

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# Arrival City

Doug Saunders

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## About the Book

We are currently in the middle of the largest migration in human history, as over two billion people - a third of humanity - move from rural to urban areas. The stage on which this epic migration is taking place is the Arrival City, a new urban space which will radically alter our future.

The Arrival City exists on the fringes of established cities - in the slums, in the suburbs, in the immigrant quarters of both the western and the developing worlds.

If understood and dealt with properly, these peripheral enclaves transform the fortunes of both the family who makes it through, and the established city itself. If not, they become breeding grounds for violence, revolution and war.

In *Arrival City*, award-winning journalist Doug Saunders travels across the globe, from London and Europe to Iran, India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Kenya and China, and reports back from the front lines of this Great Migration, the last of its kind that humanity will experience. The stories he uncovers are by turns chilling and inspiring, carry implications for immigration, social mobility and criminal underworlds, and demonstrate that this fascinating new phenomenon can be both tragic and life-changing.

## About the Author

DOUG SAUNDERS IS the European Bureau Chief of the *Globe and Mail* and the author of a popular and award-winning column devoted to intellectual ideas and social developments behind the news. He has won four National Newspaper Awards and lives in London with his wife and two children.

# ARRIVAL

How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping our World

# CITY

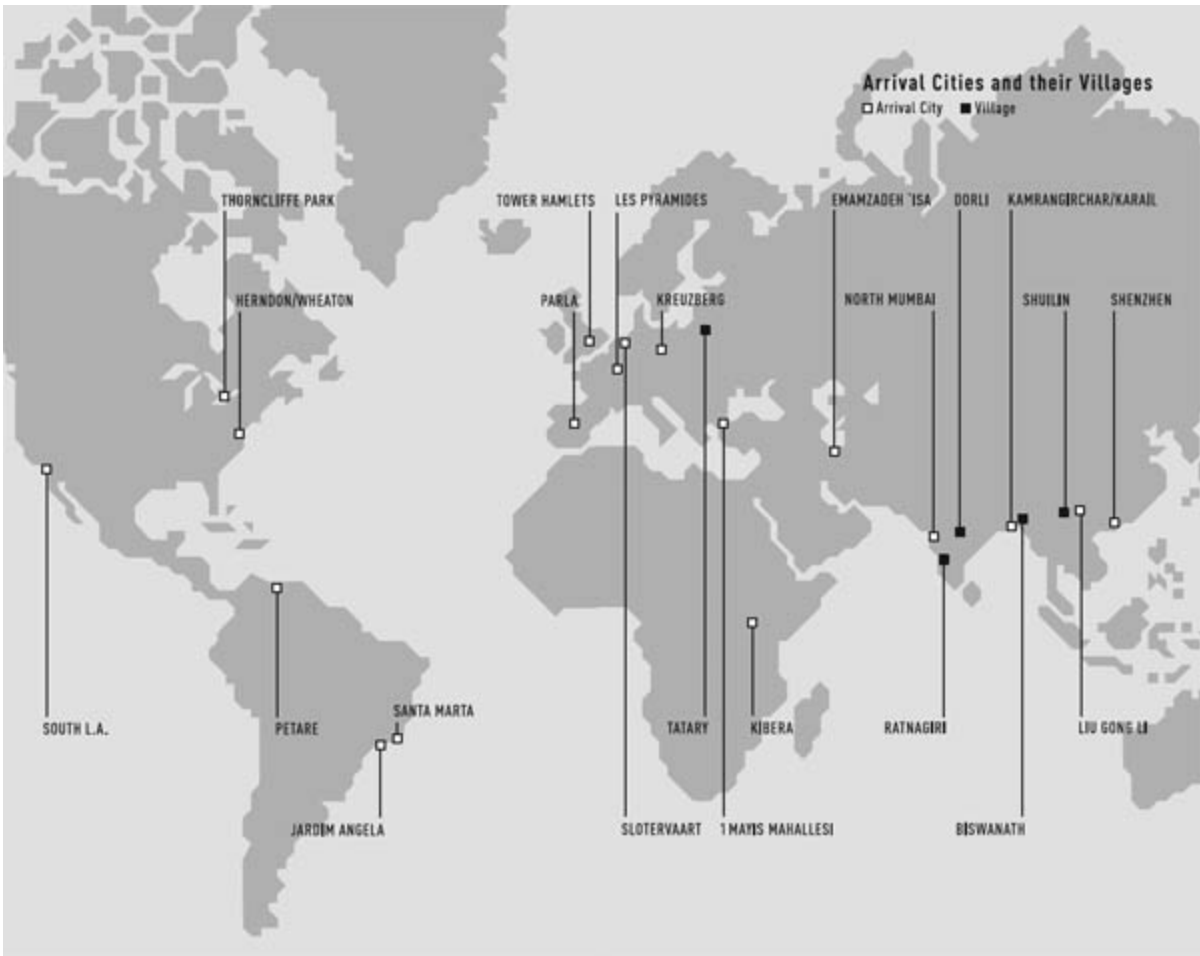
DOUG SAUNDERS



WILLIAM HEINEMANN: LONDON

For Elizabeth Renzetti





# PREFACE

## THE PLACE WHERE EVERYTHING CHANGES

WHAT WILL BE remembered about the twenty-first century, more than anything else except perhaps the effects of a changing climate, is the great, and final, shift of human populations out of rural, agricultural life and into cities. We will end this century as a wholly urban species. This movement engages an unprecedented number of people—two or three billion humans, perhaps a third of the world's population—and will affect almost everyone in tangible ways. It will be the last human movement of this size and scope; in fact, the changes it makes to family life, from large agrarian families to small urban ones, will put an end to the major theme of human history, continuous population growth.

The last time humans made such a dramatic migration, in Europe and the New World between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the direct effect was a complete reinvention of human thought, governance, technology and welfare. Mass urbanization produced the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and, with them, the enormous social and political changes of the previous two centuries. Yet this narrative of human change was not to be found in the newspapers of the 1840s or the parliamentary debates of the early twentieth century; the

city-bound migration and the rise of new, transitional urban enclaves was a story largely unknown to the people directly affected by it. And the catastrophes of mismanaged urbanization—the human miseries and revolutionary uprisings and wars—were often a direct result of this blindness: we failed to account for this influx of people, and in the process created urban communities of recent arrivals who became trapped, excluded, resentful. Much of the history of this age was the history of deracinated people, deprived of franchise, making urgent and sometimes violent attempts to gain a standing in the urban order.

