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**Studying Migration in Contemporary China:
Models And Methods, Issues and Evidence**

Zusammenfassung: Nach einem kurzen Überblick über die aktuelle Debatte zur Migrationspolitik in China erörtert der Aufsatz die Reichweite verschiedener Migrationstheorien und ihre Anwendbarkeit auf China. Da ihre allgemeinen Aussagen zu Ursachen-Wirkungs-Zusammenhängen der Migration für den chinesischen Fall nur begrenzt gültig sind, werden chinesische Spezifika analysiert und in einem für China adaptierten Migrationsmodell zusammengefasst. Der Aufsatz beschäftigt sich sodann mit Definitionen und Methoden von Migrationserhebungen in China und leistet eine kritische Bestandsaufnahme des bis 1996 verfügbaren Datenmaterials. Dabei wird letzteres hinsichtlich seiner Herkunft und Repräsentativität, Vergleichbarkeit und Aussagekraft für die wichtigsten migrationspolitischen Probleme geprüft.

Schlagworte: Bevölkerung, Migration, Theorien, Methoden, Quellen

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Abstract: After a brief overview of the current debate on migration policies in China the study discusses the reach of various migration theories and their applicability for China. Since their generalized statements on causes and effects of migration show certain limits for the Chinese case, Chinese specifics are analyzed and then summarized in an adapted migration model for China. The article then investigates definitions and methods used by Chinese migration surveys and scrutinizes data sources available up to 1996. The critical evaluation concentrates on the origin and representativeness, comparability and relevance of data in regard to major issues of migration policy.

Key words: Population, migration, theories, methods, sources

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STUDYING MIGRATION IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA: MODELS AND METHODS, ISSUES AND EVIDENCE*

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Aspects of Migration in China

Reducing mortality was the main consideration of Chinese population policy in the 1950s and 60s. It was followed by attention to high fertility which has become the dominant motive for birth control ever since the 1970s. Beginning with the second half of the 1980s, migration has developed into yet another focal point of Chinese demographic development. This puts China on a par with most other parts of the world where population movement likewise has become a major issue of social, economic and political concern. Economic reforms and the loosening of political control over social dynamics have produced an extent of mobility unknown in the recent history of the country. This mobility directed at the cities and booming coastal regions of the country is harking back to long-range trends starting in the pre-socialist period. It has largely replaced the late-Maoist pattern of stiff migration controls designed for the prevention of rural exodus to China's cities, forced rustication for unemployed urbanites and resettlement to the hinterland. On balance, the performance of these programmes has been disappointing. In many cases, they have ended up in a back-flow of settlers and qualified personnel to their areas of origin.

Instead of government intervention, spontaneous population movement within a slowly emerging labour market has evolved into the dominant form of mobility today. Just as in other areas of social policy, however, the degree to which market forces are allowed to take over command has been highly controversial. The rear battles of a socialist state in retreat and an enduring rural-urban conflict of interests have served as checks against total liberalisation and as powerful motives for maintaining the last, yet increasingly eroded barriers against the complete freedom of movement within the country. But these still remaining barriers are constantly battered by the forces released through the growing privatisation of the economy and the commercialisation of all spheres of life. Most important, they are called into question by the need to combat massive rural under-employment which has surfaced with decollectivization. Despite emphasis on labour-intensive job-creation schemes for idle peasants, the relocation of the rural labour force from agriculture to other sectors keeps being one of the most urgent problems of contemporary China. It is heightened by manpower projections for the next three decades which predict a net increase of some 230-250 mio. job-seekers as a consequence of high fertility in the past. In the minds of all actors, the spectre of open unemployment on a mass-scale therefore has been a constant companion of the more genial spirits guiding China into future affluence.

This is the setting for a surge in rural-urban migration which is signalling the rapid transformation of a country hitherto overwhelmingly agrarian in character. It is an epochal event. With a global delay of one century and a further retardation by two decades of Maoist policies directed against city growth, the urbanisation of the world's most populous country has begun in earnest. The movement from the countryside to the cities will change the very fabric of Chinese society: The redefinition of roles for peasants and urbanites will effect their economic performance, it will change the social stratification of the country, bring about a new pattern of rights and duties for various groups and ultimately have its political repercussions, too. The numbers of people involved in these processes are daunting. Driven by the promise of economic progress, they also carry with them the dangers of infrastructural, social and institutional break-down to the Chinese cities.

In view of these dangers, the government is trying to stem the tide by upholding its discriminatory policies against rural-urban migrants embodied in the household registration system. Torn between the wish to

* This article draws on collaborative survey work, secondary analysis of mass statistics, documentary analysis and the reading of both Western and Chinese literature. Besides, it is also informed by background interviews with Chinese administrators and academic experts during repeated research visits to China. Since sources for the historical and theoretical argument are too numerous, references there are very selective. Citations are more complete for those parts of the introduction covering definitional questions and data sources for China.

unleash the economic forces motivating migration on the one hand side and the urge to preserve the status quo and the power that goes along with it on the other hand, it is performing social and political brinkmanship in trying to keep up control of population movement. Attempts to channel rural migration away from the big cities and to prevent itinerant workers from becoming permanent migrants have characterised the official approach for a long time. But these policies have been repeatedly modified by the requirements of continuing economic reforms such as measures to raise productivity and reduce over-staffing in rural non-agricultural enterprises or to cut the urban wage-bill by employing cheap labour power from the villages. There are unmistakable signs that it becomes harder to reach consensus on such issues as various government agencies and regional authorities are beginning to voice the interests of their different constituencies: Hinterland provinces, which are lagging in economic development and have become eager exporters of their redundant labour power, are poised against coastal areas struggling to preserve their recently acquired wealth and welfare levels. The Ministry of Labour responsible for the well-being of city workers finds itself replaying its age-old conflict with the Ministry of Agriculture promoting peasant interest in urban jobs and remittance contributions to rural budgets. Finally, academia and the whole urban society have become involved in an intense and sometimes impassioned debate on the merits versus the faults of migration.¹

In this debate, rising personal incomes, better services and trading opportunities available through migrant labour and the newly gained freedom to choose the place of work are presented as the promises of increased population movement. A host of articles rejoicing in the beneficial impact of city-bound migration for economic growth, income generation, complementary job creation and occupational training have been appearing during the last years. But they keep struggling with the other view of the newcomer: the dirty migrant, the beggar and criminal, the snatcher of jobs and undertaker of urban civilisation evading proper registration and birth control. Given the problems of labour redundancy in state enterprises, the potential conflicts over jobs and wages, the heavy burdens for urban services and the growing insecurity in the cities, the debate also reflects the danger of urban unrest should economic growth falter and fail to offset the social costs of rising prosperity.

These are the political stakes involved in the process. They colour the highly varying assessments of migration in academic discourse, political judgement and popular attitudes. Pictures range from former Politburo member Song Jian's haunting vision of a 'lifting of sluice-gates washing away Chinese cities' to the more benign image of migration as the new 'glue holding society together when traditional moorings collapse'. The internal Chinese debate has spilled over into international reports on the wave of migration in China which has been both cited as a reason for the imminent destruction of the country and a sign of its unfailing ascent to wealth and power.² Such discussions take place in the enduring presence of a political system that has been discarded in other parts of the world. Bureaucratic institutions and control of published information, state ownership of industries and many social policies still betray the influence of the former belief in socialist ideology. Migration is taking place within the framework created by this structure, respecting and undermining it at the same time. In the era of economic reforms, it is the changes in information flows and job-searching avenues, income distribution and employment patterns which most clearly demonstrate the extent of fundamental changes of the Chinese body politic.

Of course, migration problems are not unique to China. In many respects they are just a variation of a world-wide predicament that can be observed in other developing nations, too. A number of questions therefore resemble issues under discussion elsewhere. In particular, this holds true for the economic and social aspects of the new rural-urban interchanges brought about by the reform policies of the last two decades. For a long time the debate on migration in China has focused on its effects for employment and the urban labour market. On the background of the challenging labour force projections referred to above this will remain a critical area to watch. Just as important, though, are the consequences of migration for the composition of the village labour force and the long-range trends in rural investment and consumption. A further crucial question will be whether movement of peasants is restricted to short-distance commuting for non-agricultural work in township and town enterprises, whether it entails longer circulatory sojourns in urban places with land holdings at home being kept, or whether it ends up in a lasting rush away from the villages. Chinese debates phrase this as the distinction between 'leaving the land, but not the village (li tu

¹ For a selection of major contributions and a bibliography of more than thousand academic monographs and articles published in China between 1984 and 1995 see: Ji Dangsheng and Shao Qin, ed., *Zhongguo renkou liudong taishe yu guanli (Population Mobility and Regulation in China)*, Beijing 1995.

² Song Jian, Tuan Chi-hsien and Yu Jingyuan, *Population Control in China, Theory and Applications*, New York 1985, p.209-210; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 10, 1994 and April 4, 1996 (with the latter quotation).

bu li xiang)', 'leaving the village, but not the land (li xiang bu li tu)' and 'leaving the land and the village (li tu you li xiang)'.

While the rural-urban migration stream has caught most of the public attention, rising mobility includes other types of movement with different patterns of interaction, too. This pertains to urban-urban interchanges which are more limited in volume but yet can assume major importance in contexts such as the rotation system for leading cadres, the transfer of technicians, specialists and qualified workers or the labour market for persons with academic qualifications. Rural-rural migrations in turn play an important role in the marriage behaviour of peasants. In addition, they have continued to perform their historical function as a safety valve for releasing rural surplus labour from the densely populated core regions to the periphery of the country. Last not least, there are the urban-rural migrations which have been an important aspect of former mass campaigns and preoccupied the ideologues of the 1960s and 70s. They have become reduced to a trickle once the social and administrative pressures in their favour ceased.

Population movement in China thus has both increased in scope and changed in nature to a large extent, evolving into one of the major concerns of the reform period. In this process, paradigms and over-all judgements have been changing more than once. In the past, China and its policy of curbing urban growth was presented as the shining exception to Third World over-urbanisation. This has been replaced by the image of a country with two decades of urbanisation and modernisation foregone. Urban settlements, which in the eyes of the peasant revolutionaries of yore were a drain on China's resources, have been rehabilitated as inherently positive symbols of progress. During three decades of an intermediate strategy of small-town development, rural industries have thrived and managed to take in a large part of the redundant agricultural labour force. But since the early 1990s, we start to read about the low productivity and the labour absorption problems, the environmental problems, the dissipation of investment and materials entailed by that scheme. While village industries and small towns are certainly not abandoned today, their further growth is balanced by a renewed attention to economics of scale and the advantages of concentration. Cities are greeted as the harbingers of wealth and progress and plans for the construction of many more of them are unveiled.

Migration seems to be a complicated and many-faceted subject with contradictory features - which it has been in Western history, too. While it is happening in an environment characterised by some persisting peculiarities of the Chinese case, the growing economic and social freedoms in the country have brought it closer to world-wide patterns. It is necessary to take it out of the hands of the ideologues and submit it to empirical and comparative study. All empirical study, however, is guided by theory proposing causal relationships, crucial aspects of behaviour and adequate methods of study. It is on this background that a brief look at migration theories and their explanatory power for China seems to be in place.

Migration Theories in the Chinese Context

As the most complex area of demographic research, migration studies have neither succeeded in establishing an all-encompassing grand theory nor have they been able to develop universally accepted conclusions.³ Geographical, sociological, psychological and economic approaches have focused on different aspects of population movement. Although decades of discussions have at least produced consensus on a number of indicators, dominant motives and methodological approaches, paradigms have constantly shifted in order to account for changes in political, economic and social conditions only partially following predictions. Indicative for the general situation in development studies, the multitude of hypotheses, arguments and lines of reasoning is bewildering.

³ For overviews of migration theories see: Yap, Lorene Y.L., *Internal Migration in Less Developed Countries, A Survey of the Literature*, Washington 1975; Wittmann, Heinz, *Migrationstheorien*, Saarbrücken 1975; Todaro, Michael P., *Internal Migration in Developing Countries, A Review of Theory, Evidence, Methodology and Research Priorities*, Geneva 1976; Findley, Sally, *Planning for Internal Migration, A Review of Issues and Policies in Developing Countries*, Washington 1977; United Nations, ed., *Population Distribution Policies in Development Planning*, New York 1981; De Jong, Gordon F., and Gardner, Robert W., ed., *Migration Decision Making, Multidisciplinary Approaches to Microlevel Studies in Developed and Developing Countries*, New York 1981; Jackson, J.A., *Migration*, London 1986; Oberai, A.S., *Migration, Urbanisation and Development*, Geneva 1987.

