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Focus group discussion with Burmese women living in China. Ruili, China.

## CHINA

### Political and Economic Update

The year 2003 was a turbulent one for China, marking historic political change in the country. President Jiang Zemin stepped down after 10 years in office, although he maintained his position as army chief of the Central Military Commission. His successor, Hu Jintao, who had already been named head of the Communist Party in November 2002, was elected President by the National People's Congress in March 2003. The transition of power went smoothly, but the new government was hit with the SARS crisis, which threatened the country's tourism, trade, investment and services sectors as fear spread – along with the virus – worldwide. China faced international criticism for its failure to adequately address the problem, as it became known that the government had been trying to cover up the virus since it had reportedly originated in Guangdong province in late 2002. Although the World Health Organization

declared the country SARS-free by June 2003, the country had to work to repair the damage to its economy and reputation.

China also continued to grapple with significant challenges in a number of spheres. Providing jobs for its enormous population has become a serious problem, as in August 2003 the Ministry of Labor and Social Security forecast that jobseekers would exceed the number of vacancies by 14 million by the end of the year. According to the CIA World Factbook, unemployment was 9.8% in urban areas, while an official Chinese journal estimated overall unemployment – which includes rural areas – for 2003 as high as 20%.

Despite China's extraordinary growth rate, the economy simply can not create enough jobs for the vast number of young people entering the labor market each year as well as for the millions of workers laid off over the past years as a result of the government's restructuring of state-owned enterprises. There is also an increasing flow of job seekers from rural areas who have come to the big cities looking for work. These internal migrants are likely to increase in number as farmers are driven out

of business by neo-liberal globalization highlighted in China's entry into the WTO, due to upcoming WTO-mandated removal of agricultural subsidies.<sup>1</sup> Another factor which may increase rural to urban migration is China's October 2003 policy authorizing farmers to transfer land rights.<sup>2</sup>

China's development is concomitant with an ever-increasing need for energy sources, and the government has expended a great deal of effort in building links with oil-producing countries in attempts to ensure their needs will be met. Although China's domestic oil production currently supplies about two-thirds of its crude oil needs, the government estimates that by 2020 its needs will more than triple.<sup>3</sup> It has been scrambling to find new sources of oil, particularly since the US-led war in Iraq drove home the potential for competition and insecurity in the future as the supply diminishes. The government spent much time in political maneuvering to secure oil, entering into contracts to explore or purchase production facilities in 12 countries, including Peru, Tunisia, Azerbaijan and Mauritania.<sup>4</sup> In June 2003, plans were also announced to build pipelines, including one from Russia and another from Kazakstan. Also in June 2003, progress on the controversial Three Gorges Dam project, intended to provide power throughout the region, went forward with the filling of the reservoir.

Meanwhile, growing disparities between the rich and the poor intensified the potential for social unrest. The World Bank estimated that China has 150 million citizens living in poverty,<sup>5</sup> many of whom live in rural areas. Although the rural population comprises 70% of China's population, its savings make up only 17% of the country's total.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the Gini coefficient, which measures income disparity, hit 0.4 in 2003, considered a "yellow alert" level in terms of social stability.<sup>7</sup> China's poor are also increasingly feeling the impact of the removal of social safety nets; with the "iron rice bowl" definitively smashed, unfunded pensions and lack of healthcare are commonplace. It was reported that around half of the Chinese living below the poverty line were there due to an illness, racking up huge medical bills.<sup>8</sup> In 2003, the Ministry of Health implemented a new plan to try to address the healthcare problem. Under the plan, Beijing has pledged to contribute RMB10 per year for each member of rural health co-ops in designated provinces; members are to match this amount.

This growing income inequality, combined with the removal of social safety nets and lack of healthcare, deepens dissatisfaction with central and local government. There have been more and more reports of social protests in Western media; it was reported there were 74,000 protests in 2004, up from 58,000 in 2003.<sup>9</sup> Despite increased reports of protests, strikes and demonstrations, the administration continues to employ various strategies to maintain its chokehold on civil society. For example, the media are prohibited from reporting on labor unrest, and workers are forbidden to organize across factories and cities; these measures prevent protests from spreading.<sup>10</sup> Also, government officials are often able to curtail demonstrations by making small concessions to appease protesters and/or their leaders.

