is particularly unsustainable and could potentially pose an issue for the government when comparing this to the origins of the 2007/8 financial crisis. Although the local governments have recently been exploring new ideas of how to attain the financing for new increased levels of social services, it is still key that these reforms of hukou happen at a gradual rate to ensure limited upheaval and the opportunity to test these sustainable finance measures out and give them time to succeed before embracing them in full. The first idea for sustainable financing of urbanisation is to allow people to invest in local government bonds which would provide them with a solid income that could support an income that the local governments would invest on the expansion of social services so that they could take more people. The second policy idea is to use public private partnerships wherein private corporations invest in the new social services and operate them, taking profits for the first one to two years before operations are transferred back to the state (KPMG “China’s Urbanisation” 4). These more sustainable methods will hopefully provide some reasoning for loosening restriction measures on migration slowly, however reforms will ultimately still be introduced at a very slow rate as the Chinese state is unwilling to risk the regime over anything.

In correlation with the argument presented in Chapter three; that higher rates of urbanisation can cause political instability, this is often exacerbated when the government is unable provide for the larger population level (Annett 2000), which would also present another reason for limited hukou reform. With the abolition of the hukou policy, urbanisation rates would be likely to increase and governments would struggle to fund the needed extra social services and political and social instability as well as doubt in the legitimacy of the government would be liable to increase which the local and central governments are keen to avoid. Due to the funding requirements from the central government that ensures local governments are expected to fund poverty alleviation (Chang 603), whilst receiving very little, if any funding from tax income; local governments have to

attempt to fund the creation of new social services for an increasing population as a result of rapid urbanisation. This would be unsustainable because they are mainly funding it through debt and bank loans as mentioned earlier (KPMG 3). Without *hukou* in place, urbanisation would increase and this problem would only elevate if no alternative funding methods were found. Therefore, to avoid further fragmentation of society and the system, *hukou* gives a degree of stability and more legitimacy to the government because this way they can remain able to fund individuals in their home towns, where it is likely cheaper to live rurally. This funding issue also explains why individual city municipalities create their own reforms based on whether they can sustainably afford the urbanisation or not. Hereby larger cities such as Shanghai, Chongqing and Beijing are likely to have an excess of funding enabling them to fund more people. Therefore, finding new and sustainable ways to fund urbanisation is imperative before the significant reform or abolition of the *hukou* system as it stands today.

A reasonable solution to the problems that *hukou* creates through building a divisive society, is perhaps the process of *in situ* urbanisation that involves the investment and a build-up of rural areas so that citizens become more urban without any physical relocation (Zhu 215). This would result in even development and a more evenly spread population. This example would show an effort by the Chinese government to bring development to rural areas by avoiding the destabilisation that rapid rates of urbanisation would provide the regime. By employing this type of urbanisation they are moving jobs inland and inciting trickle down effects of development from urban to rural areas which in turn limits the sending of remittances and creates inland job innovation which is necessary for more advanced economic development and reducing overall inequality. However, it still complies with the Chinese states desire to control city formation and migration manipulation which therefore reinforces state legitimacy³ and their authority whilst ensuring the development of all

³ Until the point of a redefinition of Chinese legitimacy, however this policy would no matter the type of legitimacy in existence, enable the state to work towards equality for their citizens regardless of their type or location.

areas. When this policy is fully implemented and urban benefits are felt by a majority of citizens is when China will have found a responsible solution to the internal migration crisis they are currently undergoing that *hukou* has initiated by creating this segregated two tier society as described previously (Chan, Household Registration System 357). Whilst this in situ urbanisation is currently happening, it is more through inadvertent expansion of cities than a planned policy. With an introduction of this kind of policy the government will still be able to use *hukou* to maintain their legitimacy through a more sustainable way.

6.0 - Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has established potential governmental reasoning through the lenses of economic, political and social thought as to why the continuation of hukou results in continued legitimacy. It is important to remember that hukou's original purpose was not just to restrict population movement but it was to form a web of control and give the government manipulation power over the economy, political sphere and society. From this viewpoint, hukou is an effective policy and therefore contributes to the states continued legitimacy, under this definition.

Economically, urbanisation is commonly thought to have a high correlation with economic development, however it has been found that a fast rate of urbanisation is actually more destabilising. Food security is another area where the state is keen to have agricultural workers to ensure self-reliance agriculturally which provides reasoning as to why the government wants to keep a deterrent in place for migration. In addition to this, the LTP is approaching and therefore the NUP provides some hukou reforms, however the government will not transform rapidly to ensure that surplus labour does not disappear too quickly. Therefore, economically, *hukou* gives the government legitimacy through the fulfilment of the economic prosperity dimension.

