

Shukai Zhao

Regeneration of Peasants



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Under the theme of the relationship between peasants and reform, the core concern of this book is focused on the status of peasants in China's social and political reform. The major perspective of the author's analysis is based on peasants' behaviors in the reality. Meanwhile, the author takes into account both historical review and future prospect.

To fully demonstrate the author's core concern, this book has collected writings of different subjects and styles including essays on political characters, comments of thoughts, media interviews records and speeches at meetings, etc.

—Zhao Shukai

Foreword

By naming this book “Regeneration of Peasants,” the author is not to surprise readers but to replace formerly intended “Reform of Peasants” which is now considered unsuitable. Considering the important role of peasants in China’s major social changes over recent decades, it is reasonable and consistent with mainstream discourse to say that they have been pushing forward the Reform. However, judged from its original meaning, “reform” emphasizes more on making conscious changes, designing, arrangement and rational construction. Obviously, in terms of the internal working mechanism, peasants as the fundamental driving force of profound social transformation are not deliberately “reforming” but pursuing their own vital interests. Therefore, the author comes up with “regeneration” which is in Chinese “鼎革 (Ding Ge)” to describe such status.

According to “Miscellaneous Hexagram” from the Book of Changes of Ancient China, “革” means denouncing the old and “鼎” means introducing the new. The name “Regeneration” was chosen to highlight the spontaneous decisive power of peasants in propelling social changes. The system innovation driven by the peasantry as a social group is not a reform well planned under certain kind of ideal or theory, but a natural choice out of internal life purpose, which can be more vividly and accurately expressed by “regeneration.”

Peasants are generally considered to be politically conservative, which has been affirmed by certain schools of classical theories since 1950s. The conservancy of peasants has been not only a theoretical but also a political verdict, as well as the intrinsic basis for national policy making. Therefore, peasants will be criticized by propaganda and coerced in practice when they are not ready to cooperate or even resist certain policy arrangements, which has long been the fundamental policy attitude in dealing with state-peasant relationships and however, the development and historical achievement of China’s rural reform have been the most powerful response to and disproof of such an attitude. The over-30-year reform saw the turning point in China’s discourse system on peasants. “Respect Peasants’ Initiative” has become a vibrant policy slogan. However if we take a close look at the real situation of how peasants issues are coped with in the state policy process,

there is still a long way to go in resolving major issues state–peasant relations. For instance, land property right, political participation, social security, etc., have just been identified and yet to be resolved, which will be the key areas and major directions for future reform.

Apparently, some traditional theoretical verdicts have been challenged or even overturned by the actual reform progress, which, at least, has changed people's inclination to sweepingly criticize peasants as "conservative" and "backward". In view of China's dramatic changes following the reform, a new interest coordination mechanism is being developed with peasants' contending efforts: Economically, Agricultural Household Contract Responsibility System was initiated by peasants; politically, village direct election was ushered in by peasants; socially, peasants express their demands with wave after wave of repetitions to defend their legitimate rights. Peasants have made great efforts and brilliant achievement in challenging old system, resolving new problem, and establishing new institution, which can be seen everywhere in today's China. Peasants have been pushing China's reform with formidable historic creative power. Thus, it can be seen in social innovation that peasants are enthusiastic and dynamic instead of backward forces.

It is the author's point of view that China's current policy making and academic research need to adjust their basic thoughts of peasants. Neither peasants nor any other social group shall be judged from the "advanced" or "backward" perspective. There are certain statements that are discredited assumptions from classical theories with no empirical support; some of which, though based on the study of particular facts, are too subjective due to the complicated reality and limited of knowledge; some conclusions seems reliable, but old theories can hardly explain present problems, let alone future issues. It is unreasonable to judge peasants of China with the standards of other countries or to judge them with those of former peasants. In other words, many things in the world can never be defined by being advanced or backward, neither can inferences and imaginations be made upon such a perspective. For example, it can hardly be labeled as being advanced or backward for peasants insisting on household farming to feed themselves, standing up against the government's land acquisition to get a high compensation, or besieging the local government to claim owed salaries. It's illogical and senseless to say that being totally obedient to the government's arrangements is advanced while holding one's own position is backwardness. The key is whether they have the power to claim these rights. If they do, nobody shall denounce them as "backward." Therefore, it is not necessary for both decision maker and researcher to entangle with such a problem.

Rights including economic right, social right, political right, etc., may provide a better view angle. In another word, it doesn't matter if peasants are advanced or backward, what truly matters is whether they should have such rights as to own land, to take part in public affairs, to enjoy equal government service and social security, which is the primary issue. Ever since the beginning of modern times, China's peasants have been relentlessly fighting for their own rights as a vital force impacting existing system or even propelling the reform. This should be an important perspective in the study of peasant issue, and it is from this point of view

that traditional theory on peasants conservancy should be reviewed and criticized because such kind of review or criticism was far from enough in the past reform experiences summary and peasant study.

To some extent, China's reform has become peasants' reform and China's peasants have become reforming peasants, which is the author's basic summary of the theme of this book. In reality, there are five key dimensions for the internal links between peasants and China's reform well representing the role peasants play in China's reform, which can be generalized in five aspects, namely peasants and top-level politics, peasants and grassroots government, peasants and rural democracy, peasants and social construction, peasants and local officials. In another word, so long as China is determined to deal well with peasants in its modernization, specific and concrete efforts shall be made from this aspect or profound and powerful institutional innovation shall be carried out. The major content of this book is focused on these basic relations to discuss the ways to address peasant issues at the national level.

In this book, the author proposed opinions concerning a series of major problems, particularly those connected with former policy considerations and political theories based on specific survey of actual rural life. The author thinks that the key to state-peasant relationship study doesn't lie in the conclusion or opinion itself, but in questions fully presented and freely discussed. For a very long period, it has been taken for granted by a lot of people that a certain kind of great theory and figures will be able to navigate the development of China or even human society, resolving all major problems once and for all, what common people need to do is merely learning and implementation. However, things are not that simple as shown by the reform process over recent decades. Brilliant thoughts and theories once played a leading role, but everything is in the process of change and evolution, which requires a scientific perspective of development. It is naive to think that fundamental issues in social development can be solved by a certain kind of theory once and for all. The real solution relies upon the people's own wisdom and choice, further free exploration and a full play of creative power to set the mind free of chains and break the rigidity of thoughts and theories, making favorable conditions for thorough exploration of reform and development issues. It shall not be a privilege but everybody's right as well as responsibility to conduct independent thinking, free expression, and unrestricted creation. The author dares not boast this book's discussion on peasant issues as true and correct. Adhering to the principle of honest expression of personal survey and personal opinion, the author holds that rigorous study and unrestrained expression are more important than the "right or wrong" of the opinion itself. Independent thinking by an individual person should not be replaced or hampered by any existing theory and idea.

This book is a collection of the author's discussion writings in recent years with the theme of peasant-reform relationship published on different occasions including essays on political characters, comments of thoughts, media interview records, and speeches at meetings or other events. The 33 essays are categorized by the author into five chapters as follows according to their contents instead of publishing order or types:

Chapter 1: Peasants and Top-Level Politics

The characteristic of the relationship between peasants and high-level politics speaks for itself in whether political tradition or political reality of China. Except for particular historical circumstances, peasants can hardly influence high-level politics, whereas the latter can have direct and strong impact on the former. Certainly, there are considerable differences between ancient and modern times on how the interplay works. In this chapter, the author attempts to study the relationship between peasants and high-level politics based on specific political figures and events, policy arrangements and institutional phenomena. The following issues are to be discussed: How peasants were distorted and misunderstood by the state's ideology in the age of class struggle which led to distorted rural policy and reversed peasants–politics relation? What kind of political character do China's peasants have in present historical condition? How is the historical destiny of modern peasants presenting itself against the backdrop of abnormal peasant–politics relationship? What problem will arise in the political growth of peasants in China's future development? What is the fundamental revelation of the recent 30-year reform? And what are the problems still with governments in understanding peasants?

Chapter 2: Peasants and Grassroots Government

China's five-stratum government system consists of three levels: central, regional, and grassroots, among which county and township governments are at grassroots level. Strictly speaking, regional and grassroots governments under existing institutional framework are mainly responsible for policy implementation. Therefore, peasants are mostly affected by the central government or high-level political activities in major institutional arrangement and policy making. However, policy making and policy implementation have never been the same issue because the former is more complicated and influential than the latter. Hence, the grassroots government is an integral part or dimension of the peasant–state dynamics, particularly for the study of peasants' performance and logic of action in the reform. Key issues to be discussed in this chapter include: institutional structure and action logic of village governance; how the institutional defects and behavioral biases lead to local governance crisis; grassroots government reform's position in the overall government systematic reform; public responsibility of grassroots government; the relationship between citizen participation and government development, etc.

Chapter 3: Peasants and Rural Democracy

1980s–1990s witnessed the inspiring development of village democracy featured by villager self-governance which received applauses from both domestic and abroad. Of course, such inspiration was still at imaginary or ideal level. However, reality is always harsher than expectation. This chapter will discuss the presence and future of village democracy, mainly focusing on the following questions: Why is there a division of optimists and pessimists among people concerning village democracy? The author thinks that it is reasonable for some people to be pessimistic for the fact that there are some backsets in the transition of village democracy system. Nonetheless, we have a bigger reason to be inspired and more confidence in the

future when we see the great enhancement of peasants' sense of rights and political efficacy, especially the rise of new generation of peasants as citizens. What is worth worrying about is the potential social turmoil as the result of the exacerbated imbalance between the government system improvement and citizenship growth, as well as the enlarging gap between institutional advancement and the citizens' demands.

Chapter 4: Peasants and Social Construction

There has been a prevailing perspective that rural issues can be boiled down to "poverty" and underdeveloped economy is the root of all problems. However, it is not that simple as indicated by the process of development. Presently, with the fast developing economy, social instability are also aggravating, as a result, more emphasis is laid upon social construction, which has become typical for villages nowadays. Social construction consists of development of social undertakings and maintenance of social orders. The problem is that social conflicts can be triggered not only by economic development but also by social undertaking development, in which governments play the key role. Social management is related to both economic development and social progress which needs to be achieved through the improvement of government system. Hence, this chapter is mainly concerned with the fact that social harmony does not rely on the level of economic development but on the level of social power coordination. The building of such a healthy power relation depends on the reform of the government or political system. Generally speaking, the so-called "instability" of China's rural areas became the highlight in mid-1990s, when peasants strongly resisted the over-burdened taxes and fees. What is more severe is that the rural tax reform, particularly the total abolition of agricultural tax at the turn of the century has not eradicated the "instability" problem, which was found to be more complicated and profound after 30 years of reform and peasant petition has become the famous doctrine of rural study since the beginning of the twenty-first century. This problem can be observed from both the peasant's and the government's perspectives. As the job required, the author started to study peasant petition at a very early stage and as the survey deepens, however, it is found that social instability will not be understood better until the research goes beyond peasants and their conflict behaviors to a systematic study of the operational process of governmental institutions, particularly government conflict settlement mechanism.

Chapter 5: Peasants and Local Officials

This chapter consists of forewords written for local officials with specific emphasis: some discuss the officials' standpoints of discourse; some are about their research concerns and others on their living status. It is a big issue how to look upon China's local officials. Generally speaking, local officials are regarded and evaluated as policy implementers by both high-level government and the public, which is not true in reality. Instead of simply implementing policies made by the superior authority, local officials are very important "policy makers," only that their "policies" will not be acknowledged by the superior or will be called just "local rules."

Nevertheless, these “policies” are awfully real and implemented with high efficiency, which has pushed forward China’s rural development in “policy infighting.” How to theoretically define local officials has become an important issue in China’s political study and the author holds that local officials have become a relatively independent political group or a unique interest group. For the superior, they are in another sense a pressure group countering the superior with their own choices and actions. For the subordinate, they impact grassroots’ lives more directly than the higher authority as a substantial power group managing local society. In the perspective of sociology development, local officials can be called a strategic group which makes strategic decision to protect or pursue group interest. In recent years, some political scholars in Europe who began to study this question identified the duality of such strategic group as both an analysis unit of research method and a highly autonomous collective actor. It is necessary to know about their spiritual motivation and logic of action to better understand this system and better advance the reform. To treat this group with ideological discourse is nothing but self-deception.

The author is convinced that peasant study against the backdrop of China’s reform and transition is a field of great potential in that China’s reform still has a long way to go and peasants are playing a decisive role in China’s historical stage. Social and political changes requires academic follow up including the proposal of questions, adjustment of research methods and the expansion of academic vision, as is demanded both by the times and scholars themselves. In this purpose, the author makes this collection with the prospect to be thought-provoking for further exploration of peasant and grassroots political issues.

Beijing

Shukai Zhao

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About the Author

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Chapter 1

Peasants and Top-Level Politics

1.1 Peasants' Political Enlightenment

First of all, I'd like to say thanks to www.zhongdaonet.com and the Son of Peasant Group of Beijing Normal University for organizing this reading party around the author's new books. And it is a great inspiration for me to see so many young students concerned with the research of peasant issues.

"Peasant and Politics" has been the focus of my study for two years, orienting my survey and reflection of newly published "Village Governance and Government institutionalization," "Peasant and Politics." To facilitate thorough discussion here today, I would like to talk more about peasant and political enlightenment issue based on the survey of peasants in modern society.

1.1.1 Peasants and China's Politics

There is a point of view that peasants can not affect substantial political process. Furthermore, they are of little importance even down below the horizon of China's political study, which I think is not right, at least not complete in that it has missed the other side of the coin.

The unique role of peasant issue in China's politics displays in two aspects: On one hand, considerable problems have been excluded from the top-level policy agenda; on another hand, the demands of peasants will not "reach the emperor's ears" when major issues concerning peasants' living are negotiated at the high level, or, to put it more straight forwardly, peasants limited by the system cannot speak directly while various policy makers at the top-level claim themselves to be representatives of peasants, which has put peasants into such an embarrassed situation as being represented both before and after reform. On the other hand, peasants are not always obedient to those policy decisions although they cannot directly take part in

the policy process. Instead, they will exert their own attitudes and preferences, carrying out their own actions or even fundamentally resist and change those policies in the villages and in their lives. Such power of peasants has been demonstrated by the overthrow of the People's Commune System as well as changes in a series of policies since the reform started. Therefore, while being affected by top-level politics, peasants in turn have an internal and profound influence on top-level politics.

As history shows, those policy arrangements in certain areas claimed to represent peasants' demands while compromising their interests were switched to correct path by peasants' constant and tenacious resistance which is a painful process with extremely high price both for peasants and some local governments. Harsh confrontations have taken place between peasants and local governments from early to present stage of reform, from the establishment and abolition of the People's Commune to rural enterprises and peasant immigration, etc., which put forward a question: How to integrate peasants' interest appeal with political process at an earlier stage to make policy agenda consistent with peasants' demands expression so as to minimize the expensive cost of peasants' resistance? It is more profound than the above-mentioned question what kind of political arrangement will better express peasants' interest demand instead of "being represented"? Or what kind of politics is good politics? My point of view is that peasants are a major part of politics, which can never be neglected. It is not true that politics is only the business of politicians.

It is also vigorously revealed by historical progress that the so-called "good politics" does not grow out of thin air, the so-called "good politics" has led to disasters for many times. There was a time when policy failure incurred great famine, declined economy and poverty-stricken livelihood; some places were even full of bodies of the starved, which is worthy of reflection.

Those who have made policy faults must be condemned. However, the historic responsibilities shall not be ascribed only to them. It is in another sense the responsibility of common people that misguided policies were implemented. Those "policy disasters" could have been prevented in the first place if common people were fully aware of their own rights, clearly understood the nature of politics with strong participation demand and intervening capacity, which has raised an important new issue: common people's political capacity or the building of citizenship ability that can be traced back to an old topic: enlightenment of citizenship.

1.1.2 Village Self-governance and Democratic Enlightenment

Democratic enlightenment can be regarded as the essence of citizen's capacity building and village self-governance is the primary concern of China's peasant and democracy issues.

Since the beginning of the new century, particularly these years, village self-governance has reached the bottleneck or has "hit the ceiling" in terms of both academic research and practical work. In the mid- or-late 1980s, scholars at home and abroad plunged into study village self-governance with great enthusiasm, which

last for a few years and has now evaporated, leaving this field desolated. As a result, an air of pessimism pervades since there has been no sign of breakthrough or improvement up till now, although it was affirmatively announced by the top level and strongly expected by the public that following a certain period of exploration, there could be major policy and legislature breakthrough which would push direct election from village level to town level or to a even higher level. More than that, the fundamental problems with the system have not been settled since the very beginning. For instance, the issue of Party organization leadership in the village self-governance process, i.e., the relation between the two Committees (Villagers Committee and the Party Branch Committee) is still entangled; the relation between village self-governance group and township government is yet to be straightened out. There is still no any breakthrough in those issues concerned with institutional arrangements and policy regulations, which even backed away in many aspects. That's why some scholars describe the development of village self-governance as "hitting the ceiling," which gives ground to people's pessimism and disappointment.

However, every coin has two sides. In the absence of breakthrough in the system and legal framework, we see the progress of peasants themselves with growing political awareness. Some scholars claim that China's government is fooling peasants by playing "democracy jugglery" which is not true democracy at all. To some extent, such view is reasonable in that village elections in some places are indeed manipulated by their governments, which even play tricks. However, things are not that simple: the process of fooling or playing jugglery with peasants is also a process of democratic enlightenment for them, which has greatly enhanced their awareness of political rights as well as capacity of political participation. What is more important is that peasants are beginning to use democracy as their own weapon more and more in safeguarding their rights and expressing their interests consciously or unconsciously. For example, peasants will petition at the beginning for financial compensation caused by land acquisition, with their vital interests unsettled, their trust in those village officials begin to waver, and they insist that their village leaders be dismissed and replaced until the recall by vote procedure starts. As a result, "democratic election" has become a powerful weapon, which is being more and more exerted by peasants to express their interest demands, fully demonstrating their growing citizenship ability.

Presently, village self-governance in many places in China is far from what is prescribed by the law, but this doesn't mean peasants are not able to conduct self-governance. In my opinion, self-governance is feasible not only at the village but also at the township level, even at the county level. Although there is no legal and institutional framework supporting township and county self-governance, in another word, there is no possibility for straight forward elevation of self-governance level, development of self-governance is sure to be the general trend because the public are demanding more freedom and power, more restriction and supervision of the government, and more participation in public management, which will make the society more and more equal. In my opinion, those who are against equality, freedom, and democracy as universal values cannot justify themselves. What then will they

support? Can we say that less and less freedom, worse and worse inequality plus more and more authoritarian dictatorship shall be the trend?

1.1.3 Protests for Rights and Democratic Enlightenment

The number of petitions and mass disturbances has been increasing since the beginning of the twenty-first century, which is the main feature of rural issues. We call those incidents “Protests for rights,” including rising up against local government’s infringement behaviors and safeguarding self-interests. It is only when peasants’ rights are violated will they realize that there has to be restriction on government’s power and there has to be struggle for their own rights, which is the most important enlightening process for peasants themselves.

A review of history shows that China’s rural protests for rights began to increase in the mid-1990s as a result of over-burdened taxes and fees. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, unprecedented attention was paid to the “Three Rural Issues”¹ and agricultural taxes and fees were totally abolished which fundamentally resolved the conflict incurred by taxes and fees. However, from an overall view, protests for rights and conflicts are escalating between peasants and governments from village and township level to county level, even to district and municipal level in a broader scope which are more intensified, mainly marked by fast growing conflict points, rapid increase of the organizational level and stronger political complexion. Issues like land acquisition, land contracting, land for housing, environment pollution, labor dispute, grassroots election, birth control, the people’s livelihood construction, village administration, cadre corruption, etc., are all potential burst points of peasants’ protests. As a result, stability maintenance has become an overriding task as well as top pressure for grassroots governments, overstepping family planning, fiscal revenue, investment promotion, etc. How does stability become such a big problem haunting both rural development and grassroots cadres? This is a question worth studying.

What the author strongly sensed in rural survey is peasants’ growing awareness and ability of safeguarding rights which have made today’s peasants enormously different from those of the past. Such difference expresses itself in many ways. In the case of rural family planning work, we can see clearly peasants’ new understanding of and new attitude toward state policies and governmental behaviors. As we all know, there are so many government regulations on family planning, such as frequent pregnancy examination to find out if a woman is pregnant, strict “birth approval” (no birth without approval), regular birth control knowledge assessment, complicated and overloaded family planning account, and so on. Those women at child-bearing age who migrate elsewhere for work are required to go back to their household register places to be examined; otherwise they will be heavily punished. Many family planning regulations are rigorous and tedious, some are even

¹Three Rural Issues refer to rural areas, agriculture and peasant.

unreasonable, but were generally accepted by peasants in the past with obedience and conformity because they regarded family planning regulation as a national policy they should follow, which explains why there were not so many petitions and protests by peasants though their basic human rights had been violated by family planning in many cases. However, 30 years after family planning was put into effect, situations began to change. The new generation of young peasants who have grown up since 1980s hold considerably different attitude toward family planning regulation. As prescribed by the policy, no pregnancy or pregnancy ahead of time will be allowed without government approval. Those couples who are eligible to have a second child are not allowed to give birth for several years as interval, otherwise they will be punished. These regulations as a whole seemed acceptable for older generation but not for the new who will always express their dissatisfaction with sharp skepticism and strong antagonism: "Since I have the right to give birth, how can you prescribe the time of my pregnancy? It's none of your business. Since I am permitted to have a second child, which is a human right, how can you prescribe the interval of my child birth?" Those which were not problems have now become big problems and troubles for grassroots family planning, in another word, even the basic legitimacy of family planning policy is being challenged by peasants. In the past, older peasants would feel indebted to the country for their over reproductions, while the new generation are directly criticizing the government policy as violating human rights. For another example, older peasants will take for granted that the superior government has the authority to decide how many cadres should be employed by the village or even the township government, but the new generation will not think so, instead, they raise a question: "Since both the government and its cadres are supported by peasants, we have the right to decide the staff size of both the village and the town. How can the higher authority make such decision?" These simple and plain thoughts and opinions have deep political implications, which is a demonstration of peasants' political growth with historical significance. With new understanding of politics, peasants are improving their citizenship ability. It is under such circumstances that the government is being challenged by increasing non-cooperation and even resistance from peasants.

