

# Development Strategies and Migrant Labour in China— Historical Change and Recent Struggles

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*Stratégie rozvoja a práca migrantov v Číne—minulý vývoj a zápasy za práva v súčasnosti*

**Resumé** Tento príspevok v prvom rade ponúka prehľad procesu transformácie migračnej politiky v Čínskej ľudovej republike od konca 70-tych rokov 20. storočia v kontexte meniacich sa stratégií ekonomického rozvoja. Autor v ňom poukazuje, že zameranie na exportne orientovanú ekonomiku bolo sprevádzané úpravami v oblasti riadenia migrácie jej posunom k aktívnej regulácii a podpore migrácie z vidieka do miest. Skúmanie foriem sociálneho začlenenia a vylúčenia migrujúcich vidieckych robotníkov ukázalo, že súčasný režim migrácie je založený na zbavovaní práv, teda na externalizácii sociálnej reprodukcie. Na záver článok pojednáva o samo-organizovaní sa a bojoch medzi migrujúcimi robotníkmi a prichádza k záveru, že druhá generácia vnútorštátnych migrantov len zdôrazňuje krehkosť súčasného režimu migrácie.

**Key-words** China, Economy, 20–21st century, Development Strategies, Migration · *hukou* 戶口 · System · Workers' Struggles · Inclusion and Exclusion

## *Introduction*

»The economic growth in China since the end of the 1970s continues to surpass any other long-term economic upturn in the history of the modern era«,<sup>1</sup> states

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Tobias ten Brink on the economic development in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the beginning of 'reform and opening up' in 1978. Over the past thirty years, the authoritarian state under the leadership of the Communist Party (CCP) has managed to become the leading export nation as well as the second biggest economy in the world.

While there are diverging explanations for this successful economic development, it is undisputed that a major characteristic of this form of catch-up development in the PRC consists of the unprecedented migration of large parts of the rural population into urban areas, as well as the connected processes of large-scale proletarianization. In 1980 the country's rural population still amounted to 80.6%; in 2012, according to official statistics, already 52.6% of the population lived in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> While there were only approximately two million rural migrant workers at the end of the 1970s, by 1993 the figure had already reached 60 million. Today the number of those semi-proletarian migrant workers is estimated to be between 263 and 280 million.<sup>3</sup>

This is the backdrop against which the question regarding the causal relationship between China's internal migration and development has been increasingly discussed in different scholarly circles in the past few years. This article discusses the relationship between changing state policies regarding migration and labour in the context of different economic development strategies, the related forms of inclusion and exclusion directed at internal migrants, as well as the struggles and forms of autonomous practices the workers develop around those mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

I argue that since the end of the 1970s, migration and labour policies have been adapted by the Chinese party-state in a way that led—in the context of changing economic development strategies—to the emergence of a specific migration regime functional for the strategy of export-oriented industrialization.

Entwicklung und (Kämpfe der) Migration in der Volksrepublik China«, in *Migration und Entwicklung. Neue Perspektiven*, ed. by Ilker Ataç (Vienna: Promedia, 2014), 153–170.

- 1 Tobias ten Brink, *Chinas Kapitalismus. Entstehung, Verlaufsformen, Paradoxien* (Frankfurt a. M.; New York: Campus Verlag, 2013), 12.
- 2 NBSC (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China), »Statistical Communiqué of the People's Republic of China on the 2012 National Economic and Social Development« <[www.stats.gov.cn/english/newsandcimingevents/t20130222\\_402899251.htm](http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/newsandcimingevents/t20130222_402899251.htm)> (last retrieval 20 Aug 2013).
- 3 Ibid.; Li Shi, »The Economic Situation of Rural Migrant Workers in China«, *China Perspectives* 4/2010, 8–9; Wang Kan, »Collective Awakening and Action of Chinese Workers: The 2010 Auto Workers' Strike and its Effects«, *Sozial.Geschichte Online* 6/2011, 9–10.

This functionality consists, as I proceed to show, of the selective promotion of rural-urban migration and the inclusion of migrant workers in the (segmented) labour market on the one hand and simultaneously the deprivation of their rights in urban areas on the other. The evolving migration regime is to be understood as a specific expression of the interaction between development strategies by the Chinese party-state and the collective agency of migrant workers themselves.

The following first section of the article provides a historic overview of the transformation of development strategies and the modifications in migration policies during the three periods of the socio-economic reform process (1978–1989; 1992–2002; 2002–today). The second part discusses the forms of inclusion and exclusion of migrant labour resulting from government policies and examines the functionality of the current migration regime. Finally, in the third section of the article, the forms of migrant self-organisation and labour protests within the current migration regime will be analysed and their (potential) effects on the Chinese development model will be discussed.

### 1 *The Transformation of Development Strategies and Migration Policies*

In order to grasp the meaning of the changes in state migration policies it is first necessary to look at the development goals and the state's approach to internal migration *before* 1978. The so-called household registration system (*bukou dengji zhidu* 戶口登記制度, hereafter *bukou* system), which was established nationwide in 1958, continues to be the most important institution for migration policy in the PRC. The main rationale behind its implementation was that it would enable the control and containment of rural-urban migration in the context of the collectivization of agriculture.<sup>4</sup>

With the establishment of this system every Chinese citizen was (and still is today) registered at birth, and the household registration (*bukou*) consisted of two components: a (presumed) place of permanent residence (*bukou suozaidi* 戶口所在地) as well as a classification differentiating between an 'agrarian' and 'non-agrarian' *bukou* status (*bukou leibie* 類別). A non-agrarian (or: urban) *bukou* entitled

4 Huang Ping and Frank Pieke, »China Migration Country Study«, paper presented at the conference »Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia«, Dhaka, 22–24 June 2003, <[www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0903/Dhaka\\_CP\\_3.pdf](http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0903/Dhaka_CP_3.pdf)> (last retrieval 20 Aug 2013), 3.

urban residents to employment in state companies at their place of permanent residence and thus an access to state controlled resources such as grain, housing or medical care, whereas the rural population remained excluded from those direct forms of state benefits. An agrarian *hukou* was connected to a piece of land and the inclusion in rural collectives respectively. Any changes to a person's household registration were put under strict control by the state, and were therefore hardly ever possible.<sup>5</sup> Since its establishment at the end of the 1950s, this system has been one of the main steering tools for the Maoist developmental state focused on urban heavy industry, as well as an extremely effective institution particularly for preventing rural-urban migration.<sup>6</sup> It reproduced a dualist social structure, essentially characterised by a social cleavage and spatial hierarchy between urban and rural citizens.<sup>7</sup>

*Phase I of the Reform Process: 1978–1989*

According to the decisions at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978, pushed forward by the reform-oriented faction within the CCP, diverse fundamental changes in the society's relations of production were necessary in order to stimulate economic growth and to achieve 'socialist modernisation'. The first few years of the reform era were characterised by fundamental transformations in Chinese agriculture, which would have major consequences for the future development of labour migration from rural regions.