With his 'Laws of Migration' published in 1885 and 1889, Ernst Georg Ravenstein is the ancestor of all attempts at model building. Although his rough sketch of general trends in migrant behaviour does not justify the claim to elaborate universally valid 'laws', it nevertheless provides some generalisations which by and large have stood the test of time. Still applicable today seem to be his pointed remarks on migration decreasing with the distance between two places, on the connection between migration streams and counterstreams, on the importance of the rural-urban divide, the role of technological progress in fostering population movement and the usual predominance of economic motives in migration decisions.⁴ These phenomena have reasserted their validity for the Chinese case once political fiat in migration matters decreased in importance. But other theses of Ravenstein such as migration taking place in stages or disproportionately favouring females either have to await further research or must be qualified. Migration studies have revealed large differences in sex composition and varying patterns of spatial progression. Moreover, Ravenstein's 'laws' do not take account of temporal changes in migration caused by different stages of economic and social development.

Economic geographers Walter Christaller and August Lösch with their theories of central places and standard market areas have broken ground for an understanding of rural-urban linkages and movement caused by the availability of crucial goods in a hierarchically ordered system of urban settlements.⁵ Their work inspired William Skinner's investigation of market areas in rural Sichuan and his research on the role of regional systems in the whole of China. These works analyse the situation in the pre-revolutionary period. Their conclusions on the relative lack of functional integration between Chinese macroregions have been debated. Given the better availability of data for the present period, a continuation of this research would be desirable. In the context of migration studies, it would throw light on population movement within market regions, the distances and interactions involved. This first of all concerns short-term mobility and commuting for work and schooling, for requiring administrative functions, obtaining commercial goods and services. But it also implies more sustained changes of residence from lower-order to higher-order central places, from the periphery to the core.⁶ While some first work on this line has begun, the delimitation of functional areas by identification of trade flows, patterns of tertiary services and resulting mobility remains a key problem of empirical research. It requires systematic data and large-scale survey work rather than intermittent snap-shot reports.

Other geographical approaches in migration studies are represented by the 'gravity' models developed by Zipf, Stouffer and Lowry⁷, which have been elaborating on the function of spatial distance and city size in population movement. Among them, the formula proposed by Lowry is clearly the most comprehensive attempt at generalisation. Besides the distance between two places, it incorporates differences in wage levels, volume of non-agricultural employment and unemployment rates as determining factors for predicting migration. Studies from most parts of the world indicate that these are major variables in the migration record, indeed. They mark the blending of geographical approaches with labour market theory. Application of the concept for China, though, has to struggle with a number of difficulties to be discussed later on.

One problem of gravity models has been their non-applicability to analysis on the regional level where no distances can be measured. A further question has been how to quantify a constant term that has been worked into all formulas in order to express other determining factors apart from distance and the

⁴ Ravenstein, E.G., 'The Laws of Migration', in: *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. XLVIII, Part 2, London 1885, pp. 167-227; *ibid.*, Vol. LII, London 1889, pp. 241-301.

⁵ Christaller, Walter, *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland, Eine ökonomisch-geographische Untersuchung über die Gesetzmäßigkeit der Verbreitung und Entwicklung der Siedlungen mit städtischen Funktionen*, Jena 1933; Lösch, August, *Die räumliche Ordnung der Wirtschaft, Eine Untersuchung über Standort, Wirtschaftsgebiete und internationalen Handel*, Jena 1940.

⁶ Skinner, William, 'Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China', Parts 1-3, in: *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 24, Ann Arbor 1964-65, pp. 3-43, 195-228, 363-399; Skinner, William, 'Cities and the Hierarchy of Local Systems', in: Skinner, William, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China*, Stanford 1971, pp. 275-351. See also the discussion by Barbara Sands, Ramon Myers, Daniel Little and Joseph Escherick in: *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4, Ann Arbor 1986, pp. 721-743; *ibid.*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Ann Arbor 1989, pp. 90-99. For first results of a recent project see Skinner's 'Differential Development in Lingnan', in: Lyons, Thomas P., and Nee, Victor, ed. *The Economic Transformation of South China, Reform and Development in the Post-Mao Era*, Ithaca 1994, pp. 17-54.

⁷ Stouffer, Samuel A., 'Intervening Opportunities: A Theory Relating Mobility and Distance', in: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. V, Menasha 1940, pp. 845-867; Zipf, George Kingsley, 'The P(1)P(2) / D Hypothesis: On the Intercity Movement of Person', in: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. XII, Albany 1946, pp. 677-686; Stouffer, Samuel A., 'Intervening Opportunities and Competing Migrants', in: *Journal of Regional Science*, Vol. II, Philadelphia 1960, pp. 1-26; Lowry, Ira S., *Migration and Metropolitan Growth: Two Analytical Models*, San Francisco 1966.

variables referred to above. Such other factors would be important items as, for instance, economic and social structure, business cycles or different development levels. It is in recognition of this problem that more recent versions of the models have stretched the notion of 'distance' to include aspects such as differences in social relationships, leisure time value or housing conditions between places of out- and in-migration. The increasing complexity of formulas, however, has been offset by their decreasing suitability for operationalisation. A final basic constraint of gravity models has been their inability to account for temporal change. At best, they can elegantly sum up cross-sectional analyses. But even in this respect, they are all too often hampered by lack of sufficiently disaggregated data on the sub-provincial level. This holds true for China just as for most other countries.

A major step forward in migration studies was the introduction of Lee's widely accepted discussion of push- and pull-factors as well as his theses on intervening obstacles.⁸ As a sociologist, Lee stressed that migration dynamics involve personal factors and never follow completely rational considerations. His intervening obstacles precluding push- and pull-factors from fully taking effect include cognition and perception, transportation costs and legal impediments, stages of the life-cycle and political constraints. In contrast to Stouffer, they are primarily perceived as obstacles rather than opportunities. Moreover, Lee underlined that migration streams often follow well defined pathways created by access to specific information and contacts with predecessors in migration. The majority of these qualifications are most opportune for the Chinese case where political variables, legal regulations and information policies of the state have greatly influenced migration patterns, while personal networks have worked as a major force of circumvention and facilitation. In Lee's list, only transportation costs can be discounted as a major obstacle for migration in China.

Another contribution of Lee were his comments on the selectivity of migrants which turned them from the gross figure for an undifferentiated mass used in the gravity models into an internally structured group. Key observations were that push-factors, which drive away the disprivileged, and pull-factors, which attract the better-off, often produce a bimodal distribution of migrant characteristics such as educational level and occupational status. In his assessment, the educational attainment of migrants increased with the difficulty of intervening obstacles and the distances covered. And migrants tended to cluster in younger age-groups entering the labour force and getting married. Most of these observations seem to be inherently plausible and have been confirmed by a number of surveys. However, they easily disguise the wide variety of migrant selectivity existing in different environments and time periods. While migration studies of European, Latin American and African nations have revealed notable deviations in different countries, a closer look at China suggests that it is appropriate to adopt further regional differentiation within large territories. One variable not mentioned by Lee but of paramount significance is the role of kinship ties. These have been shown to play a major role in the migrant behaviour of other developing countries, too - a role much greater than assumed by studies based on the West European experience only.⁹ Kinship ties facilitate the transmission of information, the provision of jobs, housing and credit, they are all-pervasive in Chinese social life and have reasserted their importance in the post-revolutionary period.

Often, sociological or psychological theories are confronted with the problem that a number of psychic or social categories are hard to operationalise and to quantify in suitable indicators. Examples are attempts to subdivide decision-making processes into stages or to discuss value-expectancy. Categories that are unmeasurable, however, make it well nigh impossible to weigh their explanatory power - though this objection does not invalidate these concepts as such. At first sight, economic migration theories do not suffer from such defects as they operate with better defined and easier to quantify variables such as investment and growth rates in the non-agricultural sector, wage levels, employment figures and labour productivity. Furthermore, they have the advantage of working with time series that allow to discuss temporal change and causal factors. Economic thought starts with the assumptions of neo-classical theory on migration as an equilibration mechanism for labour and wages within a dualistic economic

⁸ Lee, Everett S., 'A Theory of Migration', in: *Demography*, Vol. III, No.1, Chicago 1966, pp. 47-57.

⁹ For comparative discussions of migration in different countries see among others: Du Toit, Brian, and Safa, Helen I., ed., *Migration and Urbanization, Models and Adaptive Strategies*, Den Haag 1975; Todaro, Michael P., op. cit.; Perlman, Janice E., *The Myth of Marginality, Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro*, Berkeley 1976; Richmond, Anthony H., and Kubat, Daniel, ed., *Internal Migration, The New World and the Third World*, Beverly Hills 1976; Brown, Alan A., and Neuberger, Egon, ed., *Internal Migration, A Comparative Perspective*, New York 1977; Pryor, Robin J., *Migration and Development in South-East Asia, A Demographic Perspective*, Oxford 1979; Hauser, Philip M., Suits, Daniel B., and Ogawa Naohiro, ed., *Urbanization and Migration in ASEAN Development*, Tokyo 1985.

system.¹⁰ That system is perceived as consisting of a fast growing, urban-based, modern industrial sector with high productivity and a traditional agrarian sector characterised by peasant self-sufficiency, correspondingly low degrees of commercialisation and productivity as well as a rising level of disguised unemployment. With marginal productivity in agriculture equalling zero or even reaching negative values, migration to the cities releases surplus labour and lessens rural consumption. It was thought to continue until surplus labour reserves were depleted, rural and urban incomes had become equilibrated and urban areas were starting to suffer from rising costs for agricultural supplies. An underlying assumption was that rapid economic growth in the cities and urban industries in need of labour power could accommodate the influx from the villages. Other versions of neo-classic theory also expected that capital would flow to low-wage areas in the countryside, contributing to the eventual equilibrium thereby.

Criticism of these assumptions has focused on the lack of attention to the seasonal character of rural underemployment and the unsuitability of urban labour concepts for the countryside, the failure to discuss investments necessary for job-creation or to consider declining demand for labour power due to technological change. Moreover, the theories dwelled on macro-economic developments without considering migration decisions on the micro-level. In particular, they were unable to explain why some people left their rural areas of origin while others stayed. It was in reaction to such arguments that Sjaastad developed his concept of migration gains and costs which also managed to internalise non-monetary items. Migration was posited to take place if returns exceeded costs and justified human capital investments in training and movement over lifetime.¹¹ While Sjaastad has been widely received as far as his reasoning about the private balance of gains and losses is concerned, his rather cursory remarks on the social costs and returns of migration remain open to much debate.

Another major departure was Zelinsky's theory of mobility transition which related different migration streams to different stages of economic, social and political development in Western countries. His notion of pre-modern immobility, though, has been challenged by reference to the extent of spatial circulation among both peasants and elites in traditional societies worldwide. Moreover, the applicability of his concept to China is not only restricted by different historical circumstances as far as colonial history and the politico-economic system is concerned but also suffers from the fact that mobility transition and demographic transition here are not interrelated in the same way as they are in the West. Typically enough, the modifications proposed for retaining the mobility transition thesis are rather vague and nowhere approach the precision necessary for projection and planning.¹²

The harshest criticism of neo-classical theory has come from those who did not envision equilibrium but rather a malign process with a rural skill-drain and high dependency ratios, decreasing investment and reduced income in backward areas accumulating to produce ever-widening regional disparities.¹³ Furthermore, the hypotheses on the free play of market forces and the capacity of the modern urban sector for a seemingly unlimited absorption of rural surplus labour have met with censure. In the 1960s and 70s, they have been contradicted by the experience of large-scale urban unemployment in developing countries which has only receded in the East Asian boom economies of the last decade. The idea of a free interplay between rural labour supply and urban labour demand has been further challenged by the notion of segmented labour markets which deny the freedom of choice to unskilled labour, are governed by protectionism for the organised urban work-force and split between a high-wage formal sector and a low-wage informal one. The most influential proponent of segmented labour markets has been Todaro with his attention to probabilities for obtaining a job, his distinction of real and expected wage differences and his reference to rising urban unemployment due to a rural exodus exceeding job expansion in the cities. This line of reasoning has undergone a number of qualifications. It has been augmented by the addition of occupation-specific segments of the labour market along regional community

¹⁰ Lewis, W.A., 'Economic Development With Unlimited Supplies of Labour', in: *Manchester School of Economic and Social Studies*, Vol. XXII, No.2, Manchester 1954, pp. 139-191; Hirschman, A.O., *The Strategy of Economic Development*, New Haven 1958; Fei, J.C.H., and Ranis, G., 'A Theory of Economic Development', in: *American Economic Review*, Vol. V, No. 4, New York 1961, pp. 533-565.

¹¹ Sjaastad, Larry A., 'The Costs and Returns of Human Migration', in: *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 70, No.5, Part 2, Chicago 1962, pp. 80-93. Compare also: Hart, R.A., 'Economic Expectations and the Decision to Migrate: An Analysis by Socio-Economic Group', in: *Regional Studies*, Vol. VII, No.3 Oxford 1973, pp. 271-285; DaVanzo, Julie, *Microeconomic Approaches to Studying Migration Decisions*, Rand Note, Santa Monica 1980.

