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Hein Mallee

Rural Household Dynamics and Spatial Mobility in China

Zusammenfassung: Diese Arbeit beruht auf 1993 durchgeführten Feldstudien in 7 Provinzen mit jeweils 3 Landkreisen, in denen Migrantenhaushalte in insgesamt 189 Dörfern untersucht wurden. Damit konzentriert sie sich auf strukturelle Merkmale bäuerlicher Migranten an ihren Herkunftsorten. Skizziert werden die generellen Muster der Abwanderung vom Land, wobei zirkuläre Migrationen mit Rückkehr in die Dörfer im Vordergrund stehen. Permanente Abwanderungen aus den Dörfern machen hingegen nur eine Minderzahl der Fälle aus. Familien und nicht Individuen gelten als die Hauptakteure ökonomischer und sozialer Entscheidungen, familiäre Mobilität im Raum als Strategie zur Risikominderung. Die Analyse stellt eine signifikant höhere Mobilität fest, wenn diese auf Familien- und nicht auf Individualbasis gemessen wird. Sie unterscheidet den Mobilitätsstatus der untersuchten Bauernfamilien und ihrer arbeitenden Mitglieder nach verschiedenen Kategorien zeitlicher Dauer. Nach einer Untersuchung verschiedener Merkmale der Migrationsselektivität wird die Anzahl der Arbeitskräfte pro Bauernhaushalt als Hauptindikator für die Wahrscheinlichkeit einer Migration identifiziert.

Schlagworte: Abwanderung, Pendler, Dörfer, Bauern, Familie, Migrationsselektivität, Arbeitskräfte

Autor: Hein Mallee ist Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Institut für Sinologie der Universität Leiden, Niederlande.

Abstract: This study is based on field work in 7 provinces, each with 3 counties, in which migrant households in altogether 189 villages were investigated in 1993. It thus focuses on structural characteristics of peasant migrants at their places of origin. The study sketches the general pattern of out-migration from the countryside, with circular migrations involving a return to the villages taking pride of place. In contrast, permanent out-migrations from the villages only make up a minority of cases. Families and not individuals are viewed as the main actors in economic and social decision-making, spatial dispersion of families is treated as a risk minimizing strategy. The analysis discovers significantly higher mobility, if it is reckoned on the family level rather than on an individual basis. It distinguishes the mobility status of families and their working members by duration categories. After investigating various traits of migrant selectivity, the size of the workforce per peasant household is identified as the main indicator for predicting migration.

Key words: Out-migration, commuters, villages, peasants, family, migrant selectivity, workforce

Author: Hein Mallee is research fellow at the Institute of Sinology, Leiden University, Netherlands.

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Moderne China-Studien, Universität zu Köln
Lehrstuhl für Neuere Geschichte /
Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Chinas
Prof. Dr. Thomas Scharping
Albertus-Magnus-Platz
50923 Köln, Germany
Tel.: +49- 221- 470 5401/02
Fax: +49- 221- 470 5406
www.china.uni-koeln.de

HEIN MALLEE

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Contents

1 Introduction: Rural Mobility in Reform China.....	4
2 Circulation and the Household.....	5
3 Data Sources.....	7
4 Household Mobility: Circulation and Permanent Out-Migration.....	8
5 Mobility and Individual Characteristics.....	9
6 Household Structure and Mobility.....	10
7 Multivariate Analysis.....	12
8 Conclusion.....	.13

1 Introduction: Rural Mobility in Reform China

Over the course of the reform period, and especially since the second half of the 1980s, population mobility in China has increased dramatically. Under Mao, the Chinese state exerted unprecedented control over migration by both preventing certain types of movement and actively organising others, and migration rates were considerably lower than what they probably would have been without such controls. During the reform era, more flexible official attitudes towards urbanisation and looser regulations on residence registration, the decollectivisation of agriculture, the liberalisation of the trade and service sectors, the greater urban demand for labour, and the decline of food rationing all contributed to the growth of the 'floating population' in urban and peri-urban areas. For a long time, most research concerned with Chinese population mobility concentrated mainly on the urban destinations of the migrants. By the late 1980s, however, population movements started to command more and more attention, especially around the time of the Chinese Spring Festival, when tens of millions of Chinese visit their families to celebrate the coming of a new year. The general perception was that 'blind movement' of rural labour migrants was primarily responsible for the dislocations of the overburdened transportation system that occurred in different areas. This eventually led to heightened research activity in the field of rural labour mobility by research institutes and government departments concerned with rural affairs. The results of these studies have been coming out in recent years, and together they provide a rough picture of population mobility in the Chinese countryside during the 1990s.¹

While migration *with* transfer of registration did not experience great changes, rural out-migration, which happens mostly without such administrative changes, has increased from an estimated two million in the early eighties to somewhere between 50-60 million in recent years. Surveys found between 1.16% and 6.03% of the total population and between 10.7% and 15% of the workforce engaging in spatial mobility. It must be kept in mind that these are overall figures, and that in individual places the mobility rates can be considerably higher or lower. Migrants are predominantly young males: between 70% and 84% of migrants are men, and 70% - 80% are under 30 years of age. After the age of 25, mobility levels decline more rapidly among women, since for many women, marriage means an end to mobility. A large part of the migrants have received lower middle school education, and most studies report that migrants are better educated than the total population of the areas investigated. This conclusion is open to some doubt, however, as usually the difference in age structures of the migrant and total population are not taken into account.