If we make a similar mistake today and dismiss the great migration as a negligible effect, as a background noise or a fate of others that we can avoid in our own countries, we are in danger of suffering far larger explosions and ruptures. Some aspects of this great migration are already unfolding in front of us: the tensions over immigration in the United States, Europe and Australia; the political explosions in Iran, Venezuela, Mumbai, Amsterdam, the outskirts of Paris. But many of the changes and discontinuities are not being noticed at all. We do not understand this migration because we do not know how to look at it. We do not know where to look. We have no place, no name, for the locus of our new world.

In my journalistic travels, I developed the habit of introducing myself to new cities by riding subway and tram routes to the end of the line, or into the hidden interstices and inaccessible corners of the urban core, and examining the places that extended before me. These are always fascinating, bustling, unattractive, improvised, difficult places, full of new people and big plans. My trip to the edge was not always by choice: I have found myself drawn by news events to the northern reaches of Mumbai, the dusty edges of Tehran, the hillside folds of São Paulo and Mexico City, the smouldering apartment-block fringes of Paris and Amsterdam and Los Angeles. What I found in these places

were people who had been born in villages, who had their minds and ambitions fixed on the symbolic centre of the city, and who were engaged in a struggle of monumental scope to find a basic and lasting berth in the city for their children.

This ex-rural population, I found, was creating strikingly similar urban spaces all over the world: spaces whose physical appearance varied but whose basic set of functions, whose network of human relationships, was distinct and identifiable. And there was a contiguous, standardized pattern of institutions, customs, conflicts and frustrations being built and felt in these places across the poor expanses of the “developing” world and in the large, wealthy cities of the West. We need to devote far more attention to these places, for they are not just the sites of potential conflict and violence but also the neighbourhoods where the transition from poverty occurs, where the next middle class is forged, where the next generation’s dreams, movements and governments are created. At a time when the effectiveness and basic purpose of foreign aid have become matters of deep and well-deserved scepticism, I believe that these transitional urban spaces offer a solution. It is here, rather than at the “macro” state or “micro” household level, that serious and sustained investments from governments and agencies are most likely to create lasting and incorruptible benefit.

In researching this book, I have visited about 20 such places, in an effort to find key examples of the changes that are transforming cities and villages in far more countries. This is not an atlas of arrival or a universal guide to the great migration. Equally fascinating developments are occurring in Lima, Lagos, Cairo, Karachi, Calcutta, Jakarta, Beijing, Marrakesh, Manila. Nor is this book without precedent. Scholars in migration studies, urban studies, sociology, geography, anthropology and economics have

documented the phenomena described here, and many of them have generously assisted me with my work.