The decollectivisation of China's agriculture, which had been effectively completed by the latter part of 1983, not only paved the way for a dramatic rise in the output of agricultural production.<sup>8</sup> It also resulted in the release of surplus labour, which had previously been tied to the collectives as well as to the demise

5 Cheng Tiejun and Mark Selden, »The Construction of Spatial Hierarchies. China's Hukou and Danwei Systems«, in *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China*, ed. by Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich (Armonk, NY [etc.], 1997), 23–25.

6 Cindy C. Fan, *China on the Move. Migration, the State, and the Household* (London; New York: Routledge, 2008), 46.

7 Cheng and Selden, »The Construction of Spatial Hierarchies«, 25.

8 Naughton notes: »By 1984 grain output had surged to 407 million metric tons, more than one-third higher than in 1978«. In explaining the reasons for this surge in agricultural production, however, a mere reference to the re-invented practice of contracting land to households is not sufficient. Another important condition for this increase was the accelerating mechanization of agricultural production, and most significantly the »increased availability of modern inputs such as chemical fertilizer.« Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy. Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2007), 89.

of institutions within the people's communes that had been important for social reproduction.<sup>9</sup> According to estimates by Chinese officials in 1985, the number of rural surplus labour in the mid-1980s amounted to 200 million people.<sup>10</sup> Selling agricultural products on the emerging urban markets but also the possibility, or rather necessity, to derive income from off-farm work were important reasons for 'released' peasants to migrate into the cities.

The Chinese central government initially adopted a restrictive attitude, trying to uphold the barriers preventing rural-urban migration.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of the 1980s, however, this began to change gradually. Under the slogan 'leave the soil but not the village' (*litu bu lixiang* 離土不離鄉), rural population was encouraged to do off-farm work in their villages or rural townships. The surplus of labour in agriculture and the increasing migration movements, which were perceived as a potential danger for the social and political stability in bigger urban centres, should have been countered by expanding the efforts in rural industrialisation.<sup>12</sup> In this context, state migration policy was linked to the rapid expansion of the so-called 'township and village enterprises', which were the most dynamic part of PRC's economic development until the mid-1990s.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, labour shortages in urban state-owned enterprises, as well as the fact that a rapidly growing number of migrants stayed in urban areas without official authorisation and thus beyond state control, led the central government to incrementally remove restrictions regarding the temporary legal residence of rural migrants, though not permitting changes in their *hukou* status. It was in these circumstances that the temporary residence permits (*zanzhuzheng* 暫住証) for urban areas were introduced in 1985. People who stayed longer than three months (from 1995, longer than one month) outside the place of their household registration had to apply for such temporary residence permit, and it needed to be regularly renewed. While labour migration beyond central state planning was thus formally acknowledged, it is important to note that a temporary residence permit did not mean a transformation of a person's *hukou* status and therefore also did not include any entitlements to the (local) state benefits for which people with a local and non-agrarian *hukou* registration were eligible.

9 Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 243–246.

10 David Zweig, *Freeing China's Farmers. Rural Restructuring in the Reform Era* (New York; London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 270.

11 Huang and Pieke, »China Migration Country Study«, 32.

12 Li Shi, »The Economic Situation«, 6.

13 Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 271–293

*Phase 2 of the Reform Process: 1992–2002*

The second phase of the socio-economic reform process in the PRC is characterised by a renewed adjustment of the state development strategy. Though the conservative-Maoist faction had gained strength within the CCP for a short period of time after the 1989 Tiananmen square student and workers protests, in 1992 Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997) proclaimed an intensification of market-oriented reforms and, in particular, the further opening for foreign capital investment. In the same year, this path of reform was confirmed at the 14th Party Congress of the CCP under the new General Secretary Jiang Zemin 江澤民 (b1926).<sup>14</sup> From then on, industrialisation was mainly based on export-oriented and labour-intensive production, and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises would be a central pillar of the development strategy pursued by the party-state. Compared to the prior process of world-market integration strongly endorsed by local governments already since the 1970s, the qualitative changes since 1992 could be seen in the significantly increased importance of foreign direct investment (FDI) to the Chinese economy.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, since the beginning of the 1990s a large number of new special economic zones had been established, the urban real estate sector had been opened for investments, and since 1994 also inland provinces had been conceded more autonomy in negotiating with foreign investors.<sup>16</sup> Finally, China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 marked its full integration into global neoliberal capitalism. The volume of FDI had grown from 4.3 billion US dollars in 1991 to 41.7 billion in 1996.<sup>17</sup> An exceptionally high amount in global comparative terms has been and still is invested in the manufacturing industry: »Foreign companies, in other words, were at the heart of China's export growth. Indeed some centres of Chinese industry were quite literally created by FDI«.<sup>18</sup>

The qualitative change with regard to the development strategy was also reflected in another adjustment of central state migration policy in the 1990s: an active regulation of rural–urban migration would be in the centre of the state's approach. On the one hand, considerations regarding migration policy changes

14 Mary Elizabeth Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism. Globalization and the Politics of Labor in China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 42; Chris Bramall, *Chinese Economic Development* (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 352–353.

15 Naughton, *The Chinese Economy*, 402.

16 Gallagher, *Contagious Capitalism*, 42.

17 Hyekyung Cho, *Chinas langer Marsch in den Kapitalismus* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2005), 151.

18 Bramall, *Chinese Economic Development*, 376.

remained closely intertwined with the question of the labour surplus in the countryside, which was still estimated to be »anywhere in the range between 100 and 200 million in the mid-1990s«. <sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the question of how to regulate rural-urban migration to meet the increasing demand for (cheap) labour power in the cities and export production zones took centre stage in policy-making.