Most migration is unorganised, in the sense that no official organisations are involved in the process of decision-making, travelling, obtaining employment, and finding housing. Most peasants obtain information from fellow villagers, and are taken along by or following in the footsteps of relatives and friends, who will usually provide help with finding work and accommodation. Information on destinations is relatively hard to obtain in rural surveys of (often absent) migrants, but the majority seems to be going to places officially designated as urban, including small rural towns. About one-third of moves cross provincial boundaries. Most migrants are away for many months (one survey found an average of 6.5 months) but return home

¹ The rest of this section is based on the following studies: Han Xiaoyun, 'Shouru, xiaofei, hangye tezheng - Nongcun laodongli liudong zhuanli yanjiu zhi san' (Income, Consumption and Industry Characteristics - Research on the Problem of Rural Labor Mobility in China, Part Three), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 5 (1995), p.40-4; Li Fan, 'Waichu dagong renyuan guimo, liudong fanwei ji qita - Zhongguo nongcun laodongli liudong yanjiu zhi er' (The Volume, Scope of Mobility, and Other Aspects of Labor Migrants - Research on the Problem of Rural Mobility in China, Part Two), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 9 (1994), p.31-35; Li Fan, Han Xiaoyun, 'Waichu laodong renyuan de nianling jigou ji wenhua goucheng - Zhongguo nongcun laodongli liudong wenti yanjiu zhi yi' (The Age and Education Composition of Labor Migrants - Research on the Problem of Rural Labor Mobility in China, Part One), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 8 (1994), p.10-14; Luo Yousheng and Liu Jianwen, 'Nongcun laodongli kuaquyu zhuanli: xianzhuang, chengyi yu duice' (Rural Inter-regional Labor Transfer: Present State, Causes, and Counter-measures), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 8 (1994), p.3-9; Policy Research Section of Anhui Provincial Committee, 'Guanyu Anhuisheng 'mingongchao' de diaocha yu duice jianyi' (Survey and Suggestions for Counter-measures Regarding the 'Labor Migrant Wave' in Anhui Province), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 1 (1994), p.53-7; Project Group 'Transfer of Rural Labor and Labor Market', '28 ge xian (shi) nongcun laodongli kuaquyu liudong de diaocha yanjiu' (Survey Research on Rural Inter-regional Labor Mobility in 28 Counties (Cities)), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 4 (1995), p.19-28; Rural Group of the Policy Research Section of the Central Committee of the CCP, 'Guanyu nongcun laodongli kuaquyu liudong wenti de chubu yanjiu' (Preliminary Research on the Problem of Rural Inter-regional Labor Mobility), in: *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 3 (1994), p.3-7; Wang Yuzhao, 'Guanyu nongcun kuaquyu liudong wenti' (On the Problem of Rural Inter-regional Mobility), *Zhongguo Nongcun Jingji*, No 12 (1994), p.18-22. See Mallee, Hein, 'In Defense of Migration: Recent Chinese Studies of Rural Population Mobility', in: *China Information*, Vol. X, No.3-4, 1996, p.108-140, where these and other studies are discussed in more detail.

for part of the year, giving migration a seasonal, circulatory character. The jobs performed by the migrants are in general the less desirable types of work: heavy, monotonous, dirty, and dangerous. This includes the 'first line' production work in industry and mining, construction, and transportation. In addition, many migrants engage in self-employed informal sector work, which appears in the statistics as 'trade, service, food and drink sector'. Leaving the village therefore usually also means leaving agriculture.

Migration usually enables peasants to earn much higher wages than would be possible in their home villages.² In regions with large-scale geographic mobility, this has had a considerably impact on rural incomes. It was claimed, for example, that half of the 1992 rural income growth in Jiangxi was attributable to the 3.8 billion yuan earned by migrants. In the early 1990s, there were 16 counties nation-wide where the income from remittances exceeded 100 million. While the income remitted by migrants is a welcome addition to the average peasant household budget, migrant incomes are usually not sufficient to enable migrants to keep their families with them at destination.

Geographically, there is less rural out-migration in the eastern, coastal provinces, while the large populous provinces of central China are particularly important labour exporters. Inter-regional population flows also tend to be directed towards the coastal region. The ratio of in-migration of the eastern, central, and western regions by one source was put at 4:1:1.

The increase in numbers of migrants is at the same time a reflection and the result of a more comprehensive process: the development and maturing of migration networks, during which the nature and spatial patterns of mobility were transformed. The available evidence suggests that there was a progressive increase in distance and duration of migration, which from a 'sideline' during the slack agricultural season became a major source of income to many families. This was possible because the chain mechanisms described above slowly evolved and reduced the risk of migration. It also seems that the increase in mobility started in the more developed areas, which were only overtaken in the early 1990s by less developed regions, which by then had been incorporated in (or had developed their own) migration networks. The result is that in many areas of rural China, one or more forms of spatial mobility have become a fairly realistic option to peasant families. In this paper, we will examine what kind of households are more suited to taking this option. In order to do so, the nature of peasant mobility and the role of the household therein must be examined first.