¹² Zelinsky, W., 'The Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition', in: *Geographical Review*, Vol. 61, New York 1971, pp. 219-249; Skeldon, Ronald, *Population Mobility in Developing Countries: A Reinterpretation*, London 1990.

¹³ Myrdal, Gunnar, *Economic Theory and Under-Developed Regions*, London 1957; Myrdal, Gunnar, *Asian Drama*, 3 Vol., New York 1968; Lipton, Michael, *Why Poor People Stay Poor*, London 1977.

lines and been argued not to capture the reality of a vibrant informal sector in many developing nations.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it has offered the most concise statement of the dilemma confronting labour policies in many developing countries. How does it fit the Chinese case?

Application of labour market theory for China has to grapple with the fundamental fact that for the past decades there has been no labour market in China. Since the 50s, regulated wage levels within an urban economy dominated by state-ownership have been rather uniform, while the rural-urban income gap could not exert its potential influence due to tight control of in-migration from the villages. Although variances between different urban localities and enterprises in the endowment with various social benefits and bonuses did exist and better-off units were keenly coveted by the work-force, urban-urban migration was regulated, too. Life-long work allocation rather than freedom to choose employment and abode governed the distribution of wage-earners and their dependants. If private economic considerations played a role at all, they worked mainly through the backdoor of personal connections and arrangements for advantageous work assignments or transfers.

It is only in the era of economic reforms that differences in wage levels and benefits, caused by regional differentiation, the increasing diversification of ownership forms and the abolition of directive planning for labour and wages, have started to play a major role. Peasant labour has begun to move into the cities, where migrants crowd in low-skill occupations and segmentation of the labour 'market' with a newly created low-wage sector is a fact. The rural-urban income-gap remains large and functions as the main incentive for migration. All this is in accord with the Todaro model. On closer scrutiny, however, deviations show up. By world standards, many parts of China's present informal sector are still rather formal and employment there seems to be more stable than posited by him. The creation of a labour market is far from being accomplished as a number of restrictions concerning the change of job for both peasants and qualified personnel persist. Just as problematic is the use of unemployment rates in the formulas proposed by Todaro. While unemployment nowadays has become principally accepted as a necessary evil connected with the abolishment of labour allocation, it still is largely hidden: Implementation of the bankruptcy law or the dismissal of redundant labour power in China keep being touchy subjects where reality is largely lagging behind theory. Official unemployment rates do not include surplus farm labour. Even within the urban sector, they are artificially low and seriously biased by their definitional handling. They therefore do not reflect the real situation. Using them for reference does not make sense. But their formal integration into quantified migration models would be an exercise in academic window-dressing.

Similar objections can be raised with regard to other aspects of state interference in market economics and their underlying assumptions on the social and political level. Although state influence in China is declining due to economic reforms, individual migration decisions keep being refracted by many bureaucratic interventions and complicated institutional arrangements. Interests and procedures of departments in charge of work transfers and household registration play a major role. In the past, the influence of politics and ideology on migration matters has been such that they have to be treated as independent variables. This has been much more pronounced than in the Soviet Union and the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, where demographic patterns and economic changes nurtured a conspicuously different migration regime. After 1956, political liberalisation, regional labour shortages and efforts to raise economic productivity there all worked to largely replace coercive measures by material incentives. Economic conditions and personal calculations became the main factors influencing population movement. Although state and collective ownership continued to prescribe the bounds of private action, direct migration controls were confined to a few major cities and work allocation for limited periods of time applied to university graduates only.¹⁵

Generalised theory thus has to be integrated with different systemic factors and the peculiarities of the Chinese experience during the last decades. While it has succeeded in identifying crucial variables, reducing complexities and formulating hypotheses guiding research, it has failed to provide causal explanations independent of space and time. More attention to changing economic and political, social

¹⁴ Harris, J., Todaro, Michael P., 'Migration, Unemployment and Development: A Two-Sector Analysis', in: *American Economic Review*, Nashville 1970, pp. 126-142; Todaro, Michael P., op. cit.; Sabot, Richard H., ed., *Migration and the Labor Market in Developing Countries*, Boulder 1982; Hauser, Suits and Ogawa, ed., op. cit., pp. 131-145; Skeldon, Ronald, op. cit.

¹⁵ Höhmann, Hans-Herrmann, ed., *Arbeitsmarkt und Wirtschaftsplanung, Beiträge zur Beschäftigungsstruktur und Arbeitskräftepolitik in Osteuropa*, Köln 1977; Knabe, Bernd, *Bevölkerungsentwicklung und Binnenwanderungen in der UdSSR 1967-1974*, Berlin 1978; Lewis, Robert A., and Rowland, Richard H., *Population Redistribution in the USSR, Its Impact on Society 1897-1977*, New York 1979; Khalatbari, Parviz, ed., *Räumliche Bevölkerungsbewegung in sozialistischen Ländern*, Berlin 1980.

and cultural settings seems to be the order of the day. Western theories and Chinese policies have been anything but consistent. They have smacked of a heavy dose of ideology and preoccupation with the own historical record and have had to be constantly adapted to new developments. Many economic theories have started from the basic assumption of the homo oeconomicus, simplified to a rational maximiser of profit and utility, acting in an open political system and a free market framework of full information and equal chances. This assumption has been called into question elsewhere. In a country like China, characterised by strong political bias in published information, by impediments to freedom of movement and interaction as well as by the continued prevalence of traditional social behaviour, it needs modification even more. Evidence and thought accumulated so far stimulate an attempt at synthesis in a migration model for China. By and large, this model is still generalised enough to serve as a guideline for analysing migration behaviour in different periods and areas. It is on the level of constraints and intervening factors that most major changes can be detected. Quite obviously, here the model would show great differences between various periods of PRC history as well as between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan. Migration dynamics there resemble Western patterns much closer.¹⁶ They reflect the wide social distance to the mainland that has developed as a result of different economic and political conditions. Modelling is confined to a heuristic schema of major relationships only, which is complicated enough to furnish material for more than one study. Weighing or, if possible, measuring their relative importance makes sense on a sub-national level only. It has barely begun and defines tasks for future stages of research.

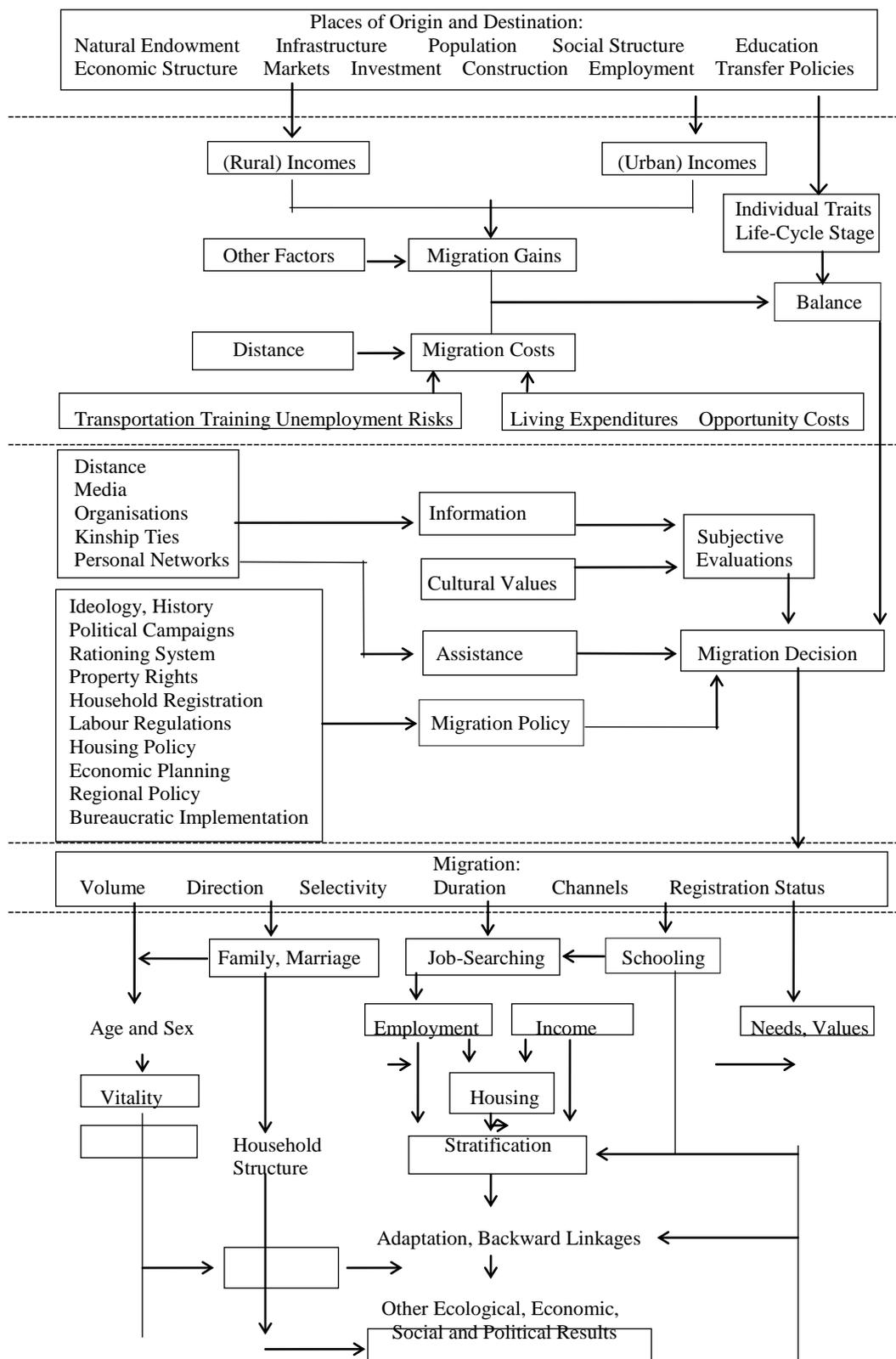
A Migration Model for China

The model presented in chart 1 tries to reconcile the analysis of macro-level data for the geographical, economic, demographic and social setting with the study of migration decisions on the micro-level of individual and household behaviour. It thereby strives to combine two planes of reasoning which are often handled separately but need to be integrated. A multitude of environmental factors is influencing migration. In particular, they include all elements effecting income levels. Theoretically, the set is inexhaustible. Methodologically, interdependencies and collinearity often render analysis difficult. Studies in China and other parts of the world suggest that the items contained in the upper box of chart 1 are the most important ones: Natural endowment, which mainly refers to geographical position, land resources, raw materials and climatic conditions, is reinforced by human endeavour for infrastructural provisions such as transportation, energy supply and housing as well as central-place functions. Furthermore, regional population dynamics and structure are an indispensable element of understanding. Besides absolute numbers determining population density, man-land-ratios and land use, fertility levels, age structure and household composition seem to be of special significance. They are intimately connected with social structure involving groups defined by family relationships, occupation, income and property. White-collar professions, specific household types and income groups seem to have a particularly great propensity for migration. Educational attainment has been shown to exert a clearly recognisable influence on migration behaviour, too.

Notwithstanding the valuable contributions of other disciplines, the great majority of migration studies have documented the overwhelming importance of economic factors. Basic among them is economic structure in regard to shares of the primary sector, the various branches of industry, construction and the tertiary sector. Market access can be a major determinant of living standards as well as a direct cause of population movement. Another important economic factor is the volume and distribution of investment. Within overall investment, capital construction displays the strongest effects on employment, as job-creation through the modernisation or replacement of existing assets is a more limited affair. However, there are also sectors such as trade, transportation and a number of services which can generate

Chart 1: A Migration Model For China

¹⁶ Kiang Yu-lung, *Determinants of Migration from Rural Areas, A Case Study of Taiwan*, Saarbrücken 1975; Tsay Ching-lung, *Employment and Earnings of City-Ward Migrants: A Study on Individual Outcomes of Migration to Taipei*, Taipei 1981; Liao Zhenghong, *Renkou qianyi (Migration)*, Taipei 1985; Xiong Ruimei, *Renkou liudong - Lilun, ziliao celiang yu zhengce (Population Mobility - Theory, Data Measurement and Policy)*, Taipei 1988.



employment without large outlays of capital. The most unfavourable employment situation prevails in rural hinterland areas with a small non-agricultural sector and little market access. They contrast with coastal regions thriving on village and township enterprises. But certainly the largest gap exists between the

countryside and the cities which do not only provide better paid jobs but profit from transfers such as social benefits, housing schemes and price subsidies.