In my point of view, the increase of protests for rights can be interpreted from two aspects: one is that there are more problems for the government's work; another is that peasants have "bigger demands" for governments. On one hand, the government has done much more work than before in economic development, livelihood construction, and standardized government construction with commendable effort and practical performance. Meanwhile, there are still some problems with the government itself including work failure, contending with peasants for profits and inactions. On the other hand, peasants have become more sensitive of their own power and interests, more aware of their rights. As can easily be seen in land acquisition that both peasants' terms for negotiation and the difficulty level for grassroots cadres' work are higher than that several years ago. Today's peasants are not as tolerant of government's problems as before. As a result, many grassroots cadres complain that peasants are hard to lead. Some even claim that "there are more and more cunning peasants," which is actually a positive sign of China's changing

political and social environment in the new era. In my point of view, this is the most important social change taking place in peasants themselves which is more significant than the change of governmental ideas and slogans. If there is only the change of government's slogans without peasants' inner change and the rise of grassroots citizenship power, it will be impossible to achieve any major breakthrough in China's democracy and Rule by Law.

I had such experience while working at the local level with a story going like this: some staff of the agriculture machinery section unpaid of their wages due to financial difficulties organized a team of three persons to raise funds by checking and fining villagers' tractors. Peasants from different villages had different reactions, which are thought-provoking. At the road crossing of a town, peasants from nearby village chose to run or get seized to pay the fine. But things were different at the road crossing of another town. The check-for-fine practice was resisted by peasants and on the second day, the checking cadres were beaten by a group of young men from the nearby village. Thereafter, the check point quickly disappeared. This story tells us that in many cases, the government's illness are spoiled by the public. If the public neither compromise nor tolerate the government's infringement, governmental behaviors will become well disciplined and honest. I still remember what a provincial Party Committee leader said at a CPC central agricultural meeting in the mid-1980s: "The so-called rural reform was forged by peasants with shoulder poles instead of governments who pride on their intelligence. This is also true for the development of democracy which will only grow in the process of the people's fighting for their own rights. Basically, instead of the government itself, the power of citizenship is the cornerstone of good governance."

In my survey at some villages, I held symposiums to listen to villagers who complained about problems such as broken roads left in disrepair, unreasonable subsidies and delinquent village cadres, etc. I asked them: "Have you reported this problem to higher authority?" They answered: "We feel embarrassed to go to the cadres for they are always so busy, or we want to but we do not know where to find them." In that case, I asked them in reply: "How will the higher authority know what's wrong with village cadres if you don't even report? How will the government know what your problem is if you don't go there? You said you felt embarrassed to go there because the government is busy, but how do you know what these cadres are busy with? It is just their right business to solve your problems. The higher authority will be deaf and blind if you always hold back your complaints." At that time, I talked to villagers as the Vice County Party Secretary. It is true that some specific issues can be resolved on the spot, but in general, peasants need to enhance their ability of expressing demands with higher initiative and activeness because the government's diligence is driven by the pressure of accountability from the public. Without peasants' pressure, officials will naturally turn sluggish, and without peasants' rising up for their own rights, governmental services can hardly be self-improving. The ability to exert pressure on the government is the ability of citizenship for peasants.

How to improve peasants' citizenship ability? I think there are two ways: One is improvement through the practice of safeguarding rights; the other is enlightenment force from outside. For those intellectuals with public responsibilities, enlightenment is an important historical mission.

1.1.4 Political Culture: Evolution and Enlightenment

In my point of view, not only institutional and systematic change but also change of peasants themselves particularly of their political behaviors should be examined while studying the evolution of China's grassroots politics. Although the reform of institutional and legal system is not going well, the changes of peasants is inspiring. In a word, peasants' change is the change of political culture.

1950s–1960s saw the prevalence of behaviorism in western political science as a correction to the political research which was mainly concerned with political institution at that time instead of human factor. Against the backdrop of behaviorism, culture research was also highlighted. In my opinion, more attentions shall be paid to behaviorism study in China's study of politics since there are both separation and entanglement between institution and behavior whether in formal or informal political life in present China. There will be no way to interpret basic political issues only through institutions and norms in the absence of people's specific behaviors. Political culture is an integral part of human behavior study. It will be very difficult to clarify as a concept what is political culture. However, it will be easier to understand political culture if we concentrate all factors on human being's ideas and behaviors beyond system and institutions. Political culture here refers to basic political understandings including the sense of rights, the awareness of participation and procedural justice, which serves as the important foundation of individual political behavior.

Personally, I think China's political culture is right in a quick and profound changing stage, which can be clearly seen in the aforementioned new generation peasants' attitudes and behaviors in response to governments and policies, as well as in the perception of present corruption issue. The aggravating corruption of officials has become a serious concern of both the rulers and the public. Frequent outbreaks of corruption cases have formed a social opinion: None official is clean handed, which is another version of "There is no righteous man in Hong tong County."² Objectively speaking, this judgment is biased but it marks a change in political culture when people believe in neither propaganda nor the official slogan of "serving the people whole-heartedly," instead, they regard officials as human beings who are vulnerable to corruption. The level of one's position has nothing to do with his virtue. The higher the position is, the worse the corruption will be. In fact, the presumption of human nature has changed with profound significance in terms of political culture, which requires the system designing based on the premise

²The grievance of Su San, a woman of Ming Dynasty in Ancient China who was unjustly charged by corrupt Hongtong county officials in Shanxi Province and sentenced to death.

that everybody is vulnerable to corruption, instead of the expectation of officials' excellent virtue and advanced thinking. Therefore, the rising number of corruption cases is playing a very real social function to remind people of the incredibility of official's personal consciousness and morality, strengthening their faith in institutional supervision and restriction of power. While people are growing more and more distrustful of officials' self-advertisement, they become more and more certain that power must be supervised by institutions and officials free of public supervision will surely go corrupt, which in turn has strengthened people's awareness and action of participating in governments' work, driving substantial changes in political culture. In another sense, political culture change actually means the change of people's impression of both the government and its leaders, which has essentially secularized the government and its leaders by peeling away the halos on the heads of politicians or officials. As a result, people are convinced of officials' nature to go corrupt and power's nature to be restricted instead of their bragging and boasting about greatness, nobility and integrity.

I was very interested in the course of government culture and American politics when I was a visiting scholar at Harvard University. Professor David King, in his thought-provoking and persuasive summary of American political culture, claimed that in traditional political culture, religious organizations, noblemen, and government leaders represented the truth, but Americans don't think so because truth is self-evident, all men are created equal. Being "equal" here doesn't mean equality of each individual but the equality between the people and the rulers like noblemen and kings. Human rights are inborn from God instead of the government. They also regard the government itself as a problem instead of the solution. The famous slogan "I love America but I hate American government" derived from the conviction that government will always be a stumbling block to the people's independence and freedom. David King also said: "There are a lot of elections in America with very low efficiency, which can hardly make anything done, but Americans regard this as a success, because a highly-efficient government is a terrible government. They also think that human rights shall be safeguarded by the people themselves instead of the government. A powerful government is a threat to human rights." In my opinion, a better understanding of political system designing relies on the knowledge of political culture evolution. Even though the government is indispensable to the people, it has to be rigidly restricted by the people. A strict and effective supervision system is the precondition of the people's trust of government and officials. It is necessary to take a close look at American political operation to well understand the characteristic of American political culture.

When I was in America, I paid attention to 1960s Civil Rights Movement and visited some birth places of black civil rights movement. What impressed me deeply was that civil rights progress was gained by struggle, for which American black civil rights movement provided a good example. At Ford Auto Museum, I visited that famous bus on which black passenger Rosa Park was arrested and put into prison for her refusal to the bus driver's request that she must give up her seat to a white man and sit in the back row as prescribed. Her resistance declared the opening of Black Civil Rights Movement and triggered the mass anti-segregation movement of

American society. For my own experience, my understanding of “No Fight, No Right” was deepened by listening to the famous speech delivered by Martin Luther King in 1960s, at the very beginning of which Martin Luther King strongly condemned the unimplemented legal institutions: “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed ‘Unalienable Rights’ of ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’ It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note, insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’ But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.” “And so, we’ve come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” “Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy.” “This sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning ... And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.” Martin Luther King summoned: “We must protest because freedom has never been given as a gift, nor has it been voluntarily given by the rich and powerful oppressor to the oppressed ... rights and opportunities must be obtained at the cost of some people’s sacrifice and suffering.” The black’s human rights status was quickly improved because hundreds and thousands of people rose up and ask for equality and rights. American Civil Rights Movement is thought-provoking for us in understanding the progress of civil rights in China’s society.

There have been continuous protests for rights with increasing depth and width in China today. In terms of the content, there are rights concerning land, environment and election. In terms of the form, the level of organization is uprising; capacity of collective action is strengthening; political negotiation ability is enhancing, which I think is driven by the elevation of people’s awareness of rights. At the same time, civil rights movement also facilitates the growth of civil rights as well as the transition of political system.

In my point of view, with the enormous improvement of peasants’ citizenship ability, particularly the awakening of peasants’ awareness of rights as well as the powerful up rise of safeguarding rights, China’s political development will be promising. Advanced ideas, democratic systems, and ideal modalities boasted by scholars instead of being acknowledged by the grassroots, or the failure of the translation of those ideas into grassroots political understanding and actions will leave China’s future politics in desperation. It is in this sense that the impact of peasants’ awakening is inestimable. Though there are still so many undesirable aspects in China’s present political reform, it is not necessary to be pessimistic. What really matters in my view is the change of people instead of the change of institutional arrangements, policies

and regulations. What should be recognized is peasants' progress that will ultimately decide the development of the system and government. Surely, there is no need to be anxious or impatient for the pace of reform, because the actual reform process will not go well if common people's citizenship ability and citizens' impact on social politics are not strong enough.

As my survey shows, China's peasants are undergoing leaps of epochal changes embodied by fundamental differences between old and new peasants. The new generation peasants are more practical, rational and advocating freedom and equality, whose understanding of government is based on the perception of the reality instead of "noble ideas" and "clangorous slogans." There is no circumvention of politics for the new generation's demands of living or rights, whether economic or social, which has to be solved by the actualization of political rights. The growth of new generation peasants is in itself the growth of new citizens. Whether they are accepted as citizens or not, they are essentially presenting franchised demands and action logic which are rooted in their understanding of freedom and equality or the belief that "all men are created equal" rather than the rights prescribed by the country's policies and institutions.

As I see it, the fundamental difference between the new generation peasants and their fathers is similar with what is described by Montesquieu, the French scholar, who pointed out in his survey of French peasants in 1960s–1970s: "People can't help acknowledging that such conflict between generations is ultimately a kind of conflict between civilizations." There are fundamental and overall conflicts of attitudes and consciousness between the old and the new generation with no possibility of compromise. For Montesquieu, such ideological conflicts were not between political factions but were still of political and ideological characters, which forward political issues. Montesquieu held that their new political attitudes and behaviors were forged by the conflicts between their demands for rights and existing political and legal structure with their personal success being constrained by market system and economic rights. "Actually, this is the conflict between world views: Some people think that actions must be governed by moral and philosophical principles and reality should be subject to perception, whereas others think that actions are restricted by circumstances and 'knowledge should be prepared for actions'." These two attitudes contain two philosophies and two ways to understand the world. Similar finding and elaboration can also be found in Huntington, an American politician's survey of the second generation of Latin American immigrants. I believe that fundamental change of the people is the key to build up the core-motivating mechanism of China's economic and political reform.

1.1.5 The Important Role of Enlightenment

Enlightenment will change national situations. In another word, the most critical change of national situations is the change of the people. As political reform has become a social focus, some people often national situations take into account,

claiming that political reform must conform to our national situations. The problem is that national situations are continuously changing instead of being stable. It is a national situation that China has an over-2000-year history of emperor's ruling, does that mean we still need those emperors now? National situation is a historic concept. A country without an emperor would be unimaginable a hundred years ago, but with the changes of times and the people's minds, the emperor has to be overthrown by the people. Merely 20 years ago, some leaders claimed that China could not follow the path of market economy; otherwise there would be great disaster. In my point of view, the path of China's political reform is forged step by step instead of being designed by people. China's political reform shall continuously expand socialist democracy, enhance legal system building, improve governing style, and consolidate the development of patriotic united front, which is also an important task for enlightenment.

In China's traditional political culture, rulers flaunted themselves as of high quality, strong capacity and noble virtue as a Chinese saying goes: "Inner sageliness and outer kingliness." However, in American political culture, government officials have never been regarded as noble persons who will serve the people wholeheartedly. Instead, they are assumed to have their own interests with not-so-high moral standards who may be evildoers driven by the evil sides of human nature. It is based on such a premise that political system was designed to restrict government officials by institutions based on the distrust. Different assumption leads to different system designing. When officials are assumed to be perishable or possible to turn corruptive, a rigorous system will be designed to place government under the people's supervision.

In my point of view, enlightenment plays a very important role in the building up of citizenship ability. From a global perspective, Art Renaissance and Enlightenment Movement aimed at fundamentally resolving this issue. Enlightenment Movement as a specific historic event ended a long time ago, but its essence has been going on. Since the New Culture Movement, China has also been undergoing an enlightenment process. About a hundred years ago, Lu Xun and Guo Moruo abandoned medicine for literature, which demonstrated intellectuals' understanding as well as undertaking of enlightenment in China. Literature is a powerful weapon of enlightenment, such as the works of Lu Xun of China, Solzhenitsyn of USSR, and Havel of Czech. Although scholars are able to reason deeply with rigorous logic on a country's political reform, their influence can hardly go beyond academic circles. To generate widespread and effective influence on the public, scholars have to deliver readable writings which are popular, attractive and easy to understand. Academic research and literature belongs to different types of thinking activities. Reasoning and story-telling expressed in writing influence the society in different ways with different intellectual standards for readers. Generally speaking, literature writings are embraced by more readers than reasoning works because the former is more moving, appealing with stronger emotional impact, which will generate wider-range social influence. Therefore, the role of popular culture shall be particularly highlighted in the process of enlightenment. People generally claim that New Culture Movement marked by "5.4 Movement" has great enlightening significance, which is not an exaggeration. But China's enlightenment movement still has a long road to go because the so-called "enlightenment" is rather superficial and has gone a long detour.

For a very long period, inflicted by the “Ultra Left” policy, a new form of obscurity dominated both ideological and educational sectors. In many cases, obscurity was practiced in the name of “enlightenment” by singing: “There has never been a savior” while boasting: “He is the great savior of the people.” Nowadays, that song is not so popular but the residual poison of feudalism and “Ultra Left” policy has yet to be eradicated, which leaves China a heavy historic enlightenment task.

It is not true enlightenment to simply educate and discipline peasants. Recent decades saw the development of research on China’s peasants with a lot of publications on rural and peasant issues, which, however, mainly consist of two categories: One is on disciplining peasants, publicizing government’s policies, laws and regulations to make peasants obedient to the Party, and government as well as leaders; the other is on descriptions of peasant livelihood focused on peasants’ economic and social situations such as employment, income status, consumption behavior, etc. What is insufficient is the research on peasants’ political activities, especially their political enlightenment. Present mainstream discourse is that peasants should listen to the government. However, the truth is that government should listen to peasants. What really matters is not the education of peasants but of the government itself, particularly of government leaders. More than that, the government shall be under supervision and restriction because education is far from enough. Then, who is to educate and discipline government? Of course the people and citizens instead of superior government leaders. How do citizens regulate the government? The core condition is peasants’ citizenship. And where is such ability from? It’s from social development itself, especially the accelerating process of globalization and information which is essentially nurturing a new generation of peasants. For example, peasants will naturally have their judgments of political systems when they are watching elections in Taiwan, America, and North Korea on TV. The process of reform and opening up itself is the most powerful enlightenment to educate and cultivate new peasants. Meanwhile, to quicken the political reform process, more self-conscious enlightening power is needed, which is the role of political enlightenment, including enlightening education at ideological level and training and practice for organizational action capacity. In a word, more emphasis should be laid upon enlightenment.

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1.2 A Fundamental Reform Experience

The title of my speech today is “Extra Discussion on the Fundamental Experiences of Rural Reform.” The word “extra” here means that what I am talking about may not be so important or it can be discussed in many ways and from many angles.

I'd like to talk about reform experiences in retrospect of history because this year is the 30th anniversary of the Reform, a time for review and summary. Rural household contract system is the most important or the most outstanding achievement of China's reform originated in rural areas. As a great creation by China's peasants, rural household contract reveals to us a fundamental reform experience: peasants' initiative or their own choice has to be respected.

These days, I've been thinking about a question. Surely, rural household contract is really a big creative process surging forward with great momentum. However, let's change the view and assume that we were peasants at that time (of course, I myself was once a peasant), this process would not have been so great and complicated. It is simply about the distribution of collectively managed land to peasants and to each household so that collective management turns to household operation, which is simple both in procedure and methodology. Such practice as household land contract took place in some places in the early 1960s. With no requirement of highly advanced intelligence and professional economics training, it was nothing spectacular for peasants. How well educated were peasants of Xiaogang Village? I think none of them has read more books than anyone of us here. However, they did so well a job simply out of the choice of their vital interests and common sense of livelihood. Nonetheless, why was such a simple, easy to operate, and reasonable practice messed up by the government that incurred so intensified conflicts? And where did heaps of abstract and magnificent doctrines and concepts such as "socialism," "capitalism," "Marxism," "revisionism," etc., come from? Why was everybody from the grass-roots to the top-level, from scholar to leading cadre involved in such a seemingly complicated strife? The answer is, in a word, politics. As the simple issue was politicized and ideologicalized, collective management was regarded as socialism that must be upheld, whereas household operation was capitalism that must be fought against, which seemed intricate but made no sense at all. As a result, an easy process of contracting land to each household was turned into a complicated political issue involving all matters. "Politics" strayed away from peasants to an evil path full of traps. At that time, those who were against peasants talked sets of speaking boldly by quoting classics and scriptures. Which would generate more incentive, planting collectively or planting individually? Which would be more productive, multiple households or a three-member household? These small issues and easy jobs were complicated. Something was wrong with politics that was separated from peasants, from the reality and from common sense. As a result, those who spoke nonsense stood on the commanding height while those who needed to feed themselves became the target of irony and satire, and such problem still exists today with common sense being mystified in many cases, which is an extremely deep and hard historic lesson. The summary of rural reform experience shall be started from recognizing this lesson.

As we all know, the 2-year breakthrough period of the rural reform took place in Anhui Province from the autumn of 1978 to the autumn of 1980. In September 1980, the CPC Central Committee held a symposium attended by the first secretaries of provincial committees which opened the window for underdeveloped and impoverished area to practice household contract system after rounds of debate. Under this

spirit, a lot of regions pushed limits and vigorously began the all-round household contract. The most intensified debate took place between the autumn of 1978 to the autumn of 1980 consisted of three stages.

The first stage was from the autumn of 1978 to the spring of 1979, against the background that people began to reconsider what was wrong with former policy direction and guideline following the end of Culture Revolution. Natural disaster was another direct factor contributing to household contract system. As Anhui suffered long and severe drought from spring to autumn, peasants could not grow wheat even at autumn planting time and began to flee from famine and go begging. Under such circumstances, some place in Chuxian Prefecture started “lending land for wheat planting” in secret. Land was lent to peasants who were divided into 3–5 households per group and a certain portion of wheat harvested the next year would be their own after the remaining portion was turned over to the collective. According to the government, such decentralized management mode or new type of distribution stimulated peasants’ enthusiasm and generated unexpected effect. This practice was kept as a secret by grassroots cadres and was called “secret weapon” which took great political risk at that time.

Later, Anhui Provincial Party Committee was informed of this practice and had to consider disposal. Wan Li, the First Party Secretary said in his speech at a provincial Party Committee meeting: “There is a near certainty for Anhui’s agriculture this year. What is it? It is the serious natural disaster beyond the will of human beings. As the whole province failed the production plan and fell short of several hundred thousand tons of grain, there are 45 million peasants yet to be fed 3 meals a day. We can see how severe the situation is. The key task before this winter and next spring is to secure autumn planting and prevent large scale rural land desolation; otherwise peasants’ survival will be even more difficult next year. Rather than wait to lay the land idle, we should distribute a certain portion of land to peasants themselves to plant. In this special draught-stricken period, we have to break the routine and overcome the disaster with special policies.” Distributing land to peasants divided by group and household, this is what the breakthrough of reform is about. However, argument arose immediately that lending land to peasants was a kind of distrust of the advantage of collective economy that would spur up not socialistic but capitalistic enthusiasm, to which Wan Li responded: “As a general principle, harvest is better than the desolation of land. It will be good only when wheat and vegetable are planted whether for the collective or for peasants themselves. Food is the only solution to survive hunger whether it is produced collectively or individually.” While some people regarded this practice as capitalistic instead of socialistic incentive, Wan Li insisted that food produced by both collective and individual could overcome famine. This was the early political mobilization of reform. In those years, politics was run on a ridiculous track away from common sense with a system imagined to be Communism or the path to Communism. Any practice against this designing would be considered against Communism and Socialism, even against the CPC. Such delusion constrained peasants and impeded the development of our country.

Facing the challenge of criticism and argument, Wan Li said: “Since you describe Communism as Heaven, are people willing to go to Heaven where they

will not even have any trousers to wear?” “For some communes practicing household contract and cultivate the land by all means, I told them to keep doing that until they become rich. If there is anything wrong with household contract, I will be the first to criticize myself. The greatest politics is to secure the food for the people and the increase of production. It will be the worst politics to leave the people in famine.” This was the most shocking views on politics in that social environment over 30 years ago.

When the news of the breakthrough in Anhui reached the central level, a reader's letter with an editor's note was published as the headline news on the cover page of “The People's Daily” on March 15, 1979, criticizing the practice of land contract responsibility system with the title “Three-level ownership and production team based system should be maintained,” claiming that group contract compromised the People's Commune and bruised their enthusiasm. The editor's note claimed that those regions which had practiced group contract shall correctly implement the Party's policy and firmly rectify their wrong doings. On March 16, Wan Li came to the contracting region and spoke to cadres who stressfully reported to him about this letter: “Don't be shaken by merely a reader's letter. The newspaper is like a bus everybody can take with a ticket. Every reader is entitled to write such a letter. They said that group contract has generated the four-level accounting. What about household accounting? Shouldn't it be a five-level accounting? Which method is really good depends on post-autumn outcome. Who will be responsible if the people have no food to eat after autumn, the country committee or the newspaper agency? Certainly the newspaper is not in charge of food supply. Let us tell common people to keep doing what they should do and not to be affected by those reader's letters on the newspaper which are merely expressions of different personal views.” Then, Wan Li held a meeting for grassroots cadres from county to village level and said: “Some places were shaken by the broadcast of a reader's letter on the People's Daily. Don't you know whether it is true or not?” The People's Daily was compared with a bus by Wan Li. Does everyone think it is a bus instead of the powerful voice of the Central Committee of the CPC? That reader's letter was endorsed by some central leaders to The People's Daily and the editor's note were drafted by the former competent central agriculture department. To resolve the emotional tension of grassroots cadres, Wan Li's interpretation with such a metaphor demonstrated his courage and wisdom.

