

China

Response to Information Request Number:	CHN99001.ZNK
Date:	6 October 1998
Subject:	China: Questions on Family Registries
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
Keywords:	China / Internal migration / Freedom of movement / Freedom of residence / Population transfers / Urbanization

Query:

Family Registries

What are the procedures, conditions, and circumstances for obtaining family registries in the People's Republic of China?

What would constitute reasonable circumstances for a denial of issuance of a family registry?

What are the procedures, conditions, and circumstances for amending family registries?

Response:

In China, everyone is born with a household registration (hukou), an official place of residence registered with the local office of the Public Security Bureau, or in rural areas, with the county or township government office. Each household is issued a booklet, listing household members by their sex, age, marital status, work unit, and class background. The hukou was introduced in the 1960s all across China as a method of demographic, political, and economic control. The booklet is necessary to obtain food rations, housing, schooling, employment and medical services, and is used in the allocation of birth control and social welfare. (*International Migration Review* Winter 1993,797, DIRB September 1993, *FEER* 10 March 1994, 27).

According to a spokesperson at the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Ottawa contacted by Canada's Research Directorate of the Immigration and Refugee Board, all moves, births, and deaths are recorded in the household register. While the booklet is kept by each family, changes are made only by the Public Security Bureau. If a person changes his or her address, a transfer of the household registration must be applied for at the Public Security Bureau. (DIRB 29 March 1990).

However, since the economic reforms of 1978, the system of household registrations has been eroding. "The need for a supplemental work force in the areas of fastest economic growth has led to official tolerance for a large itinerant population which is not in compliance with formal requirements to obtain permission to change residence. However, because this itinerant population lacks official status, access to housing, schooling, and full range of employment opportunities can be restricted." (*Country Reports* 1993, 1994, 612).

With the economic reforms contributing to the breakdown of the hukou system, the government began to look for ways to replace the system, including a study by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in February 1994 on how to streamline and eliminate

the system. (*FEER*, 10 March 1994, 27). In January 1995, the Ministries of Public Security and Personnel and Labour issued a joint circular aimed at reforming the household registration system. The joint circular states that: "people applying for a trans-city or trans-county moving will have to obtain a written permission for their moving from a local public security bureau in the city or county where they intend to move. With this written permission, they can approach the local public security where they lived and apply for a removal permit. The public security bureau in the city or county where a person is moving to will, after checking his removal permit, issue a formal removal permit to him. A person who has obtained a formal removal from the public security bureau will be thus allowed to move in and go through formalities for his settling down in the new city or county" (DIRB 3 February 1995).

While control over the household registrations is strictly regulated by the Public Security Bureau, hukou's can be purchased, and officials can be bribed to overlook hukou irregularities. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the *China Business Times* estimated in 1994 that three million household registrations have been sold, with local officials earning bribes of 25 million yuan (*FEER* 10 March 1994, 28).

Thus, a person in China obtains a family registry at the time he is born, and entered into the family registry of his parents. The family registry can only officially be amended through the Public Security Bureau. A family registry will not be denied; however, permission to change one's residence may be denied by the Public Security Bureau, refusing to provide written permission to move, or refusing to issue a removal permit.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

References:

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