Economic theory posits income differences as the single most crucial variable inducing migration. This general assumption has been proven to be valid by all rural-urban migration surveys from China since the mid-eighties. By wide margins, they have established work-related migration driven by the desire to realise higher income as the primary motive for changes of residence. As the income gap between villages and cities is widest, this applies first of all to rural-urban migration. But directly or indirectly income differences also seem to act as the major driving force for other migration streams. In present-day China, income has developed into a complex category including not only wages and earnings from main occupations but also profit from second jobs, self-employed side-line activities, interest and rents, private remittances and state subsidies. The second layer of the migration model for China is progressing to the level of micro-economic behaviour. It takes the clues from Sjaastad's concept of calculations based on a balance of gains and losses which can be refined by introducing the concept of marginal utility. Human-capital theorists as Sjaastad have understood these as individual calculations. But, in principle, they could be conceptualised as strategies for small-scale collective units, too, if research establishes private households or extended families as the prime actors. Gains are realised if migration leads to sufficiently large increases of utility. Although this involves primarily a comparison of income levels, other migration motives such as improvements in regard to family situation, old-age support, medical services or social status can be conceived as gains, too.

Gains in the areas referred to above are balanced by personal considerations of migration costs. These include obvious items as transportation or school and training expenses for a new job. A major factor are risks which arise from extended periods of unemployment either during an initial search-period or during later intervals. They also include the risk of obtaining under-paid jobs only or getting no job at all. Under the social conditions prevailing in many boom-regions of China, victimisation by crime, health risks arising from exploitation or migration costs springing from the possible need to buy oneself into a job would have to be considered, too. Further categories of migration costs are the living expenditures for food and lodging during periods of non-employment and the opportunity costs from income that could have been realised if migration would not have taken place and alternatives would have been pursued. Theoretically, all of these items have to be considered. Under conditions of limited information it remains unclear, however, to what degree they really enter the private calculations. It should also be pointed out, that the above line of reasoning would be opposed by proponents of a 'moral economy' of the peasant, who subordinate private calculations to social obligations within a village subsistence economy. Migrations costs are sensitive to the distance between areas of origin and destination. Greater distance raises transportation hindrances and costs; it may reduce knowledge and sources of support and thereby lead to greater risk and higher living expenditures. These latter effects are debatable, though, since there may be cases where sources of support are more available in far-away places than in near-by areas. Also, higher gains in distant places may offset the greater cost involved.

A final important consideration is the influence of individual traits which are connected to regional macro-structures by a weak probabilistic relationship: Personal characteristics vary widely, but in different regional environments some of them are bound to occur more frequently than others. Above all, this concerns traits such as educational level, occupation and income level which influence perceptions and available alternatives for action. Other relevant traits such as sex or psychic factors are distributed either more evenly or more erratically; they display a consequently weaker association to macro-level items. Most important is life-cycle stage. It was Sjaastad's contribution to recognise that personal balances are calculated for life-time periods and therefore also depend on factors like age and marital status, opportunities for further training and occupational advancement. This is the most important reason cited for explaining the dominance of young age-groups among the migrant total. Within a model based on the principle of economic rationality, such an argument again raises the question of how migration gains and costs can be calculated over long periods in advance. Migration decisions must often be taken under uncertainty and cannot presuppose a full knowledge of alternatives and consequences. The migrant is acting in an environment subject to social and cultural constraints or political influences beyond his grasp and choice. And due to personal traits, objective alternatives do not need to be identical with perceived choices. Cost-benefit calculations in the narrow sense therefore cover only one part of human experience.

This brings another set of elements into the picture. They involve cultural dispositions, social behaviour and state interventions either hindering or furthering migration. In the model under discussion for China, the third layer of intervening factors and constraints is especially large. This is in opposition to many

economic theories which either neglect these factors or treat them summarily as unidentified parts of risk and cost calculations. In defence of such treatment, frequently the argument is heard that most of these factors cannot be measured. This objection is only partially true as information sources and assistance levels can be investigated by survey work. But even in those cases where measurement is hard or outright impossible, dismissal of the variables would lead to gross misjudgement. Some of the reasons for this statement have been already mentioned above. They become clearer on looking closer at the items concerned. In chart 1, values, information, assistance and migration policy are conceptualised as the intervening variables effecting migration decisions grounded in personal utility considerations. These variables in turn are conditioned by deeper underlying factors which are grouped in two boxes on the left side of the graph. One of them contains mainly social and cultural entries, the other a list of important political and legal items. Values are taken as an exogenous variable too complex for further modelling within the confines of migration studies. They here refer to life-style preferences and the specific weight attached to wealth and status, comfort and risk, autonomy and affiliation. In China, these generalised items would seem to be especially relevant in terms of traditional prescriptions as to the rights and obligations of individuals versus the family and social groups. This implies the need for particular attention to family-based behaviour in migration matters. While cultural values are generally recognised to be much more tenacious than other items subject to greater vicissitude, they are certainly not unchangeable. Their establishment as a variable independent of social and economic items remains a knotty problem of research strategy.

The first item conditioning information is distance which has been already commented on. Media coverage of places of destination is another important factor for consideration. Within the political context of China, it is biased by censorship. Although reporting has much improved after the end of the Maoist period, the dissemination of news not deemed to be suitable for mass circulation is still effectively prevented. Relevant examples in the context of migration problems would be the general bias in favour of positive models, the under-reporting of social problems and the lack of precise information in many fields of investment, price and employment policies. The general unavailability of media from other provinces also plays a role. This leads to serious gaps of knowledge and distorted information. Besides conveying information, the media also transmit expectations. It may well be the case that instead of news reports, entertainment programmes, advertisement spots or mass literature function as the much more potent carriers of indirect messages.

In the absence of precise news from the media, various organisations and private channels try to close the information gap between places of out- and in-migration. Organisations include both government agencies as the Labour Bureaus as well as half-official institutions sponsored by the state, newly created community associations, private job-brokers and labour-gang leaders. Finally, traditional sources of information and support have to be considered. Above all, this involves kinship ties which have reclaimed their importance in Chinese economic life. Kinship in China is a wide category. Despite the general advance of nuclear and stem families, the extension of support and information to remoter relatives far beyond the limits of the private household keeps being imperative. This is augmented by personal networks fostered by a cultural disposition to rely on the informal capital of reciprocity and mutual obligations. The importance of such networking cannot be overestimated. Often, it is able to overcome migration barriers by mobilising financial, political and distributional resources to obtain jobs, accommodation and licenses. It may even preclude others from seeking work in particular trades, limit the freedom of personal choice and lead to group control of informally segmented labour markets. This may turn into a self-propelling mechanism for chain migration.

Migration decisions thus are co-determined by social and cultural patterns influencing subjective evaluations and the resources available to individuals. Another most important factor is Chinese migration policy. Starting in 1955, it was governed by a set of formal and informal norms which turned private choices of work and residence more and more into state and Party matters. Ideology denied the commodity attributes of human labour. For many years it displayed a marked anti-urbanism and prescribed work in the countryside for educational purposes. In the Maoist mass campaigns, this blended with large-scale mobilisation for construction work in the hinterland and with political banishment for adversaries of the leadership group who were sent to the villages or labour-camps. Ideology is intimately linked to historical experiences guiding interpretations, expectations and judgments. Traditional mistrust of urban commercial development, fear of social disorder and preoccupation with state control as well as traumatic memories of peasant uprooting and large-scale migration signalling an end of dynastic cycles keep been potent motives inspiring present-day policies. Two of such policies rooted in both recent and ancient memories have been the systems for rationing basic subsistence items and registering household

residence. They have served as further elements of political intervention as they empowered the state to grant or deny vital resources to potential migrants. Most important, the collectivisation or nationalisation of almost all economic activities facilitated the enforcement of state-defined rules. Although private utility considerations were not totally obliterated, they became seriously restricted by the changes in property rights.

Many of these elements of migration policy have gone in the Chinese reforms of the 1980s. Others elements of migration policy, however, endure: The dissolution of the People's Communes in the countryside and the advances of privatisation in all spheres of economic life have certainly resulted in fundamental changes of migration constraints. Property rights, however, keep playing a major role as the state sector continues to occupy an important place in the urban economy and private ownership of land is limited to land-use rights. In a similar manner, the rules for household registration have been relaxed but not abolished. Labour regulations have largely done away with job allocation and mandatory planning, but keep upholding state controls, permission requirements and a number of restrictions. The same picture prevails in housing policy where private property is making inroads, but the state keeps controlling vital segments. Housing problems keep being one of the highest obstacles to be overcome by potential migrants in China.

Economic planning and regional policy are overarching the guidelines for specific policy arenas. In the past, this fostered concerns like land reclamation or the relocation of industries to the hinterland for economic and strategic purposes. While nation-wide campaigns in favour of such goals have ceased, the state still retains the ability to enforce mass resettlement for large-scale projects. A recent example are the massive displacements planned for areas flooded by the Three Gorges Dam. On the regional level, state intervention has become highly varied in the reform period. Positively, it works by the extension of transportation and communication facilities which foster population movement. Negatively, it often takes the form of labour protectionism which denies jobs to non-locals. Differential policies designed to ward off migration to the metropolitan cities continue to be applied.

Finally, bureaucratic procedures and implementation problems also shape migration behaviour. This comprises all those areas where licensing or allocation has been complete in the past and partially persists in the present. Besides the permission to change the place of residence per se, this has involved employment, housing, food rationing, schooling and many others. Often the regulations governing the distribution of scarce resources are linked to preferential or discriminatory treatment of particular parts of the population. The number of rules, directives, guidelines and authoritative interpretations as well as the amount of paper-work they entail can be awe-inspiring. Internal norms guiding work allocation and migration for cadres and staff, ordinary workers, employees and their dependants, demobilised soldiers or graduated students in the early 1980s can serve as an example: On the national level, they added up to approximately 275 written regulations.¹⁷ Appending regional and local norms to the list would have driven up the total considerably.

Enforcing such rules has created foreseeable problems with staffing, funding and equipping the necessary administrative apparatus. Problems of co-ordination between different echelons and departments play a role as quotas for admission to permanent residence status in bigger cities can be handled by more than ten different government agencies. Co-ordination problems are particularly large if transfers and assignments across regional or sectoral borderlines are involved. In the past, changes of work required the consent of both old and new work units plus the permission of the authorities responsible for migration quota handling. Procedures have been successively relaxed in the reform period but for groups on both ends of the social spectrum like cadres, specialists and peasants they can be still rather tight. On the macro-level, the number of persons affected has certainly shrunk since the introduction of work-contracts; on the micro-level, however, bureaucratic implementation has to be considered as a source of continuing friction.

This then is the complex set of macro-level influences, micro-level considerations and intervening factors which make up the causal structure shaping migration decisions in China. They result in the act of migration itself which is sketched in the fourth layer of the model. Analysis of population movement on this level is largely descriptive and conventionally proceeds by a discussion of items contained in the box:

¹⁷ Laodong renshibu, ed., *Laodong renshi fagui guizhang huibian 1949-83 (Collected Regulations and Rules for Labour and Personnel 1949-83)*, Beijing 1987; Laodong renshibu, ed., *Laodong zhengce fagui huibian 1981- (Collected Laws and Regulations on Labour Policy 1981-)*, 4 Vol., Beijing 1982-86.

volume (absolute numbers and migration rates, in- and out-migration, gross and net figures); direction (migration streams by types and sizes of settlements, by natural location, distances, places of origin and destination, inter- and intra-regional movement); selectivity (age and sex structure, household sizes, educational attainment, occupational position, marital status, income levels, ethnicity in minority areas); duration (short- or long-term movement, permanency versus return or circulation, circulation by different time periods); channels (spontaneous versus organised migration, different types of private and organisational arrangements). A number of these items involve arbitrary delimitations and controversial definitions to be discussed in the following section. Cognizance of them is crucial since a different handling of definitions can seriously distort research results. It is all the more important when only few direct observations of causal factors are available and descriptive data are used for inductions. Registration status, the last item of the box, is not used in most conventional descriptions of migration. In survey work it shows strong associations to the questions whether migrants enjoy agricultural or non-agricultural status, live in collective or private households, are given temporary or long-term work contracts. Because it thus continues to be a crucial indicator for the uneven distribution of rights and opportunities in China, its inclusion is a must.