The mainland struggled to control Hong Kong SAR, however, as half a million people participated in the 1 July 2003 march against Hong Kong's proposed anti-subversion bill, Article 23 (see Hong Kong Country Report in *AMY 2002-2003*). The public outcry, although peaceful, signaled the Hong Kong people's wariness of the mainland government. In response, the Chinese government adjusted its political maneuverings, tabling the bill and launching a patriotism campaign in the SAR.

Internationally, China worked to settle boundary disputes with its neighbors. China and India reached a landmark agreement on the status of Tibet and Sikkim in June 2003 (see India Country Report), and also ratified boundary and fishing agreements with Vietnam regarding disputed territory in the Gulf of Tonkin. Both the "Agreement on the Delimitation of the Territorial Seas, Exclusive Economic Zones and Continental Shelves in the Beibu Gulf" and the "Agreement on Fishery Cooperation in the Beibu Gulf" came into force by the end of June 2004.

In October 2003, China became the third country to send a man into space, as Astronaut Yang Liwei was launched in China's first manned spacecraft. Yang landed safely after orbiting the earth 14 times. Although some international critics pointed out the folly of a developing country prioritizing its space program over improving the quality of life for its millions of poor,<sup>11</sup> China's leaders hoped the flight would boost national pride and raise the profile of Chinese technology.<sup>12</sup>

China's economic growth continued its brisk

## China Significant Events 2003 - June 2004

### 2003

#### January

Ukrainian authorities detain 70 irregular Chinese migrants – 57 men and 13 women – found in a Kiev apartment. The migrants had paid up to USD10,000 each for the trip from Beijing to Ukraine via Moscow.

#### March

(11) China promulgates rural land reform law which guarantees farmers' land use rights for 30 more years and allows for transfer and trade ownership of such rights.

(15) The National People's Congress elects Hu Jintao as President; Jiang Zemin, who had held the post for 10 years, steps down, but maintains his position as head of the Central Military Commission.

(15) A Canadian immigration lawyer claims that the Immigration Department is overwhelmed by nearly 30,000 applicants from China trying to fill the government's annual quota of 6,500 Chinese immigrants.

#### March – April

The pneumonia-like SARS virus, which is believed to have originated in

Guangdong province in November 2002, spreads to other areas of the country.

#### June

Progress goes forward on controversial Three Gorges hydroelectric project, as the dam reservoir begins to fill.

(9) 12 people charged with the brutal beating and murder of internal migrant Sun Zhigang receive sentences ranging from three years imprisonment to the death penalty. Sun's death sparked off a debate on the mainland's detention policies, and treatment of internal migrants generally.

#### August

New vagrancy rules come into effect, replacing the recently abolished Custody and Repatriation laws which had allowed for arbitrary detention of "vagrants", including migrant workers. The new laws are aimed at making the holding centers more humane.

(7) The Ministry of Public Security announces 30 new reforms involving registration and travel, among others. Residents in designated cities will have greater ease in applying for permission

to travel to Hong Kong and Macau; also, new provisions allow parents to choose to register their newborns in either the mother's or father's place of residence.

### 2004

#### March

(19) *China Daily* reports that the Ministry of Construction ordered employers to pay out wages owed to migrant workers within three years. The directive follows previous urgings from other government entities and officials to employers regarding the settlement of backpay.

#### April

(26) The National People's Congress Standing Committee issues ruling that Hong Kong will not have direct elections of its leader in 2007.

#### June

(3) China and Vietnam launch a joint anti-trafficking campaign in Guangxi province.

#### Sources:

*BBC News, Scalabrini Asian Migration News*

pace, and by first quarter 2003, the 9.9% growth raised concerns of overheating. The government took measures to rein in the growth, however, and the measures combined with the impact of SARS brought total GDP growth in 2003 down to 9.1%. According to the head of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), growth was spurred by industrial output, which rose 17% during the year.<sup>13</sup> Primary industry in 2003 added 2.5%, while secondary industry leapt 12.5% and the tertiary service sector rose 6.7%. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China continues

to flourish; according to a report in the *People's Daily*, USD53.5 billion was invested in the country in 2003, with UNCTAD predictions that FDI would grow further to USD60 billion in 2004, particularly in the banking, commerce, health and education sectors.<sup>14</sup> By 2004, China's economy became the second largest in the world, when measured on a purchasing power parity basis.<sup>15</sup>