In February 1980, Wan Li left Anhui and successively took charge of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of CPC and served as Vice Prime Minister of the State Council. Soon after that, the new Anhui Provincial Committee began to hold meetings to criticize household contract practice. Even “Rural Work Communication,” an authoritative publication of the Central Rural Work Department, the title of which was inscribed by Mao Zedong, also criticized household contract practice including Anhui Province and Wan Li. Moreover, the National agriculture Committee in charge of rural work insisted on maintaining the People's Commune while denying household contract. June 1980 saw the outcome of the argument following Deng Xiaoping's speech on production responsibility system. There had been great divergence of views at the top-level until a meeting was held in September as the resolution. Some provin-

cial Party secretary claimed that the People's Commune is a broad way while household contract a single-plank bridge. We should follow the broad way instead of the single-plank bridge. Debate on this meeting expedited major breakthrough followed by the Central Committee's issuance of No. 75 Document which ratified the implementation of household contract system in faraway backward regions and created overwhelming waves of household contract responsibility system sweeping across the whole country.

What needs to be reviewed is how such a simple operation for peasants was so much complicated by politicization? The question is about how to understand politics and how to approach peasants. The Central Party Committee refined the fundamental experience of the reform: respecting peasants' own initiative and choice, which implies three meanings: First of all, the quality of peasants' livelihood is the watershed between good and bad politics; secondly, governing for people is far from enough and peasants' wisdom must be fully trusted. Wan Li was good at discovering great truth out of little things. For example, he once came to a peasant's home and found that garlic sprouts were planted in great density which might impede the growth of garlic. In reply to his concern, the peasant said that though the density seemed high, he would plucked some heads of garlic for sale as they grew up, which would form a proper space that would not hinder the growth of garlic sprouts and heads. Then Wan Li said to his followers: "Have you seen how smart China's peasants are? They will surely be able to feed themselves provided there is a good system." He believed that with an accumulation of agriculture experiences over several thousand years, peasants will be able to solve China's agricultural problems if there is a tolerant environment for them. In his talk with a journalist from Xin Hua News Agency, Wan Li said he was thinking about a question: "Since we take charge of everything from what to plant to how to distribute, do we really understand that? Do we really know the situation and can we handle that? Therefore I'd like to highlight autonomy issue, which is actually on how to approach peasant issue. In the past, the Kuo Mintang demanded peasants merely of food and money without interfering in what they planted. However, we took care of what they plant and how to distribute their production, even their rations of grain will be discussed by the provincial Party Committee meeting. Which right do peasants have when their rights of planting and distributing are controlled by us? Some issue confusing mandates to take care of everything but neglect the well-being of peasants. As a result, we have not done well yet despite the painful lesson of the 3-year Great Famine during which so many people were starved to death." To trust peasants' wisdom and to judge politics by the standard of peasants' quality of livelihood means we should be convinced that peasants are intelligent enough to solve their own problems. Thirdly, peasants' rights must be safeguarded. In January 1980, Wan Li said in Jia Shan County that vacant positions of grassroots cadres should be elected by peasants as team leaders to see who was able to help them to achieve "three increases." The county government's proposal of grassroots rewards should be decided by peasants who had more decisive power in the selection, removal and reward of cadres. Therefore, when we talk about respecting peasants, we should

not only take their livelihood quality as a political standard or trust their wisdom but also invest them with rights, in another word, return the rights to peasants.

How to safeguard peasant's rights? This is a political question. In a famous speech at the Soft Science Conference in 1986, Wan Li said: "To create a democratic, equal and consultative political environment, we must firmly implement the guideline of "letting a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend" (Double Hundred Guideline) not only in science, technology, literature, and art, but also in policy and decision-making research; not only in natural but also in social science. This strategic guideline shall be maintained in political life, thoughts, theories, and cultural construction of our country, which is a significant mark of advanced socialistic democracy. An important reason why this guideline has not been well implemented is that political issues were misunderstood in the past as anti-Party, anti-socialism, and reactionary, which would only allow debates on academic issues while prohibit debates on political questions. Once there was anything wrong, even an academic issue would be treated as a political one with serious consequence. In many cases, academic and political issues are actually hard to tell apart, which is particularly true for policy and decision-making research because both of them are integral parts of the same issue accounting for different portions. For example, Comrade Wu Han's historical drama "Hai Rui Dismissed from Office" cost his life. Was that an academic or political issue? Therefore, the key is not to separate academic issues from political issues but to adopt "Double Hundred" guideline in the study of politics and decision-making itself. How can we talk about advanced democracy when the people's internal political issues are not allowed to be contended but only the leaders have the say? I think we should encourage the freedom of speech prescribed by our constitution." Wan Li's support to apply "Double Hundred" guideline in politics is essentially the basic direction of political system reform to maintain politics open and democratic.

A review of the above speech gives us much inspiration. In my opinion, fundamental experience of rural reform shall be summarized from such a "political" height.

This is the author's speech on China's Fourth Rural Development Forum organized by "Southern Rural Daily" on December 6, 2008.

1.3 Government Philosophy and the Rural Reform

Compared with international practices, China's government plays a stronger leading role in economic development and government officials have made positive contribution to China's achievement. At the same time, there are still serious problems with government system, which express themselves in many ways including institutional and systematic, as well as value and ideological issues. Against the historical backdrop of China's modernization, reform and opening as well as globalization, there are still some biased understandings held by the Party and government official group in the following six aspects:

Bias 1: Common people's thoughts can be unified: pursuit of the unity of thinking as an objective.

There has been an assumption consciously or unconsciously in governmental work particularly in some officials' rhetoric that common people's ideas and thoughts can and shall be unified. It is in fact an unrealistic idea or a beautiful illusion to try to unify everybody's thought with something and something else. In a historical view, thoughts have never been and will never be unified in any society. There had been rigorous control of thoughts in Cultural Revolution with all media speaking in one tone, which failed to unify the public's thoughts in the end. The public's thoughts may be controlled at certain degree and unified within certain scope, which seems like mass response; however, such kind of forced mass response is actually another form of mass silence which is obviously not the unity of thoughts or cognitions. In a realistic view, the impossibility of unity of thoughts is bigger in present social and economic conditions than before. China today is undergoing a turning period of profoundly changing system and complicated interest structure. Multiple interests will surely lead to diversified thoughts, even though there were no multiple interests, thoughts would never be unified, which is a basic social reality.

It is the government's important mission to face up to and respect the reality of diversified thoughts and create a friendly environment for multi-thoughts exploration so as to avoid more social conflicts inflicted by the attempt to suppress multi-thoughts. Extremely heavy toll was paid for oppression of dissident thoughts and control of speeches and opinions in the Cultural Revolution period, which requires us to be on alert of the lesson just before our eyes. The fundamental stand point for governmental work should be setting up effective system and mechanism to secure the public's thought expressions and interest demands so as to promote integration of interests and flourish of thoughts. Common people's thoughts can be unified in no way regardless of how beautiful the theory or how reasonable the idea is. The fundamental path to coordinate diversified changing thoughts and opinions of the public as well as people's complicated interest demands is not the unity of thoughts but institutional improvement.

Bias 2: The root of officials' problem is ideological consciousness: excessive emphasis on the role of "education."

In terms of anti-corruption, heads at all levels will highlight control from the source and prevention of corruption by systematic and institutional improvement. However, if we look at specific work deployments, most efforts are still concentrated on virtue improvement and moral preaching; discussions of the root problem will always be focused on outlooks of life and value, seeking the way out by sticking to the "faith" in communism, which has become the mind-set. There are endless learning and education campaigns rising one after another at all levels in different scales. There will be plans, reviews, summaries and assessments for these activities carried out with great momentum but little practical effect. Some place made a summary which sounds well but is not true, "Frequent education of cadres will bring long-term tangible benefits to common people." Those educational trainings are repeatedly held

with no new meaning but playing with words by fabricating some new statements and concepts which can arouse no interest of the audience.

Education and training should not be the priority for governance improvement. In review of international practices of modern governance, no country has made government efficient and officials incorrupt only by education and training. To some extent, government performance can be improved by the cultivation of officials' ideology and morality or more extensively, their own capacity building; however, the decisive factor of government and officials' performance should be the government system and mechanism. Now the problem is that there is no measure to address so many systematic government issues other than meeting for mobilization, concentrated learning, and training in rotation which repeatedly preach empty rationales, magnificent targets and talk about outlooks of life, value and political achievement. In terms of achieving good governance, it is like going south by driving the chariot northward to replace institutional innovation with indoctrination. The improvement of government performance and influence must break its path out of the old mode of replacing systematic reform with ideological education.

Bias 3: Mass media should be blamed for the government's credibility problem: improper emphasis on positive publicity.

Presently, there is a great divergence on how to interpret and resolve the issue of bad images of some officials and low credibility of the government. Some officials ascribe these problems to the media's negative reports, blaming them for undermining officials' images and the government's credibility, asking them to frequently sing praise for officials and the government, which is a misunderstanding. As the rule of media dissemination in a most popular word: "Bad news is good news," the media will spontaneously pay more attention to officials' negative behaviors and the government's poor performance which is called "muck raking" in western countries seemingly compromising officials' images. The media is like the shadow following the body and the root of a bad image is the official himself. The key for an official to avoid negative report is to avoid negative behavior. A healthy government system shall withstand the supervision, even criticism from the media and the public instead of sustaining credibility with cheap eulogies from the media. It is an absurdity to maintain a good government image by controlling the media.

The public's trust of government has two dimensions: One is social trust focused on the style and capability of officials; the other is political trust focused on government rules and institutions. Generally speaking, when common people appeal to the higher authority for the problem that can't be resolved at the grassroots level, they basically trust government as a whole or their political trust remains stable. But when the problem can neither be solved at the higher level or the result turns even worse, people's trust of the whole government system will be shaken. When people lose their political trust, they will seek solutions outside the system, which will aggravate or politicize the problem. Therefore, major efforts shall be concentrated on institutional enhancement to establish and consolidate the public's trust. The reform experience whether in China or abroad shows that the grassroots government must be supervised by the public and it is necessary to expand grassroots democracy and

promote effective public participation. Instead of withdrawing the power to be inspected and assessed by higher authority, grassroots officials must be restricted and held accountable by common people. Media is the most vital and powerful channel in the process of the public supervision of government. China's reform will be doomed to fail with the absence of a government fully supervised by the media and the public. The present supervision and criticism of the government by the media is far from enough that should be more extensive and profound with more freedom.

Bias 4: Grassroots cadres shall be blamed for many problems: improper criticism.

Grassroots cadres can hardly excuse themselves from their own problems, which partly contribute to so much chaos in the grassroots governance. Therefore, it is not surprising there are so many complaints from the public as well as so much dissatisfaction from the higher authority. However, the fact is that not all problems arising from the basic level are rooted there; neither can they be solved there. As relevant survey shows, the public of China tend to place their trust in the higher level instead of the grassroots government, as a common saying goes: "The central is our folk while the county and town are our enemies," "The central government's good policies are always misread by the local governments," which is just the opposite to Europe and America where the public prefers to trust the grassroots government. As interpreted by western scholars, the public can see and feel what the grassroots government is doing in front of them. In this sense, it is not natural for the low credibility of China's grassroots cadres which should have been higher.

The people's complaints of grassroots government mainly come from helpless dissatisfaction because they have no other way to supervise government officials, this is a problem with the government system called "top level design" in a popular word which cannot be blamed on personal virtue or ability of grassroots officials but can only be resolved by higher authority. There are also serious problems for the county government which bears great pressure of accountability with its limited power space and major consisting departments under vertical management whose power is segmented by the higher authority. As a result, the county government's ability falls short of its wishes. Since the root of the problem lies in institutional arrangement, for which the higher authority is more accountable, the blame on the "impotency" and "ineffectiveness" of grassroots cadres is not just and reasonable.

Bias 5: Problems can be solved by one-vote veto: overconfidence in "coercive" accountability.

Nowadays, the popular word "accountability" becomes in practice indiscriminate denounce and punishment with abuses of one-vote veto. Accountability is not about simply punishing wrongdoings but a healthy and collaborative process of power, responsibility, supervision, assessment, etc. Accountability shall be established on the foundation of governing system with an efficient power allocation mechanism dealing well with rights and duties. Rights and duties shall be clearly defined not only between the higher level and grassroots level governments. Current right and duty system is distorted and biased: The power is overly concentrated at the higher

level within the government system and excessively controlled by the government instead of the public. As a result, neither the higher authority nor the public can effectively supervise and restrict the grassroots government. Without a sound governance system, demanding tasks imposed on the grassroots by the higher authority and the abuse of penalty in case of any problem will do nothing but intensify the conflicts between the grassroots government and the higher authority.

Present conflicts at basic level are becoming diversified with various types. Many problems are not within the reach of grassroots government competence. For instance, a veteran's petition to Beijing for his penalty in the army, a peasant's petition for his treatment in the city hospital, a peasant worker's petition for traffic incident in the city, etc. These are problems that the township or even the county government will neither know about nor have any competence to deal with, but the liability will be shuffled by the higher authority to the grassroots government, which is hardly convincing for the latter as a sort of "brutal accountability." Of course, accountability is a two-way process in any government system, but the direction shall be from bottom to top, i.e., the government's accountability to the public. Obviously, existing government accountability system has put the cart before the horse.

Bias 6: Grassroots self-governance cannot be implemented for the low quality of peasants.

It's hard to quantify peasants' quality to implement grassroots self-governance. Nowadays, a lot of grassroots cadres still hold that peasants' quality is too low to exercise self-governance. Over two hundred years ago, America practiced grassroots self-governance upon which its democratic political system was built. It's untenable to say the quality of our people today is even lower than that of American people two hundred years ago. India's experience is also an example. It's true that national situations differ from each other. However, it shall be recognized that the public needs more political participations and the government needs to shoulder more public responsibilities, which is the general historical trend. The past three decades saw the surprising growth of Chinese peasants' rights awareness and participation ability, which is in itself a good foundation for self-governance. As some officials said: "Peasants nowadays are so hard to lead." "Peasants are so disobedient today."

It is said by some officials that after so many years of village self-governance, there are still so many rural problems, which have proved its infeasibility. Some even claim that it has messed up rural management. This opinion can be interpreted from two aspects: On one hand, village self-governance cannot solve all problems because some of them are beyond its capacity; on the other hand, village self-governance should have been able to solve more problems but failed because improper pushing efforts resulted in many other problems. Therefore, it is the lack of truly promoting village self-governance instead of the practice itself which has caused so many troublesome issues. There are still two major problems seriously impeding the healthy development of village self-governance: One is the relationship between village self-governance organization and Party organization which seems to be straightened out in documents and slogans but not in practice, the other is the relationship between

the self-governance organization and the government which has no legal and institutional boundary of each other's responsibilities. With the above two issues unresolved, the basic institutional frame work can hardly be built up. What needs to be clarified is that village self-governance is not the equivalence of grassroots self-governance. There has never been any grassroots self-governance exercised only at the village level whether in history or in international practices. Village self-governance doesn't necessarily lead to grassroots self-governance. Which level shall be suitable for the establishment of grassroots self-governance is a question yet to be explored in practice. Instead of halt in hesitation, China's grassroots self-governance shall be pushed forward more sturdily, vigorously and swiftly. Surely will there be some problems in the progress of grassroots self-governance, but there will definitely be bigger problems if we do nothing.

Objectively speaking, the government has made rapid progress in improving its work standardization, transparency, and sense of responsibility. However, the public's awareness of rights and demands for the government grow even faster, which has given rise to so many new problems. There is no choice for government officials but to upgrade them, renew their thoughts and improve their work performance to meet the public's expectations as many as possible.

This is an article published in the first edition of "the People's Tribune" of 2012 with the original title "Six Biased Views from Current Leading Cadres."

1.4 Central Government Local Government and Peasants

Editor's Note of "Oriental Morning Post:" Administrative Control System has always been the focal point and difficulty of reform. Recent years saw the unreasonable factors protruding in traditional administrative system, while "County Directly under the Provincial Government" and "Strong County Empowerment" have become hot topics. Shortening administrative hierarchy and reducing administrative level have become the common sense of reform. Moreover, academic circles begin to reflect on Central-local relations. Regarding financial relationship, many scholars and local government officials point out that there is an imbalance between the central and the local government in terms of financial and administrative power arrangement. The central has dominant authority over finance and taxation, while the local is struggling to cope with innumerable management responsibilities.

What is unreasonable with central-local relation? How to give full play to the initiative of both the Central and the local governments? How to cut down the over-staffing and streamline administration following "County Directly under the Provincial government" and "Strong County Empowerment?" How to break the obstruction of vested interest groups? With these questions in mind, the journalist of the Oriental Morning Post recently interviewed Professor Zhao Shukai, researcher of Development Research Center of the State Council.

Changes Post 1990s.

Oriental Morning Post: As you pointed out, “fragmentation” has become a feature of the operational system of China’s grassroots governments. Could you please put it more specifically?

Zhao Shukai: Specifically speaking, there are three dimensions of “Fragmentation:” No.1 is “Fragmentation” of government “value,” i.e., the subordinate only implement a part of the superior’s instructions on a selective base. In many cases, the former will only do some superficial work to express their approval or obedience though they are unwilling to accept the latter’s directions.

No. 2 is the “fragmentation” of government system. Government at different level will execute the higher authority’s mandates in accordance with their own preference. It is often seen that grassroots leaders will repeat what the higher level officials said, but everything will pass away like a cloud thereafter. A lot of policy documents issued by the higher authority will be replicated and forwarded level down level by the subordinate. Everything will be over as soon as the documents are delivered. However, different levels and departments have different demands expressed in different ways, which is the source of “contradictory documents,” i.e., conflicts among those who carry out those documents; No. 3: the “fragmentation” of government functions, this is mainly about government function setting which has been messed up without clear division both at the grassroots and central level.

Oriental Morning Post: In your opinion, what is the reason for the fragmentation of grassroots government operation system?

Zhao Shukai: There are two reasons for this problem: One is the self-interest behavioral character of the government. Government organizations at various levels have the preference or logic to pursue their self-interests, which will lead to policy or behavioral conflicts with the government system.

The other reason may be involved with organizational hierarchical relations. It is because major power is at the control of the higher level authority that the subordinate government seems to be highly consistent with the superior by following the superior’s mandates. However, such kind of strong consistency has its weakness as a saying goes: “There is always countermeasure to the policy.” In practice, the subordinate’s disobedience and distrust of the superior are disguised by other forms of obedience and trust.

In my view, typical superior–subordinate relationship, particularly that between the central and the local government has changed since 1990s.

Oriental Morning Post: In the simple sense, local governments have assumed a lot of management functions since the reform of tax distribution system but have not been matched with enough power to dispose of finance and taxation. Does this account for the “fragmentary” of grassroots government?

Zhao Shukai: Generally speaking, tax distribution has led to “serving meals from different pots” between the superior and the subordinate. As a result, the superior in dominance of political power shuffles liabilities of financial expenditure to the subordinate as many as possible, including those that should have been shouldered

by itself, as a result, the subordinate strongly complains about the superior. Therefore, existing tax distribution system needs to be reviewed.

Another problem is the imbalance between administrative and financial power. Further, something is wrong with administrative power itself. It is true that subordinate undertakes heavy responsibilities with little financial power, but this is only one side of the conflict. More profoundly, as administrative power is also incised by the superior and becomes fragmentary at the grassroots level which is deprived of autonomous right. With super strong and overcentralized authority, superior not only takes away money but also administrative power, especially all types of superior examinations and approvals that will drive subordinate governments to ask for not only money but also the power of management, which is called “No appealing to ministries, no progress.” This highly centralized power system directly leads to the tension of superior–subordinate relationship.

The local government is in lack of due power.

Oriental Morning Post: It is often said that we shall give full play to “double initiatives” both of the central and the local governments. Since now the local is short of initiative, particularly in terms of certain administrative power, is it necessary for power to be transferred down level?

Zhao Shukai: The power of the central and local governments shall be redefined. This relationship has been an issue of concern since 1950s, but why is there no progress at all? Words and speeches can do nothing without the change of government system and institutional framework. How can a local government which is deprived of financial and administrative power sustains its enthusiasm? Due to the central government’s over-rigorous control of the local, the latter is short of necessary financial and administrative power, which needs to be reviewed and reconsidered.

Oriental Morning Post: But there are some scholars such as Zheng Yongnian pointed out that de facto “Semi-Federal System” or “Quasi Federalism” has emerged in China, i.e., the balance and restriction of power between the Central and the Local resembles that of “Federal System.”

Zhao Shukai: As I understand, the so-called “Semi-Federal System” shows the fact that declining central authority has lost effective control of many local affairs, as a result, local government begins to take actions which will happen only under federal system. Local government has gained much autonomous space despite the seemingly rigorous control by the central government, but this doesn’t mean our institutional framework is “federal” in consideration of our regulations and the central government’s requirements.

Oriental Morning Post: What do you think is wrong with the current “central - province-city-county-township” administrative system? Some scholars exclaim that administrative hierarchy shall be shortened and levels reduced, will this alleviate the problems we just mentioned?

Zhao Shukai: To shorten administrative hierarchy and reduce administrative levels is a general trend of the reform which still has a long way to go. It is hard to say whether government levels will be immediately reduced. For example, the township government, due to its lack of necessary administrative and financial power, let

alone law enforcement power, is not a level of government in strict sense but at most a branch agency of the county government. There will be a certain process for such a level of government to be abolished.

There is also a tendency at the prefecture and municipal level such as “Strong County Empowerment” being pilot-tested which is also in faced with some contradictions especially after the reform. For instance, in terms of personnel, the power of county personnel appointment used to be concentrated at the municipal level, there is neither administrative nor financial power at the county level. In the process of county empowerment, things will be complicated when another “mother in law” turns up, which requires the county government to deal well not only with the municipal but also the provincial government in control of the county’s finance.

Major Conflicts “From Top to Bottom.”

Oriental Morning Post: As what you mentioned before, under the “fragmentary” state of operation, grassroots governments have become to some extent an independent political interest group with the extreme expression that some grassroots governments turn into a type of government neither for the Central government nor for the local people, but for local officials themselves. How to deal with interest relations among different levels of governments in order to push forward administrative system reform?