The fifth and last layer of the model is taking the investigation to questions of migration impact. These must be assessed for both places of origin and destination and for the country as a whole. Just like objective conditions and subjective reasons of migration, the list of potential migration consequences is endless. In many cases they involve the very same items. However, in the treatment of migration issues it is advisable to clearly separate them on the planes of causes, expectations and actual outcomes. In many instances, where no prior arrangements have been taken, migration results in job-searching activities. Chances for obtaining a job are influenced by the degree of schooling and available family connections which in turn can be altered by migration, too. This, for instance, occurs when marriages between partners from different localities are taking place, if migrants attend school or training courses in their new abode. Employment (or non-employment) and income realised then are the direct results of job-searching. They exert a decisive influence on the type of housing available which under highly imperfect market conditions is subject to both affordable rent-levels and preferential allocations by employers. The latter ones can range from attractive ownership schemes for spacious apartments to housing in hovels with bunks. Employment and income, housing and educational level are the most important indicators of a new social stratification developing on both ends of the migration stream. Under certain aspects, this would also include family structure where migrants along with other social strata develop their specific characteristics such as high percentages for singles, persons living in collective households and separated families. All these elements influence the degree to which adaptation to a new environment is taking place and backward linkages to the place of origin are entertained. The latter ones typically involve points like remittances and home visits, choice of marriage partners and transactions inducing potential chain migration.

Whereas employment, income and stratification seem to be central and immediate outcomes of migration, other results show up in the long term only. They concern demographic changes in age and sex structure which in turn condition vitality, i.e. mortality and fertility. As the results for places of in- and out-migration are different, this exacerbates the changes to local population structures brought about by the migrants themselves. More elusive is the slow change in needs, values and attitudes setting in after migration with repercussions for stratification, adaptation and backward linkages. Finally, the bracket of 'other ecological, economic, social and political results' embraces a wide range of highly complex macro-level consequences. Again, these need to be discussed for both areas of origin and areas of destination. Important items would be on the ecological level: traffic and infrastructure, environmental and health problems; on the economic level: labour developments, wage levels and income distribution, productivity and technological change, market size and inflation rates; on the social level: community relations and residential clustering of regional groups, occupational structure and labour relations, status, vertical mobility and crime; on the political level: administrative control, information and communication, national integration and regional competition, interest articulation, association and participation. While in some of these areas the consequences of population movement can be instantly discerned, in others they are much easier to proclaim than to document.

Definitions and Methods

Migration studies have to rely on theory and description to furnish the categories for interpretation. Wherever standardisation, measurement and the comparison of variables is possible, they should proceed to the level of data analysis. This is essential, because mass behaviour with a wide range of variation is involved. Without data analysis, it would be hard to generalise from singular events, to position individual actions on a scale of social behaviour or to make more precise statements as to regional and temporal developments. The discussion has repeatedly touched upon difficulties in the operationalisation of theoretical concepts. Methodological problems typically arise when abstract categories are to be transformed into precisely defined indicators that preferably should lend themselves to easy computation. Above all, this concerns the issue of how to define migration. It has been giving headaches to social scientists ever since the inception of migration studies and is all the more pertinent as Chinese usage differs from international conventions which in turn are controversial in themselves.¹⁸ The difficulties arise from the fact that population movement is a complicated affair, an operationalised concept of which has to cover more dimensions than in the case of other demographic events. Another item scrutinised are migration reasons. All definitions are intertwined with the difficulties of various methods for migration count. The lack of comparability seems to be the curse of migration studies in all parts of the world. It ultimately results from the fact that definitions and methods are dependent on highly diverse political, economic and institutional settings. Of course, they also reflect different administrative needs and academic agenda.

Operationalised definitions of migration are tedious affairs comprising five dimensions: legal status, time, space, activity and actor. On the background of wide-ranging government intervention, legal criteria have moulded the Chinese notion of 'migration (*qianyi*)' to a large degree and led to shifts in meaning. Whereas in the first half of 1950s it was used in a loose sense, the nation-wide establishment of the household registration system after 1958 and the tightening of policy in the early 60s limited the meaning of migration to persons moving with permission to change their place of permanent household registration. Since the implementation of the 1958 regulations this always requires formalities at both places of out- and in-migration, where special lists are kept. It is in this administrative sense that the term 'migration' is still applied in many official materials and academic studies from China today. That kind of de-jure definition leads to a massive understatement of numbers, to confusion in international debate and to faulty conclusions in comparative analysis proceeding from de-facto definitions. A broader and more realistic definition of migration would therefore have to include both persons moving with and without a change of household registration. In Chinese usage, the latter group of persons moving without such a change is termed 'floating population (*liudong renkou*)'. But floating or mobile population is an imprecise term as there are no universally agreed criteria for defining its temporal and spatial dimensions.

In view of the problems of a strictly legal definition, Chinese censuses and microcensuses have adopted compromise solutions for counting population and classifying it by places.¹⁹ Thus, they have included part of the floaters in the population of their immigration places. The procedures have not been consistent, though: The 1954 census faced incoherent urban registration, in rural areas it could not rely on any registration at all. While it focused on 'resident population (*changzhu renkou*)', this term could not be defined legally and the various other criteria were not always precise. For doubtful cases a minimum stay of six months was prescribed. In the second census of 1964, permanent registration became established as

¹⁸ Besides making use of primary materials from China, this section draws on the following methodological discussions: Schwarz, Karl, *Analyse der räumlichen Bevölkerungsbewegung*, Hannover 1969; United Nations, ed., *Statistics of Internal Migration: A Technical Report*, New York 1978; Goldstein, Sidney, and Goldstein, Alice, *Surveys of Migration in Developing Countries: A Methodological Review*, Honolulu 1981; Bilsborrow, Richard E., et al., *Migration Surveys in Low Income Countries: Guidelines for Survey and Questionnaire Design*, London 1984; Liao Zhenghong, op. cit.; Oberai, A.S., op. cit.; Skeldon, Ronald, op. cit.

¹⁹ Rules for the first three population counts are published in: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan renkou yanjiu zhongxin, ed. *Zhongguo renkou nianjian 1985 (Almanac of China's Population 1985)*, Beijing 1986, pp. 114-154. For the fourth census: Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian 1989 (China Population Statistics Yearbook 1989)*, Beijing 1989, pp. 601-605. For 1987 microcensus definitions see: Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo 1987 nian 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao, Quanguo fence (Materials of 1% Population Survey of 1987: National Data)*, Beijing 1988, Vol. I, pp. 1-2; Vol. III, pp. 815-818; for the 1995 microcensus: *1995 nian quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha diaochayuan shouce (Enumerator Handbook For the 1% National Population Sample Survey of 1995)*, Beijing 1995. See also: Zhang Kaimin, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo disan ci renkou pucha (The Third Population Census of the People's Republic of China)*, Shanghai 1989; Guowuyuan renkou pucha bangongshi, ed., *Disi ci quanguo renkou pucha puchayuan peixun jiaocai (Enumerator Training Manual for the Fourth Population Census of China)*, Beijing 1990.

the primary yardstick for the place of enumeration. Floating population having left their permanent registration place for more than one year plus more recently departed persons with fixed new abodes were included among the inhabitants of their actual place of stay. The population counts of 1982 and 1990 required either a permanent household registration independent of residence permanency or a minimum residence of one year with registration elsewhere or a residence of less than one year with absence from the registration place for more than one year, in order to include persons in the census population of a given place. No maximum period of stay for inclusion was stipulated. The microcensuses of 1987 and 1995 reduced the minimum time requirements for persons with registration elsewhere to 6 months. Further categories of persons tabulated in census numbers since 1982 are individuals with pending registration and those staying abroad. But only the first two categories of persons not holding permanent registration status are considered 'floating population (*liudong renkou*)' by census standards.²⁰

The content of 'resident population' has thus changed according to political and administrative circumstances. Whereas in the period of tight migration controls from 1961 to the beginning of the 80s it tended to be confounded with permanent household registration, increasing population mobility since the early 80s has required attention to the fact that in a strict sense it means census population including the additional categories mentioned above. This has necessitated the introduction of the term '[permanently] registered population (*huji renkou*)', if only inhabitants with permanent household registrations are meant. Migration analyses starting from census, microcensus or registration numbers have to observe these conventions. Whereas they are adhered to in most official tabulations and careful studies, local materials and secondary literature often mix up the categories. The term 'resident population' then becomes identical with the '[permanently] registered population'. With only 0.8% (1982) to 1.9% (1990) of the total census population in the two census brackets of 'floating population', this problem looks negligible on the national level. However, on the local level it can aggravate.

In the absence of directly enumerated migration numbers, studies sometimes have to rely on indirect methods of measurement. One suggestion has been to use annual registration numbers of that part of the urban population classified as agricultural. At first sight, these figures might be identified with rural-urban migrants. But a closer look at them reveals that these are overwhelmingly peasants living in villages under urban administration. This share of the peasant population is greater when urban areas are defined in strictly administrative terms; it is smaller when the majority of villages under urban administration are excluded. Census numbers for agricultural population in urban areas include both such peasants living in urban areas and rural-urban migrants without permanent registration.²¹ Another indirect method is the use of the residual method. This refers to the comparison of absolute population numbers for different time periods. If total growth is greater than growth implied by figures for vitality or survival rates, the difference is interpreted as net migration. The method presupposes constancy in spatial criteria and reliable data. It is particularly vulnerable to the numerous problems connected with the delimitation of urban areas and urban population. Also, it can only capture net migration and no gross flows.

The term 'registered population' and the annually published regional population totals from the registers exclude holders of provisional registration status (*zanzhu hukou*), no matter how long their durations of stay. Because it is generally assumed that these are transients only, most Western studies translate the Chinese term as 'temporary registration'. This is unfortunate as it gives rise to wrong impressions. Regulations demand that all persons staying outside their permanent home register within three days; persons age 16 and over have to obtain provisional registration cards after three months; registering of departure is required; no maximum limit of stay is set.²² Surveys of floating population in some major cities result in 30% to 50% of the respondents without permanent registration there staying longer than 1 year.²³ The regulations have proved difficult to enforce and numbers are notorious for incompleteness.

²⁰ This is the practice of many Chinese studies and official manuals such as: Guangdong sheng renkou pucha bangongshi, ed., *Guandong sheng disi ci renkou pucha liudong renkou ziliao (Materials on Floating Population From the Fourth Population Census in Guangdong)*, Guangzhou 1992.

²¹ Annual registration numbers for urban population with agricultural status are published in: Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian (China Population Statistics Yearbook)*, Beijing 1988-. 1990 census figures for agricultural population of urban areas in both the wide and the narrow sense have been published in the 1992 edition of that yearbook. Confer also table 1 in the contribution of Wang Feng to this volume.

²² *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo hukou dengji tiaoli (Regulations for Household Registration of the People's Republic of China)*, January 9, 1958; *Gong'anbu guanyu chengzhen zanzhu renkou guanli de zanxing guiding (Provisional Rules of the Ministry of Public Security for the Management of Provisional Population in Urban Areas)*, July 13, 1985.

²³ Zhang Kaimin, ed., *Shanghai liudong renkou (Floating Population in Shanghai)*, Beijing 1989, p. 281; Li Mengbai and Hu Xin, ed., *Liudong renkou dui da chengshi fazhan di yingxiang ji duice (The Impact of Floating Population on the Big Cities and*

Some local surveys in rural areas have hinted at up to 80% of rural-urban migrant workers without provisional registration.²⁴ Interviewing in Beijing, Shanghai and a number of both coastal and hinterland cities reveals many administrative contradictions and highly divergent situations ranging from attempts at tight enforcement to almost complete negligence.²⁵

Another problem is that numbers for provisional registration actually do not define persons but rather records. Individuals moving back and forth thus leave their mark in the registers more than once. Travel activity and the number of registrations vary widely by season. It then becomes more than dubious to consider such figures for points in time together with migration numbers defined by longer durations. Furthermore, provisional registration numbers also include tourists, patients in hospitals, persons on business trips etc. These should not be included in a strict definition of migrants. Although some police districts hold separate tabulations for the occupations of provisionally registered, locally employed migrants on file, such data also tend to be incomplete and are for internal use only. The legal definition of migration therefore is most unsatisfactory: Census materials designate some persons as 'floating population' and 'resident population' at the same time. 'Floaters' supposed to be temporary migrants can stay indefinitely, while numbers for 'resident population' also include persons having just moved to a given place. Local population numbers are understated, in permanent registration records more so than in census tabulations. Provisional registration suffers from definitional incompatibilities and is partly inflated, partly fragmentary.

But the problems do not stop here. As registration status does not suffice, migration materials from China have found it necessary to adopt additional temporal criteria for the definition of migrants. Such criteria concern both standards for maximum and minimum periods of stay in order to differentiate migrants from either commuters and short-term visitors or from non-migrants. Unfortunately, there is no agreement. Census and microcensus rules as well as registration practices for minimum periods of stay have been already commented upon. They raise the problem that stays of less than 12 or 6 months may be legitimately classified as migration, too - as they are if a change in permanent household registration or an absence from home for more than 12 or 6 months is involved. But where to draw the line for short-term movement without such events? While most students of migration would agree that daily commuters do not fall under the category of 'migrants', minority opinion in favour of including them persists. It continues to be a favoured approach in a number of Chinese village surveys. But even when daily commuters are excluded - what about weekly commuters, sojourners with regular seasonal moves or those having just arrived but intending to stay? In view of the seemingly high degree of migrant-worker circulation in present-day China, there are important arguments for including them. On the other end of the spectrum, some urban surveys in China concentrating on 'floating population' instead of 'migration' may reduce the permanency requirement to just one overnight stay, including travellers and visitors with no sustained housing or employment. A perfect solution does not exist.