But the larger message is lost to many citizens and leaders: the great migration of humans is manifesting itself in the creation of a special kind of urban place. These transitional spaces—arrival cities—are the places where the next great economic and cultural boom will be born, or where the next great explosion of violence will occur. The difference depends on our ability to notice, and our willingness to engage.

# 1

## ON THE EDGE OF THE CITY

Liu Gong Li, China

IT BEGINS WITH a village. To an outsider, the village seems fixed, timeless, devoid of motion or change, isolated from the larger world. We consign it to nature. To those who might glance at its jumble of low buildings from a passing vehicle, the village seems a tranquil place of ordered, subtle beauty. We imagine a pleasant rhythm of life, free from the strains of modernity. Its small cluster of weathered shacks is nestled into the crest of a modest valley. A few animals move in their pens, children run along the edge of a field, a thin plume of smoke rises from one of the huts, an old man strolls in the patch of forest on the crest, a cloth sack on his back.

The man is named Xu Qin Quan, and he is searching for a cure. He walks down the ancient stone pathway alongside terraced fields toward the small glade on the valley floor, as members of his family have done for 10 generations. Here he finds the remedies he has known since childhood: the slender stalks of *ma huang*, for sweating away a cold; the leafy branches of *gou qi zi*, for mending the liver. He slices the stalks with his pocket knife, stacks them in his bag and walks back to the crest. There, he stands for a while,

looking at the eruptions of dust rising to the north, where a construction crew is turning the narrow, bumpy road into a broad, paved boulevard. A journey north to Chongqing and back, once an all-day affair, will soon take no more than two hours. Mr. Xu watches the dust plumes turn the distant trees ochre. He considers the larger suffering, the pain that has racked their lives and killed their children and held them in decades of food panic followed by years of paralyzing tedium. That night, at a village meeting, he proffers the larger cure. After tonight, he says, we shall stop being a village.

It is 1995, and the village is called Liu Gong Li. Very little about its appearance, its families or its thoroughly unmechanized cultivation of wheat and corn has changed in centuries. It got its name, which means Six Kilometres, during the building of the Burma Road, when the great inland city of Chongqing was the eastern terminus. That name, for decades after the Second World War, was a fantasy, for the original bridge to the big city had been bombed, and the nearest replacement, many kilometres away, was impassable enough to make the journey economically pointless, even if the Communist Party had allowed it. The little village had no connection to any city, or any market. It farmed for itself. The soil, and the rudimentary farming methods, never provided quite enough food for everyone. Every few years, the vicissitudes of weather and politics would produce a famine, and people would die, children would starve. In the terrible years of 1959 through 1961, the village lost a large portion of its population. Starvation ended two decades later, replaced by a scraping, passionless dependency on government subsidies. In Liu Gong Li, as in peasant villages around the world, nobody sees rural life as tranquil, or natural, or as anything but a monotonous, frightening gamble. In the final decade of the twentieth century, when China embraced a form of capitalism, the villages here were suddenly

permitted to develop non-arable land for market purposes. So when Mr. Xu suggested his remedy, there was no dissension: all the land would be declared non-arable. From that moment, it stopped being a village and became a destination for villagers.

Fifteen years later, Liu Gong Li reveals itself as a spectre at the side of a traffic-clotted four-lane boulevard a kilometre into the city: amidst a forest of apartment towers, there unfolds a glimmering mirage of grey and brown cubes cascading across hillsides as far as the eye can see, an utterly random crystal formation that has obliterated the landscape. Closer, the crystals materialize into houses and shops, jagged brick and concrete dwellings of two or three storeys assembled by their occupants without plan or permission, cantilevered over one another, jutting at unlikely angles. Within 10 years of Mr. Xu's prescription, his village of 70 had gained more than 10,000 residents; within a dozen years, it had fused with neighbouring ex-villages into a solid agglomeration of 120,000 people, few of whom officially reside here. It is no longer a distant village, or even a place on the far outskirts; it is a key and integral part of Chongqing, a city of some 10 million people packed in and around a skyscraper peninsula that resembles Manhattan in both its density of population and its intensity of activity. With more than 200,000 people a year being added to its population and 4 million unregistered migrants within its borders, it is very likely the world's fastest-growing city.<sup>[fn1](#)</sup>

That growth is largely driven by the multiplication of places like Liu Gong Li, self-built settlements of rural escapees, known in China simply as urban "villages" (*cun*), hundreds of which flourish around the city's perimeter, even if city authorities do not acknowledge their existence. Their streets and blocks are tightly organized by the villages and regions from which their residents come; residents refer to their urban neighbours who've arrived



from their own rural regions as *tongxiang*—literally “homies.” At least 40 million peasants join these urban enclaves across China each year, though a good number—perhaps half—end up returning to their rural village, out of hardship, desperation or personal taste. Those who stay tend to be deeply determined.