Zhao Shukai: Motivation has always been a question for government reform. It is necessary for government to be self-motivated to reform itself. Judging from decades of reform, what is the motivation of government reform? Government at each level craves power expansion which is its own biggest interest. The impulse of power expansion is at odds with the general objective of government reform. As a result the latter is at a stalemate which I call a deadlock state. Where then will be the way out? It is possible from the outside but fundamentally the development of the civil society to break this deadlock with enough social power. Crisis may also be the vital force and opportunity of reform breakthrough. When dealing with the crisis in its relationship with the public, government has to reform. Therefore, the role of the public in pushing reform forward is becoming more and more important, i.e., the progress of reform relies on the public’s restriction and supervision of the government, which is an ordeal for those government leaders.

Oriental Morning Post: In order to facilitate the reform, is it necessary to transform government functions as what is often preached, from control-oriented to service-oriented government? And is it necessary to cut down on overstaffing and streamlining procedure for the purpose of shortcutting hierarchy and reducing administrative levels?

Zhao Shukai: In a democratic system, staff size is not an issue of concern, but in current system, the staff size of grassroots government is totally decided by the higher authority while common people have no right to speak, even the final say of the increase and reduction of government agencies belongs to nobody but the leader himself. Therefore, something is seriously wrong with our current staff size

establishment institution totally under the control of the higher level, which is a major contradiction of the system.

Local government shall be supervised by common people.

Oriental Morning Post: Is grassroots democracy indispensable to administrative system reform?

Zhao Shukai: Definitely. It is ridiculous to decide the staff size of government regardless of the demands of common people. In America, people of cities and towns decide the number of tax collectors and policemen by themselves.

So the major problem is that common people have no right to speak on the services they need, because personnel and budget are all controlled by the higher authority. Rights “from bottom to top” have been suppressed by power from top to bottom, which is the root of or the fundamental reason for the conflict.

Oriental Morning Post: There are serious problems with governments, particularly leading cadres’ corruption at the county level. How to effectively supervise county governments’ operation following the reform of “Strong County Empowerment”?

Zhao Shukai: This is an issue beyond administrative scope to which the traditional solution is to withdraw power from the problem county to the city and to the province, even to the central government or from the problem town to the county. There is an assumption for such case: The bottom level is unreliable while the top level is reliable, which is actually in itself an ill assumption: the top is also unreliable in that both the bottom and the top will subject to corruption. Officials with small power may inflict little corruption; those with great power may brew enormous corruption.

Oriental Morning Post: The government will not be diligent until it is supervised by the people and a leader’s administration will be cast away when he expires until the responsibilities is shouldered by the people themselves.

Zhao Shukai: Yes, it will be truly reliable only when local government is put under the restriction and supervision of the local people. Provided all power is concentrated at the central level, there will be capacity problem as well as moral risks let alone the management radius covering 2000 counties. Thoughts and practices of power concentration will not solve the problem but compromise the subordinate’s trust in the superior. More and more contradictions are caused by the higher authority which take away power and shuffle difficult tasks to local governments. As a result, the latter can never be convinced.

For example, the abolition of liaison offices in Beijing has put local governments in a passive position because the power of personnel, administration, finance, and project approval are still at the hand of the central government. There will be neither the need for local officials’ rush to Beijing nor the need of setting up liaison offices in Beijing provided there is clear cut institutional separation of power between different levels with top-level power being highly transparent and predictable. A few days ago some media claimed that the punishment was not enough for local governments, but I think it is not the local but the central government which is to punish,

because no matter how severely the local government is punished, there will be no help under current government system.

Oriental Morning Post: You also mentioned decentralization of budget institution. Is it necessary to enhance budgetary democracy in the process of administrative system reform?

Zhao Shukai: The issue of budget has become more and more important these years for two reasons: One is democracy which in the past was mainly referred to as realities with election and personnel. However, in real democratic politics, a majority of time is spent in budget which will decide the boundary of government activities. In fact, budget process is consistent with policy process. In another word, if you are going to do something, you will be asked whether you spend money here or there. Therefore, in view of government budget, it is not election but budget which is the major form and content of democratic supervision and participation because election will only be held once several years, but money will be spent continuously in real life.

Another reason is that budget itself is less sensitive than election. In current context of China, budgetary democracy is easier to be accepted than electoral democracy in that budget represents democracy more frequently than election does and budgetary democracy is easier to break ground. Therefore, government shall put more efforts in budgetary democracy.

Government reform shall be deepened.

Oriental Morning Post: In conclusion, what do you think is the most important in dealing with the relation between the central and the local government so as to give full play to the “two initiatives?”

Zhao Shukai: In my point of view, the central–local government relation is actually in a period of complication. On the surface, the central and local are highly consistent, but from another side, there are many contradictions which are being intensified in many aspects. Entangled with partly obedience and partly disobedience, the complexity has exceeded that of the 1990s, on which I don’t think there is enough domestic research.

What is most important is the adjustment and reform of government institutional framework as whole. Since something is obviously wrong with the basic framework of our government, it is necessary to deepen our government reform with further political system reform.

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Chapter 2

Peasants and Grassroots Government

2.1 Where Is Government Reform Going?

Generally speaking, China is undergoing economic transition and social transformation, but the truth is that not only economy and society but also politics and government are changing or need to be changed. Moreover, there are inner connections between social and economic transition and government transition, neither can be neglected or carried out alone. From the survey of grassroots government, involution, institutional alienation, and reform path lock are the key issues to be addressed for government transition, which needs to break ground in three dimensions: grassroots democracy, grassroots self-governance, and government under law.

2.1.1 *Grassroots Democracy*

The political benefit of grassroots democracy is to prevent grassroots government leaders' delinquencies both for the people and for the central government as well as provide institutional and political culture base to correct the deviation of grassroots governments in implementing both the central instruction and the will of the people. An extensive grassroots democracy can expand the channel of social politics participation, cultivate the public awareness of officials and common people and foster benign interaction between politics and society, which will enable government authority to be built upon the will of the people from bottom to top instead of upon political loyalty from top to bottom. The first step is to expand and improve direct elections at the grassroots level by deepening village level direct elections and straightening out the relation between the Party organization and the self-governance organization. More than that, direct elections shall be promoted at the township, county and municipal level so as to restructure the power foundation of grassroots government. Election is the core content of democracy, democracy cannot exist

without election, which should be open and competitive instead of being controlled and directed by higher authority. The second step is to develop citizens' multilevel and multichannel political participations particularly deliberative democracy. Tocqueville in his discussion of democracy in American pointed out that American people express their ideas and achieve equality through associations and organizations. In comparison, there is neither enough self-organizing power nor contradiction reconciliation mechanism inside China's society. With the absence of institutionalized participation channel and restriction of the system, grassroots governments can hardly be supervised and challenged by the society. As a result, it is very difficult to achieve effective interplay between the grassroots government and the society. The development of grassroots democracy will make more and more competent People's Congress members representing the will the people as well as more and more public opinion leaders running for NPC members which will incorporate those external political elites into the system. Moreover, peasants will be encouraged to take the election at county and township level more seriously and seek to resolve more problems within the system. It now appears the implementation and improvement of the People's Congress system as the carrier and blue print of China's socialist democracy will push forward democracy with Chinese characteristics. Only under the improvement of the People's Congress system can grassroots governments fully exert their initiatives and creativeness in the interplay within government system which is not only in line with the central government's objectives but also responsive to social demands so as to effectively meet the requirement of social environment.

Peasant organizations deserve special attention because their development will facilitate the integration and concentrated expression of peasants' interests, as well as the negotiation and dialogue mechanism between peasants and governments. If properly managed, the development of peasant organizations will create a triple-win prospect for peasants, local leaders and the central government: Peasants' rights will be truly safeguarded; grassroots government will be able to bargain with higher authority via peasant organizations; the central government can obtain authentic information from the grassroots level through peasant organizations and rebuild its authority through strict enforcement of orders and restrictions. Presently, there are too many negative restrictions over peasant organizations which will weaken peasants' trust of the government and cultivate political radicalism.

Emphasis shall be laid upon not only electoral democracy but also deliberative democracy. From the broader perspective of democratic development, the highlight of deliberative democracy comes from the discussion of China's development path of democratization. There is a kind of opinion that liberal democracy mode is the only choice and representative democracy developed in advance of deliberative democracy in most western countries. While another opinion holds that it is a strategic choice of democratization for China to develop deliberative democracy system because China has a tradition of negotiation and consultation which has been a cooperative governance pattern between officials and citizens. Deliberative democracy is a scientific and democratic decision-making process. In the theory of deliberative democracy, democracy shall not be confined only to the spread of liberal election, but shall include proposal, participation, negotiation, and citizen rights as

well as the scope and credibility of consultation, etc., which is a process of the public's participation in decision-making via debate and discussion. Deliberative democracy can help to develop a democratic concept of information publicity and the people's participation in decision-making with focus on discussion to strengthen citizens' capacities of rational discussion and deliberation (He Baogang 2008). As indicated by the research of He Baogang and other scholars on the deliberative democracy of Wenling City, Zhejiang Province, there are true consultations in those villages which have made progress in competitive election these years, and consultation at the grassroots level is more authentic than that at the higher level. Voting will only be used at the final stage of public consultation. Therefore, deliberative politics may be the source of electoral politics. However, deliberative democracy cannot replace electoral democracy because the development of the latter will help to give full play to the role of the former. Whereas competitive democracy pattern aims at selection of the leader, deliberative pattern focuses on citizens' deliberation abilities and opportunities in their participation in decision-making. Deliberative democracy can actualize two basic values: political equality and political consultation. The institution and method of consultation have complemented and improved electoral democracy. With the fully development of electoral democracy, deliberative democracy will be more important for China's grassroots government because deliberative democracy incorporate democratic value into decision-making process even in those countries where electoral democracy has not been realized yet.

Will the development of democracy weaken the Party's leadership? This is an inevitable question. Intuitively speaking, the development of democracy will surely reduce or partly replace the decision-making management power of the Party and government and the answer will be Yes if that can be called "weakening." However, another question is whether it is strengthening or weakening of the Party's leadership in terms of the practice of no separation between the Party and the government or replacing the government with the Party? Whereas many problems with the grassroots government are related with the impotency of supervision and monitoring system of the government itself, weakness of the society is also an important factor. There is an imbalance between a strong government and a weak society. In the concept of enterprise governance, the weakness of the public as the "clients" or "consumers" of the government with ill mechanism of interest expression will lead to the recklessness of the government, which is described by the public as "Big shops will bully customers." If consumers have strong awareness to safeguard and claim their rights, the manufacture's consciousness and capacity of providing service will be improved. The process of democracy is a process to achieve the balance of power between the ruling party and the public which will create a "win-win" solution both for the Party's leadership and the public. It has been proved by empirical study that the practices of grassroots democracy in some places have successfully brought about benefits for both the country and the society, and also enhanced both villagers' capacity of self-governance and the country's capacity of implementing its policies in rural areas, which shows that the authorization of newborn social power does not necessarily weaken the country's social management ability and there shall be no zero-sum game between the country and the society. The author was inspired in other

way while serving as consultant of rural development projects for the World Bank and U.K. Department for International Development. A World Bank official said casually in a project assessment survey that projects are easy to carry out in China because the government of China has enough power to deal with everything and there are few NGOs as “troublemakers.” Things are different in some other countries where some NGOs will stand up to criticize and make requests early at the stage of project feasibility study with appeals to their central governments or even complaints to the high level of World Bank. In the execution of project, these organizations will conduct on-the-spot examinations and put forward all kinds of hard questions to the government.

Considered from another view angle, such case just shows the impotency of China’s civil power which enables the government to have its full swing. With underdeveloped grassroots democracy and narrow institutional space for civil power and NGOs to play their roles, government accountability system can hardly be established. Fundamentally speaking, there is no contradiction between the expansion of grassroots democracy and upholding the Party’s leadership. Grassroots democracy is a government management system as a form of government instead of a form of state. As the empirical study shows, the better villager self-governance goes, the lower peasants’ interest will be in the direct election of township leaders. Therefore, whether implement basic-level democracy or not is about the choice of the Party’s leadership style instead of the Party’s leadership of specific affairs. It is state power but not control and coordination of specific social affairs that serves as the cornerstone of the Party’s leadership. The Party’s leadership shall be active stipulation of rules governing state operation, economic development and social life instead of passively coping with all kinds of unpredictable social political events.

In the context of enlarged basic-level democracy, winning the election shall be the primary responsibility of the grassroots Party organization. The Party organization shall secure the victory of Party members in the equal and liberal election, otherwise, the Party leader shall be politically liable, which will gradually cultivate the ruling party’s awareness of campaign so as to sustain and consolidate the ruling party’s position based on the people’s authorization and recognition, which will help to solve the impotency of the superior’s control over the subordinate inside the Party organization. Judged from the trend of social development, both the diversification of social and economic interests and pluralism of political interests are inevitable. Compared with the improvement of compatibility of political interests, it is more important for the ruling party to maintain organic connections with the public. Such connections, which can only be maintained through the development of democracy, play a vital role in securing the ruling party’s leadership.

2.1.2 Grassroots Self-governance

As an important part of China’s political institution, basic-level self-governance is the logical consequence of grassroots democracy development. The wide range pilot

testing of “Village Self-governance” began in mid-1980s and was implemented nationwide through national legislation in late 1990s. As a result of over ten year’s practice, there have been significant historical development as well as new situations and challenges for grassroots self-governance institution which needs to be deepened and improved.

This kind of grassroots self-governance is different from China’s traditional squire autonomy. In the traditional power structure, “imperial power does not go beyond county level,” the maintenance of local order relied on social customs, clan organizations and prominent squires, as is called “imperial power does not go beyond county level, clans under the county practice self-governance which is based on ethics that cultivates squires.”¹ As demonstrated by Qu Tongzu in his book “Local Government of Qing Dynasty,” gentry is the only social pressure group in local political structure whose interests were not always consistent but often conflict with other social groups. “This fact was not compatible with self-governance which requires social interests to be represented as a whole.” Under this circumstance, the class of gentry and officials are two groups under the same political order carving up the local power of the empire.² Although there was more or less publicity reserved by these two groups as the result of ideological molding, such publicity lacked institutional assurance. What we need now is not a reprint of the traditional self-governance but a democratic one adapted to modern society through which the public will report their appeals to grassroots government to be integrated and coordinated via institutionalized channel, and the social public demands will be satisfied by the regulation and service of the grassroots government. The integration and coordination of appeals from different interest groups ask for highly democratic mechanism which will make the grassroots government’s institutional authority accepted and recognized by the grassroots people. Otherwise, there will be more complaints from the public and more intensified social conflicts if the grassroots government loses its transparency and necessary transcendence and become the agent of a specific interest group.

Tocqueville said: “However enlightened and however skilful a central power may be, it cannot of itself embrace all the details of the existence of a great nation. Such vigilance exceeds the powers of man.”³ In fact, due to the vast territory, it is impossible for the central government to be clear of the slightest trends of grassroots society, even to understand the operation of the grassroots government. As found by the survey, the higher authority’s assessment and supervision measures are usually dissimilated and replaced with movement behaviors by grassroots government and it is even worse that such a kind of management from top to bottom is of high cost and poor performance. As a result, the public’s dissatisfaction spreads to the central

¹Qin Hui: “Ten Traditional Theories—institutional culture and its reform of local society”, Fudan University Press, 2003 Edition, P3.

²Qu Tongzu: “Local Government of Qing Dynasty”, translated by Fan Zhongxin, etc. Law Press 2003 Edition, P305–P330.

³[France] Tocqueville: “Democracy in American” (Volume I), Commerce Press 1996 Edition, P100.

government and people's participation in the political process in various channels both inside and outside the system which will enlarge the scope of political participation (such as organized petition and burst of mass disturbance, etc.) and affect fundamental social stability and order.

In terms of government operation, it is necessary for the higher authority to authorize the grassroots level with bigger autonomy so as to reduce the cost of problem solving. There may be some people concerned of "no control, no order", worrying that grassroots government behaviors will be more difficult to control following the decentralization of power which can hardly guarantee effectiveness and justice. Therefore, the enhancement of grassroots government's responsibilities shall be synchronized with the strengthening of supervision and control by the social public. In another word, current problems with grassroots governments will not be addressed until the public can supervise and control government at this level based on the improvement of its basic functions and institutional norms as well as its transparency, public participation level and public monitoring mechanism.

The direct political effect of grassroots self-governance is to change government's administrative control of rural society and enable the latter's autonomous power to play its basic role in various aspects including public service supply, social order maintenance and contradiction resolution, etc., so as to prevent grassroots problems to escalate into troubles for the central government and reduce the cost of government's direct control of rural areas, which will also reduce the risk of management failure caused by governments' impotency and revitalize rural society from inside. The primary objective of this new pattern of governance is to make rural issues "internalized" and "socialized". "Internalization of rural issues" means peasants' problems shall be resolved through socialized interaction as many as possible instead of evolving into political issues. A typical situation nowadays is that when peasants are confronted with problems such as traffic accident, fake and inferior fertilizer and labor disputes, etc., they will impose pressure on the government from the very beginning through petitions, demonstrations and protests in the heartland of the government, which will turn common conflicts of social life into political events. It doesn't make any sense to say whether peasants are right or not in resorting to such means because this is their spontaneous reaction against the system. Objectively speaking, the government's rigorous control of social life has to some extent led to peasants' inclination of seeking political solution with the government in case of any problem. In fact, there are better solutions or methods for both peasants and the government which seeks to resolve problems through the rules of market economy, or interaction of social organization, or negotiation of interest group, in a word, by the way of social channel instead of political pressure.

Present government operational pattern has actually politicalized many problems. When the power is centralized and the government at lower level cannot satisfy the demands of the public, people will appeal to higher authority even up to the central government which has given rise to the "escalation" and "centralization" of grassroots problems. For example, peasant petitioners will go directly to the Secretary of county Party Committee instead of the Bureau of Letters and Visits, saying: "It's useless in our county to go to the Bureau of Letters and Visits or even the county

head, only the Party Secretary himself has the final say.” This is exactly the problem with the system which concentrated and politicalized contradictions. Who can supervise the county Party Secretary? Only the higher authority can. Therefore, peasants have to appeal to the higher level till Beijing. Such a system of higher level and individual power centralization is in fact a system drawing fire against itself. It is an inevitable consequence of the system’s nature that petitions frequently bypass the immediate leadership. Simple issues which should have been solved by the regular operation of administrative system were politicalized and had to be dealt with by political pressure in the end; those which should have been settled in different departments were finally centralized at the Party Secretary’s hands. Therefore grassroots self-governance shall take “Governance without Government” as a direction in terms of public administration.

“Governance without Government” is an important concept in governance theory which does not mean there is no need for the government but many sectors in the governing process can be operated without direct governmental manipulation. This perception is consistent with the essential experiences of the New Public Administration Movement in Europe and America. From the view of New Public Administration theory, not all public goods come from the government and a lot of them can be provided by NGOs or private sector, or at least there should be competitions between NGOs and government departments in the supply of public goods such as education, health and environment construction in which NGOs play an outstanding role so as to improve the quality of public goods as well as the government’s accountability and efficiency. There are many affairs in rural construction that can be handled with civilian power without being arranged specifically by the government. The operation by peasants themselves in the name of NGOs is of lower cost and higher efficiency. Government shall reduce direct control of rural affairs as much as possible and abandon the delusion to change rural situations in the twinkling of an eye through the abuse of “movement” in grand scale. On the base of self-governance, it is not necessary for the central government to directly control local governments and there are clear boundaries of political rights and liabilities between the central and the local. In the context of fully implemented grassroots democracy, the real “managers” of local governments are the local people.

Grassroots self-governance does not mean to abandon the higher level and even the central government. The answer to questions on how to integrate the demands of grassroots society, how to set up professional work divisions and how to safeguard the publicity and authority of grassroots regime lies in the institutional control of higher and central authority as well as the regulation by a sound legal system. Grassroots self-governance will not run effectively until a complicated and adaptive government system is established. Sound grassroots self-governance is necessary for both the improvement and the enhancement of government institutionalization. Grassroots self-governance restricted and safeguarded by the rule of law will strengthen the justice and authority of state power system. In case of any divergence and argument in the grassroots governance, the central government will be able to resolve these conflicts with its transcendence and authority. Such a system will reduce the pressure of public political participation on state power and dissolve

contradictions at the grassroots level by securing the continuity and effectiveness of grassroots government's general administrative behaviors. At the same time, the higher level authority will have enough resources and means to cope with political conflicts that are beyond the competence of the grassroots government, and the separation of administrative behaviors from political activities will make the political system more stable and better organized.

2.1.3 *Construction of Rule by Law*

Whether to standardize society–government relation and politics–administration relation at the grassroots level or to secure the effective running of grassroots democracy and government organizational structure relies on the construction of rule by law which is the internal requirements of both government system and the grassroots society.

There is significant difference between rule by law and politics. Rule by law is certain in its clarification and standardization of all kinds of social relations, whereas politics is uncertain in its constant adjustment following the change of social interest structure and the will of the public. Tocqueville mentioned: “Scarcely any question arises in the United States which does not become, sooner or later, a subject of judicial debate; hence all parties are obliged to borrow the ideas, and even the language, usual in judicial proceedings in their daily controversies”.⁴ Rule by Law is an effective way to sustain the running of political power, Aristotle pointed out in *Politics*: “Therefore he who bids the law rule may be deemed to bid God and Reason alone rule, but he who bids man rule adds an element of the beast...The law is God and Reason unaffected by all desires.”⁵ He believed that one of the meanings of Rule by Law is “universally complying with the laws established.”⁶ That is to say, all social relations must be restricted by law and the law is the ultimate authority in dealing with all social issues.

Although Rule by law shall be applied to regulate politics, it cannot replace politics because politics must keep running to satisfy social demands driven by constant change of social power and interest structure as well as the public's appeals. After the establishment of Rule by Law, all affairs which are not of political nature can be solved by law so as to de-politicalize social problems and control social contradictions and conflicts within certain scope and intensity, which, based on definite legal provisions and prejudications as well as rational predictions and judgments of different power or interest subjects, will not only secure the authority of management but also reduce social conflicts.

⁴[France] Tocqueville: “Democracy in American” (Volume I), Commerce Press, 1988 Edition, P310.

⁵[Ancient Greece] Aristotle: “Politics”, translated by Wu Shoupeng, Commerce Press, 1996 Edition, P 166.