The maximum period of stay has equally become an issue after microcensus and census questionnaires in China started to include direct questions as to migration. Again, comparability has been hindered by different methods: The microcensus of 1987 posed a duration-specific question, giving all persons enumerated a multiple choice of various periods of residence. All persons staying less than 5 years had to answer two further questions as to their last place of out-migration and their migration reason. The 1990 census phrased the migrant definition differently, asking for the place of 'permanent residence' at a fixed date 5 years prior to the count; the 1995 microcensus adopted a compromise solution, asking for the time of migration and posing a fixed-date question, too. Under this latter type of question, all those, whose permanent residence then was different from the present one, were considered to be migrants. Use of a fixed reference period has the advantage of precision and data cohesion, but it excludes circulatory migrants having returned to their place of origin. If there has been more than one move between the fixed date and the census time, it produces different results, too. A further drawback is the fact that the calculation of duration-specific figures becomes impossible and no persons born after the fixed date can be covered. In this way, migration totals of the 1987 microcensus and the 1990 census are not strictly compatible in methodical terms. Also, they yield two figures for both counts respectively as either the legal criteria for floating population or the data produced by the temporally defined migration questions can be used. Usually, the more readily accessible figures from the direct migration questions are utilised. They

Remedial Measures), Beijing 1991, pp. 193, 218; Zou Lanchun, ed., *Beijing de liudong renkou (Floating Population in Beijing)*, Beijing 1996, p. 113.

²⁴ Far Eastern Economic Review, April 4, 1996.

²⁵ Own interviews in Beijing, Shanghai, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Foshan, Shantou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Haikou, Sanya, Chengdu and Kunming from 1986 to 1994.

are designated as 'migration', whereas the other set of data is presented as 'floating population'. But in reality, the differences are more methodical than conceptual. While the 5-year reference period seems to become the dominating approach in China, some research issues have justified other cut-off points like 7-year or 1-year periods. Migration figures can be also obtained by comparing the place of birth with the present place of residence. The resulting migrant definition, however, is very broad. No precise information for the time of migration is gained, making it impossible to discuss specific issues.

Spatial criteria can rival the temporal ones in intricateness. In principle, it would be possible or even advisable to adopt homogenous, integrated economic areas as relevant units of analysis, paying regard to comparable size and distances. In practise, however, data are only available for administrative units. An obvious rule of the thumb states, that migration volume increases if administrative areas, for which movement is defined, are small and vice versa. In China just as in other countries, many data are limited to the province-level with figures for sub-provincial units thinning out progressively. While a number of them can be still procured for the level of provincial districts or municipal regions, they dwindle to just a handful of indicators published regularly for the Chinese counties. This is the reason why in many cases macro-analysis is confined to the province-level only - an unsatisfactory situation because the high degree of aggregation conceals great intra-regional variation and may lead to faulty conclusions. A further problem is the redrawing of administrative boundaries and the classification of places under categories like city, town or township, which can change over time. Incorporation of rural areas into towns and cities has been sizeable. Disregard of this factor can lead to rather misleading conclusions.

In China, migration numbers from the household registers are the most complete in spatial terms as they include short-distance migration, too. They cover all movement across police district lines. In most cases, these are identical with the lines between towns, townships or urban street committees. This definition has been adopted for the definition of floating population (resident population with permanent registration outside) in the 1995 microcensus, too. In the countryside, some independent village surveys still go below the township- and town-level and also count migration over village lines. In contrast, the last census and most urban-based surveys enumerated migration over county- and city-lines only. This excludes short-distance moves within urban districts or rural counties (townships and towns and their subordinate villages). If cities are overbounded and include many villages belonging to the urban districts, the method produces some downward bias in numbers. Particularly vexing has been the wide-spread establishment of small towns. Just like villages, they can also be subordinate to either urban districts or rural counties. The 1987 microcensus asked for migration across county-, town- or city-lines. It thus included intra-county changes of residence, if these involved movements between townships and towns. It excluded them, if only movement between townships took place. This situation was changed by the 1990 census rules. The 1995 microcensus has been the most refined attempt at enumeration so far, as it also covers short-distance movement between different urban districts and offers a very detailed multiple choice for the administrative character of places of origin. Household registers contain separate numbers for in- and out-migration. Urban survey and census work, however, usually limits itself to in-migration. Numbers then neither contain out-migrants from the normal city population nor do they cover departed in-migrants - which can create serious problems of bias. In contrast, rural surveys usually concentrate on out-migration. Often they operate with the fuzzy notion of 'out-moving for work (*waichu dagong*)', an all-encompassing category including both sustained changes of residence in far-away places and short-distance commuting. Concentrating on out-migration may capture more migrants than the reverse procedure. Yet completely departed households elude the procedures, too.

The last two criteria for migrant definitions can be treated shortly. Census, microcensus and registers always aim at recording total population. Within the confines of their legal, temporal and spatial definitions, they thus include all kinds of migrants. Independent migration surveys focusing on employment and income, though, often establish special activity criteria. They can limit the object of their enquiry to either earning migrants or to the labour force above age 14. The latter category would include non-working migrants, i.e. housewives, students, handicapped, unemployed and others, too. Finally, surveys can differ on the question whether private and/or collective households (dormitories for workers, students etc.) are covered. This can have large repercussions on sample composition. The same applies to the question whether individuals or the complete household are treated as actors and the proper unit of measurement. No ready-made answers exist as there are important logical and methodical arguments for either case. On balance, urban-based surveys seem to fare better with an approach centred on individuals. The strong position of rural households as units of economic action, though, often leads to a preference for the household approach there.

A final comment on the classification of migration reasons seems appropriate: Attempts at comparative analysis struggle with the problem that classification schemes of various surveys are not strictly compatible. Official counts bracket subjective migration motives and administrative migration channels under the heading 'migration reasons'. This makes it hard to distinguish personal and organisational factors, causes and forms of migration. With the exception of 'work and business', designating self-employment or job-searching on the own initiative, the list of work-related migrations includes various organisational items such as 'work transfer', 'job assignment', 'demobilisation' and 'work replacement'. This suggests enduring elements of state intervention. Interviewing in South China, though, brings out the fact that the majority of work transfers and job assignments are based on self-applications and therefore carry a strong voluntary character. At least, this is the situation for the reform period in the early 90s. Family-related migration reasons such as 'co-migration' and 'staying with family' often serve to disguise a search for work just as well. In view of such difficulties, it seems advisable to separate job-searching avenues from migration reasons and pull- from push-factors. Furthermore, new job-searching channels of the emerging labour market and further personal motives should be taken into account.

An Assessment of Migration Data and Other Sources for China

Coherent migration studies on China are marked by late appearance and confusion created by the definitional problems that have just been discussed. With the exception of very crude and deficient registration data, no systematic effort at collecting migration figures was made before the mid-80s. The few studies available for earlier periods therefore are mostly restricted to geographical and historical accounts, concentrating on land reclamation and border resettlement, urbanisation or rustication programs. These can provide good discussions of the changing political and economic framework for migration. However, migration in the past has to be either reconstructed by the residual method or must be induced from fragmentary reports. In most cases, such reports have emanated from the various political mass campaigns, leading to biased information, no attention to internal consistency and underestimation of the extent to which spontaneous population movement endured. Concise discussion of migration in the context of labour issues is rare. Better documentation and deeper analysis only starts with the reform period. But interpretation keeps being hampered by disagreement on conceptual issues and lack of reliable data on important aspects.²⁶

During the last decade five types of data sources have become available: the official household registration records; census, microcensus and other nation-wide surveys; data from special migration surveys in cities and towns; data on urban population mobility in a broader sense; and migration data from village surveys. Household registers from the local police districts hold numbers for both permanently registered in- and out-migrants on the township, town or urban street-committee level. Although the registration records contain further data, only the raw numbers are compiled for quarterly and annual reports to the Ministry for Public Security. Some province-level units introduced additional tabulations for inter-regional migration in the early 50s. In most other cases, however, separate statistics for inter-regional migration begin in 1980. With a few exceptions, they are limited to the province level. National compilations of the records prior to the 1980s are full of inconsistencies, unclear definitions and

²⁶ For monographic studies see: Tien, H. Yuan, *China's Population Struggle, Demographic Decisions of the People's Republic, 1949-1969*, Columbus 1973, pp. 59-162; Scharping, Thomas, *Umsiedlungsprogramme für Chinas Jugend 1955-1980, Probleme der Stadt-Land-Beziehungen in der chinesischen Entwicklungspolitik*, Hamburg 1981; Hu Huanyong and Zhang Shanyu, *Zhongguo renkou dili (Population Geography of China)*, 2 Vol., Shanghai 1984-86; Kirkby, Richard R.J., *Urbanisation in China: Town and Country in a Developing Economy 1949-2000*, London 1985; Goldstein, Sidney, and Goldstein, Alice, *Population Mobility in the People's Republic of China*, Honolulu 1985; Taylor, Jeffrey R., and Banister, Judith, *China: The Problem of Employing Surplus Rural Labour*, Washington 1988; Tian Fang and Zhang Dongliang, ed., *Zhongguo renkou qianyi xintan (A New Investigation of Migration in China)*, Beijing 1989; Kwok Yin-wang et al., ed., *Chinese Urban Reform: What Model Now?*, Armonk 1990; Herith, Uwe, *Migration und Mobilität in Ostchina*, Hamburg 1991; Shen Yimin and Tong Chengzhu, *Zhongguo renkou qianyi (Migration in China)*, Beijing 1992; Taubmann, Wolfgang, ed., *Urban Problems and Urban Development in China*, Hamburg 1993; Giese, Karsten, *Landflucht und interprovinzielle Migration in der VR China*, Hamburg 1993; Chan Kam Wing, *Cities With Invisible Walls, Reinterpreting Urbanization in Post-1949 China*, Oxford 1994; Gu Shengzu and Jian Xinhua, *Dangdai Zhongguo liudong yu chengzhenhua (Population Mobility and Urbanisation in Present-Day China)*, Wuhan 1994; Yang Yunyan, *Zhongguo renkou qianyi yu fazhan de changqi zhanlue (Migration and Long-Term Development Strategy in China)*, Wuhan 1994; Goldstein, Alice, and Wang Feng, ed., *China: The Many Facets of Demographic Change*, Boulder 1996.

double-counts. In the more recent period they do not reflect the real situation any more. These data therefore cannot be accepted bona fide for long-range analysis of interregional migration streams. They can only be used for reference or for specific research purposes concentrating on the registration system. The same applies to the figures for provisional registration which have been already commented on. Information on their degree of completeness and reliability is usually lacking.²⁷

While the first tentative city surveys of population mobility started in 1984/85, the era of more ambitious empirical research dawned in 1986 with the migration survey in 74 cities and towns organised by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS).²⁸ This has been the first nation-wide migration survey in Chinese history. Deviating from prevalent practice, it did not adopt a 5-year migration interval but rather focused on all migrants since 1949. Different questionnaires were directed at either all household residents or various types of in- and out-migrants defined by different registration and temporal criteria. The most extensive database was generated for in-migrants either with permanent registration or with a minimum stay of 1 year. While the published analyses and materials of the survey include intra-county migration, screening the database to exclude it is principally possible. The CASS survey is the typical product of a transitional age. Although the increasing importance of spontaneous migration is realised and some parts of the floating population are included, the definitions and the reference period adopted still result in an overwhelming predominance of migrants with an official change of permanent household registration. High shares of married, better educated and somewhat older urban-urban migrants ensue. Despite its large size, the survey is not strictly representative, especially not on the provincial level. It neither covers all migration streams nor is it adequate for measuring them in terms of absolute numbers or rates. A further drawback is the fact that it contains hardly any questions related to private job-searching activities or backward linkages. Therefore, it is invaluable for the analysis of temporal patterns in the past. But these pertain only to selectivity, official migration reasons and rough personal evaluations.