2 Circulation and the Household

Migration is usually conceptualised as an in principle permanent move from one community to another. This was the case, for example, in the 1990 Chinese Population Census, which defined migrants as people who moved to another county/city and who had transferred their official registration there, or who had been away from their place of registration for at least one year. Much population mobility in China and other developing countries, however, is not permanent and unidirectional, and is therefore not covered by such definitions. This circulation, as this variety of mobility forms will be called here, is characterised by movement from, and continuing ties with, a rural home base. In the words of Chapman and Prothero:

For the people who circulate, the basic principle is a territorial separation of obligations, activities, and goods. Throughout the Third World, this separateness manifests two major influences. On the one hand is the security associated with the home or natal place through access to land and other local resources for food, housing materials and trading items; through kinship affiliations; through the presence of children and the elderly; and through common values and beliefs. There are, on the other hand, the locationally more widely spread opportunities and associated risks involving local political and religious leaders; kinsfolk; marriageable partners; items for exchange or trade; ceremonials and feasts; and the introduced goods and services of wage employment, commerce, medicine, education, religion, politics, and entertainment.³

² See the comparison of income earned in the village and other places in Mallee, Hein, *Rural Population Mobility in Seven Chinese Provinces* (Paper presented at the ECARDC IV Conference in Manchester, 12-12 November 1995), pp.15, 17.

³ Chapman, Murray and R. Manseil Prothero, 'Themes on Circulation in the Third World', in Prothero, R.M. and M. Chapman, eds., *Circulation in Third World Countries*, London 1985, pp. 1-2.

In present-day China, circulation (as opposed to permanent migration) is stimulated both by the security the home ties offer as well as by the difficulties associated with permanent settlement in urban destinations. Basically all peasant households were allocated land in the early 1980s, and families are usually very hesitant to part with their land, even when income from non-agricultural work forms an important part of the household budget. When situations occur where the household land can not be completely farmed with the available labour, for example, because members are absent due to migration, it is often transferred to others (preferably relatives) under flexible and informal arrangements rather than returned officially to the collectives.⁴ At the same time, official settlement in urban areas is still relatively rare, due to the restrictions of the *hukou* system. One study found that 0.16% of rural out-migrants had officially registered at destination. Usually these were cases where migrants had become technician or cadre, married to locals, or had bought housing.⁵ Although migrant incomes are usually much higher than those earned in the villages, the costs of urban living (especially to non-registered residents) are such that settlement with a complete family is difficult.

The importance of circulation is closely inter-related with the role of the rural family or household,⁶ and in fact, although the institutional factors just referred to are important, circulation can be best understood as an integral part of a wider repertoire of household strategies. The family 'is the structural and functional context in which motivations and values are shaped, human capital is accrued, information is received and interpreted, and decisions are put into operation'.⁷ Although individuals move, aspects of the family situation will at least be factors taken into account in mobility decision-making. Often, the family will actually be the decision-making unit and the unit of welfare maximisation, in which case we are dealing with family mobility strategies. The literature on Chinese families suggests that this second situation will often apply in the Chinese countryside. Descriptions of 'traditional' Chinese families make clear that families operate as corporate units owning property, pooling income, and maximising collective welfare. The ultimate goal thereby lies in the continuation of the male line, rather than specific contemporary concerns.⁸ Recent research in different areas of China suggests that the corporate character of the family is still strong, and that individual property rights are subordinate to those of the family as a whole.⁹ Even when income is generated from different sources, it is pooled and allocated according to joint interests.¹⁰ It has been shown that families in Taiwan in the 1960s with a secure land base developed explicit mobility strategies stressing demographic expansion, sectoral diversification and spatial dispersal.¹¹ Demographic expansion took the form of adding more children to the family and the formation of more complex families.¹² Diversification of the household portfolio and spatial mobility can then be regarded as ways of

⁴ Judd, Ellen J., 'Land Divided, Land United', in: *The China Quarterly*, 130, 1992, pp. 338-56; Michiki Kikuchi, 'Chugoku ni okeru kaikaku, chousei seisaku no moto de no rodo ido' ('Labor Transfer Under Reform and Readjustment Policies in China'), in: *Ajia Keizai*, 33, 4, 1992, pp.2-23; Mallee, Hein, 'Reforming the *Hukou* System: The Experiment with the 'Urban Registration with Self-Supplied Grain'', in: Dong Lisheng, ed., *Administrative Reform in the People's Republic of China Since 1978*, Leiden 1994, pp.100-120; Project Group 'Survey Investigation of Rural Spatial Labor Mobility in 28 Counties (Cities).

⁵ Project Group 'Survey Investigation of Rural Spatial Labor Mobility in 28 Counties'.

⁶ In this paper, I will use these two terms as interchangeable.

⁷ Harbison, Sarah F., 'Family Structure and Family Strategy in Migration Decision Making', in: Dejong, Gordon F. and Robert W. Gardner, eds., *Migration Decision Making, Multidisciplinary Approaches to Microlevel Studies in Developed Countries*, New York 1981, pp.225-51.

⁸ See eg. Baker, Hugh D.R., *Chinese Family and Kinship*, New York 1979.

⁹ Cohen, Myron L., 'Family Management and Family Division in Contemporary Rural China', in: *The China Quarterly*, 130, 1992, pp.357-77.