NBS statistics confirmed, however, that per capita disposable incomes grew faster during 2003 in urban areas than in the country side, as urban incomes

climbed 9.3% but rural incomes rose only 4.3%.<sup>16</sup>

## Migration Update

*In 2004-2005, the Mekong Migration Network conducted a joint research on quality of life of migrants in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), published in the Resource Book: Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion. This section is a summary of the findings of the research in China, with additional information collected by AMC.*

Although mainstream migration in China has been internal, there is an increasing trend in international migration, including labor contract migration (See China Country Report in *AMY 2002-2003* for a more detailed discussion). In 2003, China's labor export industry reached USD3,309 billion, with newly signed contracts worth USD3,087 billion. By the end of the year, official statistics counted 525,000 Chinese migrant workers overseas. As the migration business becomes more lucrative, around 2,000 labor export agencies have been authorized by the Ministry of Commerce. Labor export extended to 189 countries and regions in businesses including manufacturing, farming, forestry, animal husbandry, assembly-line production, fishery, transportation and construction.

Concurrent with the deepening of state enterprise reforms and economic adjustment, the urban employment structure has experienced drastic changes. According to estimates, the population of working age Chinese in 2005 will increase by 42 million over that of 2000, with another increase of 39 million by 2010. The natural labor supply is estimated at 635-669 million people for the period of 2001-2005, a net increase of 34 million, or average annual increase of 6.8 million, with an approximately similar increase predicted for 2005-2010. These new workers will face a changing labor market; growing employment opportunities in the private sector will increase as the number of people working in state-owned enterprises (SOEs) decrease. Statistical data shows work units dropped by 3.423 million from the end of 1997 to the end of 2000; the number of people working in private and individual business rose by 7.35 million; other types of employment increased 3.755 million. This trend is expected to continue in

the future.

The transfer of surplus rural labor to cities will inevitably bring about a crowding-out effect on urban employment. In addition, with the increase in the capital-labor ratio in production and the development of high technology, especially after China's WTO entry, demand for highly-skilled labor will increase while the number of people working in traditional jobs will continue to fall. Structural problems will then arise as a large, low-skilled labor force is unable to find jobs, concomitant with a shortage of labor to fill high technology job vacancies. Limited by educational background and technical capability, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the laid-off and unemployed workers to find new jobs. The re-employment rate is falling, having dropped from 50% in 1998 to 30% in 2001. In the nine months from January to September of 2002, only 773,000 laid-off workers from the state enterprises found re-employment, a mere 15% re-employment rate. Moreover, the period of unemployment has become longer, generating a disadvantaged group with difficulties re-entering the labor market.

These factors could lead ever increasing numbers of Chinese to consider migration for employment, and some provincial governments are even encouraging migration. In Anhui province, for example, the government maintains employment offices in large cities such as Shanghai to assist prospective migrant workers in finding jobs.<sup>17</sup>

## Migration trends in China

### • *China and Mongolia*

There is a trading zone near the China-Mongolia border along the railway, and cities such as Erlianhaut on the China side and Zamiin-Uud on the Mongolian side of the border attract merchants from the two countries. It was reported that more than 300,000 trips were made across the border each year from Mongolia to China in 2003. This includes those from Mongolia, Russia, and other East European countries. Due to plans such as building a free trade zone around Erlianhaut and Zamiin-Uud, as well as a new Trading Mall in Erlianhaut, it is predicted that there will be increased cross-border activity between Inner Mongolia and Mongolia in the future.

### ● *China and Russia*

Russia and China share a border over 2,000 miles long, and border crossings are common. Most Russians enter China as tourists, largely through Heilongjiang province, which recorded 612,300 visits in 2001. Russian waitresses can be found not only in Harbin restaurants, but also in Beijing and the northern provinces. Since these workers are often undocumented, the exact number is difficult to estimate.

From the 1990s an increasing number of farmers from Northeastern China went to Russia to seek jobs. According to official data provided by Russia, the actual number of permanent Chinese residents in Russian is below one million, but cross border labor migrants exceed one million. A growing number of Chinese workers crowd into Russia, mostly farmers. Russian farm owners are said to be pleased to employ these Chinese farmers due to their reputation as enduring and hard-working. The majority of these Chinese migrant laborers work in Russia's coastal provinces, however, some have moved to regions bordering the European continent for work. They are seasonal workers with legal work permits. They generally work in labor intensive Russian farms with a rather low demand for technology.