On the basis of the more general process of decentralisation in economic policy-making, the first essential aspect of the regulation of rural-urban migration in the 1990s had been the increasing *decentralisation of the administration of the hukou system*. With the end of state grain rationing in almost all regions in China in 1992, also the distinction between an agrarian and non-agrarian *hukou* gradually lost its significance in the context of an increasingly local state-based migration management. This distinction was substituted by locally defined immigration criteria, or, in a few cities on an experimental basis, abolished altogether. Ever since then, it is not primarily the difference between an agrarian or non-agrarian *hukou* which has been important for Chinese internal migrants, but the question whether they can obtain a local *hukou* tied to respective rights and entitlements. <sup>20</sup> This was also the beginning of a *commodification* of the household registration. Selling specific forms of the urban *hukou* presented local administrations with an additional source of income and served as a tool for a targeted recruitment of skilled labour. <sup>21</sup>

A local, urban *hukou* still remained out of reach for the vast majority of rural migrant workers. On the contrary, another aspect of the regulation of internal migration was the expansion of regulations regarding temporary residence permits to rural areas in 1995, and provisions for repatriation were extended to also cover destitute, undocumented and homeless migrants who therefore became exposed to the permanent threat of being deported. <sup>22</sup> Documents of the party's Central Committee, of the State Council as well as of the Ministry of Labour demonstrate that national migration policy in the 1990s became

19 Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China. Peasant Migrants, the State, and the Logic of the Market* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 155.

20 Kam Wing Chan and Will Buckingham, »Is China Abolishing the Hukou System«, *The China Quarterly* no 195 (2008), 582–606.

21 Kam Wing Chan and Zhang Li, »The Hukou System and Rural-Urban Migration in China: Processes and Changes«, *The China Quarterly* no 160 (1999), 836–840; Fan, *China on the Move*, 50.

22 Bettina Gransow, »Binnenmigration in China—Chance oder Falle«, *Focus Migration Kurzdossier* no 19, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Dec 2012) <[www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration/151241/binnenmigration-in-china](http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration/151241/binnenmigration-in-china)> (last retrieval 20 Aug 2013).

increasingly intertwined with the regulation of the labour market, and that in the second half of the 1990s sector-specific restrictions for migrant workers should have allowed job security for workers with a local-urban household registration in bigger cities.<sup>23</sup>

*Phase 3 of the Reform Process: 2002 and Beyond*

The third phase of the Chinese reform process began with the succession of Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 (b1942) and Wen Jiabao 溫家寶 (b1942) to state and party leadership in the years 2002 and 2003. This phase is not so much characterised by a fundamental change in the economic development strategy, but rather by the attempt to strengthen the state's regulation capacity given the expansion of capitalist relations of production and the related socio-economic upheavals.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that since 2006—and, with particular emphasis, since the most recent change of leadership in 2012/13—reforms to boost domestic consumption, to promote industrial upgrading as well as to disentangle the prevailing export dependency of the Chinese economy have been announced,<sup>25</sup> social and environmental concerns in the context of the proclaimed goal of a 'harmonious society' have been in the centre of the policies pursued by the central state.

Closely linked to this political focus, which is to be seen as a reaction to the growth in social struggles in general and labour unrest in particular,<sup>26</sup> we can discern significant adjustments in migration policy in two respects. Firstly, internal migration became, for the first time, to be seen and officially referred to by the central government as an effective means for reducing regional as well as the growing rural-urban inequalities. Hence, since the beginning of the 2000s, the *promotion* of rural-urban migration has been explicitly pointed out as a political goal in documents issued by the central government. The more specific guidelines issued by the central government were focused on removing barriers for rural-urban migration, that is, most importantly, eliminating bureaucratic

23 Huang and Pieke, »China Migration Country Study«, 34–35.

24 Frido Wenten, »Restructured Class-Relations since 1978«, in *China's Labor Question*, ed by Christoph Scherrer (München: Rainer Hampp Verlag, 2011), 41.

25 KPMG, »China's 12th Five Year Plan: Overview«, <[www.kpmg.com/cn/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/China-12th-Five-Year-Plan-Overview-201104.pdf](http://www.kpmg.com/cn/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/China-12th-Five-Year-Plan-Overview-201104.pdf)> (last retrieval 20 Aug 2013).

26 Beverly J. Silver and Zhang Lu, »China als neuer Mittelpunkt der globalen Arbeiterunruhe«, *PROKLA. Zeitschrift für kritische Sozialwissenschaft* 40,4 (2010, no 161), 605–618; see also below.



barriers and obstructive fees. The *bukou* system itself, however, remained largely unchanged and is still in operation. Although the system's future abolition was considered by the State Council in 2004,<sup>27</sup> concrete reforms of the household registration system at the local level would not go beyond the stage of pilot projects. Secondly, and of particular relevance, since 2003/04 migrant workers have for the first time been acknowledged as part of the working class in official state and party documents, and their importance for the economic development of the country has been highlighted. This was the starting point for the publication of a series of regulations at the central state level for the improvement of the working and living conditions of migrant labourers. Examples include the »Notice on Doing a Better Job Concerning the Employment Management of and Services for Migrant Workers« issued by the State Council in 2003, and the first comprehensive policy document by the central government on the issue of migrant workers in 2006, in which a generally improved legal protection and stronger controls on the actual conclusion of employment contracts were listed as the main goals of central state politics.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, this has been part of an intended 'harmonisation' of capitalist labour relations with a focus on a juridification of industrial relations and the establishment of mechanisms for an institutionalised form of conflict resolution. Especially notable are the Labour Contract Law and the Labour Dispute Mediation and Arbitration Law, which both came into effect in 2008.<sup>29</sup> Also related is the attempt to integrate migrant workers in the party-led All-China Federation of Trade Union, the sole legal union organization in the PRC.<sup>30</sup>

Although the above statements regarding a stronger promotion of domestic consumption do hint at yet another round of adjustments of the development strategy, China's export dependency has so far remained unchanged. This can be seen, for example, by looking at manufacturing exports: the value of light

27 Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, »The Distance between State and Rural Society in the PRC. Reading Document No 1«, *Journal of Environmental Management* 87 (2008), 222.