¹⁰ Croll, Elisabeth, *From Heaven to Earth, Images and Experiences of Development in China*, London, New York 1994, p. 177.

¹¹ Cohen, Myron L., *House United, House Divided: The Chinese Family in Taiwan*, New York 1976; Greenhalgh, Susan, 'Land Reform and Family Entrepreneurship in East Asia', in: McNicoll, Geoffrey and Mead Cain, eds., *Rural Development and Population, Institutions and Policy*, New York, Oxford 1990, pp.77-118.

¹² For an illustration of this kind of family dynamics in Fujian province during the Republican Period, see Lin Yue-hwa, *The Golden Wing: A Sociological Study of Chinese Familism*, London 1948. For a demographic expansion as a successful family strategy in conjunction with circular migration in a completely different cultural setting, see Arizpe, Lourdes, 'Relay Migration and the Survival of the Peasant Household', in: Safa, Helen, ed., *Towards a Political Economy of Urbanization in Third World Countries*, Delhi 1982, pp.19-46.

spreading, and thus minimising, risk.¹³ Such families which have sent out one or more members to work in different places have been labelled 'expanded families': they are spatially dispersed, but functionally united.¹⁴ This paper is concerned with such expanded families. It examines spatial mobility in relation to a number of aspects of family structure, taking into account both the members in the rural home and those away for labour mobility. I will treat the household structure as given, ignoring to a large extent the effect that the absence of members has on the situation back home.¹⁵

3 Data Sources

The data presented in this paper originated from a survey undertaken as a co-operative project of the Institute of Population and Development Studies of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and this writer. The field interviews of the survey were undertaken just after the Spring Festival of 1993,¹⁶ the reason being that this festival is a time at which traditionally most Chinese sojourning somewhere away from home will try to return to their families to take part in the celebrations. It was expected that this timing would enable us to interview most migrants in person. When this was not possible, the information was obtained from other household members. The central focus of the survey was on labour allocation of the household, which was defined as all individuals usually living under the same roof, sharing meals, *plus* individuals not present in the household at the time of the survey, who were regarded by the other household members as belonging to the household. In this way, the entire 'expanded' family is covered.

In sampling households, as a first step, seven Chinese provinces were chosen: Liaoning, Shanghai, Anhui, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Sichuan. The main objective in the selection of these provinces was to include as much variations as possible, in terms of level and type of development, and in mobility patterns. In each province, three counties were selected, according to criteria of economic development (as reflected in average per capita rural gross product) and geographic location. The concrete criteria were: one county with relatively high incomes, close to a large city; one county with relatively high incomes, close to a medium-sized city (less than 600,000 inhabitants); and one county with medium income levels, away from urban areas. No specific attempt was made to over-sample migrants, but in view of the findings in the literature that poor areas tend to have low levels of mobility, very poor counties were not included, in order to ensure sufficient representation of migrants in the sample. The townships in each sampled county were stratified according to income (high, middle, and low), and from each stratum one township was randomly selected. In each selected township, three villages were drawn at random. The rule was that households in each village were to be stratified according to size, and collective households and households without at least one couple in the child-bearing age bracket removed from the sampling space. Then 15 households were to be drawn from the strata according to proportion. In practice, the individual interviewers interpreted this rule with some freedom, leading to the inclusion of households without married couples. Still, this stipulation may have biased the sample towards over-representation of 'complete' households built up around a married couple. As a result of the sampling design, especially of the selection of provinces and counties, the sample is best seen as reflecting the situation of middle-level and more developed areas of the Chinese countryside.

¹³ Cf. Stark, Oded and Robert E.B. Lucas, 'Migration, Remittances, and the Family', in: *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 1988, pp. 465-81.

¹⁴ Seller, Frits, 'Rural-Urban Migration: Some Theoretical Approaches', in: Seller, Frits and Methab S. Karim, *Migration in Pakistan, Theories and Facts*, Vanguard 1986, pp.7-20.

¹⁵ For example, some have seen spatial mobility and local non-agricultural employment as potential disrupting factors in the operation of families as corporate units, because independent sources of income and the impact of new ideas, etc. leads to a more independent attitude of the young migrants. See Whyte, Martin K., 'Rural Economic Reforms and Chinese Family patterns', in: *The China Quarterly*, 130, 1992, pp.315-22; and Lavelly, William and Ren Xinhua, 'Patrilocality and Early Marital Co-residence in Rural China, 1955-85', in: *The China Quarterly*, 130, 1992, pp.378-91.

¹⁶ In Sichuan, the survey had to be postponed a few weeks, because the provincial counterparts were not able to find sufficient numbers of interviewers: all were busy celebrating the festival.

4 Household Mobility: Circulation and Permanent Out-Migration

In the survey, mobility was measured by asking where people had worked during 1992, giving the possibility to list up to six activities and places. No respondent mentioned more than four. Six types of mobility situations are distinguished: work in the village of residence, work in the surrounding township, commuting with daily returns to places beyond the township boundaries, and mobility involving absences of at least one night, which is here again subdivided into short-term mobility (absences of less than six months), mid-term mobility (6-12 months), and long-term mobility (over one year). In the following discussion, an hierarchical criterion is used to assign respondents (and households) to different mobility categories. Regarding the six mobility categories as an ordinal scale, people were labelled with the 'highest' form of mobility. For example, someone working in another county for 4 months and cultivating the family land for the rest of the year is classified under 'mobility of 1-6 months'. Households are similarly classified according to the status of the member in the highest category. Although all work taking place outside the village involves some form of spatial mobility, our main interest here is in absences over more than one night, i.e. the last three categories. I will usually use the term 'mobility' as referring to these three categories. The basic situation is shown in table 1.