⁶The same with the above.

In present China, the relation among different level of government is mainly characterized by Rule of Man which is a kind of politics neglecting rules and procedures. The author's survey reveals that what will decide the withdrawal or the transfer of power between different government levels is merely a word of a higher level Party or government leader or a work meeting. Therefore, the higher authority must respect the political role and power of the grassroots government as the first step to secure the Rule by Law of the latter. The fundamental respect is the guarantee of law which will build a Rule by Law government instead of an independent Rule by Man kingdom. On the basis of Rule by Law, misplaced administrative power shall be returned to grassroots government to make it worthy of the name. Due to the incomplete institutional designing of present political power of the grassroots government and the absence of effective Rule by Law in practice, the dominance and abuse of power are free from powerful restraint. There is a circle in which the higher authority abuses power on the grassroots government and the latter do the same thing on the public. As a result, the public's complaints about the grassroots government will spread to the higher level government. Hence, there must be powerful restriction based on Rule by Law in both the designing and practice of power institution whether for higher or grassroots government. It is only administrative instead of political reform to build up Rule by Law governance structure among different level of governments that will generate enormous political benefit when grassroots governments actually execute their rights and shoulder their responsibilities.

The survey shows that more and more peasants have begun to regulate behaviors and express demands by law in rural social and economic life. Some actively study and quote laws, seeking solutions in judicial channel; some follow an institutionalized means to participate in the representative elections of mass organization and the basic NPC, which demonstrates the public's recognition of the path of Rule by Law and their trust of channels within the system. Such progress shall be actively, timely, effectively and positively responded and guided with the improvement of legal system so as to prevent "Street Politics" and "Underworld Politics" from happening. The primary issue is whether there is an institutional channel for the expression of interest demands or a set of procedures to secure expression of appeals and settlement of disputes regardless of who is right in the conflict between peasants and the grassroots government. The problem is, some grassroots governments, by taking advantage of loopholes in laws and regulations, manipulate the procedure and control the means and consequence when peasants are trying to express their demands in a democratic way, which will lead to more conflicts and peasants' distrust of governments and Rule by Law. Objectively speaking, though there has been quick progress in China's Rule by Law construction with legal system of grassroots democracy basically established, the process still lags behind fast changing social life and the people's increasing demands of participation. Particularly, current legal system cannot accommodate the reality of flourishing and changing grassroots political life. The major deflection of present legal system expresses itself as emphasizing the entity while neglecting the procedure. A lot of procedural contents are expressed in substantive law. There is only sketchy or even no legal provision on the procedures particularly for the resolution of illegal cases, which leads to difficulties in judging

“whether it is against the law” with the absence of relevant mechanism. Due to the ambiguity of legal settlement, a number of contradictions remain unresolved, which provide the space for illegitimate interventions from various forces. For example, with the development of grassroots democracy and the public’s increasing enthusiasm of participation, basic-level election is growing more and more competitive, which has put forward urgent need for the legalization of grassroots democracy. Otherwise the democratic election will be subject to manipulation and even destroyed by money and violence. For example, as stipulated by law concerning dispute settlement of the grassroots election, the People’s Congress and government at the township and county level as well as competent sections of the county government are all in charge of dealing with whistle-blowing, which has resulted in poor performance and responsibilities shuffled by each other. For example, it is common place that the publicity of governmental affairs at the grassroots level has become a mere formality despite many documents issued from top to bottom including explicit requests of Regulations on Government Information Disclosure issued by the State Council. Without specific laws and regulations, institutions and requirements of improving governmental affairs publicity have become the “bestowing style” participation which arbitrarily publicizes information regarding the content, scope and channel. But it is very hard for the public to claim their rights and ask for the publicity of the information which is their primary concern whereas the leader is unwilling to disclose. Therefore, it is necessary to secure by law the public’s right to know with hard restrictions on each aspect of governmental affairs publicity.

Peasants’ political rights shall be ordained by law clearly and specifically which will dissolve some ambiguous statements and practices. For instance, in dealing with peasants’ resistance, some local governments, while recognizing the rationality and legitimacy of peasants’ demands, assert with no exception that there must be someone “ill-intentioned”. Such a statement on one hand acknowledges the reasonability and validity of peasants’ demands in abstract sense and on the other hand denies the motive and properness of their collective actions which will provide excuse for violent suppression. This is obviously a conspiracy theory in the handling of peasants’ resistance. Those conspiracy theorists can only utter with equivocation instead of substantial proof. With clarified laws and regulations, what is most important is to judge by law whether peasants’ demands and their expression of demands are legal or not, instead of criticizing others as “ill-intentioned” and peasants as “ignorant of facts”, which is actually demonizing peasants to absolve the government of its breach of law and delinquency.

To improve the political functions and administrative structure as well as the smooth operation of grassroots democracy, the grassroots government shall strengthen Rule by Law in four dimensions: No. 1 is to define the relations among power subjects by laws and regulations including rights and liabilities relations among grassroots authorities, governmental organizations and the Party organizations to secure their orderly operation and benign interactions. To achieve the justice and harmony of grassroots society and satisfy its demands of public service, it is necessary to strengthen grassroots government’s engagement with public opinion organs and social organizations as well as standardize the relations among power authorities, govern-

ments and social organizations; No. 2 is to establish a service-oriented government which is mature, rational, efficient and clean with scientific functions and proper organizational structure. Legal normalization plays a vital role in the function setting, organizational structure and power relation inside the grassroots government. Present power centralization structure of grassroots government needs to be changed and institutionalized through complete basic government organizational law to define its functions and structure; No. 3 is to establish mature grassroots democracy institution with the improvement of democracy operational mechanism at the grassroots level. Conflicts are inevitable for the complicated relationship among power and interest subjects, and the integration of these conflicting wills and demands relies on the construction of effective democratic mechanism. Therefore, the law shall be applied not only in the normalization of relations among various social interest subjects but also in establishing complete democratic system to express, coordinate and ultimately integrate wills and demands of grassroots society into the will of authoritative government; No. 4 is to coordinate various social power interest relations and reach social common sense as the base of legislature. The law will have authority only when there are laws to abide by as the premise of Rule by Law and legislature is based on broad social consensus.

This article is the summary part of Township Reform Research Report of Rural Department of the development research center of the State Council completed by the author in September 2009.

2.2 Good Policies and Good Implementation

Editor's Note of Sichuan Daily How to achieve good execution of good policies in the booming New Rural Construction? What shall be the role of the government in and what is the key to village governance? With these questions, the journalist interviewed Mr. Zhao Shukai, a researcher of Development Research Center of the State Council. In Zhao Shukai's point of view, the major constraint of rural development is "poor governance". Therefore, extraordinary emphasis shall be laid upon the issue of governance in New Rural Construction with renovation of governance philosophy and transformation of governance paradigm to secure good execution of good policy and effective governance of rural society.

Democratic management of new rural construction shall be strengthened.

Sichuan Daily: Recent years saw the government's efforts in rural work such as abolition of agricultural taxes, direct subsidy of food production and increasing input of rural education and medical health, etc. What do you think of such a "rural new deal"?

Zhao Shukai: The focus of the new rural policy of this administration can be summed up in two points: One is strong economic support such as the above mentioned abolition of agricultural taxes, etc., which has remarkably accelerated rural economic development and promoted the harmonization of economic and

social progress. Another is enhanced safeguarding and advocating of peasants' rights such as the resolute abolition of "House and Repatriate Regulation" aimed at migrant workers, severe punishment on the violation of peasants' interests in land acquisition and cancelation of several discriminating regulations on peasants' mobility and employment. All these efforts have truly demonstrated people-oriented governing philosophy which has revived rural economy, effectively dissolved or restrained many rural conflicts and risks.

Sichuan Daily: Despite the good momentum, there are still many perplexing problems in rural development. What do you think is the chief problem?

Zhao Shukai: Let me explain with simple facts: Poverty relief funds allocated by the Central Government will flow away level by level before they reach rural poor household and the government's special funds will drain away level by level before they are invested in specific projects, which has long perplexed the government, peasants and rural development. In my opinion, the major problem is whether these good policies can fully play their role through effective implementation, particularly whether the increase of input can fully benefit peasants, which is in another sense, the problem of how to improve democratic management.

Sichuan Daily: Why is there no good implementation of good policies?

Zhao Shukai: How to well implement a good policy is not a new puzzle for rural work. It has been a main feature of local government to change forms or dissolve policies in the practice with implementation replaced by meetings and documents, which is typical in rural work. In a simple sense, this is an issue of ineffectiveness of work. Furthermore, it is about the demonstration of the strategic objective of New Rural Construction in the operation of the government system.

Internalization and Socialization of Rural Issues.

Sichuan Daily: "Governance" has become a very popular topic of present rural research.

Zhao Shukai: Grassroots cadres generally regard "ruling" as treatment and management of so much social and economic "chaos" in rural areas, which is involved with rigorous rectification and strict control based on administrative compulsion and power centralization, which is anything but the advocated "governance".

Sichuan Daily: Then, how to understand "governance" as you mentioned?

Zhao Shukai: The new "governance" is fundamentally different from "ruling" and the latter must be transferred into the former. In the transition from "ruling" to "governance", it is necessary to straighten out both internal and external relations of rural areas with new governance paradigm, i.e., "polycentric governance" which means there will be multi-subjects undertaking social order maintenance and social development coordination, including governmental and nongovernmental organizations; profit and nonprofit organizations; individual and interest groups, etc. In such a governance system, various subjects interdependently manage public affairs through cooperative "participation", "negotiation" and "coordination", maintaining a sound and harmonized order. Under this principle, governance becomes an interactive managing process instead of a compulsory behavior from top to bottom.

Sichuan Daily: What is the objective of "Polycentric Governance"?

Zhao Shukai: The basic objective of this new governance paradigm is to internalize and socialize rural issues as much as possible. “Internalization of rural issues” means that problems derived from grassroots shall be dissolved at that level; problems derived from rural society shall be internally resolved instead of being confronted by government. “Socialization of rural issues” means that peasants’ problems shall be treated as social ones and rural problems as market ones instead of political ones, so as to prevent the politicization of common issues, which shall also be the focus of rural governance.

Sichuan Daily: In that sense, the improvement of governance will be inevitable.

Zhao Shukai: Definitely. It will be a very complicated process to achieve polycentric governance and de-politicization of rural issues. Hence, there shall be both overthrow and establishment instead of sticking to the old path in pushing forward governance. “Overthrow” means breaking overcentralization of power at the higher level inside government system and overcontrol of rural society by the government outside government system. In terms of present basic organization construction, it is necessary to adjust the thinking of two issues: First of all, who shall take care of rural affairs? Since rural community management is the business of the community itself, it is unnecessary for the government to conduct administrative control with grand unification. Secondly, who shall feed rural managers? There is something wrong with government’s “keeping” of village cadres, which needs further exploration.

Sichuan Daily: What then does “establishment” mean?

Zhao Shukai: “Establishment” here means that multidimensional rural relations shall be straightened out with the new paradigm of governance. The strategy of governments’ rural leadership shall conform to changes of situations and establish the direction of polycentric governance. The cooperative relations of shared governance between governmental and civil organizations, governmental and private sectors and among citizen groups will be the essential feature of rural polycentric governance.

Sichuan Daily: Will “polycentric governance” give people an impression of “governance without government”?

Zhao Shukai: “Polycentric governance” doesn’t mean “governance without government”. It means aspects of the governance can be free of governmental direct manipulation. The root of the implementation failure of government mandates and unfulfilled expectation of peasants is the weakness of civic response power. Provided that rural civic power interacts positively with the government system, there will be real supervisor of policy execution and make government decrees easy to implement. Therefore, the institutional space shall be expanded for the growth of civic groups to give a full play of their role in the establishment of good governance.

Sichuan Daily: What is the practical significance of the concept of polycentric governance in new rural construction?

Zhao Shukai: Defected government operational mechanism has been the major bottleneck for rural development. Good policies and great without systematic innovation, input can hardly achieve desired effect. Therefore, innovation of government operation mechanism should be integrated into New Rural Construction which shall

also be the process of government's learning of how to apply new concept and mechanism in rural "governance". The core of such new type of relationship is to activate peasants' initiative and creativity and make peasants the real subject of New Rural Construction.

This article was the record of an interview of the author by the journalist of "Sichuan Daily" published in "Sichuan Daily" on May 15th, 2006 with the original title "Good Policy Deserves Good Execution".

2.3 Government Performance in Public Service Perspective

Nowadays, China is engaged with great effort in improving rural public service to reduce the enormous gap between urban and rural areas aiming at the construction of a harmonious society. For that purpose, government has sharply increased financial spending on "Three Rural Issues (agriculture, rural areas and peasants)" and the improvement of public service oriented government has become the core issue of government innovation.

It is an inescapable responsibility of the government to increase the supply of rural public goods and improve the quality of rural public service. From the middle and late 1990s to the beginning of 21st century, China's "Three Rural Issues" aggravated and rural social and economic contradictions intensified, even governance crisis arose to some extent due to the government's negligence of public service construction in economic development. Recent years saw the rapid improvement of rural conditions for the government's unprecedented emphasis on rural public service building, whereas peasants' degree of livelihood satisfaction and trust of the government do not rely only on the increase of economic level, an all-round social development will be the cornerstone of a happy rural life.

Increasing government input is important but not enough for the improvement of rural public goods supply. In terms of quantity, government supply can hardly fulfill the demands. Furthermore, there are problems such as poor efficiency, fund waste and imbalanced supply and demand. Foreign and domestic experiences show that these problems exist not only in rural public goods supply in China but also in public management over the world which differ merely in degree, the main reason of which is the uniqueness of public management system and management objective that leads to the dysfunction of efficiency mechanism.

Traditional economic theory holds that public goods must be supplied by the government due to the existence of market failure and lots of economists and common people also think that only government is able to provide public service as demanded by people. However, according to some research, there is no any logical reason why public service has to be provided by bureaucratic government agencies. Compared with traditional administration study which focuses on the reform and improvement of the government itself, New Public Administration theory pays more attention to government-society relationship, insisting that there will not be better

supply of public goods until the government's monopoly of public service is broken up and the competition between the public and private sectors is established, i.e., non-governmental subjects such as communities and enterprises can also play their roles in public goods supply. In correspondence with theoretical breakthrough, there were waves of privatization from 1970s which spread to rural areas. For example, as indicated by a research report of the World Bank, the practice of providing rural public infrastructure by the private sector has been carried out in many developing countries since market supply was introduced to the rural communication of Chile since 1990s. Some foreign and domestic surveys also reveal that there are plenty of non-governmental supplies in rural medical service, irrigation and agricultural technology service, etc. In China's history, there was also a rich tradition of non-governmental supply of rural public goods.

Whereas non-governmental supply like marketization can improve efficiency, it is not omni-potent. As indicated by "2004 World Development Report" of the World Bank, public service will not automatically benefit the poor. It is hard to imagine the poor's benefit in a world where public service is provided totally by the market will be better than that provided by the government. In another word, non-governmental supply of public goods may not be able to provide basic public services to a part of people, whereas securing everybody's access to these services is the fundamental meaning of social equality. Meanwhile, because different "public goods" has different attribute, channels and efforts of non-governmental supplies also differ from each other. For example, in terms of infrastructure, the exclusiveness of irrigation system particularly irrigation facilities like electromechanical wells are stronger than that of rural road. Individual peasant may be uninterested in rural road investment but enthusiastic in irrigation system. For another example, as agricultural technology service, market may play different roles in pest control and special breeding. Hence, there should be detailed classification of non-governmental supplies of rural public goods instead of a general concept, which is not only about equality but also supply efficiency.

In a general view of rural public goods, government should, based on its major function of public supply, create an environment for as many as possible channels of non-governmental supply which will form a competitive supply pattern to some extent and complement the government's fund shortage and improve supply efficiency. On the other hand, classified guidance and control is necessary for market supply which should neither be lumped together nor laissez-faire. In fact, certain research finding like the World Bank report has proposed "differential treatment" to private supply of rural public goods.

Obviously, non-governmental supply of public goods has been a cutting edge issue for China's public administration whether from livelihood or research perspective, the discussion of which is undoubtedly a great challenge. Presently, there is hardly any fruitful result of research. In my opinion, the biggest value of Professor Lin Wanlong's works is the expansion of this research field with new contributions both in theory and methodology. Based on the summary of several patterns of China's non-governmental supply of rural public goods and discussion of various factors affecting rural public goods supply, this book proposes a policy framework

considering both efficiency and equality of non-governmental supply of rural public goods. It also takes note of many unequal and unreasonable policy interventions which were neglected consciously or unconsciously by policy makers in rural public goods supply. Instead of simple and unconditionally approval, it objectively analyzes the equality and efficiency issue as well as the due role of the government in rural public goods supply, which is fundamentally different from those general “extensive marketization” slogans.

The research designing of this book was initiated by the author in the bidding of China Development Research Project Fund. Sponsored by the key project fund, the author carried out a series of field surveys. Special surveys were conducted in six provinces and eight counties and others centered on this research topic were conducted in other three provinces and five counties. All of its research conclusions are supported by empirical materials and its special study of several cases based on field research data can provide us with very rich empirical information. In my personal view, the right or wrong of application research is open to discussion, whereas the research attitude must be upright and the conclusion must be established upon field research and empirical analysis which is what I appreciate most of his study, and I hope the author will keep going and make new academic achievement.

This article is the author’s preface for “Private Supply of Rural Public Goods: Influencing Factors and Policy Choices” (China’s Development Press, October 2007) by Lin Wanlong.

2.4 Political Development in Public Participation Perspective

2011 is the 100th anniversary of China’s 1911 Revolution. If we look back at the discussions and designing thoughts of political and legal system at that time, we may have the feeling that present research level is no better than that of a hundred years ago in many aspects. The 1911 Revolution succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy but failed obviously to establish democracy and republic. Of course we shall not be overcritical of our precedents who have done as much as they could. It is not those minority theorists and politicians who will decide the level of democratic politics of the society no matter how insightful and brilliant they are. What then is the basic decisive factor? A possible answer will be: citizen participation. Without effective participation of citizens, in another word, in the absence of citizens’ will, capacity and proper means to participate, the so called “democracy” can only be a castle in the air, no matter how advanced political conception or institutional arrangement is. Therefore, public participation is very important. Where there is no public participation, there will be no real democracy; where there is no high-quality public participation, there will be no developed democracy.

This book written by Dr. Sun Long is an important research achievement on citizens’ participation. In recent years, democracy was a hot topic of both foreign and domestic studies of China’s politics which has set off a small upsurge and achieved some key results. These studies cover a wide range of democratic politics with

different focuses on high-level democracy, grassroots democracy, democracy within the Party, social democracy, electoral democracy and deliberative democracy, etc. However, a review of research status shows that many books only focus on the advantage of democracy, some argue for how successful is China's democratization based on textual regulations and some empirical studies of political development have to some extent neglected the study of citizen participation. Compared with rural areas, urban citizen participation is relatively weaker because the rise of village election and rural conflict has strongly promoted the study of peasants' political participation whereas similar study of urban citizen participation lags behind. Against this background and based on the field survey of Beijing, this book is remarkable for its systematic presentation and analysis of urban citizen participation.

A typical feature of Dr. Sun Long's study is his personal involvement in "citizen participation" for several times. Though there has been no major breakthrough in policy and legislation of citizen participation these years, something is changing with urban citizens which is not vigorous but feels like surging spring tide. In the rapid social and economic transition, people's expression of interests is growing stronger. Under such new circumstance of citizen participation, Sun Long is not only a researcher with intense academic concern but also a man of action to some extent. For a few years, he kept involving himself in some "citizen participation" at the grassroots level such as university election campaign for the People's Congress member and planning of safeguarding property owner's rights, which has made his research highly practical and pertinent, whether large scale questionnaires or in-depth interviews of specific persons and events.

Another important feature of Dr. Sun Long's study of citizen participation is his broad academic vision and dedicated innovation. This book systematically sorts out relevant foreign and domestic studies and analyzes research status of citizen participation with the conclusion that academic research lags far behind citizens' practical participation, which I totally agree. The author accurately points out defections of present research: separated research of election and direct participation; insufficient field survey and first-hand material of empirical research; overemphasis on elites or "active citizens" participation and negligence of common people or "passive citizens"; lack of specialized study of different strata and groups. Based on the analysis of former studies, the author made his own research strategy and innovation approach, focusing on two major activities of urban citizen participation: the People's Congress members election and property owners self-governance. By analyzing the link between election and direct participation, the author demonstrates the complexity of China's urban citizen participation pattern. Engaged in long-term tracking surveys, the author concentrates on the study of the occurrence logic, development and transit track as well as the social implication of urban citizen participation network, which has deepened the observation and understanding of China's citizen participation pattern.

This book keenly finds and points out several important issues on present citizen participation. In my point of view, some of them are noteworthy. First of all, there are new problems in the election of grassroots People's Congress. As found by this research, voters' request of representatives is increasing with more and more

emphasis on whether the representatives are “speaking for the people” and “doing practical things to solve the people’s problems”. Meanwhile, they are more and more inclined to choose “representatives of interests” instead of “model workers”. However, their will of taking part in the election has declined and their sense of alienation intensified. The past decade saw the declining scope, frequency and depth of interplay between voters and local district NPC members, dropping personal voting rate, weakening comprehension of candidates and former representatives’ performance, which shows the obstacle of present election system and even the social contradictions derived herein. Secondly, there are new problems with the citizen participation channel. As the basic means of urban citizen participation, petition and reception, administrative litigation, legislative proposal and voluntary candidates are participations within the system established by laws and regulations. However, there are interceptions of petition, difficulties of filing a case and opening a court session in the filing when instituting an administrative lawsuit as well as the obstruction to and even pressure on legislative proposals and voluntary candidates. As a result, the cost of legal citizen participation has increased, which has even led to radical and disordered participation and petition, and the “Rule-by-Man” characteristic of governance has been intensified. Thirdly, there are changes of the political attitude of middle-class. More than 30% of the emerging urban middle-class citizens think their political position is lower than their economic positions; about 15–35% think they have strong capacity of political participation but their demands are not effectively responded by the government. Divergence of recognitions of middle class social status and asymmetric senses of internal and external political efficacy have demonstrated their dissatisfaction of existing interest expression mechanism, which has put forward the issue of how political system can adapt to increasingly complicated social structure. Fourthly, there are changes in safeguarding property owners’ rights. As revealed by this research, the participation rate of Property Owners Committee elections and of their self-governance has exceeded that of Residents Committee. Safeguarding property owners’ rights is developing into a social movement with broad and profound impact on grassroots social governance. Particularly, the collective actions of Property Owners Committee beyond the border of community and residential quarter have demonstrated the rapid growth of civic social organizations and have made a higher requirement for the social adaptability of the grassroots political system. Generally speaking, this book has enriched and push forward academic research of citizen participation with its new findings based on the survey and analysis of China’s path of citizenship development.