Politically, it has been found that; fast rates of urbanisation are likely to result in higher fractionalisation and cause more destabilisation for the regime which the government is keen to avoid and therefore likely to employ policies such as hukou that can avoid this by inducing a

deterrent to migration. This is not to claim that urbanisation does not occur in China, however it would be likely to happen at a much faster rate without the use of a prevention policy such as *hukou*. Migration management policies are also considered to be valuable for ensuring stability through an urbanisation process by the UN constituting to the continued hukou policy. In addition to this, China is currently undergoing an ideological upheaval in which the state needs to assert themselves as the only party that can legitimately rule over China which also lends strength to the argument for the continuation of hukou.

Another key issue that the state needs to think about is the funding of urbanisation. Based on the current system, urbanisation at an accelerated rate is unsustainable and could cause higher fractionalisation because the state would be unable to provide for migrants even if they did attain urban hukou type. Therefore, it is still within their interest to maintain the policy to remain legitimate. City imaging is also a priority to the state as they perceive the aesthetics of cities to be state planned and any failure represents a failure of the state which could result in illegitimacy of the state. If the state can manipulate the movement of people, then they can work to ensure less fractionalisation occurs through the segregation physically and mentally of the urban and rural classes and prevent the occurrence of more or exacerbated urban diseases, especially within megacities.

These arguments represent the potential beliefs that the Chinese government holds as to why they continue to implement a policy that creates a migrant population of 278 million people and a significant division of a population. Based upon these outcomes, that ultimately strengthen the economy, the political environment and national unity, these dimensions support the continuation of performance legitimacy by the Chinese government. Combining this with the “idea that legitimacy creates a reservoir of goodwill on which the authorities can draw in difficult times and increases considerably the willingness of the people to tolerate shortcomings of effectiveness” (Dogan 123). It is of little wonder that the Chinese government will continue to implement this policy and only gradually reform to ensure a continuation of overall legitimacy.

However, it is necessary to remind that many of these arguments work on the basis that *hukou* is at least partially succeeding at its intended job of deterring rural citizens from moving to the cities. If they were sufficiently deterred, then arguments for *hukou* of reducing fractionalisation and maintaining food security would hold significantly more weight. However, migration is occurring, and there already exists a large migrant community of over 278 million in China, who are living in cities so if fractionalisation were to occur and cause political instability then it would be happening, the only reason it may not have happened is that they are not legally accepted and within minds, a stigma attached to the migrant population is still accepted by the state and actively encouraged by the continuation of *hukou*. A legal acceptance of the migrants could cause higher fractionalisation and unrest from the urban population, because of a loss of acceptance for current beliefs that migrants exist as second class citizens. Reforming *hukou* now to delay the LTP may not have the desired effect because much of the underproductive agricultural population has already migrated, however it does deter any more of the agricultural productive population from migrating – also upholding food security. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate what the exact results would be if an abolition of *hukou* occurred because it has not managed to completely stop migration from occurring. Despite this, as the economy sophisticates, the policy on *hukou* is likely to continue to adapt as it has for the past decades as well. For now, whilst China remains in these stages of economic growth, *hukou* remains a useful policy to the Chinese government for maintaining legitimacy and domestic stability. If legitimacy were to redefine itself in China and in order to remain legitimate the government needed to satisfy other dimensions than the current economic prosperity, political stability and national unity, then another look at whether *hukou* were to still provide legitimacy would be necessary and interesting. However, whilst this definition of legitimacy is used, as brutal and harsh as the *hukou* policy is, it remains an important tool for maintaining this type of legitimacy and the abolition of the policy could create severe unintended and undesirable consequences for not only the legitimacy of the Chinese government but also the economic development of the country.

7.0 - Works Cited

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8.0 - Appendices

Figure 1. - Demonstrating the differences of Rice Production, Exports and Imports in China in 2007-8. (Food Security Portal).

	2007	2008
Agricultural Production of Rice	187,397,460 MT	193,284,180 MT
Agricultural Exports of Rice	1,324,807 MT	971,208 MT
Agricultural Imports of Rice	598,685 MT	361,940 MT

Fig. 2 - Map showing the railway links in China (January 2016)