The most conspicuous element in this table are the differences between the individual and household level figures. From the perspective of the household, there is considerably more mobility in the Chinese countryside than is revealed by the usual individual data. Two-thirds of all peasants work in the villages of residence, but only 47% of households are entirely confined to the village. As I have argued above that migration decisions are to a large extent a household affair, this means that, through their own mobility or that of their household members, a much larger proportion of the rural population has 'access' to and experiences the impact of labour migration, than is suggested by mobility rates alone.

Table 1 **Mobility Status of Households and Individuals**

	Percent of Households	Percent of Workforce (Individuals)
Village	46.6	67.9
Township	21.9	13.3
Commuting	20.0	10.7
Under 6 Months	4.5	2.3
6-12 Months	4.0	2.2
Over 1 Year	3.1	1.6
Valid N	2786	6735

These figures are only concerned with circulation, mobility that is undertaken from a fixed rural base. The survey design precludes detailed investigation of cases where entire households moved out,¹⁷ but some information on this was obtained from village cadres. In two-thirds of the villages (N = 189), at least some households had left since 1978. In most cases, however, such household registration was limited in scale: in 82% of villages less than two percent had moved out, and only in a handful of villages did the migrating households account for more than 10%. Such migration usually took place within the county, and destinations were mostly rural areas or towns and small cities. One county-level study of rural mobility also found that such permanent out-migration was very rare, and that substantial out-migration of

¹⁷ I assume here that out-migration of households usually implies a more pronounced break with the community at origin than migration of individuals. This is not necessarily always the case, however. It seems that especially where migrants sub-contract land to farm, they often move as (nuclear) families. See Tao Xiaoyong, 'Zhujiang sanjiaozhou diqu de daigeng jingying jiqi jingji, shehui yingxiang' ('Transfer of Land in the Pearl River Delta Area and its Economic and Social Impact'), in: *Nongye Jinji Wenti*, 10, 1986, pp.16, 8, 61; and Avernarius-Herborn, Christine, '*Gemüsebauern in Peking - Eine Feldforschung zum aktuellen Wandel der stadtnahen Landwirtschaft*' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Cologne 1994) for examples. Xu Zhong, 'Anhuisheng Wuweixian 12 ge xiang liuchu renkou diaocha baogao' ('Report of the Survey of the Out-Migrant Population of 12 Townships in Wuwei County, Anhui Province'), in: *Zhongguo Renkou Kexue*, 6, 1991, pp.58-62, 34 also found that about one-third of migrants from Wuwei County in Anhui (which is an important labor exporting area) engaged in small-scale food retailing (salted duck) and then often man and wife moved together. Both types of mobility are not necessarily permanent, and are definitely not accompanied by official transfer of registration.

households mainly took place in poor mountainous areas.¹⁸ In a situation where the household registration system still makes official migration to urban areas difficult, rural out-migration mainly takes the form of circulation. Although migrants can augment their household incomes considerably with the earnings from migration, these are insufficient to keep an entire family at destination. While most goods and many services can nowadays be bought with money in the Chinese cities, non-locals are often charged extra for schooling of children, medical care, etc.. Therefore, permanent migration is relatively rare, and it is safe to say, with the exception of the mainly intra-rural marriage migration, the circulation discussed here covers the bulk of rural mobility.

5 Mobility and Individual Characteristics

In line with findings in other investigations, men were found to be more mobile than women. Over 80% of women worked in the village, against 60% of men. Only 3.3% of women engaged in short-, mid-, or long-term mobility, which was 8.7% for men. In comparison to males, among female migrants long-term mobility was relatively more important than shorter forms. This suggests that more men return home for part of the year, probably to help with agricultural work, and thus tend to maintain a more regular contact with their homes.

Singles have a higher probability of engaging in mobility, especially mobility of longer duration, than married people. However, as only 13% of the working population was single, married people dominate most mobility categories. The exceptions to this are revealing: more single men were found in the long-term group, and more single women in the mid- and long-term categories. Marriage strengthens the ties with home and community, and may thus be a deterrent to migration. This is especially so in the case of women: the differences in mobility levels of single and married people is much larger among women than among men. Mobility levels also decrease more rapidly after age 25 among women than among men, again suggesting that marriage (and subsequent child-birth) makes it harder for women to leave the family.

Finally, mobility decreases with age and increases with level of education. The mean age of people working in the village is about 10 years higher than that of long-term migrants. The proportion remaining in the village grows from about half in the 15 - 19 age bracket to over 90% in the oldest groups. The opposite is true for education: village-based people are less-well educated than those engaging in various forms of mobility, especially long-term migration. Illiteracy is associated with immobility: over 90% of those without formal education work in the village.