With reform and opening as well as social-economic transition, China’s citizen participation is continuously unfolding and deepening which will directly orient China’s political transition. This process will be characterized by emerging new questions, expanding practical research demands and springing new academic achievements and theoretical innovations. Dr. Sun Long’s research is an exploring result as well as a significant breakthrough of this academic field. I expect more of his contributions to this field through continuous efforts.

This essay is the author's preface for Dr. Sun Long's book: "Citizen Participation: An Empirical Study of Beijing Citizens' Attitudes and Behaviors" (published by China Social Science Press, May, 2011).

2.5 "Income Account" of Township Government

The 30 years of China's reform, is in a strict sense 30 years of rural reform for the reform was started in rural area. As the saying goes: "Times are always changing", today's towns, with their old name and old signs, has changed a lot in their way of living, operational mechanism and organizational structure. At the beginning of reform, there was clear direction for grassroots government construction, but now the situation goes, if not poles apart, at least athwart. Township reform is still "crossing the river by feeling its way over the stones". What on earth shall be the designing of grassroots government managing rural area? Or what will the future grassroots government looks like? This problem is still ahead of us.

As we can see, "Three Rural Issues" have attracted many scholars with a number of results. Those engaged in this research field are from different subjects with different analyzing tools and languages. To explain how "Three Rural Issues" become problems, researchers have created quite a few new theories and conceptions. These flourishing studies have undoubtedly provided rich inspirations for our understanding of "Three Rural Issues" and theoretical development is becoming a major force pushing forward practical progress. However, defections can be found in examination of these studies: there are so many "research results" over emphasizing theoretical abstract and generalization while neglecting in-depth observation of real life; there are too many surveys on present issues but few about historical development. In many cases, researchers are neither willing to undertake constant and deepened observation of reality nor exploring the engendering process of problems in historical depth. On the contrary, they are enthusiastic about extracting new theories and conceptions and presenting ideas and proposals. In fact, easy theoretical generalization and policy making without insightful observation and historical study of practical issues as well as accumulation of surveys will inevitably lead to superficial conclusions. Therefore, in my point of view, though data analysis and theory generalization are necessary, close watch and detailed description are more important for grassroots government research because the tree of life will keep green all the time whereas theories are often gray. Survey of social life development and transition is the basis of theoretical innovation.

It is from this understanding that I particularly appreciate "Taxes of a faraway Town: Thirty Years of a Town" by Tian Yi and Zhao Xu. Based on practical issues, this book describes real life, probing livelihood behaviors of grassroots government through the progress of reform with rich study materials and exquisite techniques, showing us a significant 30-year history of town government living.

This book focuses on the financial activities of Ping Cheng, a common town in Northwest China to carry out systematic survey with a time span of 30 years. The

author's survey of Ping Cheng Town is skillful and enduring. A lot of interviews were conducted for several years with diversified and a multitude of objectives including former and present cadres, township cadres, county and village cadres as well as common villagers. The content of interviews is systematic and detailed which covers all major aspects of township finance and livelihood, unfolding problems in a series of stories. In my personal academic vision, there is hardly any professional researcher who has done so many interviews with so rich perspectives on only such a town. Furthermore, the author accumulated precious first-hand materials including over-20-year working diaries of grassroots cadres, 30-year files and documents of grassroots government and common peasants' account books, etc., which makes the narrative full and accurate. So far as I know, some scholars in Shanghai made great efforts in material collection in terms of village case study and some researchers also did a lot in terms of township case study in recent years, but none of their accumulation is as rich as the author's with its unique advantage of interviews and materials, this book has undoubtedly occupied an important position. As nonprofessional researchers, the two authors have done something awesome in their study.

This book has sketched a historical picture of township financial activities over 30 years of reform which sheds much light on Ping Cheng, a common small town in the West with grand narrative of rural reform. The main characters moving in this picture are organizations at the low end of China's public power, i.e., governments at town and village level. These organizations are consists of individual cadres with different positions and roles, and there are interplays between peasants of rural society and these organizations and cadres. What we can find in this picture is a series of stories centered on finance or frankly speaking, on the money of government and the money of peasants, which happened in the past thirty years. In these stories, superior and subordinate authorities, high-level and basic-level cadres, town leaders and village cadres, village leader and villagers were fully playing their roles, giving us a taste of China's rural political and economic transition through 30 years of reform and help us to understand how grassroots governments, peasants as well as rural economic and social structure are changed by reform. There is a strong historical sense while reading these stories, reflecting on institutional evolution and social development and ruminating gratitude and grudges between peasants and government. We will gradually come to realize why "Three Rural Issues" has become "problems" since 1990s and burst out and what has been challenging China's grassroots government construction and rural governance in dealing with "Three Rural Issues".

This article is the author's preface for the book "Township Tax: Thirty Years of a Town" by Tian Yi and Zhao Xu (published by CITIC press, October, 2008).

2.6 Government Reform in Local Government Corporatization Perspective

In a strict sense, it is hard to tell the specific source of the concept “Corporatization of Local Government”. As a popular generalization of government’s over emphasis on economic growth, the author prefers to believe it is from the mouth of local cadres. Since 1980s and 1990s, the author has constantly heard grassroots cadres sneering at their own governmental work by saying: “Our county and town governments are running like companies”. Actually, it doesn’t matter where this concept is from, what matters is the understanding and application of such concept. In association with relevant foreign and domestic research, particularly the development of China’s political science over thirty years of reform, this concept is of clear characteristic of times and profound theoretical meaning.

The author’s understanding of “Corporatization of Local Government” is against such background: Since reform and opening up, Chinese government has transferred its focus on economic construction and achieved “Chinese Miracle” marked by continuous high-speed economic growth. In this process, Local government obtained many characteristics of corporation as a result of its concentration on economic growth. Local leading group runs like the management board of a company by integrating company decision making principle of “cost–benefit” into government decision making, which makes government operated like a company. As we also note, China’s economic growth is achieved under the circumstance of unchanged local Party and government system. Furthermore, the question is how government and politics run behind appearances of local government corporatization.

“Corporatization of Local Government” is basically a metaphor. However, for many scholars including the author himself, this metaphor has strong explanatory power. In another word, as a perspective of China’s local government system, incentive mechanism and power distribution, “Corporatization of Local Government” can well demonstrate the nature of local government since reform. This concept is to some extent the perception of “state–social relations” at local level as well as the key to understand “Central–Local” government relations such as how local government accept, select or even distort policy directives from top to bottom. In this sense, it can account for not only China’s economic takeoff but also China’s “governance crisis”—A local government fully engaged in economic development or economic interests will certainly neglect social management and public service within its duties. The author insists that without policy changes of such internal government mechanism, there will hardly be any real breakthrough whether in economic transition or in social equality and justice.

2.6.1 *Local State Corporatism*

In terms of academic sequence of thought, the discussion of “Corporatization of Local Government” has to be started from “Local State Corporatism”.

China’s continuous rapid economic growth of over 30 years has greatly stimulated and impacted theorists’ discussions. In international academic world, the study of China has become an important topic of comparative politics and economics research: why continuous rapid growth is happening in China? What are the facts contributing to this growth? Researchers’ interpretations of China’s economic growth have enriched existing research paradigms. In 1989, American scholar Jean C. Oi initiated “Local State Corporatism” in his paper “State and Peasant in Contemporary China: Political Economy of Town Government”, emphasizing the corporatism relation among local government, financial organization and enterprise.⁷ Later, Jean C. Oi expanded this concept to analyze the institutional foundation of China’s reform. She claimed that the success of China’s rural economic reform lay in the integration of local regime and cadre organizational system established in Mao Zedong Era and local commerce and industry which brought about “Local State Corporatism.”⁸

In Jean C. Oi’s concept of “Local State Corporatism,” “corporatism” does not mean interest groups engaged in interest aggregation or coordination but organized or integrated narrow interests of the society in terms of “state–social relation” to achieve higher objectives such as national and social stability and economic growth.⁹ She applied “Local State Corporatism” to local level and focused her analysis on county, town and village power institutions including the Party Committees and governments at county and village level as well as branch Party Committees at village level because these grassroots power institutions directly participate in social and economic management and are involved into rural industrialization, which she thought was the key to explain the takeoff of China’s rural economy and the answer to the question “what has made this prominent growth happen in absence of any political reform?” By synthesizing analysis in relevant documents, Jean C. Oi proposed the concept of “Local State Corporatism” and its explanatory framework.¹⁰

⁷Oi, Jean. *State and Peasant in Contemporary China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

⁸Oi, Jean. *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

⁹Oi, Jean. *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

¹⁰Oi, Jean. *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989; Oi, Jean. “Fiscal Reform and Economic Foundations of Local State Corporatism In China”, *World Politics*, 45, 1992; Oi, Jean. “The Role of the Local State in China’s Transitional Economy,” *The China Quarterly* 144, 1995; Oi, Jean. *Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Like Soviet–Eastern Europe countries in transit from planned economy to market economy, China is also faced with the startup of rural industrialization. In Jean C. Oi’s point of view, the given condition at the beginning of reform is a well-preserved political system, i.e., local Party and Government organizational network which she called “legacy of Mao Zedong,” a resource left by old system. Whether Party Committee or government has retained its entrenched official position, but how these authorities were mobilized as the pushing force of economic development? Jean C. Oi proposed two structures of incentive: decollectivization and financial reform. Former income pattern of production team and Commune was changed by the disintegration of the People’s Commune and decollectivization of agricultural production. Instead of being kept by village collective group, the harvest of agricultural products were mainly owned by rural households after rendering of basic public grain and collective turnover, which improved peasants’ income but sharply reduced village collective income and grassroots government income. Particularly for village level which was not a legal part of state power and fiscal revenue would not go directly to village collective. As a result, village collective income suffered most from decollectivization which made agriculture no longer the main source of fiscal revenue. Meanwhile, financial reform started at the beginning of 1980s put tax responsibility system into practice and made local government an independent financial entity, which drove local government to search for new source of income. Constrained by all conditions, the most beneficial and political risk-free solution for local government was to develop rural collective enterprises, i.e., township enterprises which not only solved rural labor problem that conformed to the requirement of national leaders but also generated legal disposable income. Encouraged by the two structures of incentive, local government nurtured and developed local economy by taking advantage of its authoritative position and distributing power of resources, which made rural industry and collective enterprises spring up. Hence, the country achieved “economic miracle” through formal institutional transition.

In the system structure of Jean C. Oi’s “Local State Corporatism,” local government incorporated enterprise development into public governance, providing economic reliance and political support for while exerting influence and control over enterprises. Various levels of ruling Party, governments and enterprises constituted a community of interests with interest maximization as an objective including maximization of economic interest and other interests of the community like employment. According to Jean C. Oi’s analysis, government intervened economy in the following ways in 1980s: No. 1 was factory management. Grassroots government contracted or rent enterprises to individuals instead of privatization which not only helped the government to intervene and control the profit distribution of enterprises but also encourage factory manager to improve efficiency and production. No. 2 is resource distribution. Local government selectively prioritized the distribution or low-price supply resources to enterprises including materials allocated by the central government and other rare scarce production materials. No. 3 was administrative services including facilitation of business license, products certificate and tax reduction opportunity, etc. Local government was able to mobilize all internal agencies and organizations to support selected township enterprises and provide services beyond

regular administrative scope. No. 4 was investment and loaning. By making investment and loaning decisions, local government effectively led the path of economic development. Jean C. Oi's compared local government in 1980s with enterprise because local leading cadres were playing the role like corporation decision-makers.

From 1990s, China's economy maintained rapid growth, whereas township enterprises lost the momentum. Restructure by privatization led to bankruptcy and withdrawal from the market of a lot of collective enterprises, which challenged "Local State Corporatism." Jean C. Oi claimed that "Local State Corporatism" evolved in this period: on one hand, government continuously adopted direct control over important and well-ran collective enterprises via selective privatization, and shut down or restructured other enterprises to reduce the burden; on the other hand, government expand its fostering objective and scope to private enterprises with community of interests established between local government and some key private enterprises. "Just like what they did to support collective enterprises, local officials are now promoting private enterprises within their jurisdictions by allocating funds, providing technical aids, seeking market opportunities and issuing licenses."¹¹ Therefore, in Jean C. Oi's point of view, despite the evolution of corporatism, the nature of "Local State Corporatism" did not fundamentally changed with the change of institutional environment. She claimed that in 1980, this concept was marked by "corporatization" of local government which coordinated the operation of economic units in its region like a industrial corporation running various businesses. In 1990s, it was more characterized by local government practicing corporatism. Nowadays, this concept still has explanatory power for China in reform. The role and nature of local governments, particularly of Party Committee organizations and authorities (and its extension at village level) remain unchanged. They are still playing an important role of micro distribution of resource factors in enterprise restructuring. Therefore, "Local state Corporatism" can still account for present politics-economic relation and government role.

"Local state Corporatism" has significantly influenced foreign and domestic researchers, representing foreign scholar's perception and imagination of China's politics. So to speak, this concept enriched the traditional explanatory framework of comparative political economics by creatively applying "corporatism" and "State corporatism."

2.6.2 Corporatism and State Corporatism

Jean C. Oi's "Local State Corporatism" is not a totally new theoretical concept but developed from European "Corporatism" and "State corporatism" based on the survey of China's reform.

¹¹Oi Jean, "The Evolution of Local State Corporation". in Andrew Welder (eds), *Zouping in Transition: The Process of Reform in Rural North China*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998.

“Corporatism” can be traced back to authoritarian regime of modern Europe, originated in Italy ruled by Fascists. At that time, the country tried to integrate workers and employers into governance process so as to establish corporate state. In late 1970s, “corporatism” became the generalization of specific system represented by “tripartite government” which integrated state, employers group and workers group into governance. Though Jean C. Oi’s emphasized the distinctive difference between “Local State Corporatism” and traditional “corporatism” in her research, she held that the former shared the same nature with the latter.

“Corporatism” was very typical in Post-World War II Scandinavia nations which emphasized “integration of organizational interests of civic society into state decision making,” which was remarkably different from aforementioned “pluralism” political pattern and theory based on American politics study. In a pluralism democratic system, various interest groups generated by social labor division and social structure diversification compete with each other for interests and for more self-beneficiary policies on the platform of state and government, which breaks the political analysis of traditional democratic theory based on selection, claiming that beyond competitive selection, there are different interest groups impacting on public decision-making and power distribution through specific means, achieving a balance upon instable interests competition. Just because of the diversity of interest groups, “independence, permeability and heterogeneity of different parts of political class have provided guarantee for any unsatisfied group to find its spokesman in politics.”¹²

Similar with pluralism, the political pattern of “Corporatism” is also concerned with social participation in public decision-making and governance. In this structure, “civic groups are integrated into state system through legal, competitive and monopolistic channels and state institutionalization, their representative positions and contact channels are recognized and protected by the country. Meanwhile, they are obliged to provide proposals in case of relevant policy making.”¹³ This system focuses on internal participation instead of external protest, with an aim to reshaping relationship between interest group and state; interest conflicts among competitive interest groups under pluralistic structure are turned into well-organized coordination—regular consultative relation are established between monopolizing groups representing specific interests and the state. The state will ask for their proposals which will be integrated into public policy-making. In turn, they must persuade their group members to cooperate with the state to achieve effective policy implementation.¹⁴

“Corporatism” is also translated as “Legal Corporatism” or “Collaborationism.” In literal sense, the former focuses on special position of legal social groups in interest expression, integration and political participation, while the latter on cooperation between the country and the society. But where does “legal social group” come from? Is it designated by the country or selected by the society? Which is

¹²Dahl, Robert. *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in the City*: New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961.

¹³Zhang Jing: “Corporatism”, China Social Science Press, 2005, P17–18.

¹⁴Zhang Jing: “Corporatism”, China Social Science Press, 2005, P27.

leading the cooperation between the country and society, the former or the latter? In terms of these considerations, corporatism can be categorized by “state corporatism” and “social corporatism,” the former emphasizes state as the leader of its cooperation with interest groups which are representatives of state for social governance rather than representatives of the society.”¹⁵

In late twentieth century, “Corporatism” was incorporated into the analysis of government’s role in economic development. Particularly, with the development of “Late-Late Developers,” people noticed the important role of government. The country incorporated all resource factors necessary for economic development and achieved integration of free market and state intervention. Just as Charles Taylor said, in present environment, a truly successful economy is “corporatism” economy represented by Germany and Japan. To gain advantage in economic development and international competition via natural evolution of free market has been a fantasy.¹⁶

In the perspective of corporatism theory, it is easy to see the differences of Chinese experience in whether historical situation and systematic logic which needs more comparative analysis and in-depth discussion. As pointed out by Jean COi, “Local state Corporatism” shares some essential characteristics of “Corporatism.” However, compared with traditional “Corporatism” and “State corporatism,” “Local state Corporatism” adapted to China’s specific situation is different: traditional “Corporatism” system or structure mainly deals with “state–society” relationship, while “Local state Corporatism” focuses on “government–market” relationship. There are significant differences between “Local State Corporatism” and traditional “Corporatism” in their targets, practitioners and participating objects. First of all, in terms of incorporation target, traditional “Corporatism” aims at social harmony and order with reduced social conflicts. Though corporatism economic policy involves economic development objective, its basic consideration is national economic competitiveness. However, the focus of “Local State Corporatism” is government revenue and disposable amount of resources. Secondly, as “Corporatism” practitioners, countries of traditional “Corporatism” system are to some extent transcendent in the balance and integration of different values by means of corporation. In corporatism economic policy of Japan and countries alike, there are specific central departments or pilot agencies guiding economic development instead of local regimes or governments. Whereas in China, subjects of Local State Corporatism consist of various departments of Party Committee and government with the whole grassroots regime involved in corporation. Instead of being transcendent, state power has become invest interest group and competitor against private sector. Thirdly, in terms of corporation objects, traditional “Corporatism” system is a participating process of corporation by legal social and interest groups. In Japan and countries alike, big enterprises, financial organizations, and relevant industrial policy departments are involved in Corporatism economic policy within a limited scope for the

¹⁵Zhu Tianbiao. “Comparative Political Economics”, Beijing University Press, 2006, P86.

¹⁶[Canada] Charles Taylor, “Original Civic Society”, published in Harbey Mars: “Socialism: Post-Cold War reflection”, translated by Liu Feng, Oxford University Press, 1995.

resources their governments can control and distribute are limited. Because China is transformed from an omni-potent state structure with inertia of the old system, government is still in real or potential control of all kinds of resources which has complicated the relationship between officials and merchants. In corporation, government involves all economic subjects, resources and factors either actively or passively, either by positive power like providing support or by negative power such as infringement penalty and local judicial investigation.

Jean C. Oi's "Local State Corporatism" gives very high appraisal to government's role in economic development, claiming that it is a feasible path for the successful transition and development of countries of Leninism system. Her explanation also verifies development-oriented theory of state post 1980s which holds that government can play a leading role in economic development through selective intervention of micro economy and push forward economic development and catch-up. However, in some scholars' point of view, the key of China's economic takeoff is not the involvement and driving force from local government but market transformation, i.e., the transformation of resource distribution pattern from old state redistributinal system to market system. While market transformation compromises redistributors' interests, it provides direct producers with more benefits; while the efficacy and reward of administrative power declines, the reward for human capitals and entrepreneurs increases.¹⁷ Just as Victor Nee pointed out, local government can provide township enterprises with administrative resource and help them to achieve more competitive advantages, but this is not the reason for China's economic takeoff. The success of China's economic reform lies in market transition, whereas local government's engagement of economic development and involvement in specific enterprises' running have only changed interest distribution pattern following market transition.¹⁸ Other scholars made responsive discussions on the micro mechanism of "Local state Corporatism." In Lin Nan's point of view, "Local state Corporatism" is fundamentally an economic paradigm which can hardly explain pluralistic patterns of local development under nationwide financial institutions. He insisted in analysis of socialistic reform progress based on the concept of "Local Market Socialism," i.e., analysis of reforming economic system focused on hierarchical coordination, market regulation and local coordination. He particularly highlighted the importance of social network base on expanded household relations, claiming that the foundation of local coordination is local network (a network of relations), mainly family and blood ties.¹⁹ Furthermore, some scholars tried to

¹⁷Nee, Victor, "A Theory of Market Transformation From Redistribution to Market in State Socialism." *American Sociology Review* 54, 1989. Also see Nee, Victor, "The Emergence of a Market Society: Changing Mechanisms of Stratification in China." *American Journal of Sociology* 101. 1996.

¹⁸Cao, Yang and Victor Nee. "Comment: Controversies and Evidence in the Market Transition Debate." *American Journal of Sociology*, 105, 2000.

¹⁹Lin Nan, "Local Market Socialism: Practical Operation of China's Rural Corporatism", *Foreign Sociology*, 5-6, 1996.

explain how China overcame major obstructions of planned system. Just as Walder Andrew pointed out, corporatism has overcome dilemma described by Kornai that transaction cost will sharply increase when government and enterprise become owners as well as bargaining rivals of resources necessary for each other, because local governments are no longer purely governments, they have become industrial firms in pursuit of economic objectives.²⁰

Generally speaking, arguments of international academic circles are replenishing and improving the micro mechanism of “Local state Corporatism.” Though there are different views over the cause and effect relationship between government system and its economic performance, they have not brought about fundamental challenge or impact on the nature and systematic feature of government defined by this concept. “Corporatization” in the running of local government has become a fact widely accepted and recognized.

2.6.3 Local Government Corporatization

Obviously, foreign scholars observe China’s development in the perspective of corporatism theory with international background and historical thickness which gives us important thoughtful and academic inspiration. However, there is always a sense of dissatisfaction when reading these foreign studies for their lack of more fundamentally penetrating power. These studies are limited to the external role of China’s government and politics while neglecting the internal mechanism of government operation as well as due perspective and analysis. Therefore, this paper elaborate Corporatization of Local Government here by absorbing the theoretical essence of “Local state Corporatism” on one hand, and make efforts in deepened analysis of China’s political process on the other hand. Further speaking, this paper tries to understand Corporatization of Local Government in view of its practical running and internal mechanism.²¹

(i) Behavioral Features of Corporatization of Local Governments

Intuitively speaking, Corporatization of Local Governments expresses itself specifically in the routine work of local governments which is oriented by investment promotion and motivated by the pursuit of fiscal revenue increase. Local government leaders’ rhetoric is full of allegations and promises of “low-price land,” “preferential duty” and “cheap labor.” As a result, investors become the highest clients for government whereas the public’s demands are neglected. In faced with conflicts between industrial and commercial enterprises and the local people, local governments will protect enterprises at the cost of breaching the law. On the roadside of

²⁰Walder, Andrew, “Local Governments: As Industrial Firms”, *American Journal of Sociology* 101, 1995 (2).