To an outsider, Liu Gong Li is a fetid slum. The old pathway into the valley is now a busy street overhung with a shambles of thrown-together houses, its dirt laneway lined with phone shops, butchers, huge steaming woks full of pungent peppers at streetside eateries, merchants hawking clothes, tools, fast-spinning bobbins of thread, a cacophony of commerce spiralling away for two kilometres into dizzying back pathways and snaking staircases whose ungrounded perspectives resemble an upturned Escher engraving. Electrical and cable television lines fill the air; raw sewage spills from the concrete, runs down the sides of buildings, cascades along open gutters into a terrible stinking river beneath the concrete bridges at the foot of the valley. Garbage and waste are seemingly everywhere, accumulating in a small mountain behind the houses. A chaos of vehicles with two, three and four wheels clots every lane. There is no space without people, without activity, and none to be seen with greenery. It might seem, from this vantage, that this is a hellish refuge for the destitute, a last-ditch landing pad for the failed outcasts of an enormous nation—a place for those on the way downward.

The true nature of places like Liu Gong Li becomes evident when you walk off the main lane into the rough dirt side streets that descend into the valley. Behind each window, each crude opening in the concrete, is a clatter of activity. On the crest of the valley, near the place where Mr. Xu made his big decision in 1995, you are drawn to a noisy cinder-block rectangle, jammed into a steep corner, exuding a pleasant cedar scent. It is the shop-cum-home of

39-year-old Wang Jian and his family. Four years before, Mr. Wang moved here from the village of Nan Chung, 80 kilometres away, with the money he had saved from two years of carpentry work, a total of 700 renminbi (\$102).<sup>fn2</sup> He rented a tiny room, accumulated some scrap wood and iron and began building, by hand, traditional Chinese wooden bathtubs, which have become popular with the new middle class. These took two days to make, and he sold them for a profit of R50 (\$7.30) each. After a year, he had earned enough to get power tools and a bigger shop. He brought over his wife, his son, his son's wife and their infant grandson. They all sleep, cook, wash and eat in a windowless area in the back, behind a plastic curtain, in a space that is even more exposed and cramped than the dirt-floor hut they endured in the village.

But there is no talk of returning: this, filth and all, is the better life. "Here, you can turn your grandchildren into successful people if you find the right way to make a living—in the village you can only live," says Mr. Wang, in boisterous Sichuan dialect, as he bends an iron strap around a tub. "I'd say about a fifth of the people who've left my village have ended up starting their own businesses. And almost everybody has left the village—there are just old people left. It has become a hollow village."

Mr. Wang and his wife still send a third of their earnings back to the village, to support their two surviving retired parents, and the year before, he'd bought a small restaurant down the road in Liu Gong Li, for his son to run. Mr. Wang's margins are tiny, because the competition is intense: there are 12 other wood-bathtub factories in Chongqing, one of them also located in Liu Gong Li. "Mine has the highest output," he says, "but we're not necessarily the most profitable." So it will be years of saving, and hoping for the best in the bathtub trade, before they will be able to buy their own apartment, send their grandson to university and get out of Liu Gong Li—although by then, if

the dream comes true, Liu Gong Li might have evolved into the sort of place where they'd want to stay.

All down the valley, the grey cubism materializes into a quilt of tiny, officially non-existent industries hidden behind ramshackle concrete slum buildings. Down the street from the bathtub shop is an exceptionally noisy place where 20 employees are making metal security railings; a little farther, a shop making custom walk-in refrigerators; a powdered-paint blending shop; a place churning out computer-guided embroidery patterns on half a dozen massive machines; a factory making electric-motor windings; a sour-smelling place where barely teenaged workers hunched over heat-sealing machines make inflatable beach toys; similar family shops, of every description, making shop displays, vinyl-frame windows, extruded industrial air-conditioning ducts, cheap wood cabinetry, ornamental wooden bed frames, high-voltage transformers, computer-lathe-milled motorcycle parts and stainless-steel restaurant range hoods. These factories, most of whose goods are destined for Asian consumers, were all launched during the previous dozen years by villagers who arrived here or by the former employees of the first wave of villagers.