Indicative of the gradual changes within the country, the Chinese micro-census and census started to incorporate migration questions in 1987 and 1990 respectively. The data enumerated are limited to the conventional criteria for migrant selectivity and to migration reasons. The published materials from the 1987 micro-census mostly classify figures by type of destination (cities, towns or counties) only. For some provinces, though, it is possible to obtain multi-dimensional cross-tabulations by types of origin and destination. In those cases, the selectivity of different migration streams can be investigated. Such cross-tabulations are rarely available from the materials of the 1990 census, which tend to classify migration by types of origin only.²⁹ The lack of sufficiently refined break-downs in published census materials, the

Table 1: Basic Census and Survey Data on Migration Streams 1981-95

²⁷ See the migration numbers in: Guojia tongjiju and Gong'anbu, ed., *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo renkou tongji ziliao huibian 1949-1985 (Collection of Population Statistics from the People's Republic of China 1949-1985)*, Beijing 1988, pp. 3, 989-1008. These materials are misinterpreted as inter-regional migration in: Shen Yimin and Tong Chengzhu, op. cit., pp. 142-149, 292-320. For an attempt at synthesis see the national summary, for further fragmentary and mostly undefined provincial data the provincial volumes of *Zhongguo renkou congshu (Encyclopedia of Chinese Population)*, 32 Vol., Beijing 1987-93. Some fragmentary migration data from counties and cities are contained in individual volumes of the survey series initiated by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: *Zhongguo guoqing congshu - Bai xian shi jingji shehui diaocha (Encyclopedia of Chinese Affairs - An Economic and Social Survey of One-Hundred Counties and Cities)*, Beijing 1991-. Analyses for Beijing, Shanghai, Shenyang, Guangzhou and Wuhan are available in: Ba da chengshi zhengfu diaoyan jigou lianhe keti-zu, ed., *Zhongguo da chengshi renkou y shehui fazhan (Demographic and Social Development in Big Cities of China)*, Beijing 1990, pp. 145-201. Provisional registration data underly some surveys of the floating population; see: Li Mengbai and Hu Xin, op. cit., pp. 125-150, 264-284.

²⁸ The most important published materials and analyses of the CASS survey can be found in: *Zhongguo 1986 nian 74 chengzhen renkou qianyi chouyang diaocha ziliao (China Migration of 74 Cities and Towns Sampling Survey Data)*, Beijing 1988; *Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan renkou yanjiusuo, ed., Zhongguo renkou qianyi yu chengshihua yanjiu (Studies on Migration and Urbanisation in China)*, Beijing 1988; Zhang Kaimin, ed., *Shanghai renkou qianyi yanjiu (Studies on Migration in Shanghai)*, Shanghai 1989; *Migration and Urbanization in China*, Beijing 1993; Ma Xia, ed., *Zhongguo chengzhen renkou qianyi (Migration to China's Cities and Towns)*, Beijing 1994. Adjustments can be made from the original database.

²⁹ For the 1987 micro-census see: Guojia tongjiju, ed., *1987 nian quanguo 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao, Quanguo fence (Materials of the 1% Sample Survey on the National Population, China)*, 3 vol., Beijing 1988; Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian (China Population Statistics Yearbook)*, Beijing 1989, pp. 571-573; Guangdong-sheng tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo 1987 nian 1% renkou chouyang diaocha ziliao, Guangdong fence (Materials of the 1% Sample Survey on the National Population: Guangdong)*, Guangzhou 1988. For the 1990 census: Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo 1990 nian renkou pucha ziliao (Data From the 1990 Population Census of China)*, Beijing 1993, vol. 4; Guojia tongjiju, ed., *Zhongguo renkou tongji nianjian (China Population Statistics Yearbook)*, Beijing 1989, pp. 282-289; *ibid*, Beijing 1993, pp. 158-179; *ibid*, Beijing 1994, pp. 282-321; *ibid*, Beijing 1995, pp. 202-207. Data from the 1995 microcensus have not been available yet.

rural-rural

19%, 13% of total migration, higher shares in Anhui, Jiangxi, SW and NW^{3,5}

38% inter-regional, high out-migration from SW and parts of NE and E to Hebei, Liaoning, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Xinjiang⁵

74% (82%) in age groups 15-29, mostly age 20-24³⁽⁴⁾

75% (77%), 59% female, mostly migrating for marriage^{3(4),5}

urban-urban

25%, 34% of total migration, higher shares in N, NE, Shanghai and NW^{3,5}

15% (28%), 44%, 25% to towns; 85% (72%), 56%, 75% to cities^{1(2),3,5}

29% (29%), 50% inter-regional, high out-migration from Hebei, NE, Jiangsu, Sichuan, Xinjiang, high in-migration to Hebei, Beijing, Liaoning, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, Guangdong^{1(2),5}

51% (58%), 57% (65%), (~57%-74%) in age groups 15-29^{1(2),3(4),6}

42% (41%), 45% (45%), 41%, (49%-55%) female, higher in Guangdong and other coastal areas^{1(2),3(4),5,6}

35% (41%), (38%-50%) unmarried^{1(2),6}

(12%), (3%-22%) illit. and elementary; (63%), (28%-72%) senior high and college level^{(2),6}

(32%), (37%-38%) non-working, (1%), (33%-35%) peasants, (24%), (15%) workers, (26%), (12%-45%) white-collar employees before^{(2),6}

(60%), (60%-75%) work-related, (7%), (8%-10%) marriage-related, (17%), (8%-14%) family-related, (7%), (1%-4%) school migration^{(2),6}

Own calculations from the following data:

¹ CASS national survey figures, adjusted for 1981-86 inter-county migrants only

² CASS national survey figures, adjusted for 1981-86 inter-county migrants > 14

³ microcensus figures for 1982-87, partially including intra-county migrants

⁴ microcensus figures for 1982-87, adjusted for migrants > age 14

⁵ census figures for 1985-90, excluding intra-county migration

⁶ Foshan-Shenzhen survey for 1988-93, migrants > age 14

⁷ village surveys from the early 1990s for all types of mobility, earners > age 14

rural-urban

49%, 49% of total migration, higher shares in Hebei, Henan, Jiangsu, Guangdong, Guangxi^{3,5}

13% (12%), 55%, 25% to towns; 87% (88%), 45%, 75% to cities^{1(2),3}

3% of urban population, higher shares in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, NW and in all metropolises⁵

19% (19%), 30% inter-regional, high out-migration from Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Hunan, Zhejiang, Anhui, Sichuan, Guangxi; high in-migration to Beijing, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Shanghai, Hubei, Guangdong, Xinjiang^{1(2),5}

55% (64%), 61% (72%), (~75%), (~60%) in age groups 15-29^{1(2),3(4),6,7}

52% (53%), 55% (57%), 45%, (18%-33%) female, higher in Guangdong and other coastal areas^{1(2),3(4),5,7}

37% (43%), (> 50%), (53%) unmarried^{1(2),6,7}

(26%), (14%-31%), (28%-42%) illit. and elementary education; (34%), (11%-24%), (8%-14%) senior high and college level^{(2),6,7}

(36%), (44%-49%) non-working, (36%), (33%-35%) peasants, (14%), (12%-14%) workers, (14%), (5%-10%) white-collar employees before^{(2),6}

(31%), (79%-80%) work-related, (15%), (8%) marriage-related, (29%), (3%-5%) family-related, (9%), (1%) school migration^{(2),6}

urban-rural

7%, 4% of total migration, higher shares in Beijing, Shanghai, Yunnan, Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang^{3,5}

51% interregional, high out-migration from Hebei, Heilongjiang, Hunan, Xinjiang, high in-migration to Liaoning, E, Hunan and Sichuan⁵

62% (68%) in age groups 15-29³⁽⁴⁾

54% (54%), 31% female^{3(4),5}

paucity of census questions related to migration issues plus the restrictive handling of definitions circumscribe the use of the data. Still, microcensus and census provide the most representative Chinese

migration figures to date. This is why their major results are presented in table 1. An effort has been made to distinguish the four different types of migration streams and to produce roughly compatible data. Numbers from the CASS survey and other local investigations are included for reference, too. Despite an attempt at adjustment, all figures continue to be subject to some divergent definitions. Even within the official population count, every new census or micro-census has handled migration indicators differently. Therefore, no time-series can be constructed - a serious impediment for studies on population mobility in China. Also, the table reveals that information on different types of migration streams is uneven.

Nevertheless, the following general observations for Chinese migration in the reform period emerge from the table and the more detailed figures underlying it: 1) There is a general prevalence of rural-urban migration; 2) figures for the relative position of towns and cities in the process of rural-urban migration are rather divergent and hard to evaluate due to definitional problems; 3) rural-rural and urban-urban migration shares reflect the regional gradation of urbanisation and development levels within the country; 4) urban-rural migration has receded to minimal importance; 5) rising inter-regional migration is mostly directed at the coastal regions and Xinjiang; 6) most inter-regional migration involves movement between neighbouring provinces, but labour-exporters for the whole nation such as Zhejiang, Anhui, Shandong, Henan and Sichuan can be identified; 7) younger age groups dominate all kinds of migration, they are particularly conspicuous in movement from the villages; 8) gender roles in migration vary and seem to be dependent on distance, different migration reasons, developmental levels and regional specifics; 9) data for migrant education, occupations and migration reasons vary by types of origin, they are unsatisfactory and available only for strongly varying localised samples or for higher planes of aggregation including more than one migration stream; 10) in spite of these caveats, a general predominance of economic motives in migration matters can be discerned.

Not included in the overview is a large national migrant sample that was obtained as a side-product of the 1988 National Fertility Survey. That survey defined 'migrants' as all persons having stayed at another place for at least 6 months, irrespective of their registration status; 'floating population' having stayed for shorter periods was covered, too. Figures for lifelong migration were collected, allowing for a very comprehensive data-set on migrant selectivity. But, as indicated by the purpose of the survey, women make up the large majority of respondents, leading to bias in the figures. The usefulness of the published materials is further constrained by the fact that only tabulations by administrative areas and no figures for different types of migration streams are given. A last group of national-level figures hail from the regular rural investigations of various government agencies. Noteworthy among them is the annual Green Report of the Ministry of Agriculture. Based on the reporting system of the Agricultural Bank, it covers some migration-related issues. Another important source is the annual rural household survey of the Statistical Bureau with data on household structure and living conditions, income composition and national averages for migrant remittances.³⁰

In contrast to the plethora of urban mobility surveys, small-town investigations and village studies, only a few surveys furnish more extensive information for sustained types of migration to larger cities. Among the few examples are surveys on the cities of Foshan and Shenzhen (Guangdong), Ji'nan and Qingdao (Shandong) introduced in the present volume. In-depth questionnaires like the one of the Foshan-Shenzhen survey are generally much larger than those of the national census. This is the only way to investigate explanatory micro-level variables on the role of job-searching avenues, employment and income, family situation and co-migration, information, assistance levels and remittance flows.³¹ But just like the census and micro-census, urban-based surveys of in-migration are not able to measure return flows; their duration-specific migration figures cover the reference period of 5 or 7 years only. Within these limits, they can suggest longer periods of migrant stay than evinced by village surveys.

³⁰ Liang Jimin and Chen Shengli, ed., *Quanguo shengyu jieyu chouyang diaocha fenxi shuju juan (Analytical Data of the National Fertility Sample Survey)*, 4 Vol., Beijing 1993; *Green Report: Annual Report on Economic Development of Rural China in 1993 and the Development Trends in 1994*, Beijing 1994. Figures of the rural household survey are published in the statistical yearbooks of the provinces and in: Guojia tongjiju, ed. *Zhongguo nongcun zhuhu diaocha nianjian (Chinese Rural Household Survey Yearbook)*, Beijing 1993.

³¹ For further reports on the Foshan-Shenzhen survey see: Scharping, Thomas, and Sun Huaiyang, ed., *Migration in China's Guangdong Province, Major Results of a 1993 Sample Survey in Shenzhen and Foshan*, Hamburg 1997; Scharping, Thomas, 'Selectivity, Migration Reasons and Backward Linkages of Rural-Urban Migrants: A Sample Survey of Migrants to Foshan and Shenzhen in Comparative Perspective', in: Pieke, Frank, and Mallee, Hein, eds., *Internal and International Migration: Chinese Perspectives*, Richmond 1999, pp. 73-102.

Because of the prominent place of small-town strategy in China, a greater number of studies focus on migration to towns exclusively. These include a 1987 Sino-Canadian survey on migration to 36 small towns in 9 coastal provinces, noteworthy for its innovative questionnaire; a 1991 survey of in- and out-migration in 50 towns and townships in 20 provinces; and a 1993/94 survey of 7 towns in 6 provinces, which again is introduced in the present volume. As all these surveys adopt rather different migrant definitions and sampling designs, they are not easily comparable. Town surveys generally include intra-county movement; they usually feature high shares of both permanent migrants and short-distance commuters.³² This is different from city surveys. An increasingly important problem of the latter ones is how to study migrants in squatter settlements and other provisional housing.

