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“Development on the margin”

## Evolution of Rural Land Right Systems and China’s Internal Migration

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### Abstract

This paper analyses how the evolution of rural land system has influenced the internal migration of China from the foundation of People’s Republic of China in 1949 to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Especially it tries to find out how the new policy which promotes land transfer in rural China has influenced the pattern of labour transfer at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Scholars of structuralism argued, society or the social structure is a precondition for the individual and the purpose of structure is to delimit individual acts (Olof Stjernstroem 2004). In China, migration is closely linked to insecurity of land rights, as “village land ownership remains collective and land use rights can be periodically reallocated, individual out-migration can result in deprivation of those rights.” (Li Shi 2009). Thus migration is not solely to be analysed with reference to the individual experience of the migrant, but also with reference to social and institutional factors in regions of origin.

The present paper aims to find out which relationships have existed between land policy (i.e. the government’s and state’s regulations of land rights and land management) and migration movements. It focuses on the rural region of Hunan Province in China and starts from the following hypotheses: 1. There is a close relationship between land rights and migration. 2. Rural return-migration increased with the strength of individual land rights by the land policy.

Desk-top research on the basis of a literature review and the analysis of secondary data from the National Bureau Statistics is conducted as research method. The paper is structured as follows. In the first session we discuss state of research on the links of land use and migration. In the second section we illustrate the links between land use and internal migration of China in the past decades. The third section shows empirical evidence for the impact of the New Policy of Land Rights on return migration at the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the last section conclusion is drawn from the data analysis.

**Keywords:** Internal migration, land policy, land right, return migrant