

In the future, there is no denying that acute environmental degradation could cause substantial, environmentally motivated population movements. Beyond concerns over land degradation, there is a fear that global warming will cause a rise in sea levels and that this would force millions to flee coastal cities and low-lying agricultural land. But the extreme degree of degradation required to foster such massive shifts, the assumption that countries would be willing and able to take action to mitigate pressures for emigration at the source, and the potential recipient countries' unwillingness to accept immigrants on such a massive scale, do not make large population movements inevitable or even likely, except on a limited regional basis. The general view that environmental stress will result in emigrants from the developing countries, specifically China, that could overwhelm the developed countries is unwarranted at this time.

It is worth restating that this does not mean that emigration from China and all the international security fears this may raise are of little concern.⁴⁰ In China, worsening economic conditions, social unrest and political instability could encourage potentially destabilizing out-migration. More plausible than the "Mad Max" scenario, however, is a lesser degree of environmental degradation, coupled with economic dissatisfaction and a political crisis that could produce a wave of emigrants. Large-scale migration would likely seek to move to Southeast Asia, Japan and the western countries with sizeable ethnic Chinese communities, such as the United States and Canada. Yet, while Chinese emigrants may seek admittance to these countries, it does not mean that they would be willingly accepted, as countries such as Japan have not traditionally welcomed newcomers.⁴¹

5.3 China's Economic Reform and Growth Strategy⁴²

In 1981, the Chinese leadership set the goal of quadrupling China's 1980 per capita GNP by the year 2000 in order to raise the people's standard of living to a

⁴⁰A case in point is the smuggling of people into developed countries by organized Chinese gangs.

⁴¹Takashi Sugimoto's view is that China has the potential for large-scale emigration that might threaten the stability of other countries.

⁴²Parts of this section draw from Stephen Lavergne, "China 2000: The Nature of Growth and Canada's Economic Interests," Policy Staff Paper No. 94/10, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, May 1994,