

THOMAS HEBERER, WOLFGANG TAUBMANN, unter Mitarbeit von FAN JIE, FAN GONZHENG und ZHU HONGXING, *Chinas ländliche Gesellschaft im Umbruch – Urbanisierung und sozio-ökonomischer Wandel auf dem Lande*. Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998. 494 pages, DM 98,-. ISBN 3-531-13260-1

The authors analyse the findings of a field study in seven communes, spread over six provinces from the north to the south of China, and compare their results with several other studies, so as to enable cross-checking and a measure of generalisation. Their research is limited to the level of the smaller townships and villages. Townships function as intermediaries between city and village and try to offer jobs to those who are surplus in the farming sector.

The introductory chapter 1 describes the research project, its objectives and the problems of research, which was carried out with support from high-level Chinese institutions. The basic hypothesis differs from conventional "Western" wisdom. For the authors "the transition from a planned economy of the Stalinist type to an (authoritarian) market system under the rule of a Communist party is possible and not necessarily accompanied by economic decline" (p. 15). The program of economic reform is not due to "the perspicacity of individual party leaders"; reform is rather progressing "in its own dynamism, i.e. spontaneously and often in deviation from official politics" (p. 16); but "the spontaneous change from below and that intended from above are complimentary" (p. 20). They agree that the recipes of "Western economic experts ... cannot be materialised" and they see the clear difference between Chinese reform strategies and the abortive ones in eastern Europe.

Chapter 2 describes demographic and settlement structure, infrastructure and functions of the townships as central places for the surrounding villages.

The economic structures and their changes are analysed in chapter 3. The authors concentrate on non-agricultural production and services, where the changes in form and content are still in progress and denominations sometimes are a fake due to the desire to conform to official regulations. Millions of jobs have been created in the new village and township enterprises (VTE). "The control of the country's economy has largely slipped away" from the center in Beijing (p. 102). Decentralised rural industries in 1994 employed 27% of the rural workforce against 14.5% before 1984; still 73% mainly work in farming.

Rural industrialisation is financed by the local authorities, but also by the peasantry thanks to "growing incomes and high saving inclination" as a necessary prerequisite for the loans to rural entrepreneurs offered by rural credit cooperatives.

The real balance sheet of the VTE is difficult to assess: owners and/or managers try to hide real profits for understandable reasons. Thus, the relatively high percentage of loss enterprises is a doubtful "fact": balance sheets are often falsified" (p. 125). Part of the profit is ploughed back to the local farming sector for its modernisation and intensification. "Privatisation is limited": Local authorities hold shares and they control the management; they also prefer the employment of local labour. Technical equipment and productivity vary widely.

The transformation is seen as de-etatisation in different forms, and still new forms are sought, but not as privatisation east European style. Part of the new in-

dustries is not stable, many enterprises are formed, but many are at the same time closing down.

With these enterprises an entrepreneurial middle stratum is emerging, faster in the countryside, more slowly in large urban settlements, where the state sector is still dominant. The authors are sure that the integration of private entrepreneurs will accelerate the ideological and organisational undermining of the CP.

Chapter 4 analyses the system of taxation and financing and the development of the townships. The researchers "usually did not find illegal or excessive fees and levies from peasant households" (p. 249), though they occasionally found an exorbitant burden (p. 251). Chapter 5 discusses processes of administrative and political change. On the one hand, the government aims at efficiency, debureaucratisation; on the other hand the informal structures continue "to play the dominant role in administration" (p. 259). The center wishes a separation of economic management and administration. The authors found in their research "that the overwhelming majority of rural party secretaries were at the same time directors of the 'industrial societies' and in addition also managed an enterprise, though nominally only" (p. 264).

The structure of party membership in one location is analysed: by education, age, time of joining, profession and the conclusion drawn that the changes undermine the system of values and organisation of the party. More local and regional self-assertion is reported; the provincial People's Congresses in Zhejiang and Guizhou in 1993 elected provincial leaders from their own slate and rejected the candidates from the center. Similar facts are reported from other provinces, which proves a flexible attitude of the central authorities, accepting regional decisions (p. 304).

Chapter 6 deals with stratification and the emergence of local elites. In the village and in the enterprise there is rarely a party unit or trade-union, while the traditional elite plays an important role. There is an interaction between the local political leadership (of the CP) and the new economic "leaders"; though their expectations are somewhat contradictory, they also meet halfway: "The local party leadership hopes to integrate influential entrepreneurs into local politics, better social control and material advantages, the entrepreneurs (expect) political protection, improved relations with the administration and increased power." (p. 345)

Chapter 7 is based less on quantifiable "facts"; it is more an interpretation of ongoing change of values and formulation of interests. 2200 persons were asked about their priorities. Most important were "happy family" - 93.6%, "good future for the children" - 82.2%, "enjoying professional work" - 67.0%, while among the 12 alternatives a private car ranked last - 12.9%. In another questionnaire 8.6% wanted a car, while 54.9% wished good education for their children and 15.0% wished to promote charities. The authors then discuss political issues. In the countryside there is a return to tradition and to the hierarchy of the clan, which has changed and is no longer controlled by the gentry. Recent developments have increased the potential for rural unrest and conflicts, which is confirmed by official publications. There is an informal dialogue, influencing the central decisions; there are also organisations of interest groups.

The last chapter sums up the development of the townships. The non-state industrial sector also has some negative aspects. Sometimes also work conditions are poor. "In the countryside there is no state ownership worth talking about ... At the same time economic malpractices (*Wildwuchs*) emerge, expressed by the reappearance of usury, child labour and economic exploitation of the employees in the private sector." (p. 414)

The research work of the authors, collection and analysis of comprehensive data and the perusal of relevant research by others, is impressive. But a few critical remarks may be made.

The issues and development problems of the farming sector are largely ignored. Where they are mentioned, figures sometimes seem doubtful: E.g. a yield of corn of 195 tons/hectare (p. 343) or the high transfer of farmland for industrial purposes ("nine times as much as really necessary", p. 167). The same can be said about the balance-sheets of industrial enterprises (p. 148/149).

The discussion about social fallow, the neglect of farmland by landholders, is contradictory. On page 42 it is "a frequent phenomenon in the coastal regions", this is repeated on page 379 and 411. On page 89 these acreages are cultivated largely by non-resident agriculturists. Under the household responsibility system every landholder has to deliver a quota of grain; it is, therefore, difficult to imagine how holders can leave their plots fallow and still deliver their grain quota.

Generally the translation of figures seems to be a problem. Thus, a second-hand Mercedes, bought by a party secretary, probably did not really cost one million Yuan (= 208,000 DM) (p. 332).

The political interpretation of facts is subjective and therefore open to controversy. Sometimes there are contradictions in the statements made by the authors, which may reflect the complex reality of this vast country. The authors seem to incline to an open perspective for China's stable development. With the interruption of June 1989, the years from 1978 to 1999 have been years of economic progress, social and political stability. All incidents of unrest, demonstrations, rebellions are now officially reported (p.374), mostly handled cautiously and the reasons for the grievances analysed and remedies offered. After the crash of the small Asian tigers China appears as the stable factor in the region. Only history can give the answer about China's future path, whether the CP will retain power by success and flexibility or not.

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Finally, after a "new sociology", a "new archaeology", "new geopolitics" – now also "new geographies"?

From the sub-title the reader could imagine that a new scientific concept of the geographical discipline will be presented – exemplified by Asia Pacific. Soon, however, he will notice that this is not the case, rather will he find a multi-disciplinary