Table 2 Relation to Head of Household by Mobility (%)

	Column Percentages				Row Percentages			
	Head/ Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse	Other Relation	Head/ Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse	Other Relation
Village	73.7	47.6	70.6	81.5	83.7	10.4	3.3	2.5
Township	12.7	16.9	16.1	6.8	75.6	19.4	3.9	1.1
Commute	9.7	17.6	7.8	4.8	71.6	25.1	2.4	1.0
< 6 Months	1.8	4.8	3.7	0.7	62.3	31.8	5.2	0.6
6-12 Months	1.4	6.3	1.4	2.1	52.0	43.9	2.0	2.0
> 1 Year	0.6	6.9	0.5	4.1	29.7	64.0	0.9	5.4

¹⁸ Project Group on 'Survey Investigation of Rural Spatial Mobility in 28 Counties'.

The four aspects discussed here are attributes of individuals, although they partly reflect their household situation. To some extent, the link between these individual attributes and household situation becomes clear by looking at the relation of mobility to the position of members in the family, here represented as relation to the head of the household.¹⁹ Of the working people in the sample, almost 80% were household head and their spouses, while 15.3% were their children, 3.3% spouses of children, and 1.3% their parents (plus very small numbers of other relatives). The mobility behaviour of people in these categories shows a clear pattern: 'children' are considerably more mobile than those in the first generation (table 2).

Under half of the children were working in the village, against over 70% for all other categories, and over 18% engages in mobility of more than one day. In spite of the fact that there are almost five times as many people in the head/spouse category than in the child category, children account for 64% of all long-term migrants. Of the people in the first category, children account for 64% of all long-term migrants. Of the people in the first generation who engage in mobility, relatively larger percentages are found in the short-term mobility categories, which suggests that even when the heads or their spouses leave, they will do so only for part of the year, returning to attend to responsibilities at home.

All this suggests that households which, in addition to the core couple, contain young, single members ('children') who are old enough to make a significant contribution to the household labour force, while at the same time not having developed ties and obligations that discourage migration, will be more likely to allocate labour through spatial mobility. In the next section, we will examine what kind of households these are, and whether this hypothesis holds at the household level.

6 Household Structure and Mobility

The central question in this section is whether there are certain structural demographic features of households that are relevant to explaining differences in mobility. Put differently, what kinds of household are more likely to allocate labour through spatial mobility? This way of putting the question indicates that we are mainly concerned with labour aspects of the household. Concretely, we will look at the amount of labour that the household can allocate (number of working members), the relative amount of labour (proportion of working and dependent members), the complexity of household composition, the age structure of the household workforce, and the life-cycle stage of the household. Before discussing these aspects in relation to mobility, a brief account of household structure as found in the survey is called for.

Households were not very large: 3.93 members on average. The great majority of households (71.2%) had three or four members, and another 16.6% five members. The size of the workforce shows even less variation: 71% of all households had two working members. In terms of composition, the nuclear family dominated: 75.3% of households consisted of a married couple and their children, and the only other type of some importance was the stem family in which a couple and their children were supplemented by one or two parents (18.9%). The ideal-type extended (or joint) family, with two or more married sons living with their parents, was only found in 10 cases (0.4%).²⁰ As a result of the predominance of relatively small households, the variation in the ratio of workers to total members was also limited. Over one-third had 66.7% workers (usually a married couple with one child), a quarter had 50% workers, etc..

Information on these aspects of the household workforce for each of the mobility categories is contained in table 3. Both the number of household members and the number of workers show a positive association with mobility (col. 1 and 2). Households with three or more working members account for about one-fifth of the village category. This proportion grows with increasing mobility to over three quarters in the long-term migration category. The relative amount of labour, expressed as the percentage

¹⁹ The oldest intact married couple was taken as the starting point of this categorization. This means, for example, that in stem families with one surviving member of the first generation ('half' stem families), someone from the second generation was labeled as head.

²⁰ In addition, 47 'truncated' households (lacking a married couple), 91 married couples without other family members, and 19 relatively complex households that did not fit into any of the mentioned types were found. The total sample consisted of 288 households.

of working members, also increases with mobility. The gap between long-term mobility and the other categories is especially pronounced.

Households gain members first and foremost through the addition of children, but by the time these children start participating full-time in production, and the greater household size is thus translated into an increase of the workforce, other changes are also likely to take place. The children may marry, and either leave the household (as most daughters will, and many sons as well), leading to the loss of a worker, or stay, in which case the workforce is augmented with a new worker in addition to the child and a stem family is formed. Thus, the household grows in size, but also in complexity. The figures in column (4) of table 3 indicate that such complex households play an important role in mobility. This is borne out in more detail in table 4, where the stem families have been sub-divided into 'full' and 'half' types. 'Full stem' refers to the situation that comes into existence when a child marries and continues to live in the household of his or her parents. When one of the parents dies, the transition to the 'half' type is made.

Table 4 **Mobility by Family Type (%)**

	Column Percentage			Row Percentage		
	Nuclear	Full Stem	Half Stem	Nuclear	Full Stem	Half Stem
Village	47.6	31.7	44.7	77.1	5.4	10.6
Township	21.9	24.4	21.0	75.7	8.9	10.7
Commute	20.6	22.6	16.5	77.9	9.0	9.2
< 6 Months	4.1	10.4	3.2	68.8	18.4	8.0
6-12 Months	3.1	5.9	9.7	59.5	11.7	27.0
> 1 Year	2.7	5.0	4.9	67.1	12.9	17.6
N:	2106	221	309	2106	221	309

Note: Other family types have not been included in the table due to small numbers, but have been taken into account in the calculation of the row percentages. These, therefore, do not add up to 100%. 'Full' stem refers to stem families with the first generation couple intact, whereas 'half' stem families have lost one of the parents.