28 Kinglun Ngok, »The Changes of Chinese Labor Policy and Labor Legislation in the Context of Market Transition«, *International Labor and Working Class History* 73 (2008), 45–64; Rachel Murphy, »Introduction: Labour Migration and Social Development in China«, in *Labour Migration and Social Development in Contemporary China*, ed. by Rachel Murphy (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 1–16.

29 Günter Schucher, »Harmonisierung per Gesetz. Arbeitskonflikte in China und das neue Arbeitskonfliktgesetz«, *China aktuell* 37,4 (2008), 64–109.

30 Sergio Grassi, »Die neuen Aufgaben der chinesischen Gewerkschaften«, *China aktuell* 37,1 (2008), 139–161.

industrial exports, which had grown by approximately 190 per cent between 1994 and 2001, rose by 600 per cent between 2001 and 2008.<sup>31</sup> Whereas the corporatist inclusion of migrant workers has been further promoted, the household registration system is still effective and has lost nothing of its significance for the state's migration policy.

#### *A Migration Regime's Perspective*

To sum up, it can be noted that with the reorientation of the state development strategy since 1992, there have also been important changes in the central state's management of rural-urban migration. For the first time and contrary to the dominant strategies of preventing and then tacitly tolerating internal migration in the 1980s, its active regulation became key. Migration policy is thereby still tied to the question of the rural labour surplus, however, corresponding to the growing demand for labour in the cities and export production zones, the active regulation and later the explicit promotion of internal migration has been moving to the core of state policy.

In this context, the functionality of the *hukou*-system, remaining essential for the state's migration policy, has changed. Whereas the household registration had been a state institution until the beginning of the 1980s, which established borders within the PRC in order to guarantee the total exclusion of the rural population from urban areas according to the Maoist development strategy, it has now been adjusted in a specific way making it functional for the export-oriented development strategy. In the following section, I will discuss what this functionality for the transformed state development strategy consists of. This necessitates looking at those forms of inclusion and exclusion migrant workers are confronted with due to the changes in migration policy on the basis of the *hukou* system.

However, to avoid statist and functionalist models of explanation, it is first necessary to introduce an analytical perspective connected to the notion of the 'migration regime' which has been developed within debates on international (irregular) migration, but which nevertheless also seems productive for the case of internal migration in the PRC. The notion of the migration regime can serve »to think about the relation between labour force mobility and its control without lapsing into to the dualism established within migration theory of an economic perspective on mobility and the presupposition of its control by the

31 Wenten, »Restructured Class-Relations«, 41.

state». <sup>32</sup> According to Willenbücher, migration regimes can be defined as »the sum of legal, administrative, border-control and police related as well as socio-political regulations and practices, [...] which are regulating the temporal, repeated and permanent mobility between nation states«. <sup>33</sup>

By employing the concept of the regime the regulation of social relations can be grasped as the result of social struggles, as the condensation of social power relations. With regards to migration policies, the concept of the regime enables us to analyse them not as consistently planned actions but rather as the (contingent) outcome of negotiation processes, in which a series of state and non-state actors are taking part in:

It is [...] a mix of implicit conceptual frames, generations of turf wars among bureaucracies and waves after waves of ›quick fix‹ to emergencies, triggered by changing political constellations of actors. The notion of a migration regime allows for gaps, ambiguities and outright strains: the life of a regime is the result of continuous repair work through practices. <sup>34</sup>

The actors involved in the social negotiations and »continuous repair work« regarding migration regimes include not only different state apparatuses and levels of administration, but also businesses (that is, different fractions of capital), civil society organisations and, in particular, the migrants themselves. <sup>35</sup>

Hence, the economic considerations of the central state, which have so far been the primary discussion points in this article, are a central but by no means the only relevant aspect for explaining the emergence of as well as the changes in the currently dominant migration regime in the PRC. This has to be considered in the following discussion on the inclusions and exclusions of migrant workers and the related question of the functionality of the migration regime for the state development strategy.

32 Serhat Karakayali and Vassilis Tsianos, »Mapping the Order of New Migration. Undokumentierte Arbeit und die Autonomie der Migration«, *Peripherie. Zeitschrift für Politik und Ökonomie in der Dritten Welt* 25 (2005, no 97/98), 37.

33 Michael Willenbücher, *Das Scharnier der Macht. Der Illegalisierte als homo sacer des Postfordismus* (Berlin: b\_books, 2007), 52; quoted from Julia Hartung, »"Arbeit war das erste Wort". Ein- und Ausschluss undokumentierter Arbeit in Deutschland« (Philipps-Universität Marburg, unpublished M.A. thesis, 2009), 49.

34 Guiseppe Sciortino, »Between Phantoms and Necessary Evils. Some Critical Points in the Study of Irregular Migrations to Western Europe«, in *IMIS-Beiträge* 24 (2004), 32-33.

35 Hartung, *Arbeit war das erste Wort*, 51.

## 2 Inclusion and Exclusion of Migrant Workers

The reforms in migration policy have in no way resulted in a dismantling of the dual social structure privileging the urban over the rural society. We could rather observe the emergence of an additional form of social stratification in-between and within urban regions. In what follows, I will focus on those labour migrants who have no or only a temporary residence permit in Chinese cities (and who are interpellated as 'peasant workers', *nongmingong* 農民工, in dominant Chinese discourse). According to different sources the total number of migrant workers has now grown to about 263–280 million.<sup>36</sup> The varying estimates on the number of migrant workers are partly due to the different concepts and terms used in statistics on China's internal migration processes. Furthermore, the number of undocumented migrants—who in the mid-90s formed one third of the total figure—escape any attempts of statistical documentation.

The major part of labour migration starts out from the economically less developed regions in central and western China (for example the provinces of Hubei, Hunan, Anhui or Sichuan) towards the coastal regions which attract foreign capital.<sup>37</sup> The coastal provinces Guangdong, Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Shandong are considered to be the most important destinations for internal migration.<sup>38</sup> The three main target areas are the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtse Delta as well as the Beijing-Tianjin region. According to 2011 estimates, migrant workers formed 40% of the total population in Beijing; in Shenzhen, located in the Pearl River Delta, almost 12 million of the total 14 million inhabitants were migrants.<sup>39</sup> Besides these spatial characteristics, also the specific social composition of migrant workers must be highlighted. According to Cindy C. Fan, Chinese internal migrants tend to be young, unmarried and male.<sup>40</sup> However, since the 1990s the migration of women has been growing comparatively stronger than that of men. In 2009, the ratio of male to female migrants was

36 NBSC (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China), *2012 nian quanguo nongmingong jiance diaocha baogao* 2012 年全國農民工監測調查報告 [Monitoring Survey Report on Migrant Workers in 2012] <[www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201305/t20130527\\_12978.html](http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201305/t20130527_12978.html)> (last retrieval 20 Feb 2014); Wang Kan, »Collective Awakening and Action«, 9–10.