### ● *China and North Korea (DPRK)*

With the increasing trade between China and DPRK, especially after the establishment of a Free Trade Zone in China near the DPRK border, cross-border movement has become more active. DPRK has also started to build a new economic zone close to the border of China near Dandong, thus it can be expected that even more cross-border activity might follow in the future. China is currently developing the Tumen Region to encourage further trading and other cross-border activity with DPRK and between China and Russia. The Tumen (River) Region is also a tourism spot for both domestic and international tourists.

It is known that a stream of people continue to enter China from the DPRK, and are usually scattered throughout the northern part of China. Since their movement is not formally permitted, the distribution and size of this group is not clear. Estimates range from one million to 200,000 – 250,000.<sup>18</sup> Due to their undocumented status, North Koreans face many hardships. These include labor

exploitation, mental and physical abuse, and fear of exposure and arrest.<sup>19</sup>

### ● *China and Central Asia*

It is believed that frequent cross-border activity occurs in the border areas and trading posts of Xinjiang, and that there is a large stream of mobile people in the region. There is no reliable detailed information in this area, however. One issue to note is that Xinjiang has become a major drug trafficking route that bridges the Golden Triangle and Central Asia. There are groups of drug dealers and users along the route and these should be important target populations in HIV/AIDS prevention efforts.

### ● *Southeastern coastal provinces*

Coastal provinces Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang have long been major sending regions of China's cross border migrants, of which Guangdong accounted for 65% and Fujian accounted for 25%. Currently, international migration is still active in these regions, and in the last 20 years the primary destinations of migrants from these provinces include the US, Japan and European countries.

### ● *Southeast Asia and China*

Cross-border trading and tourism has been very active between Yunnan and Ganxi provinces and other neighboring countries. Residents from both sides commonly cross the border for one to three days, to visit friends or relatives as well as to conduct small business trading. This situation has changed in recent years, however, with more people crossing the border and staying longer to work. Migrant workers to China come from countries such as Burma, Vietnam, and Laos; also, many young people from Yunnan and Ganxi seek work in other Mekong countries.

## Internal migration in China

There are an estimated 100 to 150 million migrants who annually move from rural to urban areas. Due to China's registration system, internal migrants experience many of the same difficulties faced by undocumented international migrants. A Chinese citizen who moves from one city to another must register and obtain residence permits necessary to



**China's booming construction industry provides many jobs for internal migrant workers, although non-payment of these workers' wages has become a serious issue. Guangdong, China, November 2003.**

live in the city and obtain social services such as health care and education. As strong control policies exist regarding migration within China, the majority of internal migrants do not have this urban household registration. As a result, China's vast floating population not only endures a standard of living far below that of documented residents, but is also denied access to many social welfare benefits and social-mobility opportunities.

Internal migrants usually perform marginal jobs characterized by long hours, poor working conditions, low and unstable pay, and no benefits. To exacerbate the situation, some cities have enacted local regulations to protect urban residents' privileges in the labor market through an enforced labor market division, which restricts rural people from being employed in certain jobs. Although the Central Government has issued a formal request to local governments to remove such restrictions, it will most

likely take some time for local practice to change.

A number of actors have taken steps to try to improve the situation of internal migrant workers in China. Reforms include actions taken by China's State Council in January 2003, which proposed to provide migrants with the legal right to work in cities along with an end to discriminatory policies favoring urban residents. In September 2003, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) opened membership of ACFTU unions to migrant workers; it stated that 34 million migrants were members of ACFTU unions.<sup>20</sup>

The CPC Central Committee issued Document Number 1, which established a minimum wage and worked to eliminate special registration fees. Also, several cities such as Beijing and Shanghai have enacted local regulations governing migrant workers which strive to ease residency requirements and improve access to schooling and



Burmese residents in Yunnan, China, display their PRC ID cards. August 2004.

health care. For example, Beijing municipality has also eased residency requirements, whereby two-year residents can register for Beijing residency. Effective July 2004, Beijing announced a new requirement that employers must provide workers compensation insurance to employees, including migrant workers.<sup>21</sup> Shanghai and Xiamen promulgated initiatives to increase enrollment of the children of migrant workers in school.