The first panel in table 4 (the column percentages) makes abundantly clear that the stem families are more likely to allocate labour through mobility: 9.9% of the nuclear families engage in short- through long-term mobility, against 21.3% in full stem families and 17.8% in half stem families. The right-hand panel (the row percentages), however, shows that in spite of the greater mobile tendency of the stem families, due to their great number, the nuclear families account for around two-thirds of the households in all three categories.

The large number of nuclear households invites further investigation to see whether sub-groups can be distinguished. The nuclear stage of the household life-cycle lasts from the birth of the first child until a son marries *and* stays with his parents. This will at least take about 20 years, and usually more, especially if the first son to marry moves out. This suggests that a look at the life-cycle stage may shed some more light on what kinds of households are more likely to engage in mobility. Life-cycle stage is here represented by the age of the mother.²¹ Among nuclear households, the mean age of the mother in the different mobility categories is as follows: 35.8 for households in the village, 35.4 for the township, 35.6 for commuting, 37.0 for short-term mobility, 38.2 for mid-term mobility, and 41.7 for long-term mobility. Households engaging in mobility are on average older than village-based households, and the mean age increases with the duration of mobility.

²¹ That is, the female in the eldest intact couple. In 'half' stem families, where the first generation couple is no longer intact, the age of the first generation members was used.

Table 5: **Proportion of Nuclear Households Engaging in Mobility, by Life-Cycle Stage**

Stage	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	> 60
Percent	6.7	7.8	9.0	7.1	10.8	15.9	34.5	25.0	10.0	0

Note: Mobility here includes all absences longer than 1 night, i.e. short-, mid-, and long-term mobility.

Table 5 illustrates that mobility, among nuclear families, only becomes more common from about age 40, and is most important in the 50 - 54 bracket, when 35% of households (n = 55) engages in mobility. Nuclear families thereafter become rarer, and the frequency of mobility also declines. Households in the stages beyond age 40 account for about 30% of households in the village to short-term mobility. Their share then increases to 43.9% and 68.4% of the mid- and long-term mobility groups respectively. These are exactly those households in which the children (are beginning to) participate in labour, thus giving the household a high proportion of workers. From the category village to long-term mobility, the mean proportion of working members in the household grows steadily: 60.4 - 63.8 - 64.3 - 65.2 - 69.5 - 77.8% respectively, and the more striking differences occur when absences become longer.

Thus, among nuclear households, those in the middle stage of development, when the mother is aged between 40 and 60 are more likely to send out members to work in other places. Reference back to table 3, column 5, shows that this seems to be the case for all households: the mean age of the mother increases from 41.8 years in the village category to 50.1 years in long-term mobility. We have also seen (table 4) that 'half' stem families, which usually occur later in the cycle, are more mobile than the younger nuclear households, but less so than the 'full' stem households, suggesting something of a curvilinear relation between life-cycle and mobility, with mobility most likely occurring in the middle stage.

The age structure of the workforce, represented in table 3, cols. 6 to 10, as the mean percentages of workers in certain age brackets,²² still remains to be discussed. We have seen above that people of the 'child' generation were much more likely to engage in spatial mobility than other household members. This suggests that households with one or more young working members are better equipped for migration than those that do not have youthful workers. Indeed, the proportion of workers aged under 25 increases considerably in the higher mobility categories. A parallel increase is evident in the 45 - 54 group, indicating that to some extent we are probably dealing with members from the same households: the parental generation and that of their (migrant-) children. By contrast, the share of workers aged from 25 to 34 and from 35 to 44 diminishes among the more mobile households. Workers older than 54 comprise a smaller proportion of household workforce, and there is little variation across mobility categories.

7 Multivariate Analysis

From the descriptive analysis presented in the preceding section it emerged that, on a one-by-one basis, the number and the proportion of working members, the complexity of the household, and the presence of workers aged under 25 and between 45 and 54 are positively associated with allocation of labour through mobility. Mobility is also more likely to occur during the later and especially middle stages of household development. We will now look at the outcomes of a number of logistic regressions, to see which of these factors remain of importance when all are considered simultaneously. In logistic regression, the dependent variable is dichotomous, and here we will compare the households in the short-, mid-, and long-term mobility categories with those in lower categories. The resulting logistic regressions, however, suffer from the imbalance in size of the groups compared. For example, when a logistic regression comparing short-, mid-, and long-term mobility on the one hand with the less mobile group on the other is performed on the entire sample, the resulting model overall predicts the mobility status of households correct in close to 90% of the cases, but for mobile households, the correct prediction percentage is less

²² To some extent these mean percentages are misleading, as the proportion of households that do not have workers of a certain age is close to or exceeds 50% in all the categories. Households without workers under 25 accounted for 72.9%; those without workers aged 25-34 for 56.5%; without workers aged 35-44: 49.1%; without workers aged 45-54: 78.3%; and without workers aged over 55: 87.2%. Still, the figures are useful as an indication of the general pattern.

than 5. Obviously, this is not a satisfying result. In order to make up for the imbalance in numbers between the mobile and non-mobile categories, a random sample was drawn from the non-mobile group, in which the number of households approximated that of the mobile households. Then a new model was estimated, using all mobile households and this new sub-sample of non-mobile ones. In order to see whether this leads to a stable model, the procedure was repeated a number of times, and despite some variation, the overall pattern was stable.