37, »Migrant Workers in China«, *CLB China Labour Bulletin* <[www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100259](http://www.clb.org.hk/en/node/100259)> (last retrieval 31 Jan 2013).

38 NBSC, *2012 nian quanguo nongmingong jiance diaocha baogao*.

39 »Migrant Workers in China«, *CLB*.

40 Cindy C. Fan, *China on the Move*, 57–61.

50.4% to 49.6%, though markedly more men than women were in waged employment relationships, with over a quarter of all female migrants carrying out unpaid reproductive labour.<sup>41</sup> In addition, there are also significant regional and sectoral differences. In the export-oriented manufacturing industry as well as the catering and service industry women make up the majority of employed labour, and the amount of locally employed female migrant workers in Shenzhen, for example, was estimated to be around 65.6%.<sup>42</sup>

## 2.1 *Characteristics of Migrant Labour*

### *Areas of Informal Employment*

The majority of rural migrant workers in China are informally employed. At the beginning of the 2000s, the proportion of migrants without labour contract was estimated to be around 79%.<sup>43</sup> Although this practice violates the 1995 Labour Law and the 2008 Labour Contract Law, official statistics shows that still today over 50% have not signed a contract. Here, significant sectoral differences must be pointed out. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 75.1% of migrant workers in the construction industry, 48.8% in the manufacturing industry, 60.8% in the service industry, 62.4% in the catering industry, and 59.9% of those employed in retail and wholesale are working without a signed contract.<sup>44</sup> In general, migrant workers are employed predominantly in labour intensive sectors, in which the demand for low-qualified workers is the highest. The quantitatively most relevant sectors are the manufacturing industry (36%) and the construction industry (18%), where labour migrants constitute the majority of the workforce (68% and 80%, respectively).<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, migrants are also employed in the urban service industry, for example as domestic workers, sex workers or in the catering industry. In the following section, the characteristics of migrant work will be examined. The attempt is to capture the commonalities across different sectors, but it must be noted that due to the nature of the existing and available sources and research, the focus will lie on the labour-intensive and construction sectors.

41 Gransow, »Binnenmigration in China«, 4.

42 Pun Ngai, »Schlafsalkapitalismus in Shenzhen«, *Perspektiven* 3 (2007), 31.

43 Li Shi, »The Economic Situation«, 14.

44 2012 nian quanguo nongmingong jiance diaocha baogao.

45 *Ibid.*; »Migrant Workers in China«, CLB.

### *Wages and Working Hours*

Rural migrant workers are paid considerably less than urban registered labourers. In general, their wages have hardly increased during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>46</sup> Substantial increases in wage levels—in the context of growing labour unrest and regional labour shortages (see below)—could be observed only since 2004. However, despite the fact that for example in Shenzhen the legal minimum wage (which is commonly used as a yardstick for basic monthly wages) had trebled by 2011,<sup>47</sup> the significant gap with regards to average wages for non-migrant labour has remained largely unchanged. In many cities the legal minimum wage is approximately 20–30% of the local average wage.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, wage deductions in the form of penalty and deposit payments, which are part of the rigid disciplinary measures at workplaces, are very widespread.<sup>49</sup> Apart from this, leaving wages unpaid for several months and the practice of paying only fractions of the actual wages are very frequent. This is especially prevalent in the construction industry but can also be observed in other sectors, as seen in the surveys of the National Bureau of Statistics: 20 per cent of the 30,000 workers interviewed in 2006 said that they received their wages only after a delay or that they only ever received a part of it.<sup>50</sup> Against this background of relatively low basic wages, migrant workers usually have to rely on working overtime. According to data from 2002, 80% of migrant workers are working seven days a week. It is not uncommon to work 12 to 13 hours daily, amounting to 90–110 hours per week.<sup>51</sup> As is the case with missing labour contracts, the long working hours also constitute a systematic violation of the existing labour law provisions.

46 Li Shi, »The Economic Situation«, 13.

47 Jonathan Unger, »Die Veränderung der Lebens- und Arbeitsbedingungen chinesischer WanderarbeiterInnen und ihre Auswirkungen auf Arbeitskonflikte«, in *Arbeitskämpfe in China. Berichte von der Werkbank der Welt*, ed. by Georg Egger, Daniel Fuchs, Thomas Immervoll and Lydia Steinmassl (Wien: Promedia, 2013), 28–30.

48 Mark Selden and Wu Jieh-min, »The Chinese State, Incomplete Proletarianization and Structures of Inequality in Two Epochs«, *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9,5.1, (31 Jan 2011) <[www.japanfocus.org/-Wu-Jieh\\_min/3480](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Wu-Jieh_min/3480)> (last retrieval 20 Feb 2014).

49 Anita Chan, *China's Workers under Assault. The Exploitation of Labor in a Globalizing Economy* (Armonk, NY; London: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 11–12.

50 *China Daily* 27 Oct 2006.

51 Pun, »Schlafsaalkapitalismus in Shenzhen«.

### *Flexibility and Labour Turnover*

Another characteristic of migrant labour is its highly changing and short-term nature. An important factor here is the systematic accommodation of workers in dormitories within or in close proximity to the industrial premises. The 'dormitory labour regime' allows not only for very flexible working hours, but also serves to control and discipline the workers as well as to keep reproduction and wage costs at a very low level.<sup>52</sup>

Extremely high turnover rates are another characteristic of migrant labour. The construction industry is characterised by seasonal work, and construction workers are usually employed by a subcontractor (*baogongtou* 包工頭) coming from the same village or region for a specific project.<sup>53</sup> In the case of industrial workers, the turnover rate can be as high as 100%, while frequent job-hopping is a very common practice for Chinese migrant labour in general.

