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PHOTOGRAPHY

Moving Pictures. Photographer Andreas Seibert captures the human sacrifices behind China's economic boom

BY LING WOO LIU

THE EPIC STORY OF CHINA'S MODERNIZATION has often been told in numbers. Once dormant, insulated and ravaged by war and social upheaval, China is now the world's third biggest economy with more mobile-phone users and, by the end of this year, more car sales than anywhere else on the planet. But the story behind those

numbers, of the coal miners and assembly-line workers, of the parents and children they've left behind and the arduous journeys made out of sheer desperation to find work, has rarely been given the same attention as the country's impressive economic achievements.

In 2002, Tokyo-based Swiss photographer Andreas Seibert set out to document the lives of some of the 130 million Chinese

Homeward bound

Millions of migrant workers, like this young man at Guangzhou's train station, return home during the annual Lunar New Year holiday



migrant workers who, through their toil, help make China the economic powerhouse it is today. Over the next six years, Seibert traveled to a dozen Chinese provinces and captured images of construction workers, waitresses and scavengers, among others, many of whom he says live a precarious existence due to hazardous working conditions or shady employers. Seibert's strength is in his long-form documentary storytelling, such as when he follows a Mr. Zhou, a solar-panel-factory worker, on a 35-hour trek from his workplace in Guangzhou to his hometown in rural Sichuan province.

A selection of images from Seibert's 2008 book *From Somewhere to Nowhere: China's Internal Migrants*, will be showcased for two months beginning Nov. 12 at Zurich's Helmhaus Museum. During the course of his project, Seibert found that while his subjects earn vastly higher salaries in the cities than they do in the countryside, their material gains cannot adequately compensate for the enormous sacrifices they make. "They watch TV and see pictures of worlds they will never be part of," he says. "That can create unrest." Such is the dark side of China's boom. ■

Carving a living

Female artisans engrave jade figurines at a rudimentary factory in Anhui province, above. Migrants often toil in difficult working conditions

Life, interrupted

The bare village home, below, of Mr. Zhou, a Sichuan native who lives and works 1,100 miles away in Guangzhou, where he assembles solar panels