In every unpainted concrete cube, it is the same rhythm of arrival, struggle, support, saving, planning, calculation. Everyone who lives in Liu Gong Li, and all 120,000 people in this strip of land, has arrived, since 1995, from a rural village. Everyone who remains here beyond a few months has decided to stay for the long haul, despite the filth and the crowding and the difficulty of life, and even though their children are often left behind with family members back in the village, because they have decided that it is a better life. Most have endured extraordinarily long odysseys of self-denial and austere deprivation. Almost all send money, quite often almost all of their earnings, back to support the village and put some into savings for their

children's education here in the city. All are engaged in a daily calculation that involves the unbearable burden of rural deprivation, the impossible expense of full-fledged urban life and the broken pathway of opportunities that might someday form a bridge between the two.

In other words, the main function of this place is *arrival*. Liu Gong Li, like millions of other new and peripheral urban neighbourhoods around the world, performs a specific set of functions. It is not merely a place for living and working, for sleeping and eating and shopping; it is most importantly a place of transition. Almost all of its important activities, beyond mere survival, exist to bring villagers, and entire villages, into the urban sphere, into the centre of social and economic life, into education and acculturation and belonging, into sustainable prosperity. The arrival city is both populated with people in transition—for it turns outsiders into central, “core” urbanites with sustainable social, economic and political futures in the city—and is itself a place in transition, for its streets, homes and established families will either someday become part of the core city itself or will fail and decay into poverty or be destroyed.

The arrival city can be readily distinguished from other urban neighbourhoods, not only by its rural-immigrant population, its improvised appearance and ever-changing nature, but also by the constant linkages it makes, from every street and every house and every workplace, in two directions. It is linked in a lasting and intensive way to its *originating villages*, constantly sending people and money and knowledge back and forth, making possible the next wave of migrations from the village, facilitating within the village the care of older generations and the education of younger ones, financing the improvement of the village. And it is linked in important and deeply engaged ways to the *established city*. Its political institutions, business relationships, social networks and transactions are all

footholds intended to give new village arrivals a purchase, however fragile, on the edge of the larger society, and to give them a place to push themselves, and their children, further into the centre, into acceptability, into connectedness. Liu Gong Li makes many things, sells many things and houses many people, but all with one overarching goal, one project that unites its mad range of activities. Liu Gong Li is an *arrival city*. Here, on the periphery, is the new centre of the world.

At the crest of the valley, a short, steep walk up the curved gravel road from the factory-packed valley floor, is an especially dense conglomeration of concrete buildings. If you enter an alley behind a small restaurant, then cut through a labyrinth of tunnels and narrow passageways surrounded by high walls, you will reach a small grey courtyard. It is a tranquil spot amidst the chaos of the slum, with low wooden stools surrounding a small table. The air is filled with the pungent smells of Sichuan cooking and the remote sounds of motors, babies crying, shouted commands, horns. Crouched near the table is an old man, dressed in the traditional green cloth jacket and beaten canvas shoes of a peasant, and a Nike baseball cap. Beside him is a conical bamboo hat filled with herbs he has gathered on a walk in a little-known green patch at the far end of the valley, behind the five-storey garbage mountain that covers most of the old glade.

This is Xu Qin Quan, the cure-gatherer and village patriarch, still living in exactly the same spot at the centre of Liu Gong Li. The shift to urban life has made him a wealthy man: from his rental earnings, he has housed most of his family members in condominium apartments costing \$75,000 each, or 10 years' earnings for a manager. He alone stays here, close to his medicinal trove. The "village" is still owned collectively by its original residents, and it is still legally a village. This means that none of the hundreds

of dwellings here, other than this one, fully belong to their owners, even though many have purchased title deeds from the collective and buy and sell their houses for profit. The thriving property market has driven rents and unofficial land prices upward, giving the village-migrant “owners” a source of capital through rent, sublease and property speculation—none of it official or taxed—which they often use to launch businesses. At any moment, the city authorities could bulldoze the whole district and either throw all 120,000 residents out or move them into apartment blocks with clean, official garment factories next door. China has done this to hundreds of such neighbourhoods, disrupting the lives and economic relationships of families that have invested everything in this urban foothold. Liu Gong Li’s founders are confident that they have at least a decade before this happens.