Internal migrant workers are usually paid less than their urban counterparts, and enjoy fewer benefits. Even in large cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, the most reported problem in the workplace is overtime work. In addition, there have been reports regarding poor working conditions in some industries, such as in the footwear manufacturing industry, that greatly harm young workers' health. An investigation among migrant workers in the Pearl River Delta found that the greatest number of complaints about their workplace were noise, ventilation, and dust.<sup>22</sup>

Rural migrants also experience increased health risks. Not only do such migrants have little access to health care services for reasons including fear

and affordability, they often must also tolerate poor living conditions. These conditions can cause increased incidence of infectious disease. One study, for example, reported a high number of respiratory tract infection (RTI) among young women workers in Guangdong, probably due to poor hygienic conditions. Also, because most rural unmarried youth have little knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, and hardly any knowledge about contraception, unprotected sex often occurs.

There has also been significant migration from mainland China to Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR, and Taiwan. Treatment of these migrant workers has sometimes been controversial, particularly in Taiwan (see Taiwan Country Report, p.268 for further discussion). As this trend continues, further research and responses on these workers' issues and needs is greatly needed.

### Chinese Migrants Overseas

Statistics show that there were about 12 million Chinese citizens who went abroad in 2001. Due to

the fact that the number of overseas migrant workers is quite small compared with China's large floating population of internal migrant workers, however, more information is available on internal migration than on cross-border migration. As such, reliable data on cross-border activity and populations is scarce, and age, gender and occupational data of the population are not clear. It is generally reported that there are more men in these populations.

#### ● *Chinese migrant workers in Korea*

Trade between China and South Korea has increased rapidly since the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1991. As a result, more and more Chinese people try to seek jobs in South Korea. Ethnic Korean-Chinese took the lead, and then workers of non-Korean origin also joined them. Most come from the northeast and north of China, such as Shandong Province. At present, about 200,000 Chinese workers are employed in various businesses in South Korea, including manufacturing, construction, retail sales and food production. According to the Report of the Ministry of Labor of South Korea issued on 29 March 2003, there are 147,367 undocumented Chinese workers in South Korea.

#### ● *Chinese Migrants in Cambodia*

Cambodia's garment industry attracts a large number of Chinese skilled workers in the garment manufacturing business. Most come from Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangsu and Sichuan provinces, and are regarded as technical workers although they are mainly involved in technical direction and management. They face problems such as a large workload managing a number of workers, difficulties in cooperating with Cambodian workers and trade unions, language difficulties, and difficulties visiting their families due to the expense as well as limited time off.

There is also a growing problem of recruiters who deceive Chinese laborers into working in Cambodia without proper documentation, due in part to the lack of regulation/monitoring of labor exporters in both China and Cambodia. According to statistics, among the 7,000 migrant workers in Cambodia, only 2,000 are issued work permits by the Cambodian government. The rest are undocumented.

Due to nonstandard labor export methods, in 2002 a few Chinese workers were reported to be cheated in Phnom Pen and had no way out but to ask for the help of the Chinese embassy in Cambodia. In the first half of 2002, China's embassy in Cambodia received six batches of labor fraud cases, concerning over 100 workers.

Undocumented migration occurs in part due to Chinese workers' lack of awareness about Cambodia's labor market, and because labor cooperation between the two countries is not well organized. Therefore, the Chinese government needs to play a more active role in labor export to Cambodia and ensure that the businesses and workers complete requisite legal procedures. Information about the risks of undocumented labor migration to Cambodia should be disseminated in order to prevent other workers from being cheated.

#### ● *Chinese Migrants in Burma*

While there are currently only rudimentary studies on Chinese migrants working in Burma, it is generally known that a number of Chinese people migrate to Burma to work in karaoke bars and casinos in the country. According to the police agency in Yunnan province, there are 82 casinos near the Yunnan border. These casinos cater to Chinese customers, and in fact, it is forbidden for Burmese people to participate in gambling. Many of these Chinese gamblers are leaders and owners of state and party sectors, public services and industries, who take advantage of tourist packages and a lack of border restrictions in the area. The ease of cross-border travel also enables many Chinese migrant workers along the border to find employment opportunities at the casinos and in sex entertainment. Many of these workers live in nearby villages and cities such as Ruili, and commute across the border to work.