### *Social Protection*

Workers in urban China are dependent on contributions from their employers in order to be eligible for social security. However, as the majority of internal migrants have not signed a labour contract, and because most employers are reluctant to register their employees, most migrant workers remain excluded from the local social insurance schemes.<sup>54</sup> Since 2006, and in particular with the new Social Insurance Law which came into effect in 2011, the Chinese central government has been trying to push companies to take out insurances for their employees, that is, to register employees for local social insurance schemes. These policies, however, have only slightly increased the share of insured labourers. In 2012, 14.3% of all migrant workers had a pension insurance, 24% were eligible for workers' compensation, 16.9% had a health insurance, 8.4% an unemployment insurance, and 6.1% a maternity insurance.<sup>55</sup> Expenditures in the case of workplace-related injuries or diseases therefore exert a lot of financial pressure on migrant workers and can lead to absolute poverty. Because of their

52 Chris Smith and Pun Ngai, »The Dormitory Labor Regime in China as a Site for Control and Resistance«, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17,8 (2006), 1456–1470.

53 Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin, »Unfinished Proletarianization: Self, Anger, and Class Action among the Second Generation of Peasant-Workers in Present-Day China«, *Modern China* 36,5 (2010), 493–519.

54 Pun Ngai, »Schlafsaalkapitalismus in Shenzhen«, 33; see also, »China's Social Security System«, *CLB*.

55 2012 nian quanguo nongmingong jiance diaocha baogao.

precarious residence status and the lack of contracts, migrant workers have little prospect of making their employer cover the expenses for medical treatment.<sup>56</sup>

*Urban Living Conditions and the Externalisation of Reproduction Costs*

Of particular importance for the living conditions of migrant workers is their precarious residence status in Chinese cities based on the *hukou*-system. To lose their job might lead to a loss of their legal temporary residence permit unless new employment is taken up within a certain period of time. Until the beginning of the 2000s, arrests and deportations of unregistered migrant workers were a common practice, usually as part of so-called »clean-up« campaigns which were often carried out prior to major public events.<sup>57</sup> This did not start to change until in 2003 after a young migrant employee had been beaten to death while in police custody, sparking a wide-ranging public debate in the PRC. Since then, in most cities unregistered migrants would not be immediately fined, arrested or deported. This however did not bring an end to police harassment and deportations in general, as the eviction of migrants prior to the 2008 Olympic Games demonstrated.

The access to urban housing is regulated based on the household registration system. Migrant workers without a local urban household registration are not allowed to build or buy houses in the cities, while at the same time they remain excluded from low-cost, state-subsidised public housing. In this situation, and because of the low level of income on the one hand and the high prices at the urban housing market on the other, the increasing commodification of housing does not actually enhance migrants' capacity to rent private accommodation either.<sup>58</sup> Against this background, two precarious forms of housing became characteristic for rural migrants in Chinese cities: dormitories provided by their employers or self-organised accommodation in informal migrant villages (see below).

56 Pun Ngai, *Made in China. Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace* (Durham: Duke University Press; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 5 *passim*; Pun Ngai and Li Wanwei, *Dagongmei. Arbeiterinnen aus Chinas Weltmarktfabriken erzählen* (Berlin/Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2008), 97–133 *passim*.

57 Hein Mallee, »Migration, *hukou* and Resistance in Reform China«, in *Chinese Society. Change, Conflict and Resistance* ed. by Elizabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 151.

58 Zhang Li, Simon Xiaobin Zhao and Tian Jianping, »Self-Help in Housing and Chengzhongcun in China's Urbanization«, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27,4 (2003), 916–917.



The possibilities for school education for migrant children are also affected by the demarcations drawn by the *hukou* system. Despite legislation on the national level, local governments still refuse the admission of migrant children into public schools due to financial reasons. The two remaining legal options for putting their children through school—enrolment in expensive private schools or the payment of additional fees for attending public schools—are not affordable for most migrant families.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, the rural *hukou* status constitutes a barrier also for adequate health care. While the rural health care system is incapable of covering migrant workers' medical expenditures, they remain largely excluded from urban health care programmes because of their household registration. Despite the attempts to reform the health care system since the end of the 1990s, many migrant workers can simply not afford the necessary physical examinations and hospital treatments without any support from the local state and/or without health insurance.

An essential characteristic of the migration regime linked to the forms of exclusion described above is the externalisation of the reproduction of labour power to the rural areas. This as well is conditioned by the *hukou* system, insofar as a rural *hukou* registration is coupled to land use rights in the respective home village. The patterns of migration emerging under these conditions have resulted in a double existence of Chinese migrants workers in between the city and the countryside: while the migrant labour power is consumed in the urban space, its (social) reproduction is secured predominantly in the rural home villages. The costs for the reproduction of labour power—including basic human needs like food, physical recovery and clothing as well as familial, societal and cultural needs—are borne to a significant extent within the rural households.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.2 *The Functionality of the Migration Regime for the State Development Strategy*

This short discussion of the inclusion and exclusion of rural migrant workers in the current migration regime shows that 'peasant workers' constitute a very cheap and flexible form of labour power. On the one hand, employers are able to

59 Terry Woronov, »Migrant Children and Migrant Schooling. Policies, Problems and Possibilities«, in *Labour Migration and Social Development in Contemporary China*, ed. by Rachel Murphy (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 96–114.

60 Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law. Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 210–216.

reduce labour costs significantly, and on the other, local state expenditures for the social reproduction of labour power in the target areas of internal migration can also be minimised.

Essential for migration policies in the PRC, the *hukou* system establishes borders within the Chinese state which are indeed comparable to national borders, not least because they also define access to the (local) state benefits and to citizenship more generally. As demonstrated by the forms of inclusion and exclusion, the specificity of the regulation of internal migration since the beginning of the 1990s consists—similar to what Karakayali and Tsianos argued in the case of transnational criminalised (irregular) migration—of the »flexible decoupling of labour from its places of reproduction, its resources and rights.«<sup>61</sup> Thus, the functionality of the current migration regime for the export-oriented development strategy consists precisely of the deprivation of migrant workers' rights, which is apparent in their precarious residence status, their exclusion from the local state in an urban environment as well as from the labour related provisions. Further, the separation of the places where labour power is consumed from the places where the major part of the social reproduction of labour power takes place is essential for the inclusion of those disenfranchised migrant workers into the segmented urban labour market. The active regulation of internal migration through the functionally adjusted household registration system therefore (re)produces the specific form of labour power, whose exploitation is the backbone of the development strategy focused on export-oriented industrialisation since the early 1990s.