Officials from the Chongqing People’s Congress tell me vaguely that they someday want to turn their entire megalopolis into a place without shantytown settlements, replacing them with neat workers’ dormitories and private apartments built around industrial centres. But they also tell me that they want to urbanize as fast as possible, at a rate of growth that cannot possibly be absorbed without an exponential increase in these high-density informal settlements. There may be several thousand housing towers under construction around Chongqing on any given day (all by private companies), but the budget for housing is dwarfed by the influx of people, and village arrivals are still officially excluded from housing unless they’re able to earn enough money to afford it on the private market. The arrival city is not a temporary anomaly. In inland Chinese cities, these arrival-city “villages” have become intrinsic if unacknowledged parts of the city’s growth plan, its economy and its way of life.

“My tenants are generally people who want very badly to become urban residents, but only a fraction will be able

to do so," Mr. Xu tells me, as his daughters prepare a lavish meal for the June dragon-boat festival. "They often don't make enough money to save anything, and it's becoming too expensive for them. Unless things change here, a lot of them will have to move back. We all want to quit being peasants, and China wants us to become city-dwellers now, but they've made it so difficult to get there."

Indeed, a great many of Liu Gong Li's residents are like Wang Zhen Lei, 36, and her husband, Shu Wei Dong, 34, who spend their nights in a two-by-three-metre room, built of drywall sheets hung from thin wood joists half a metre below the poured-concrete ceiling of a couples' dormitory that is home to a dozen similar chambers, the whole structure cantilevered precariously over a fetid stream. The sole window is barred and covered, except a 60-centimetre slit at the top; light comes from bare incandescent bulbs. Ten hours a day, and often on weekends, they sew garments at work tables in an adjoining concrete room, its walls coated in a shag of lint, equally barren except for a colour TV showing a constant stream of Chinese soap operas. The factory, with 30 sewing tables, is owned by a man who moved from a distant village to Liu Gong Li in 1996, initially as a garment worker himself, and who pays his workers by the piece; they earn between \$200 and \$400 a month. The dormitory room is provided free (which is not the case in all factories). Mrs. Wang and Mr. Shu's life here consists of exactly 29 possessions, including four chopsticks and a mobile phone; they have never seen the great city of Chongqing beyond Liu Gong Li's streets. Each month, they keep \$45 for food and \$30 to cover expenses, and send all the rest back to their village, to support their daughter's secondary-school education and to feed their parents, who raise their daughter.

For 11 years, beginning in 1993, the two of them lived in more modern and somewhat less cryptlike worker dormitories in Shenzhen, the all-industrial city in the Pearl

River Delta, 1,500 kilometres south. The garment factories there, which made goods for Western companies, had better working conditions and paid more. But they discovered a serious flaw: in Shenzhen, there was no prospect of arrival. No matter how much the couple saved, they could never afford an apartment, and the city offered them no option of purchasing a piece of shantytown housing, of the sort that dominates Liu Gong Li, because none exists in the planned city of Shenzhen. And they had no chance of seeing their beloved daughter, except once a year during Chinese New Year. There was, in short, no future. They moved north, in a painful bargain: they would have a family nearby, and maybe a future for their daughter and their parents in the city, in exchange for working most of the rest of their lives in a pit of lonely darkness.

Like so many people here, and around the world today, they have staked their entire lives on their daughter's education—something they know is not much better than an even bet. "We all want to have our kids stay in school and get into university so they don't have to work in a factory like this," Mrs. Wang says. "But if my daughter doesn't get in, I would accept the alternative, which is still better than the village—she works in this factory like we do."

For every 20 families like them in Liu Gong Li, there is one like Xian Guang Quan's clan. He and his wife arrived as illiterate peasants, spent years sleeping on open-air slabs on construction sites, moved into a concrete hut in Liu Gong Li, and saved. In 2007, they moved across the road into a 10-storey apartment building that was constructed by Mr. Xian, 46, and his crew. It's a rudimentary structure of unpainted red bricks with a raw-concrete staircase running up the centre, but the Xian family have turned their apartment's spacious interior into something palatial: attractively tiled floors with big swathes of empty space, bright wallpaper, modernist chandeliers, a big orange



sectional sofa, a large plasma TV and surround-sound system. Mr. Xian, a heavyset man with a balding pate and a permanent smile, spends his spare hours on shopping trips downtown or lengthy smoke-filled mah-jong games with his old village friends, a truly middle-class lifestyle, backed by a genuine middle-class income, that belies the six years he spent here, not long ago, exposed to the elements, with no money or possessions.