### Migrants in China

#### ● *Burmese*

There is a large population of Burmese migrant workers living primarily in Yunnan province, in towns such as Ruili and Jiegao. There is an established community of Burmese businessmen who have legal residence and work permits, and

who generally earn more money and have better living conditions compared to the local Chinese. There are also a number of undocumented Burmese migrant workers living in Ruili and Jiegao, however, who face a wide range of problems in China. Many of these are said to be selling drugs or working as sex workers, and their children, most of whom do not have access to schooling due to expense, language barriers and undocumented status, work as beggars (See “Migration Needs, Issues and Responses in the Greater Mekong Sub-region: A Resource Book” for further information).

Drug-related problems present serious issues for Burmese migrants, as local Burmese estimate that over 90% of Burmese deaths are caused by drug abuse, which also contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS. Ruili has the highest number of HIV-positive people in China, primarily through intravenous drug injection. Burmese sex workers also have a high risk of catching HIV/AIDS and STIs.

Due to their undocumented status and informal work, many lack sufficient food and housing, and experience difficulty accessing social services. Language problems and the comparatively higher expense of medical care also create barriers to accessing health care, and sex workers often have added difficulty because the brothels they work for may control their money and limit their physical freedom.

● *Vietnamese*

There is also a large population of Vietnamese migrants living and working in China; some are members of a community of established Vietnamese who have essentially settled in China through immigration or marriage, while there is also a population of short-term migrants who go to China to conduct trade or to work in shops in the border area. Hekou in Yunnan province and Pingxiang in Guangxi province are the main border cities between the two countries, and trade is quite significant. In the first half of 2004, total border trade between China and Vietnam amounted to USD120 million, ranking the region’s border trade as China’s third largest after Russia and the Republic of Kazakhstan. A large number of Chinese and Vietnamese cross between the two countries to conduct trade; in 2002, for example, around 1.357 million people passed through the

border at the Hekou checkpoint.

Vietnamese migrants primarily migrate from Lao Cai province and its border counties, although some also come from Yen Bai province, Phu Tho province, Hanoi and Hai Phong. The majority of cross-border mobile vendors are women aged between 16 and 26, and come to China to buy goods such as seasonal fruits and vegetables to sell in Vietnam. Some also conduct trade in Vietnamese tropical fruits and handicrafts to sell in China. These migrants are often concentrated at the border trading market areas and open small merchandise shops, restaurants or other related services.

Many short-term migrants from Vietnam work for Vietnamese-owned establishments in China. Many of these shops are family-owned by permanent Vietnamese immigrants, many of whom can speak Mandarin. This population has grown to quite large, and in Hekou accounts for 47.8% of Vietnamese migrants there.

There are also a number of Vietnamese sex workers in Hekou, the majority of whom also come from Lao Cai, as well as some from Hanoi or Hai Phong province. Hekou country has around 120 entertainment venues such as karaoke bars as well as hair salons which offer commercial sexual services. The demand for Vietnamese sex workers is said to be quite high, which may be in part due to their lower fees. Their ages generally range from 17 to 22 years old, with mainly primary school education and only basic proficiency in Chinese language. They generally work for about two years in Hekou, save up to certain amount of money and return to their villages to start families. Sometimes they will return to earn living expenses while married.

Vietnamese brides comprise a special group in cross-border migration. Starting from the late 1990s, the number of Vietnamese women marrying Chinese men increased dramatically; however, since the majority of these women did not register with the local government, the total number is difficult to estimate. They are generally distributed in the border area along the Sino-Vietnam border (Yunnan and Guangxi provinces), but their living conditions remain unknown due to lack of research. According to a women’s federation’s survey in Guangxi province, there were a total of 1,104 Vietnamese women marrying into Pingxiang,

Guangxi and 1,269 marrying into Dongxing, Guangxi in 2002. One reason for the growing prevalence of Vietnamese brides is said to be the greater male to female ratio on the Chinese side of the border (in one country measured at 115:100), while there is a larger proportion of women on the Vietnamese side (100:150). Another factor facilitating cross-border marriages is the shared language and culture amongst the many ethnic groups living on both sides of the border.

According to a survey conducted by the MMN China country research team in one county in Wenshan prefecture in Yunnan, the actual marrying ages of some of the women are 16-18 years old, below the stipulated legal marrying age under Chinese marital law. A greater part of these women did not go through any visa formalities, and after marriage in the Chinese territory, they did not go to the relevant departments to get marriage licenses. These women mostly did not go to school and almost all of them are illiterate or semi-illiterate, and cannot speak any Mandarin.