²¹See relevant discussions by Zhao Shukai, “Township Governance and Government Institutionalization”.

some places, we can see slogans in an imposing manner like “Those who are at odds with investment promotion are at odds with the people of the whole county,” etc.

Corporatization of Local Governments reflects not only its behavioral logic but also reveals the incentive mechanism behind which has formed the pattern of China’s present local governments in strengthening interaction with fragmented power structure and movement style of actions.

The fragmentation of local governments expresses itself in three dimensions: No. 1 is the fragmentation of “value.” In many cases, the subordinate does not recognize the superior’s deployments and directions in mind. The former’s obedience to the latter is merely symbolic. No. 2 is the fragmentation of “system.” Governments at different levels and different departments of government carry out the superior’s deployments in accordance with their own preferences, which leads to a lot of contradictions among documents and conflicts among document executors. The seemingly mass-response government system is actually internally separated. No. 3 is the fragmentation of “function.” There is no integration of functional departments and policy links are disconnected with each other. Major mechanism of government operation turns into “individual operation” dominated by informal rules. In another word, the running of government has been rooted in the interpersonal relations within the government and bargaining has become an important means of government work not only in policymaking but also in policy implementation. Different policies are separated from each other and government power is often utilized to seek personal gain with a number of grey zones between the legal and illegal. In such government operation, formal institutions and norms will only be displays and it will be very hard to establish effective legal framework and even harder to reach common sense of value and generally acknowledged procedure.

The divergence of value and separation of system have become typical features of local government operation, which is represented by government’s launching of “movement” in dealing with regular work and daily task. As a result, routine administration and public services are replaced by movement-style mobilizing mechanism which is characterized by administrative subject’s law enforcement to achieve specific objective like a furry in a short period with maximum utilization of administrative resource. As a major feature of government operation, such kind of “movement” is not “social movement” spontaneously derived from civic power but forged by administrative power of the government. In view of the governmental movement process, it is always started by the leader’s instruction, pushed forward by examination and assessment, publicized with great momentum at the beginning, inspected and accepted in a formidable array, resulted with a happy ending for all and summarized with countless rich fruits as a big success ascribed to the superior’s excellent leadership as well as the subordinate’s well done job. However, in reality of work, formalism has become a common practice which is marked by “implementation of documents by documents” and “implementation of meetings by meetings.” Or there are after effects caused by coercive orders. For example, a considerable percentage of enormous rural debts are the “fruitful achievement” of these movements.

Incentive mechanism of corporatization of local governments, fragmented power structure, and movement behavioral pattern are the three factors in strengthening

interaction, which has revealed the internal mechanism of present local governments operation and become the unshakable crux of reform.

(ii) **Political Premise for Local Government Corporatization**

Both foreign and domestic studies have noticed that China's great development in the past 30 years was achieved without the fundamental change of existing Party and governmental organization system. In another word, existing Party and government system has embraced not only former planned economy but also present market economy. Then, what has remained unchanged? In my point of view, it is the political premise or political guarantee for corporatization of local governments.

Power centralization or superior power concentration. There have been a few changes in the central–local relationship including that among governments at different level since reform, particularly, the adoption of tax distribution system has derived new features of government behavior and new pattern of interplay among governments at different level, making intergovernmental financial relations considerably different. Upon entering the new century, “County Directly under the Provincial Government” financial policy were issued, “County Empowerment” policy were adopted at administrative level and “Township Finance Supervised by County” policy were implemented at basic level which has strongly influenced the central–local relationship. However, in the perspective of governmental economic activities, the basic systematic pattern of power centralization or superior power concentration has not changed. Whether investment decision making or specific transfer payment is still marked mainly by upwards power centralization. Furthermore, this power centralization pattern has become more serious in several dimensions through these years. In terms of politics, such pattern of superior power concentration has not changed and even strengthened in some places these years. The major expression is that the superior is still the subordinate's fundamental source of power. Though selections were held by local Party Committees and governments in recent years, new and wired situations arose when the superior was reinforce power concentration. For example, in general selection, the superior made clear request that candidates recommended by the Party organization must be elected with guarantee, otherwise the Party Committee Secretary would be liable. Meanwhile, there are various prohibitions on competitive selections which have intensified the centralization of the superior's power of appointment. In the past, Secretary of county Party Committee was directly appointed by municipal or regional Party Committee, but now this position is appointed by provincial Party Committee due to its importance. Such highly concentrated central power and superior power have intensified the authoritarianism of government.

Individual power concentration. There is power monopoly by the Party and government leaders at local level and by those at department level, the major expression of which is the Party Committee Secretary's highly centralized power. In terms of the decision-making and execution of government budget, there are institutions and relevant norms for department budget as well as legislation on the function of public opinion agencies in budget, but the Party Committee leader's personal will is still playing a decisive role. The most important policy making

steps such as arrangement of construction projects, distribution of budget funds are still at the command of the leader. As a result, urban construction plans and industrial development arrangements in some places will change with the change of leaders. In terms of industrial project building, land acquisition and remove, there have some norms and regulations issued by the central government which only remain on paper and will be offset by the leader's personal decisions. Therefore, corruption cases are increasing instead of being reduced in projects biddings, land acquisitions and removes. In terms of official management, both the central and local governments are on one hand making efforts to standardize procedures of selecting and appointing cadres, promoting institutions such as open selection, democratic assessment, democratic voting and vote by all committee members. In another word, there are more and more procedural requirements and restrictions of Party Committee leader's power of appointing cadres in terms of textual provisions. On the other hand, power monopoly of leaders is still very serious in personnel appointment and removal with unstoppable craving, buying and selling of official positions. Further speaking, various types of corruption of official selection have become intensified despite the Central Committee's painstaking prevention effort, which shows that leaders' personal monopoly of power has not been relieved, let alone being resolved in present system and the core mechanism of this power centralization system is still working effectively.

The Party's power centralization, i.e., the failure to separate the Party from the government. In a separate view of the history of the Party and government organizational reform, the strength of the former was weaker than that of the latter. Therefore, in specific analysis, the Party organization is much more overstuffed and bloated than the government. In terms of the distinction the Party and government functions, the 13th National Party Congress clearly put forward Separation of the Party and Government with some substantial measures. Though this reform objective of the 13th National Party Congress had never been openly denied at the high level of the Party, there was obvious reversion in the Separation process later on. So far as present situation goes, the Party organization has become more bloated with more power concentrated. In local management work, the Party Committee and government have become one integrated mass. In order to enhance the pushing effort, some routine jobs of the government are directly under the command of the Party Committee. For instance, in the municipal Party Committee's deployment of afforestation task, due to the vice mayor's lack of necessary power, the Committee Secretary will directly send the head of Organization Department who will directly command not only the vice mayor but also relevant government departments. In some county, the development of livestock farming is directly led by the Secretary of Discipline and Inspection Committee due to the incompetence of the vice county chief. As can be seen in local survey, there are more and more interventions and even monopolizing everything by the Party Committee in regular government work. At the level of central power authority, it is a common practice for Secretary of the Party Committee to hold the post of Director of Standing Committee of Local People's Congress at the same time, which further constrains the limited supervision function of the People's Congress. There is no institutional mechanism to divide the boundary

of rights and liabilities between the Party Committee and organizations like government and the People's Congress. As the result, the divisions of labor and power become more and more obscure, which enables the Party Committee to rise above the government and provide the corporatization of local government with support of power structure.

(iii) **Social Consequence of Local Government Corporatization**

Foreign scholars' discussions of the influence of Corporatization of Local Governments often focus on its role in promoting economic development. Against a broader background, people will always pay attention to its positive meaning. Jean C. Oi also explored more extensive influence of "Local state Corporatism" on China's political prospect. She thought that "Local state Corporatism" would provide China with an institutional choice different from privatization and system collapse of Soviet-East Europe nations, "an optional and relative friendly economic institution which allows powerful interventions by local governments and enables Communist Party officials to play not only political role but also economic leadership."²² Because economic reform and development "hold the potential energy to strengthen instead of weaken the power of local officials,"²³ China's local officials, unlike former Soviet Union officials who were against economic reform, are willing to push it forward. She also claimed that local economic development and the increase of fiscal revenue brought about by "Local state Corporatism" enabled governments to redistribute money to peasants through various forms of subsidies such as food, education, health, pension and housing. Social welfare was integrated by local governments into decision-making of economic development which helped maintain the value system of traditional socialistic country.²⁴ In this sense, she held that Chinese local government actions in economic development were different from those of the so-called "predator" countries because the former's resources gained were not privatized but utilized through public finance for public undertakings and well-being purpose.

However, in the economic perspective, Paul Krugman's analysis seems to be verified by problems of disorder, imbalance and unsustainability challenging China's economy these years: In terms of economic development based on input increase, government can mobilize and integrate resources into economic growth but can hardly improve efficiency, technology and total factor productivity. Whether "Local State Corporatism" can successfully push economic progress from quantity level to quality level of is still at doubt.

Meanwhile, in terms of politics, local governments' total involvements in economic and market activities as well as their decision-making based on "Profit Maximization" have led to political crisis. In the word of Daniel Bell's analysis in

²²Jean C. Oi: "Institutional Foundation of Corporatization of China's Local Governments", "Governmental Economics of China's Reform" edited by Gang Yang, Cui Yuanzhi, Oxford University Press. 1997, P130.

²³Jean C. Oi: "Institutional Foundation of Corporatization of China's Local Governments", P131.

²⁴Jean C. Oi: "Institutional Foundation of Corporatization of China's Local Governments", P131-132.

his book “the Coming of Post-Industry Era,” the axial principle of politics is fundamentally different from that of market (enterprises).²⁵ The basic interest of modern regime lies in legal gains, whereas the fundamental principle of enterprises’ market decision lies in “Profit Maximization” following “cost–benefit” analysis.

While sticking to the rule of enterprises’ decision-making, grassroots governments neglect the supply of public goods and services. Furthermore, as governments have become interest subjects in market operation competing with the people for their vested interests, social conflicts including those between governments and other market subjects have been intensified instead of being effectively managed. Recent years saw the conflicts centered on land acquisition and remove issues which are no doubt vivid reflections of these problems. Moreover, various subjects, factors and resources are involved by governments into the process of integration through Corporatism, which has expanded the scope of state power instead of turning “Totalitarianism Country” into “Limited Government.”²⁶

Driven by the mechanism of local government corporatization, governments have changed themselves into competitive market subjects and done a lot of jobs which should have been dealt with by market. Government officials are mainly concerned with investors and rich people. In another word, policies are inclined to favor the rich. Overintervention of market running by public power will confuse the boundary between politics and commerce which is negative for the establishment of a fair environment for market economy. The corporatization of government operation has led to governments’ lack of capacity to respond to the public demands of grassroots society. The Public’s needs and requirements can hardly be fed back quickly to the government system. In another word, channels for feedback are not regular such as petition and mass disturbance, etc., whereas those well-designed institutional channels are impeded or abolished or blocked. Even when the information is fed back, there will be no sound government mechanism for disposal. Due to the lack of incentive mechanism to serve the people, government employees lack the motivation of responding to relevant information.

The results of corporatization mechanism can be understood in at least three dimensions: first of all, considerable amount of resources are used for the purpose of local economic development, which has occupied available resources for public service and social management and strongly motivated grassroots governments to put various resources into economic development. Furthermore, under the mobilization-oriented political system, relationship between state and society is imbalanced. There is neither institutional restriction of grassroots governments on serving the demands of rural society nor motivation for them to provide public goods. Second, there is no effective way to resolve tensions and conflicts within grassroots society. On one hand, grassroots governments lack motivation of coping with social

²⁵[American] Daniel Bell: *the Coming of Post-Industry Era—An Exploration of Social Prediction* translated by Gao Xian, Xin Hua Press, 1997.

²⁶See relevant discussions by Zhao Shukai: *Rural Development and Grassroots Government Corporatization in China* Development Watch, 2006 (10) and Zhao Shukai: *Village Governance and Government Institutionalization*, the Commercial Press, 2010.

conflicts; on the other hand, they themselves are involved into social conflicts as stake holders or even perpetrators, which is particularly true in land acquisition work, the focal point of contradictions. Third, governments fail to gain political support due to their incompetence in satisfying grassroots society's demands of public services and goods, which has intensified the sense of alienation between township governments and local society and weakened governments' social penetration and mobilization power."

Township governments in corporatization are characterized by strong autonomy. Such "autonomy of grassroots government" is represented not only by its autonomy from higher level authority as the result of financial independence under the system of dividing revenue but also by its autonomy from local society in neglecting social and public demands as well as the balance of diversified social interests. A lot of mass disturbances and social conflicts in China's grassroots society are rooted in the corporatization of governments.

According to Jean C. Oi's high appraisal of "Local state Corporatism", it is a special advantage for China to achieve economic growth in its economic transition through institutional arrangement without political reform. However, as the reform deepens and market system has been established, "Local state Corporatism" can hardly be an advantageous institutional arrangement for its deep involvement in the running of market. It has more and more become a systematic obstruction for the establishment of China's modern state power with aggravating problems caused by grassroots governments as vested interests group. Without tackling this crux problem for the system, any policy change can hardly be implemented or pushed forward. In the same way, without fundamental change of existing political system, economic transition and political stability will get into trouble in the process of "feeling for the stones" and fail to achieve the goal of "crossing the river."

Nowadays, arguments are still going on for China Model. Obviously, China made great achievement in the past over 30 years. However, it is too early to say China's reform has been a success. In terms of government transformation, China model has not passed the most critical "Narrow Gate." Development paradigm of local government corporatization facilitated rapid economic growth at the beginning, but its drawbacks manifested in the late stage. Obviously, this is not a sustainable way of development. Since China's reform of the former stage was carried out without any change of political system, the primary issue for the coming stage will be how to transform the mechanism of local government corporatization into a modern state power system in the real sense.

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Chapter 3

Peasants and Rural Democracy

3.1 Prospect of Rural Democracy

There are so many friends coming to my speech on rural democracy in such a cold day, which shows your enthusiasm of this issue. Why I am going to talk about this topic? It is because this is a highlighted issue in both rural study and political research. Of course, present study of rural democracy study is no longer as hot as before. Especially since the beginning of the 21st century, academic and social attention to this issue has sharply declined. Against this background, I think it is necessary for us to discuss the following questions: what is the status of rural democracy? What will be its prospect? What will be the direction of its development?

I. The Starting of Rural Democracy

Village self-governance, which was started in the 1980s, is the basic issue of China's present rural democracy.

There were elections in rural areas without legal and institutional support before the reform. Prior to the establishment of Rural Household Contracting System, there was the People's Commune System, a three-level organization consisted of commune, production brigade, and production team with a policy statement of "three-level ownership based on production team." As the essential expression of planned economy in rural areas, the People's Commune is a production and management system under the direct control of administrative power, or a kind of semi-militarized organizational system. At that time, the government decided all peasant issues including how much to plant, what to plant, how to distribute harvest, and even how much grain one will eat each year. Despite such rigorous control, there were some direct village elections mainly at the level of production team. In term of policy, there was statement that the People's Commune should practice democratic management and let peasants play their initiatives. Before I went to college, I had been a peasant working in the production team with direct experience and under-

standing. From my own experience, there would be election for production team cadres once a year, as the local saying goes “sweet potatoes dried, team leader changed,” which means Commune members would begin to elect next leader of the production team as soon as sweet potato was dried and autumn harvest was over. I took part in such election at that time. Were it not for my entering into college in 1978, I would have been a leader of production team.

The discussion of rural democracy since the reform shall be started from household contracting system. It is necessary to recognize the differences between “fixing farm output quotas for each household” and “household contract system” which are often confused. In fact, there are major distinctions between these two concepts. The former did not break the management framework of production team. For example, the harvest of land contracted to peasants would be turned over to the production team and redistributed to them after being converted into labor value by the production team. In early 1960s, people began to think of how to produce more food from the land and reduce the huge number of people starved to death in the three-year Great Famine, and farm output quotas were fixed for each household in many places. Under this circumstance, the production team still conducted unified accounting without major change of collective accounting system and the collective was still the subject of accounting and management. Whereas household contract system originated from “all-round contract” of Xiao Gang Village of Feng Yang County, Anhui Province was different. Household contract system means the harvest belongs to peasants themselves after deduction of the part turned over to the country and the collective instead of handing into the collective which will decide the distribution based on the overall production. In the all-round contract system, the collective did not control the production of each household and peasants would get as much as what is left after collective withdrawal. In their own words, “fixing farm output quotas for each household” was pre-accounting and “all-round contract” was post-accounting, which was a fundamental systematic change of the relationship between rural households and the production. All-round contract made peasants the real accounting and managing subjects. These two accounting systems were different in that the former was still within the scope of collective accounting and management while the latter totally discarded the collective management system. Therefore, it is not reasonable for many people to regard the two concepts as one. This change of accounting and management system became the economic foundation of village democratic governance.

All-round contract had basically spread to the whole China by 1981. As a result, the production brigade system could hardly go on. A village in Guangxi Province established “Village Committee” upon the recognition that neither the system nor the name of the production brigade was suitable for the new practice of household contract, which was the precedent of the “Village Committee” in China’s reform. In 1982, production brigade was changed into village committee by the constitution, which brought about another problem: how to deal with the People’s Commune based on the production brigade? In the summer of 1982, I entered the Rural Policy Research Office of Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee after college graduation when the high level was discussing this issue and formed a basic consideration,

i.e., separation of rural power and economic organizations by establishing township government and abolishing the People's Commune as stated in policy "separating politics and community, establishing township government." The document was drafted in the autumn of 1982 and confirmed through the discussion of Central Committee's Agricultural Meeting. I was a meeting staff at the Secretariat with proofreading of that draft document as one of my tasks, running back and forth to the printing house. In the autumn of 1983, this document was officially issued on the separation of politics and society and establishment of township government.

Following the abolition of the People's Commune and Production Brigade, Villagers Committee was established at the village level which was a historic turning point in terms of organizational form. However, problems still remained such as how to constitute, how to operate, and how to manage Villagers Committee. In the few years that followed, the top level developed Organizational Law of Villagers Committee (Tentative) which was passed in 1986 and put into trial nationwide in 1988 with foreign and domestic research of China's rural democracy specifically rural election started thereafter. There were some political inside stories and a number of studies and explorations by foreign and domestic scholars. China's rural election was formally started and incorporated into the legal system by the issuing of Organizational Law of Villagers Committee which was a critical historic event. Some leaders at the central level played a key role in developing this Law, particularly Peng Zhen, the former Chairman of the NPC Standing Committee who repeatedly emphasized that China's political democracy must be started at the grassroots level based on peasants' democratic practices. Through democratic training, peasants would be able to well manage villages, then towns and counties, then cities and provinces till the whole country. In recent years, Premier Wen Jiabao also highlighted this idea. Basically, village self-governance can be perceived as a form of grassroots democracy as required by grassroots social management itself as well as a necessary training stage for the democracy at the national level.

As we all know, there were much intensified arguments over village self-governance from the beginning including fierce debates at the top level and strong voices of objection from grassroots leaders. The debates went on even after the issuing of Organizational Law of Villagers Committee. Many people regarded this Law as much ahead of its time which would lead to rural instability or even chaos. Therefore, this Law was not officially issued until 1998 after ten years of pilot testing. Previously, whether the Law should be implemented at the local level or not had been subjected to local Party and government leaders' understanding and attitude. Some southern provinces did not implement, whereas most places began to practice vigorously and even push it forward with great momentum. In late 1998, Organizational Law of Villagers Committee was officially issued and put into effect with nationwide mandatory requirements, i.e., all Villagers Committees must be elected by law and township leaders should not be administratively appointed which would otherwise be against the Law. Thereafter, more problems arose such as the relation among self-governance organization, the Party organization and the government, villagers' qualification and the procedure of recall and so on. Hence, this Law was highly expected to be amended from the beginning. At the central level, the amend-

ment had been put on the agenda since the issuing of the Law which also triggered debates on this issue. I took part in some internal discussions of amendment and the newly revised “Organizational Law of Villagers Committee” was promulgated in October, 2010. There were intensified internal debates in the amending process because the amendment would solve some problems but would bring about more, which now seems exactly true because there are still some major problems and even greater challenges ahead of us.

Regarding the question “Why China’s elections are only held at the grassroots level in rural areas instead of higher level?” In my opinion, there should be elections at both the grassroots and higher level and I disagree with the view that election is not feasible in rural areas due to the low quality of peasants. In fact, there is nothing complicated about direct rural election which can be well operated by peasants themselves. Elections at different level are different with each other in terms of difficulty and knowledge requirement. Rural election is a common way of public life for peasants, which is not much associated with education level. Generally, a few hundred villagers are quite familiar with each other and they know who is more competent and who is more eligible to be a village cadre. Having such information and making choice in elections have nothing to do with peasants’ education degree. In view of post-election decision-making and management, peasants are totally competent at direct participation in rural management in the same way with election because rural affairs decision-making is within the scope of peasants’ direct experiences and capabilities, such as distribution of the land for housing, building of village roads, and improvement of farmland irrigation facilities concerning villagers’ vital interests. With unambiguous experiences and understandings, peasants can deal with these problems regardless of their education level. Basic issues to be settled by grassroots democracy are different from those at the national level. In the same way, I do not think there is any problem with representatives elected by peasants themselves to participate in the higher level decision-making, which is nothing more than giving peasants the right to choose their own representatives and decide by themselves who will be qualified to speak on half of them in national political life. This is not a complicated process which was practiced in some countries one or two hundred years ago and can be well handled by today’s Chinese peasants. I always hold that the objection to the expansion and improvement of direct elections on the excuse of peasants’ low quality cannot hold ground.