He came from the village of Shi Long, more than 100 kilometres away, in 1992, shortly after China's economy liberalized and the government began tolerating some peasant mobility. It was a move of desperation, from a farm where six of them slept in a tiny dirt-floor straw hut. Buildings were beginning to rise in Chongqing, replacing the ancient wood-gable houses with crude high-rises, and there was a demand for construction labour. He had only his hands, his wits and his wife. She cooked for construction crews, and he worked, at first for 50 to 75 cents a day, plus meals of rice, which contained pork every five days, and the right to sleep on the site. They spent their nights wrapped in sheets on the foundations of buildings, joining hundreds of thousands of other homeless workers in the city.

They sent all of their income back to Shi Long, and went years without seeing their daughter. They joined China's "floating population" of between 150 million and 200 million people. Under the country's rigid household-registration (*hukou*) system, people living in the city but holding village registration papers are not entitled to urban housing, welfare, medical care or access to schooling for their children in the city. After reforms to the *hukou* system at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it became possible for migrants to apply for urban *hukou*—but this is in practice virtually impossible, and means giving up their village homes. Very few peasants are able to do this in the first generation, because China's primary-education, child-

care, welfare and unemployment insurance systems are not even remotely sufficient to support the precarious life of a new city-dweller. So as many as a sixth of the Chinese population are neither villagers nor official urbanites.

Xian Guang Quan was determined to break into genuine urban life. In 1998, he organized 20 of his fellow village workers into a building crew and began operating as a company. They weren't registered or accredited to national standards, which would have required an urban *hukou*. The money became good, reaching the comfortable middle-class level of \$15,000 a year, and up to \$30,000 in good years. Despite their financial security, Mr. Xian and his wife kept living in a tiny concrete hut they had bought in Liu Gong Li. "We could have lived in a better place when we first made our fortune in the late '90s, but we didn't want to take that risk," he told me. "First we had to put our daughter through school, set up our elders in the village with proper brick houses—we needed large amounts of money for future security in savings."

This need for poor village migrants to sacrifice much of their earnings to health, education and emergency savings is exactly what has kept thousands of Liu Gong Li residents like Mrs. Wang trapped in an uncomfortable world that is neither urban nor rural, isolating them from their own children, preventing them from becoming full members of the country's economy. To mutual disadvantage, the Chinese state barely touches their lives. Mr. Xian broke through that barrier by hatching a plan. He gathered 14 of his most successful construction-worker friends, and they each pooled \$15,000 to build three 10-storey apartment buildings across the road from Liu Gong Li, in a settlement they gave a pleasant-sounding name that translates rather awkwardly to "Ethnic National New Village." One building would provide them with an income—they would rent its small apartments to "the farmers," as he calls the new village arrivals. The second would contain factory spaces

for sale, as well as shopfronts on the ground level. And the third would contain 15 large condominiums for him and his partners. With this scheme, and 15 years of deprivation and saving, Mr. Xian and his mates were able to realize the dream of arrival.

It is rare, anywhere in the world, to find a family that grew up on a dirt floor and made it, in the same generation, into the middle-class world of mortgages and shopping malls. Many more people are like Pu Jun, 32, a slender and somewhat awkward man who works in one of the scores of villager-owned factories at the bottom of the valley. This particular factory, unlike its neighbours, is quiet, neat, airy, and plunged into a perpetual darkness that gives it the air of a minimalist cathedral; its 30 employees do the difficult work of refurbishing high-voltage transformers, intricate, toxin-filled devices the size of a car. Mr. Pu is a trained and experienced technician, educated in a trade school near his village in eastern Sichuan and seasoned in Shenzhen's factories, a background that should be a ticket to middle-class security.

Yet when I met him in the factory one afternoon, he was in a mood of quiet anxiety, discreetly trying to absorb a blow that seemed to throw the whole venture into question. At the moment, he had \$150 in his pocket, leaving him wondering how he'd find the remaining \$15 for the month's rent. This from a man who had spent five years spending nothing on himself. He had been able to tell his two young children, only three months earlier, that they could look forward to living with him in the city by the end of the year.

But things had suddenly gone wrong. His father, 61, had come down with an illness that proved hard to diagnose and required constant medication. The anti-seizure pills, in a medical system that is far from free, now eat up a third of Mr. Pu's income, which is mainly devoted to supporting his children in the village. He had already endured a series of setbacks, including a disastrously failed attempt at shifting

his village farm to fruit trees and the unplanned-for birth of his second child. And his marriage had collapsed. This last, in arrival cities around the world, is not uncommon: the transition to urban life places a terrible strain on marriages. But in Mr. Pu's case it was the end of this estrangement, just a few weeks earlier, that had cost more: his wife, who works as a dim sum server for \$150 a month, had built up considerable debts trying to live on her own. "Now has become my worst time ever," he said plainly. "We lived apart, and when we live apart we fight, and we get to forget each other's common goals—we forgot that the goal is to build a future together. And suddenly I'm having to support three generations."