A special category are urban surveys on population mobility in a wide sense. Working with either raw head-counts or short questionnaires addressed at a large number of respondents, they have been staged by municipal governments and the Ministry for Urban Construction in major cities of China ever since 1984. The sequence and documentation for Shanghai and Beijing has been particularly dense. Results from the last round in Shanghai are discussed in the volume at hand. Other cities with this type of survey have been provincial capitals and high-order central places like Tianjin, Taiyuan, Shenyang, Jilin and Harbin, Hangzhou, Zhengzhou and Wuhan, Guangzhou, Xi'an and Chengdu. Urban surveys of population mobility in a wide sense are aimed at studying traffic turnover and the burden of urban infrastructure. As all persons without permanent registration are targeted, samples are characterised by a large share of travellers, visitors, persons on business and purchasing trips etc. Enumeration points include private households and collective dormitories as well as places with a high concentration of transients such as hotels, guesthouses and hospitals, market sheds, railway stations and ships. The minimum period of stay ranges from three days to no time criterion at all; no sustained work or lodging is required; no maximum period of stay for the delimitation of migrant status is set either. Numbers are calculated by duration of stay rather than by the fixed-date method.

Because these definitions are unlike the normal migrant specification, the resulting volume of mobility is much higher and sample compositions are different, too. The share of women, for instance, tends to be lower than in other types of investigations. It is these surveys which can provide spectacularly high migrant shares of more than 20% of the urban population and result in totals of more than 100 mio. Chinese on the move. In some cases, though, tabulations for the activities and the length of stay of the survey population may hint at migrants in the narrower sense. But there is no way to calculate a representative figure for a greater number of places. Figures from Shanghai and Beijing differ considerably. A trend towards longer periods of stay is discernible in recent years, with usually more than one half of the sampled respondents staying between 6 months and 5 years.³³

In contrast to most urban surveys, village surveys usually concentrate on out-migration. They are preferable for researching rural household strategies and circulation patterns. In many cases, however, they have to rely on interviews with informants rather than with the frequently absent migrants themselves. Often, only earners or household heads are questioned. Although the first migration surveys in villages already started in 1986, the great majority of them has been undertaken in the early 1990s by the Ministry of Agriculture, various other government agencies and research institutes. Eight large-scale projects spanning more than one province stand out. One among them is introduced in this volume; further ones are going on. In most cases, commuters and intra-county migrants are included in the samples which feature a strong dominance of male, under-educated peasants with circulatory movement, often having neither permanent nor provisional registration in the cities and towns. Survey items include employment,

³² For the Sino-Canadian survey see: Zhongguo yanhai diqu xiaochengzhen fazhan yu renkou qianyi diaocha yanjiuzu, ed., *Zhongguo yanhai diqu xiao chengzhen fazhan yu renkou qianyi (Development and Migration in Small Towns of Coastal China)*, Beijing 1989; Liu Zheng et al., *Woguo yanhai diqu xiao chengzhen jingji fazhan he renkou qianyi (Economic Development and Migration in Small Towns of Chinese Coastal Areas)*, Beijing 1990. For the survey of 50 townships and towns see: Zhang Qingwu, ed., *Zhongguo 50 xiang zhen liudong renkou diaocha yanjiu (A Survey Study of Floating Population in 50 Townships and Towns of China)*, Beijing 1994.

³³ Fudan daxue, '1985 nian yu 1984 nian Shanghai shiqu liudong renkou di bijiao fenxi (A Comparative Analysis of Floating Population in Shanghai City in 1984 and 1985)', in: *Renkou*, No. 2, Shanghai 1986, pp. 1-4; Zheng Guizhen et al., 'Shanghai shiqu liudong renkou wenti chutan (Preliminary Remarks on the Floating Population in Shanghai)', in: *Renkou yanjiu*, No. 3, Beijing 1985, pp. 2-7; Luo Maochu et al., 'Quanmian renshi renkou liudong xianxiang, shenshen xuanze duice (For a Comprehensive Understanding of Floating Population and a Careful Consideration of Remedial Measures)', in: *ibid.*, No. 3, Beijing 1986, pp. 2-27, 19; Zhang Kaimin, ed., *Shanghai liudong renkou (Floating Population in Shanghai)*, Beijing 1989; Ba da chengshi zhengfu diaoyan jigou lianhe keti-zu, ed., op. cit., pp. 202-270; Wu Canping, ed., *Gaige kaifang yu renkou fazhan (Reform, Opening-Up and Population Development)*, Shenyang 1990, pp. 151-163; Li Mengbai and Hu Xin, ed., op. cit.; Zou Lanchun, ed., *Beijing de liudong renkou (Floating Population in Beijing)*, Beijing 1996.

income, duration of work outside and the usual elements of migrant selectivity; in a few exemplary cases land use and tenancy, remittance and investment patterns are enquired, too. Investigation tends to focus on areas of heavy out-migration, such as hinterland provinces with large peasant populations. Variation of figures is high. The practice of most reports not to provide any precise information on definitions and sample composition, questionnaire and survey design creates major problems of interpretation.³⁴

This then is the data base for studies of migration in present-day mainland China. During the last 5 years it has tremendously grown, yet still it keeps being insufficient. Because of the size, internal diversity and backwardness of the territory, it is much more varied and patchy than the highly standardised and differentiated figures for Taiwan.³⁵ While census data on migration and commuting there are very exhaustive, registration numbers suffer from a certainly bigger lack of enforcement than across the Taiwan Strait. Under conditions of modernisation, liberalisation and market economics, this may be the future situation on the mainland, too. But apart from uneven coverage and methodological difficulties, other deficiencies show up in the data collections and the literature based on them to date: Analyses have concentrated on the macro-level, studies of individual decision-making processes keep being the rare exception. Determinants of migration are much better researched than consequences which are usually hypothesised rather than documented. There are manifold reasons for this. One of them is the relative lack of information on a number of crucial aspects: City planning procedures and utilisation of public services, private (in contrast to public) investment in rural and urban areas, financial flows (between migrants and family members, migrants and non-migrants, migrants and urban administrations), patterns of labour disputes, deviant behaviour and crime are examples for areas which await more thorough treatment. There is only few academic or administrative basework which can be used here. Often, research problems arise from the fact that the informal sector is studied - a shadowy affair by definition. Studies have to cope with the difficulties of transgressing interests, dealing with illegal behaviour and touching taboo subjects.

Another methodological problem is connected to the multi-dimensional nature of economic, social and political evolution where migration operates as one determinant besides others. It is hard to isolate its influence on broader areas like labour productivity or income distribution, environmental affairs or regional development from the many other forces at work. Secondary analysis of highly aggregated macro-level indicators seems hardly suitable for such an attempt. Analysis of quasi-experimental situations would suggest itself as an alternative approach. Chinese policy is strong on pragmatically testing new models, and a number of experimental points on the regional level exist that involve new rules for handling migration matters. But as yet no systematic evaluation procedures have been designed. And, of course, the study of local experiences always raises the issue of transferability. Careful control of parameters would be of utmost importance. A more immediate suggestion would be to improve survey questionnaires. As yet, they are usually weak on variables reflecting migration results. Study of long-term circulation and

³⁴ Yu Dechang, *Quanguo bai cun laodongli qingkuang diaocha ziliao 1978-1986 (Materials From a Labour-Force Survey of More Than Hundred Villages in China 1978-1986)*, Beijing 1989, pp. 15-19, 28-33; Zhang Chunyuan, 'Nongcun renkou liudong yu jingji shouru de zengzhang (Rural population mobility and income growth)', in: *Renkou kexue yanjiu*, No.5, Beijing 1991, pp.13-19; Luo Yousheng and Liu Jianwen, 'Nongcun laodongli kua quyu zhuanji: Xianzhuang, chengyin yu duice (Inter-Regional Relocation of the Rural Labour Force: Present Situation, Factors and Policies)', in: *Zhongguo nongcun jingji*, No.8, Beijing 1994, pp. 3-9; Li Fan and Han Xiaoyun, 'Waichu dagong ren yuan de nianling jiegou he wenhua goucheng (Age Structure and Educational Composition of Migrant Workers)', in: *ibid*, No.8, Beijing 1994, pp. 10-14; Li Fan, 'Waichu dagong ren yuan de guimo, liudong fanwei ji qita (Volume, Range and Other Aspects of Worker Migration)', in: *ibid*, No.9, Beijing 1994, pp. 31-35; Nongyebu, 'Jingji fazhan zhong de nongcun laodongli liudong (Rural Labour Mobility During Economic Development)', in: *ibid*, No.1, Beijing 1995, pp. 43-50; '28 ge xian (shi) nongcun laodongli kua quyu liudong de diaocha yanjiu (A Survey Study on Inter-Regional Mobility of Peasant Labourers in 28 Counties (Cities))', in: *ibid*, No.4, Beijing 1995, pp. 19-28; Zhang Qingwu, *op. cit.*; Mallee, Hein, *Rural Population Mobility in Seven Chinese Provinces*, Paper Prepared for the ECARDC IV Conference in Manchester, November 12, 1995. The best documentation is available from: Nongyebu, ed., *Zhongguo nongcun laodongli liudong yanjiu: Waichuzhe yu shuchudi (A Study of Labor Mobility in Chinese Villages: Out-Migrants and Labor-Exporting Places)*, Beijing 1996. For other local samples see: 'Henan-sheng nongcun shehui jingji diaocha-dui, Guanyu nongcun renkou waichu liudong qingkuang de diaocha (A Survey on Rural Out-Migrants)', in: *Renkou yu jingji*, No. 3, Beijing 1991, pp. 42-46; Xu Zhong, 'Anhui-sheng Wuwei-xian 12 ge xiang liuchu renkou diaocha baogao (Survey Report on Out-Migration in 12 Townships of Wuwei County in Anhui Province)', in: *Renkou kexue yanjiu*, No.6, Beijing 1991, pp. 58-62, 34.

³⁵ Census and micro-census on Taiwan have included successively more detailed migration questions since 1966. For the last census see: Census Office of the Executive Yuan, ed., *An Extract Report on the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Taiwan-Fukien Area, Republic of China*, 2 Vol., Taipei 1992; for the annual registration data: Neizhengbu, ed., *Zhonghua minguo Tai-Min renkou tongji niankan (Taiwan-Fukien Demographic Fact Book, Republic of China)*, Taipei 1974-; for migration numbers from the annual sample survey of labour statistics: Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics, ed., *Report on the Internal Migration Survey in Taiwan Area, Republic of China*, Taipei 1979-.

employment patterns, the volume and use of remittances, private investment and land use, family dynamics and co-migration would be the order of the day. First steps in this direction have been taken by the significant enlargement of questionnaires. But in view of the danger of overload with resulting non-cooperation of respondents, specially focused surveys rather than multi-purpose studies should be considered. Preferably, this would be grounded on prior work in better-known areas as well as adoption of compatible definitions and sampling designs.

Finally, quantitative research needs to be supplemented by other methods of study. While it would be foolish to disregard the crucial elements of socio-economic change expressed in representative survey figures and non-professional to renounce the advantages of statistical analysis, the survey approach tends to ignore or underestimate aspects of behaviour that cannot be fitted into figures. Reviewing the literature to date, one is struck by the relative dearth of good qualitative work on migration. Description can throw a light on important areas which are hard to operationalise in suitable indicators or which do not lend themselves to data analysis at all. These can be both macro-level factors on the political plane as well as micro-level items in subjective and personal matters. It is also the obvious approach in those areas, where data collection may be feasible in principle, but either has not been undertaken or not been accessible for a variety of reasons.

While newspaper and magazine reports on migrant workers fill thousands of pages, few serious case studies relying on extended periods of observation are available.³⁶ Intensions, interpretations and identities, group-structures and self-organisation, household strategies and personal networks along with labour, authority and community relations are obvious fields where a blending of quantitative and qualitative research would be highly desirable. Documentary study of administrative and legal norms and content analysis of Chinese publications could be improved, too.

³⁶ First work on this line is submitted in: Oi, Jean, 'The Fate of the Collective After the Commune', in: Davis, Deborah, and Vogel, Ezra, ed., *Chinese Society on the Eve of Tiananmen, The Impact of Reform*, Cambridge, Mass. 1990, pp. 15-36; Siu, Helen F., 'The Politics of Migration in a Market Town', in: *ibid*, pp. 61-82; Pennarz, Johanna, *Haushaltsstrategien zwischen Markt und Subsistenz, Eine Untersuchung zur sozial-ökonomischen Differenzierung im ländlichen Sichuan, China*, Berlin 1994. See also the valuable contributions on the Zhejiang Village of Beijing by Catherine Pianté, Zhu Haibo, Wang Chunguang, Jean Philippe Béja and Michel Bonnin in: *China Perspectives*, No.2, Hongkong 1995, pp. 12-25. Other observational field-work in the Anhui and Zhejiang villages of Beijing has been carried out since 1995 by a Chinese research team and is due for publication.