CHAPTER 13


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Abstract

Researchers generally hold that during the more than twenty years of the era of collectivization, it was difficult for rural citizens to pick up and move, and that there was very little population mobility in rural society at this time. Analysis of population movements in rural areas of the border region between Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong shows that a trickle of rural population movement did occur during the era of collectivization. There was some movement of urban population to the countryside as well as movement of rural laborers into cities. There were also movements of population within the countryside. During this era, population movements were, to a large extent, organized and executed by the government. In general, members of China’s rural population who moved during this time moved mostly toward the countryside and mountainous regions.

Keywords

era of collectivization – Gan-Min-Yue Border Region – population – movement

In this essay the border region between Jiangxi, Fujian, and Guangdong Provinces refers to the large area covering the Southeast of Jiangxi, the West of Fujian, and the Northeast of Guangdong, encompassing the Wuyi Mountains.

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2 Translator’s Note: Hereafter referred to as the Gan-Min-Yue Border Region, adopting the abbreviated names for the three provinces.
3 Here the “Southeast of Jiangxi” refers to the county and city level administrative districts of Xunwu, Huichang, Ruijin, Shicheng, Ningdu, Xingguo, Yudu, Anyuan, Gan County, Ganzhou,
and spanning the Jiulian Mountains. This essay will refer to this region as the Gan-Min-Yue Border Region [“Gan” being short for Jiangxi, “Min” being short for Fujian, and “Yue” being short for Guangdong]. This is a mountainous area where road networks are not well developed, and distances from political and economic centers are far. These are impoverished regions of all three provinces. In this essay I shall focus attention on these mountainous rural areas that are relatively isolated and socioeconomically underdeveloped to answer the following questions. During the era of collectivization, was there nearly no movement of the rural population? If there were movements, then how did the people move? My goal is to focus on the microcosm of the Gan-Min-Yue Border Region in order to piece together the overall pattern of rural population movements across the country.

1 The Urban Movement of “Going to the Countryside”

During the “Great Leap Forward,” a large number of rural laborers entered cities, causing a sudden inflation to urban populations and subsequent supply shortages, helping to trigger the introduction of government policies that bifurcated China’s population into urban and rural. As urban centers became saturated and grew less able to absorb the annual increases to the number of unemployed, governments adopted administrative measures to create a “green channel” for siphoning excess urban population off to the countryside, which led to a great countercurrent population flow in which people moved in large numbers from towns and cities to rural areas, a phenomenon scarcely observed in all of Chinese history. There were three groups of them.

The first group consisted of surplus urban population that resulted from the downsizing of the urban workforce, many of whom had originally come from the countryside. As explained earlier, too many had moved to towns and cities during the Great Leap Forward. When this proved to overwhelm urban supplies, the state adopted drastic measures to correct the situation. Chen Youzhen 陈友桢 (fifty years old), who had lived on Beimiaqian Street 北庙前街

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4 In this essay, “population movement” generally refers to changes in area of household registration, changes in area of residence, and changes in area of work (i.e. leaving the village).