Now, if nothing else goes wrong, he expects it will be three more years before he will be able to live in the same house as his children, send them to school in the city and end his family's peasant history forever. When work slows, he grasps the worn and creased photo of his son, Ming Lin, 6, and daughter, Dong, 4, and quietly whispers to them. He aches for their presence. "I hope the kids will understand someday—understand why we were away so much, understand why we were never there for them when they were learning about the world, and understand the sacrifice we made. I believe we can make it up to them. We want to provide them with a better future than we've experienced. For now," he says, using a Chinese phrase that is almost a mantra in the arrival city, "we will have to eat the bitterness."

The ex-villager enclave within the city, located on the periphery of our vision and beyond the tourist maps, has become the setting of the world's next chapter, driven by exertion and promise, battered by violence and death, strangled by neglect and misunderstanding. History is being written, and largely ignored, in places like Liu Gong Li, or in Clichy-sous-Bois, on the outskirts of Paris, or in

Dharavi, the almost million-strong arrival city in Mumbai, or in the Latino arrival city of Compton, on the edge of Los Angeles—all places settled by people who have arrived from the village, all places that function to propel people into the core life of the city and to send support back to the next wave of arrivals. Arrival cities are known around the world by many names: as the slums, *favelas*, *bustees*, *bidonvilles*, *ashwaiyyat*, shantytowns, *kampongs*, urban villages, *gecekondular* and barrios of the developing world, but also as the immigrant neighbourhoods, ethnic districts, *banlieues difficiles*, *Plattenbau* developments, Chinatowns, Little Indias, Hispanic quarters, urban slums and migrant suburbs of wealthy countries, which are themselves each year absorbing two million people, mainly villagers, from the developing world.

I am coining the term “arrival city” to unite these places, because our conventional scholarly and bureaucratic language—“immigrant gateway,” “community of primary settlement”—misrepresents them by disguising their dynamic nature, their transitory role. When we look at arrival cities, we tend to see them as fixed entities: an accumulation of inexpensive dwellings containing poor people, usually in less than salubrious conditions. In the language of urban planners and governments, these enclaves are too often defined as static appendages, cancerous growths on an otherwise healthy city. Their residents are seen, in the words of the former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “as an ecologically defined group rather than as part of the social system.”<sup>1</sup>

This leads to tragic urban-housing policies in the West, of the sort that made Paris erupt into riots in 2005, London in the 1980s, Amsterdam into murderous violence in the first decade of this century. It leads to even worse policies in the cities of Asia, Africa and South America, to slum-clearance projects in which the futures of tens or hundreds of thousands of people are recklessly erased. Or, in an

alternative version offered in popular books and movies, arrival cities are written off as contiguous extensions of a dystopian “planet of slums,” a homogenous netherworld in which the static poor are consigned to prisonlike neighbourhoods guarded by hostile police, abused by exploitative corporations and preyed upon by parasitic evangelical religions.<sup>2</sup> This is certainly the fate of many arrival cities, after they have been deprived of their fluid structure or abandoned by the state. Yet to see this as their normal condition is to ignore the arrival city’s great success: it is, in the most successful parts of both the developing world and the Western world, the key instrument in creating a new middle class, abolishing the horrors of rural poverty and ending inequality.<sup>fn3</sup>

Rather than dismissing these neighbourhoods as changeless entities or mere locations, we need to start seeing them as a set of functions. The first arrival-city function is the creation and maintenance of a *network*: a web of human relationships connecting village to arrival city to established city. These networks, aided by communications technology, money transfers and more traditional family and village relationships, provide a sense of protection and security (always of primary importance in the arrival city); they generate a sense of leadership and political representation; they give the arrival-city enclave a self-identity. Second, the arrival city functions as an *entry mechanism*. It not only takes people in, by providing cheap housing and assistance finding entry-level jobs (through the networks), but it also makes possible the next wave of arrivals in a process known as chain migration: the arrival city sends cash and provides basic lines of credit to the village, it arranges jobs and marriages across international boundaries and sets up schemes to circumvent immigration restrictions. Third, the arrival city functions as an *urban establishment platform*: it provides informal resources that allow the village migrant, after saving and becoming part of