

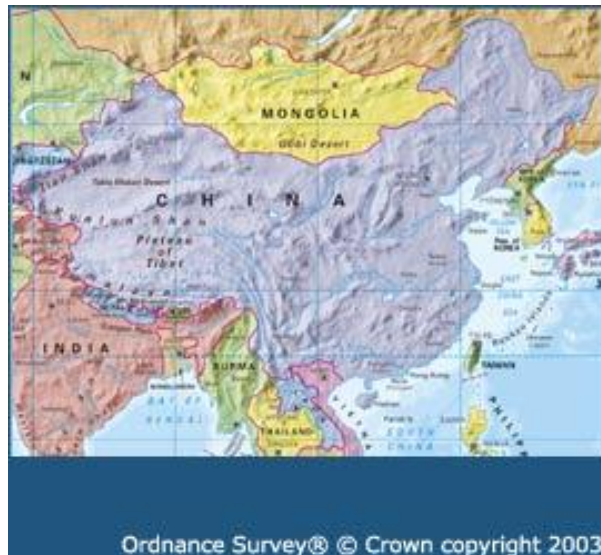
Roboraptor!



What's he got to do with migration?

What has rural migration (people moving from the country to the cities) got to do with a 36-inch tall plastic statue with a long tail, two huge clawed feet, a noisy roar and an electronic brain the size of a calculator? The geography of *Roboraptor* - the must-have toy of Christmas 2005 - connects the demands of UK school-children with the fates of millions of penniless young Chinese men and women. Leaving their homes in the countryside, every year countless numbers head for the city of Dongguan, where they will work long shifts in “Santa’s workshop”.

Every decade, *hundreds of millions* of people born into *rural poverty* in poorer nations *make their way to towns* and cities in *search of work denied to them in areas of over-populated countryside*. The run up to Christmas is a particularly good time to find work in Chinese cities, just before western shopping spending peaks over the holiday season.



In 2005, one of the most popular items on UK high streets was Roboraptor, selling at around **£80**. The product was manufactured by a Chinese company Wah Shing Toys using very cheap labour. After it was shown at a toy fair early in 2005, orders poured in from retailers around the world. Wah Shing responded by producing **60,000 Roboraptors a day**, each assembled from **132** plastic parts, **235** metal ones and **191** electrical components.

Dongguan, where Wah Shing are based, is in the southeast province of Guangdong, known as “Santa’s workshop” because so many of the world’s toys are made there. **Working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the factory produced 1.5 million Roboraptors during 2005.**

The workforce was **more than doubled** from 3,000 to 7,000, absorbing plenty of rural migrants into the bargain, **especially women** who the firm prefer to employ for the **handling of small delicate parts on the assembly line**.

And what are the costs and benefits of the production of these kind of consumer items? The **pay is poor**, at 574 yuan (£41) for a very, very long **60-hour week** of work. It is also work that **cannot offer security**. Workers **often lose their jobs** when the Christmas production period ends. **But without this temporary work, would not some migrants fare even worse? What else could they do?**

There are **costs to the environment too**. Large amounts of **energy** are used **making** parts, **assembling** them (parts need to be heated to between 180°C and 280°C) and **transporting** them to markets, via lorry to Hong Kong and then by sea to Europe (17 days) and North America.

A RURAL MIGRANT'S STORY: WANG XIAO AN

Wang Xiao An has been working at Wah Shing for a year, operating the machines that inject molten plastic into moulds to create the raptor's body parts. Why did he make the journey from his distant rural home? "It's very simple," he says. "I'm here to earn money. I come from a poor family in Shanxi province. My parents are farmers. If I work in this factory, I can help them by sending money home." Wang has picked up a little English, which he uses to demonstrate his ambition to the first foreigner he has ever met. "One day," he says, "I want to be a boss."

Summary *Migration to cities in China is triggered by the search for work. Employment opportunities are available due to the global shift of manufacturing to countries like China. However, rural migrants face challenges once they begin to work in these industries. The fates of migrant workers in China are thus connected with High Street shopping habits in Britain.*

Source: Based on *The Guardian* 22 December 2005