This functionality of the current migration regime is, however, all but equivalent to a configuration without contradictions. As I aimed to clarify above, the theoretical perspective taken by employing the concept of a migration regime requires an understanding of migration politics not solely as a one-sided process governed by the state, but as a constantly contested result of social struggles, in which a variety of social actors is involved.<sup>62</sup> Below I will focus on one of the relevant aspects in this framework; that is, the forms of resistance and the collective agency by migrant workers within the current migration regime.

61 Karakayali and Tsianos, »Mapping the Order of New Migration«, 49.

62 This is, however, also relevant with regards to different levels of the state administration. While it is beyond the scope of this article, especially the agency of the local (urban) state and varied regional development goals would be another important object of analysis for understanding local variations of the current migration regime.

### 3 *Migrant Self-Organisation and Workers' Struggles in the Migration Regime*

Considering their social marginalisation, rural migrant workers are in a very weak position for articulating their interests within the current migration regime. This is aggravated by the fact that like all other social actors in the PRC, they have no legal option of organising themselves outside of the Chinese state and the existing institutions controlled by the CCP. Nevertheless, during the past decades an increase in the diversity of the forms of informal self-organising practices and resistance against the existing mechanisms of social exclusion has been observed.

#### 3.1 *Self-Organisation for Social Rights in Urban Areas*

With regards to the reproduction of migrant workers in urban areas, two forms of self-organising practices should be highlighted: the creation of informal housing as well as the establishment of informal schools for migrant children. Confronted with the limited options for rental housing at the urban housing market since the beginning of the 1990s, informal migrant settlements in so-called 'urban villages' (*chengzhongcun* 城中村) have begun to spread in almost every major Chinese city.<sup>63</sup> These *chengzhongcun* are rural areas (mostly at urban peripheries) in which local peasants still have land use rights and housing plots, though they have been surrounded by the city in the course of urbanisation.

The local inhabitants can offer accommodation to the migrant workers at relatively affordable prices—and outside the reach of the municipal administration.<sup>64</sup> Area and kinship-based networks play a significant role here, as *chengzhongcun*—holding the highest amount of rental flats for migrant workers—are usually established by people from the same place of origin. While the housing conditions are usually quite precarious in *chengzhongcun*, this form of self-organising allows for affordable rental prices and provides a supportive social environment that can repeatedly evade direct state intervention.<sup>65</sup>

Another form of migrant self-organisation is the establishment of officially unrecognised schools for migrant children. These schools have also been quickly

63 Zhang Li & al., »Self-Help in Housing and Chengzhongcun«, 917–924.

64 Ibid., 921.

65 E. g. Xiang Biao, *Transcending Boundaries. Zhejiangcun: the Story of a Migrant Village in Beijing* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

spreading in the urban villages and city outskirts since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>66</sup> Whereas the Chinese government condoned these schools for a longer period of time, there have been differences in the local administrations' reactions since the end of the 1990s. While reforms for improving educational institutions for migrant children have been implemented in several cities, other municipalities reacted by evicting and/or demolishing the informal migrant schools—a practice which merely just led to the erection of a new school at a different place.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.2 *Workers' Struggles and the Second Generation of Labour Migrants*

Migrant workers' resistance against the conditions of exploitation mediated by the *hukou* system has sharply increased over the last decade. Alongside everyday forms of resistance and the unannounced exits from factories—the so called »voting with one's feet«—, strikes organised outside the party-state-controlled unions are occurring more and more frequently, especially in the export production zones in Southern China.<sup>68</sup> Due to the fact that workers have no formal right to strike in the PRC, statistical data on strikes is not available. However, not only the number of those labour conflicts which are registered as arbitration cases at labour bureaus has increased from 48,121 in 1996 to 602,000 in 2010.<sup>69</sup> Also the rise in so called 'mass incidents' (*quntixing shijian* 群體性事件), that is, larger protests, demonstrations and strikes, on which the Ministry of Public Security (Gong'anbu 公安部) had collected statistical data until 2005, demonstrates the growing readiness of migrant workers to resist the existing mechanisms of exclusion. While in 1993 11,000 'mass incidents' had been registered, in

66 Julia Kwong, »Educating Migrant Children: Negotiations Between the State and Civil Society«, *The China Quarterly* no 180 (2004), 1073–1088.

67 Ibid., 1079–1083; see also Eli Friedman, »Outside the New China«, <jacobinmag.com/2013/09/outside-the-new-china/> (last retrieval 20 Nov 2013).

68 Chih-Jou Jay Chen, »Die Zunahme von Arbeitskonflikten in China: Ein Vergleich von ArbeiterInnenprotesten in verschiedenen Sektoren«, in Eggert & al., *Arbeitskämpfe in China. Berichte von der Werkbank der Welt*, 78–105.

69 *Zhongguo laodong tongji nianjian* 中國勞動統計年刊 [China Labour Statistical Yearbook] (Beijing: Zhongguo tongji chubanshe, 2010); »Unity is Strength. The Workers' Movement in China 2009–2011«, *CLB* <www.clb.org.hk/en/files/share/File/research\_reports/unity\_is\_strength\_web.pdf> (last retrieval 1 Dec 2011).