However, since the Vietnamese brides do not

have valid legal documents and experience language barriers, their living scope is limited and mainly restricted to the community. The husbands generally handle outside dealings while Vietnamese brides carry out the farm work. Information about new agricultural techniques is generally provided in Mandarin, but the wives' inability to understand the language hinders agricultural production, therefore they cannot improve their impoverished living conditions. The lack of legal documents causes a great deal of worry to these Vietnamese brides, who fear they may be deported if discovered. Also, since they cannot settle legally in China, their children's residential registrations (Hukou) are not easily resolved. Though children without legal documents have no problems going to school in the village, they encounter difficulties when it comes time for continuing education or finding a job.

### *Trafficking*

Trafficking in China occurs both domestically and internationally. Within China, the phenomenon has spread throughout the country, although women and



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**Vietnamese vendors and entrepreneurs sell Vietnamese products along the Jinming Market in "Vietnam street". Sex workers usually work in entertainment places on the second or third floors of this market. Hekou, August, 2004.**

children in border regions such as Yunnan and Guangxi are particularly vulnerable. Victims are often trafficked for marriage to other regions in China, including Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Guangdong and Henan.

In transnational trafficking, traffickers traffic women and children to Southeast Asian countries, mainly Thailand and Malaysia, for sex work. It is also noted that transnational trafficking is bi-directional: on one hand, traffickers abduct Chinese women to Thailand and Malaysia; on the other hand, traffickers bring Vietnamese women and children into China. Factors such as improved roadways, wage discrepancies and increased demand for sex workers in Southeast Asia has led to fears that trafficking will increase. The traffickers often garner huge profits, and it is feared that increasing demand will also enlarge the scale of transnational trafficking.

Currently, the only statistical measure available in regard to trafficking incidence in China are police records and reports from victims' families, although these numbers are unreliable and generally far lower than the actual number of victims. Many families do not report their missing children to the police, while others may delay reporting, which often results in the inability of the police to track down and/or prosecute traffickers due to lack of evidence. According to the police's statistics, for example, from 1991 to November 1996, there were only 467 cases of transnational trafficking in Yunnan Province, of which 85 were Chinese women and 467 were Burmese and Vietnamese women.

Police records also indicate that 1,293 traffickers were arrested, of which 137 were foreigners. The police also rescued 147 women from outside the country, while rescuing 284 Vietnamese women in China (mainly in Yunnan province). Although the Chinese government has reinforced its efforts to stop trafficking in women and children, traffickers continue their activities due to the large profits to be gained. Instead, traffickers have merely adopted more shady and cunning methods, which has made it harder for the police to carry out anti-trafficking initiatives. A number of recent phenomena have been noted as to traffickers' methods. While in the past trafficking networks have usually been made up of independent

operators, organized crime gangs that can oversee the entire process are increasingly dominating the trade. Often these gangs are members of the same family or clan. Also, as more and more rural women migrate for work, traffickers are moving from villages to labor markets, often luring victims with offers of legitimate work. According to the NBS, 60% to 70% of abductions by traffickers now take place in labor markets. Once almost exclusively dominated by men, the human trafficking industry now sees women and girls playing major roles, for example in luring other women and girls – even their own friends and classmates – by inviting them on seemingly innocent day-trips or offering them non-existent jobs. The potential victims are much more likely to trust a woman, especially a familiar one.

### Responses

Similar to many other countries in Asia, many of the government's responses to mobility/migration issues have focused on anti-trafficking and HIV/AIDS prevention measures.

The police have linked up with groups such as the Women's League as well as international organizations to develop anti-trafficking measures and rescue trafficked women. Local governments, such as that in Piangxiang have also implemented public education programs and awareness raising on trafficking issues. Local governments have also cooperated with IGOs on anti-trafficking projects. The Yunnan government, for example, takes part in the ILO Mekong Sub-regional Project to Combat Trafficking and Women and Children, as does the Yunnan provincial Women's League.

The Chinese and Vietnamese governments have also implemented coordinated measures on STD and HIV/AIDS prevention, and have held semi-annual conferences to exchange information and discuss strategies for future cooperation. Local governments have also linked up with international and local NGOs to provide educational materials and programs on HIV/AIDS prevention. In border areas, these materials are available in migrants' languages. Trainings have also been conducted on prevention measures.

## Endnotes

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