In table 6, three different definitions of mobility are used for testing the effects of different household characteristics. A number of points emerge fairly consistently from the repeated logistic regressions. The proportion of workers and the type of household have little effect on the probability of mobility (this is, of course, when the other variables are also taken into account). The most useful indicator is the number of workers in the households, which attains significance consistently in all three comparisons. Its effect increases as the type of mobility looked at becomes longer in duration. The importance of the proportion of workers aged under 25 is also clear when mobility is defined as including short-, mid-, and long-term forms, as well as when only mid, and long-term mobility are included. It loses its significance when long-term mobility is examined, however. The life-cycle stage does not always attain significance, but is also positively associated with the probability of mobility.

Table 6 Effects of Household Characteristics on the Probability of Labour Allocation Through Different Types of Mobility

	All Mobility			Mid- and Long-Term Mobility			Long-term Mobility		
	Odds Ratio	Times	Times	Odds Ratio	Times	Times	Odds Ratio	Times	Times
		P<0.05	p<0.10		p<0.05	p<0.10		p<0.05	p<0.10
Age Head	1.01-1.02	1	4	1.01-1.04	3	2	1.00-1.04	0	4
Workers	1.16-1.89	10	--	1.62-2.51	10	--	1.76-5.30	10	--
% Workers	0,98-0,99	1	2	0.99	1	0	0,98-0,99	0	0
% Workers < 25	1.01-1.02	8	2	1.01-1.02	9	0	0,99-1.02	1	0
Simple Family	0.90-1.18	0	0	0.91-1.64	1	0	0,93-2.72	1	1
Correct Overall	63.49-67.63%			68.17-72.15%			72.19-77.65%		
Correct Mobile Households	55.45-62.31 %			63.78-70.41%			70.59-75.29%		
IN	622-670			373-406			170		

Note: Results from 10 logistic regressions (per comparison) whereby a random sample of non-mobile households was drawn each time. The odds ratio columns give the range in which results fell in the repeated regressions, The 'times p<0.05/0.10' columns give the number of times that the significance level fell under these limits, Odds ratio: 1.00 = no influence.

8 Conclusion

When the household is taken as the unit of analysis, spatial mobility is considerably more widespread in the Chinese countryside than individual level data usually reveal. Under half of all households surveyed stays entirely in the village, against over two-third of individuals. In the same vein, 11.6% of families allocate labour through mobility involving absences of at least one day, which accounts for 6.1% of individuals.

The most useful predictor of household mobility is the number of working members in the household: the more workers, the higher the chance that at least one of them leaves (temporarily). Depending on how mobility is defined, the presence of working members ages under 25 usually also makes mobility more likely. It is in families in the middle (and to some extent late) stages of development, when grown-up children contribute significantly to daily work, that the household workforce is at its peak. When these children marry and remain in the household more complex families come into existence, and these tend

to be more mobile. This is, however, true as well of nuclear families with grown-up children. Thus, stem families on the one hand and nuclear families in the stage where the mother is aged between 40 and 59 on the other, when taken together, account for 61.6% of all mobile households. The salience of this aspect of household structure increases with the length of migration: the proportion in the short-, mid-, and long-term mobility categories are 49.6%, 63.9%, and 76.4% respectively. Such differences, not only in type of household or life-cycle, but with regard to basically all aspects of household structure as well as individual characteristics, show that it is useful to distinguish different types of mobility, instead of simply speaking of migration or mobility as one unitary phenomenon.

There is a (often implicit) tendency in the literature on Chinese mobility and rural development to assume that rural under-employment ('surplus labour') almost automatically and directly leads to out-migration. Apart from the fact that 'push' factors *alone* are hardly sufficient explanations of the recent growth in mobility, the findings presented in this paper suggest that this assumption needs to be qualified. The essence of the problem has been aptly described by Arizpe, albeit in reference to a very different region:

Part of the problem in studies in Latin America has arisen because of the failure to distinguish between migration and rural unemployment at a theoretical level. Because attention has been focused primarily on structural processes, it was taken for granted that the same mechanism that explains the rise of a relative surplus population in rural areas also explained the rural exodus. It is now clear that the problem of selectivity does not allow for such easy generalisations. [...]he patterns of age, sex, recurrence, and occupational specialisation can only be understood with reference to the labour and social conditions of the peasant household.²³

The fact that large households, in the stage of development where two generations of working members are present, are most likely to engage in mobility and account for the majority of mobility found, suggests that, apart still from regional differences, under-employment is not evenly spread over the Chinese rural population. Rather, it is more likely to occur in certain phases of family development, and often the least tied second generation will make use of the mobility option that has become available through the development of extensive mobility networks. Whether they are 'pushed out' of the countryside, or that ample household labour simply is a factor facilitating the step towards lucrative non-local employment is open to discussion.

²³ Arizpe, 'Relay Migration and the Survival of the Peasant Household', p.20.