2005 this number had increased to 87,000.<sup>70</sup> According to the Sun Liping 孙立平 (b1955), Professor at Tsinghua University, there has been a further increase up to over 180,000 in 2010.<sup>71</sup> It has to be taken into account, however, that these figures do not differentiate between strikes by migrant workers and protests by other social actors. Some researchers estimate the share of ‘mass incidents’ triggered by workers to constitute about 30 per cent of the total, which would still mean that there were about 26,100 labour related protests in 2005, for example.<sup>72</sup>

Apart from layoffs, three principal reasons for migrant workers’ struggles in Southern China can be highlighted: »(1) unpaid wages, illegal wage deductions, or substandard wage rates; (2) disciplinary violence and dignity violations; and (3) industrial injuries and lack of injury compensation«.<sup>73</sup> One significant driving force behind the rise in workers’ struggles is the generational succession within the class of migrant labour, which has become noticeable since the beginning of the 2000s. The prime objective of the first generation of migrant workers, who had migrated to the cities in the 1980s and 1990s, was the financial support they could provide for the families in their home villages. They would usually return to the countryside after several years of work in the cities. In contrast, the majority of the now second and even third generation of migrant workers, who were and are growing up in the ‘reform era’, is unwilling to return to their rural homes. Without having ever worked in agriculture, they rather place their hopes on a ‘modern’ urban life and permanent residency in the city. Their changed lifestyles, expectations and future prospects result in an increased readiness to actively stand up for an improvement of their working conditions.<sup>74</sup> Their growing refusal to work for low salaries and under bad conditions is also

70 Günter Schucher, »Ein Gespenst geht um in China—das Gespenst sozialer Instabilität«, *China aktuell* 35,5 (2006), 49.

71 »Unity is Strength«, *CLB*; »A National Conundrum«, *People's Daily Online* 10 Feb 2012 <english.peopledaily.com.cn/90882/7725198.html> (last retrieval 20 Nov 2013).

72 See Yu Jianrong 于建嵘, »Zhongguo de saoluan shijian yu guanzhi weiji« 中國的騷亂事件與管治危機 [Unrest Incidents and the Governance Crisis in China] <www.chinaelections.org/newsinfo.asp?newsid=118361> (last retrieval 2 Dec 2011).

73 Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law*, 164.

74 Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin, »Unfinished Proletarianization«; ACFTU (All-China Federation of Trade Unions), »Guanyu xin shengdai non-gmingong wenti de yanjiu baogao« 關於新生代農民工問題的研究報告 [Research Report on Problems of the New Generation of Migrant Workers], <acftu.people.com.cn/GB/11921899.html> (last retrieval 31 Aug 2013).

reflected in the local labour shortages, which can be observed in the coastal regions in Southern China since 2004.

Apart from the quantitative increase, workers' struggles have also started to change qualitatively. Whereas strikes have usually been confined to single enterprises—a phenomenon which has been termed »cellular activism«<sup>75</sup> (Lee 2007)—over the last few years an increasing number of »contagious« strikes has been recorded. In those »copycats«, demands as well as the specific forms of action are being adopted in other factories.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, while in the past workers' protests usually took place only in the case of obvious violations of the labour law, migrant employees are increasingly going on strike based on their experiences and expectations regarding reasonable and decent working and living conditions. This is linked to a rise in offensive (economic) demands that are going beyond the frame of legal stipulations.<sup>77</sup> Especially during the wildcat strikes of the most recent past, demands for having autonomous representative bodies outside of the state unions have also been voiced insistently. The strike wave in the Chinese automobile industry in the early summer 2010 was a very prominent example in this respect, leading to wage hikes of up to more than 30 per cent as well as to new reform attempts of the state unions in the southern Chinese province Guangdong.<sup>78</sup>

Thus far, however, due to state repression, significant regional and sectoral differences, the precarious residence status of workers in the cities as well as the high turnover rate, neither long-term, stable forms of organisation have emerged nor have we seen any alliance regarding demands put forward by urban workers or other social groups. Nevertheless, the developments outlined above raise the following question: to what extent can the current migration regime, functional for the export-oriented development strategy, be sustained in the future?<sup>79</sup> As described above, since the 2000s the Chinese government has been forced to

75 Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law*, 191–195 *passim*.

76 Florian Butollo and Tobias ten Brink, »Challenging the Atomization of Discontent. Patterns of Migrant-Worker Protest in China During the Series of Strikes in 2010«, *Critical Asian Studies* 44.3 (2012), 419–444.

77 Chris King-Chi Chan and Pun Ngai, »The Making of a New Working Class? A Study of Collective Action of Migrant Workers in South China«, *The China Quarterly* no 198 (2009), 287–303.

78 Egger & al., *Arbeitskämpfe in China*; Butollo and ten Brink, »Challenging the Atomization of Discontent«.

79 Kam Wing Chan, »Migration and Development in China: Trends, Geography and Current Issues«, *Migration and Development* 1.2 (2012), 187–205.

react to the increase in social struggles by giving legal concessions. Furthermore, the intensifying labour unrest has resulted, also within the context of local labour shortages, in actual wage increases. It remains unclear whether the Chinese state will succeed in containing the potential for social conflicts through its attempts of corporatist inclusion. And it is not any less uncertain how the export industry will react to further increases in wages. By placing their expectations on a permanent life in the cities and by showing a significantly greater willingness to fight for better working and living conditions, migrant workers are currently exerting pressure on precisely those mechanism of exclusion which constitute the main pillar of the Chinese development model.

### *Conclusion*

This article has analysed, firstly, the transformation of migration policies at the level of the central state against the background of the adjustment of economic development strategies since the beginning of 'reform and opening up' at the end of the 1970s. It has been demonstrated that the focus on export-oriented industrialisation since the early 1990s was accompanied by a shift in the state's handling of internal migration. The dominant strategies of preventing and, respectively, tacitly tolerating migration have been replaced by an active regulation and then explicit promotion of rural-urban migration. The household registration system, the central institution for the management of migration in the PRC, has taken on a different role in this process. Secondly, the article has examined the functionality of the emerging migration regime by looking at the interlinked forms of social inclusion and exclusion of rural migrant workers. As has been demonstrated, the current migration regime is essentially based on the deprivation of rights as well as the institutionally mediated externalisation of the social reproduction of internal migrants. Therefore, the precarious residence status, the exclusion from urban state benefits and the denial of basic labour rights as well as the spatial separation of the places where the migrant labour power is consumed from the places where its social reproduction is secured, constitute the endogenous basis for the economic development strategy pursued by the Chinese central state since the 1990s. By discussing this specific functionality, the article has also argued for an analytical perspective which sees the emergence and transformation of migration regimes as a contested negotiation process shaped by diverging interests of different social actors. In this regard, the article has, thirdly, highlighted the forms of self-organisation as well as the struggles by migrant workers within the authoritarian state. It has been

shown that particularly with the emergence of the second generation of internal migrants in the PRC, not only the number of workers' protests has risen but also their forms have changed. The mounting readiness to go on strike for improving the current working and living conditions points to the fragility of the current migration regime. Considering the growing number of concessions made by the state and the increases in wages for migrant workers, the future stability of the Chinese development path is thereby increasingly put into question.

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