II. The Challenge of Rural Democracy

There were extremely intensified debates and diversified opinions in the amending of “Organizational Law of Villagers Committee,” which does not change too much today. There are some people who regard it useless to go on debating since the Law has been put into effect, as a result, the intensity of debate has mitigated a lot. Recent years saw the sharp decline of confidence and even strong pessimism of many scholars on grassroots democracy. In view of real life, there are big problems for the enforcement of law or great troubles for the development of rural democracy without immediate breakthrough or any effective solution. In my own opinion, I do not agree with pessimism but I acknowledge the real difficulties facing the

development of rural democracy and severe challenges confronting rural democracy. So far as my observation goes, there are three major challenges:

Challenge No. 1: There are great tensions and even direct oppositions or sharp contradictions in the relationship between the Party organization and villagers' self governance organization at the village level.

Specifically, there is not only the Party organization, i.e., the Party Branch but also a self-governance organization, i.e., the Villagers Committee democratically elected by all villagers. The relationship between these two organizations is generally called "Two-Committee Relationship" which expresses itself as the personal relationship between the Party Branch Secretary and the Villagers Committee Head. In a historical perspective, the Party Branch has always been the decision-making group of village affairs not only in the period of the People's Commune but also in the reform. However, the Villagers Committee authorized by "Organizational Law of Villagers Committee" to manage local affairs which has given rise to questions: What is the boundary of power between the Party Branch and the Villagers Committee? How to deal with their relationship? And what is the rule of their interplay? There is no clear provisions in whether "Organizational Law of Villagers Committee" or work regulation of the Party Branch at basic level. As a result, the Head of the Villagers Committee vigorously elected has little power in village affairs which is ridiculed by the peasants as "a second hand elected with great effort but no power of command." Furthermore, many of the, who are unwilling to be a "second hand," claim the execution of their own power. Therefore, the power struggle between the Party Branch Secretaries and the Villagers Committee Heads are being performed on a grand scale, which has become a nationwide problem since the beginning of the new century. In some places, Heads of the Villagers Committee even organized group appeals or petitions. The Party Branches claim themselves to be the core of village leadership, whereas the Villagers Committees regard themselves as the center of village power, which is generally called the struggle between "the Core and the Center." In the absence of the Villagers Committee, Secretary of the Party Branch has the final say of village affairs. After the Head of the Villagers Committee is elected, things begin to change. With a strong sense of self-governance, competent head of the Villagers Committee will challenge the Party Branch Secretary: "I am elected by hundreds and even thousands of villagers, but you are selected from merely dozens of Party members, then who should have the final say?" Therefore, neither the issuing of "Organizational Law of Villagers Committee" in 1988 nor the promulgation of its newly revised version in 2010 has straightened out such entanglement of power in real life, while the conflicts are becoming more and more intensified.

Challenge No. 2: intensified contradictions and stressed relations between the higher level governments and grassroots self-governance organizations.

According to Organizational Law of Villagers Committee, village affairs shall be subjected to self-governance. However, in terms of present operation of village management, village organizations as another level of governments are rigorously controlled by governments at county and township level. Nowadays, there are very strict assessments of village cadres at the village level, for example, there will be

deductions of points in cases of being late for the meeting, failure of well receiving the superior and poor performance of investment promotion. These points associated with performance will be converted into certain amount of money which will decide village cadres' material benefits. Governments execute rigid assessments of village cadres in the same way with their internal and hierarchical management. In the past, salaries and subsidies of village cadres were basically paid off at village level by "Three Deductions and Five Plans"¹ collected from villagers. After the abolition of agricultural taxes, local expenditures relied on transfer payments by the superior as the new salary payer. As a result, village cadres' salaries, subsidies, and office expenses are directly paid by county and township governments with standards based on the performance assessment of village cadres. In some places, salaries will bypass township governments and be directly remitted to village cadres' bank accounts. The problem is that village cadres, with their chief responsibility to serve villagers, shall be evaluated by villagers who have the final say of village cadres' performance, however, present salaries and subsidies are directly decided by governments, which has little to do with villagers and has led to village cadres' despise of villagers or negligence of villagers' demands and voices in their work.

Nowadays, village cadres feel that there are too many controls and interventions from governments and little running space of village self-governance or even no "self-governance" in the strict sense. Not only salaries and subsidies of village cadres but also the whole township finance are directly controlled by township governments as a common practice. As a result, each expense spent by village organizations must be approved by township governments. Even worse, the official seals of some Villagers Committees are directly controlled by township governments. In case of using their own seals, the former must apply for the latter's approval. Of course, in another view, this governmental control helps to normalize village governance and secure the integrity of village cadres, however, it is not the fundamental solution to village affairs management because village organizations are not departments within governments but community organizations which need their own spaces. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the boundaries between grassroots governments and the Villagers Committees in their power relationship. Current pattern of relationship is still like a tangled warfare in which village cadres get confused about what they should or should not do and governments perplexed about what they should or should not intervene. In the absence of clear norms and boundaries, the relationship between grassroots governments and the Villagers Committees presents the following features: On one hand, governments exercise very rigid control over village affairs; on the other hand, village cadres strongly resist governments. As a result, both sides distrust each other and bring about more conflicts. Several years ago when I was lecturing on the group study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, I put forward a proposal directly to central leaders that in order to establish the basic institutional framework, "Organizational Law of Villagers Committee" was not enough and it was necessary to make Village Self-Governance Law that should

¹Deductions of accumulation fund, public welfare fund and administrative fee; plans of education, birth control, preferential treatment, people's militia training and village road building.

prescribe both the scope of power of self-governance organizations free of government interventions as well as their obligations to cooperate with governments, which should otherwise be treated as against the Law. A clear boundary will help to overcome the disorder, while some local governments are still acting as if they were trying to control all village affairs, which has triggered more contradictions and disputes against their expectations.

Some people may have the question: “Is it a tendency for the central level to integrate village organizations into grassroots governments?” In my opinion, it is not a tendency that can be attributed to individual person or the change of central policy. Instead, there is the logic of transition revealed by a specific survey of how grassroots governments control villages. It has nothing to do with whether government leaders’ personal styles or even the ruling will of the Central Government but are related with the political system. In 1980s, township governments began to control villages with a series of assessments including family planning, township enterprises, tax collection, agricultural restructure, investment promotion and social-stability-related one-vote veto and petition assessment, etc., which is a gradual and logical process instead of individual leader’s idea. However, the question is why is there more and more strict control over village affairs which is opposite to the legal statement that grassroots governments shall be more autonomous and village self-governance shall have more freedom? There is something wrong with both the government management system and political decision-making system, which needs to be re-examined. It is not certain to tell what the solution is but there are severe tensions and unprecedented contradictions between the subordinate and the superior governments. In appearance, the superior’s control over the subordinate is more and more rigorous. Actually, the control is becoming more and more ineffective in terms of whether township control over villages or provincial and municipal control over counties (districts). What then will be the result? The only result will be reform because the fragile stability supported by the internal tension of political system is sure to be broken by the stretching force of system itself. The relations between the society and the government, the village organization and the grassroots government, the local and the central government will be either straightened out in gradual changes or restructured in upheavals.

Challenge No. 3: considerable contradictions and conflicts led by then lagging of laws and regulations.

Many statements of existing laws are pleasant to the eye but equivocal and useless. For instance, as stipulated by the law: Upon detection of bribes and threats in village elections, villagers have the right to report to competent authorities who shall investigate and dispose, but there is neither provision on how to investigate and deal with such cases nor regulation on the delinquency of relevant authorities. As a result of vague and general laws and regulations, peasants cannot find those who are responsible when filing a suit. There is neither specific provision on persons in charge of peasants’ petitions for election problems nor relief measures in case of no treatment. In local practices, governments will resort to delays and shuffles which can relieve and solve some problems while complicate and intensify others. Nowadays, there are lofty tones, resounding ideals and attractive slogans in the leaders’ speeches and

administrative documents on many rural issues, particularly peasant rights and political participation. However, most of them are generalized political commitments without the guarantee of implementation by laws and regulations. Peasants' demands of rights stimulated by those political commitments which cannot be realized in any legal channel, which has led to the following problem: There are real and objective interest demands with increasing complicated interest relationships and disputes particularly in the rapid economic development and marketization. Under such circumstances, peasants expect to resolve their problems by legal means with urgent need and great trust of the law; however, because of the absence or weakness of the law, people have to seek solutions beyond the institution and law which leads to street politics.

There will be serious consequences for the lag of laws and regulations. Generally speaking, laws and regulations always lag behind the real life and there will not be any establishment of rules and standards until contradictions arise, but the problem is that laws and regulation are too much lagging behind. Many problems are ignored by legislation and policy making on purpose, some laws and policies become problems themselves. Some leaders like to say that China has established a complete legal system, which is true in terms of laws securing economic development and government power but is not true for in terms of laws securing political, social development and citizenship rights that are much underdeveloped. The concentrated expression of the lagging behind of laws and regulations is the government's reluctance to decentralize power to the lower level or the superior's unwillingness to transfer power to the subordinate.

In my point of view, the core issue of the challenge confronting present rural democracy is the contradiction between the Party's leadership and democratic development. Theoretically, the leadership of the Party and the people being masters of the country are the two parts of an organic unity. However, it is not as simple as in operation because it is much easier to describe an empty principle than to handle real life which is more complicated. In many cases, some high-level leaders incline to confront specific and intricate issues concerning power and interests with empty slogans and abstract principles. Judged from the status quo of democracy at the village level, not to mention the reform of the whole political system of the country, there will be no real start of democratic politics without the courage to face the reality and straighten out the relationship between the Party and democracy through institutional and systematic innovations.

III. Fundamental Responsibility of Rural Democracy

If the development of democracy can be compared with the growth of human body, what will be the skeleton as its fundamental support? In my view, it is the public who will shoulder China's democracy instead of politicians. In the final analysis, what the democracy will look like depends on what the public will do. Whether democratic theories of thinkers or democratic pursuits of politicians have to be supported, established, and maintained by the power of the public. As proved by the history and being testified by the reality, the fundamental driving force behind political democracy is the public.

Some scholars think it is very difficult to promote rural democracy and even feel distressed and disappointed. But I am optimistic about it. Why? Because I have faith in peasants who are growing in terms of their awareness of rights and capability of interests expression, vigorously pushing forward village democracy, which is the most important driving force behind the improvement of national Rule by Law as well as governments' capacity of governing.

I regard peasants as the fundamental force of rural democracy in the same way that peasants have directly and vitally pushed the reform of economic system. All-round contract in rural areas was carried out by peasants instead of being designed and promoted by governments. It is generally held that China's reform was started from the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, which is not wrong but short of further understanding. The major contribution of this meeting was the shift of the focus of work to economic development. Though documents were issued by this meeting to encourage peasants' initiatives, the basic tone of policy was in favor of the People's Commune system which was still regarded as suitable to the productivity level of our country and the practice of household contract was still prohibited. It is peasants themselves who have pushed forward the reform and broken up the old system not in line of document requirements but out of the harsh reality of life. To improve their living conditions, they had to get rid of the production and distribution system of the People's Commune. Peasants know best about their own demands and what kind of production mode they need. There is no theoretical design in contracting farmland to each household. For my understanding, though the awareness of governments themselves and spirit of the top-level leaders are important, primary driving force lies in the civil society and political democracy is essentially supported by the public.

In my point of view, the major obstacle to the breakthrough in economic reform like household contract over thirty years ago was from the ideological understanding of "socialism," because whether household contract or collective management of farmland would not substantially impact the top high-level politics and power pattern in terms of interest. However, in present government reform, the public ask for restriction of government power and directly supervise officials; the obstacle is no longer about ideology but tangible issues of power and interest. Ideological block from inside the government has changed into the impediment of power and interest. Therefore, political reform is confronted with greater difficulties. If the public's strength has not grown strong enough, there will be neither effective way to move and break up existing structure of power and interest nor brand-new prospect of the political reform.

I don't have too much faith in theorists and scholars because good institutions are not designed by those experts. Recent years saw a lot of changes of governmental behaviors with stronger sense of responsibility and more standardized procedures, which for my understanding is pushed by peasants. Governmental behaviors are gradually improved under the pressure from peasants. For example, villagers will organize petitions or even besieges of government office buildings and various forms of protest in case of officials' abuse of power for personal gain. Under the pressure of such resistance, grassroots officials have to respond and fulfill the demands of

peasants and change governmental decisions and behaviors so as to break away from their petitions. In case of villagers' petitions caused by corrupt village cadres, governments at the county or township level have to carry out investigation and treatment including allowing villagers to check account books and publicizing accounts, which has introduced village affairs publicity and supervision by villagers. In case of long-term unresolved problems such as unfairness in land acquisition, embezzlement of collective properties, peasants will ask for replacing cadres instead of specific economic benefits and ask for replacing cadres at the township and county level instead of the village level. There is political logic for those specific demands based on material interests which will express themselves fundamentally as political demands. Such improvement of peasants' awareness is of great significance and the progress of the government is to some extent not a self-conscious and voluntary process, instead, it is driven by peasants' pressure which is the soil for the growth of true political democracy.

The development of China's democracy will not be solid and reliable until peasants' political capacities keep strengthening. Let us imagine that there is neither reaction nor resistance by peasants to village cadres' corruption, to arbitrary land acquisition and to environment pollution, will governments change their policies and behaviors? Definitely not. Nowadays, peasants' protest-for-rights movements across China's rural areas are playing an important role in political improvement. Therefore, it is revealed by rural grassroots social life that democracy is a tangible demand from peasants to secure their specific and substantial rights, which is not about the empty slogan that "the people shall be the masters of the country." To strive for and safeguard their rights, peasants' behaviors will finally point to the political system. The growth of peasants is irreversible and their striding forward is unstoppable, which is a great test for the law and the government. I think that peasants will be the ultimate driving force behind the development China's rural democracy, which is a logical process beyond the will of man.

Regarding possible directions of political reform, some people usually think that there is no democratic tradition in China's special national situations, which is unfavorable for the development of democracy. However, people need to acknowledge that national situation is just a continuously changing historical concept. Does it mean that we shall maintain imperialism for ever since China has a two-thousand-year tradition of emperor? The way of Mao Zedong's leadership will not be practicable in today's society, not to mention it is impossible to continue imperialism. I believe that the most crucial national situation is the people themselves. In another word, the analysis of national situations shall be based on the people. What is recognized and desired by the people will be what is consistent with national conditions. How to know what the people recognize and demand? The only way is to let the public have freedom to make choices and distinguish by themselves, which shall be secured by a set of institutions including the freedom of contacting, understanding, and choosing from thoughts, ideas and systems, rather than decisions made by a minor part of the people on what the public should or should not accept and even make choice by replacing the public. Democracy and Rule by Law are not inherent for China. Similarly, Marxism as the present directing thought, socialism with

Chinese characteristics and socialistic theories are not from China either. According to the reasoning of those “national situation” theorists,” are not these theories and doctrines originated in the western world unsuitable for China and its national situations? Provided that these western theories were historically reasonable upon their introduction to China in the past, it is equally reasonable to say whether at present or in the future, the introduction of advanced western theories to China will surely be historically justifiable.

Over twenty years ago, the 13th National Party Congress report highly emphasized political reform and put forward major issues including the separation of the Party from the government and accelerating democratic progress, etc. During my rural survey at that time, many grassroots cadres expressed their puzzles and some directly claimed that there was neither serious problem with China’s political system nor strong desire of political reform which was highlighted at the higher level but undervalued at the grassroots level. Now the situation is the opposite. Political reform appears to be not so important for government work but a lot of local cadres are strongly concerned with and intensively discuss political reform whether officially or unofficially. Some grassroots leaders directly complained that they are the victims of the lagging political reform who are disliked by both the superior and the subordinate in an embarrassing situation. Under such circumstances, some local leaders autonomously began to reform, some even insisted on reforming regardless of being criticized and blamed by the superior, which has promoted courageous breakthroughs such as the direct election and the grassroots budget system. In this sense, cadres with lofty ideals and ambitions are also important pushing force of rural democracy. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the general understanding that local government reform is pushed by governance crisis. However, where does the crisis such as group petition and mass disturbance come from? What is pushing it forward? Obviously, the answer lies in peasants and the ultimate driving force of the government reform is the public. In my point of view, it is possible for peasants to play a more significant role in China’s future political reform with more contributions.

As claimed by a friend just now: “It’s impossible for peasants to hold up the giant flag of rural democracy with their weak shoulders.” But I think that the flag of rural democracy will have to and can only be held up by peasants because any kind of democracy is first of all the undertaking of the public without which there will never be presentable democracy developed in any society. For example, Great Charter of Britain and constitution-making following French Revolution were not conjured up by governments but the result of games and contests among various social forces based on the strength and struggle for rights by the public. For the case of China, there had been democracy and parliaments with complete structure as well as hundreds of parties in the Republic of China with an air of importance. However, due to the lack of social support and public foundation, such designing of democratic institution collapsed in a moment like a sand building on the beach. From a global perspective, political development experiences of both South America and the Middle East have demonstrated that democratic institutions will not run effectively in any country without the growth of citizens’ power. Democratic politics is under-

pinned by the public or the level of democratic politics depends on the strength of the public support. The weaker the public is, the more difficult the development of democracy will be. The strong shoulders of the public will provide impetus for the rapid development of democracy and guarantee for the running of democracy. Therefore, citizenship capacity building of the public is the most important infrastructure of China's political development.

This article is the author's speech draft at the "Yanshan Mountain Forum" organized by Tencen.net on December 5th, 2010.

3.2 Guarantee of a Harmonious Society

Telegraph of XINHUA News Agency, December 5th 2006 (journalist: Li Weiwei): On the recent 36th Collective Study of the Central Bureau of Politics, it was highlighted by President Hu Jintao that the level of socialistic grassroots democracy shall be improved to secure the people's direct exercising of democratic rights for the people at the grassroots level. What are the status quo and features of China's grassroots democracy? What are the new situations and problems? How to expand and develop grassroots democracy? With the above questions, the journalist of XINHUA News Agency exclusively interviewed Mr. Zhao Shukai, researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council, one of the experts who lectured the above-mentioned Collective Study.

Grassroots Democracy: the most extensive practice of socialistic democracy

"Grassroots democracy is the major platform for the people to directly exercise their democratic rights, legally conduct self-governance, self-service and self-development as well as the most extensive practice of socialistic democracy." As pointed out by Zhao Shukai, China has established grassroots democratic self-governance system consists of rural Villagers Committee, urban Residents Committee, and Workers General Assembly. The People directly exercise their rights of election, decision-making, management, and supervision by legal democratic means, carrying out democratic self-governance of public affairs and public welfare, which has become the most immediate and extensive democratic practice of modern China.

Zhao Shukai's statements are strongly supported by data: there have been 640,000 Villagers Committees in China's rural areas and 70,000 Residents' Committees in China's urban areas. The national average voting participation rate of peasants is above 80%. More than 80% of villages have made statutes, rules, and agreements of villagers' self-governance. Over 50% of publicly owned enterprises with labor unions have established Workers' Congresses. "The focus of building socialistic harmonious society lies in the basic level. Strengthening grassroots democracy is an important guarantee of the construction of a harmonious society." Zhao Shukai pointed out that the People's Congress system shall be developed and grassroots

democracy shall be strengthened, which is decided by our national conditions. “Only when there is assurance for the people to directly exercise democratic rights and only when the people are enthusiastic in political participation, can we better mobilize every positive factor to facilitate the building of a harmonious society.”

Grassroots Democracy Construction: five major problems to be solved

“Judging from the present situation, there have been great achievements in China’s grassroots democracy construction. On one hand, the practices of democratic election and management by self-governance organizations at the grassroots level are increasingly mature. Democratic procedures and institutions are gradually normalized. On the other hand, grassroots governments have made considerable explorations and innovations in governmental affairs publicity and democratic election, etc. However, in terms of the requirements of socialistic democracy development and specific basic-level practices, there are still many problems which need to be studied and solved as quickly as possible.” These problems are summed up by Zhao Shukai into the following five aspects:

No. 1: There is a new pattern of grassroots organization system. “In rural areas, the relationship between the Party Branch and the Villagers Committee is confronted with new problems; in urban areas, the relationship between the Resident’ Committee and the Property Owners’ Committee is also faced with new challenges.” Zhao Shukai claimed that with the gradual disintegration of former centralized power structure, the interactions among different grassroots organizations are changing, discords of inter-organizational relations are increasing and a new pattern of power relation is emerging.

No. 2: Grassroots government reform is confronted with new tasks. The development of grassroots democracy requires accelerated transformation of government work mechanism. As Zhao Shukai points out, present mechanism of grassroots government is incompatible with democracy development as a result of the administration of self-governance organizations. Governments still follow the routine of managing self-government organizations as their internal agencies with various tasks and indicators, which has seriously hindered the development of the service function of self-governance organizations themselves.

No. 3: There are new problems confronting institutionalized participation. “There is no smooth channel for institutional participation and the people can hardly be integrated into the participation.” Zhao Shukai illustrates this problem with the example of floating population’s difficulty in exercising democratic rights. “China has a floating population of 150 million which will increase by 5 million each year. On one hand, with considerable amount of adult labor force transferred to cities, some villages can hardly held any villagers’ meeting or villagers’ assembly. On the other hand, existing regulations on the election qualification for temporary residents are over-rigid and complicated, which deprives most of the floating population of their opportunities of democratic participation. Though some of them take part in elections, there is neither smooth channel for their interest demands nor institutional means to solve their problems.”

No. 4: There are arbitrary democratic decision-making procedures and participation without any hard institutional regulation which have greatly weakened the public's impact on decision-making of public affairs.

No. 5: There is Lack of hard indicators on government affairs publicity of grassroots authorities. There is disclosure of trifles instead of major issues; of projects instead of details. As a result, supervision can hardly be exercised in practice.

Development of Grassroots Democracy: focus on the people's most concerned issues

How to push forward democratic progress by solving those problems in the development of China's grassroots democracy?

In Zhao Shukai's point of view, as the subject of socialistic grassroots democratic practice, the people's interest, support, and participation will decide the result of grassroots democracy construction. Therefore, the development of grassroots democracy shall be focused on the people's most vital concerns. Both rural and urban grassroots power authorities and self-governance organizations shall improve democratic institutions and promote the openness of administrative and financial affairs. Common people shall be allowed to take part in discussing and making decisions of grassroots public affairs and public welfare and exercise democratic supervision of cadres. Zhao Shukai says that at the first place, it is necessary to consolidate existing achievements of grassroots democracy while resolving problems with existing system. Institutional compatibility shall be strengthened to make democratic institution more open, equal, and efficient. "To promote grassroots democracy, the improvement of quality shall be highlighted and existing forms of democracy shall be well-organized to provide smooth and efficient participation channels." Secondly, grassroots democracy shall be steadily expanded. "It is the demands of social development as well as our Party's consistent guideline of democratic development."

Zhao Shukai also claims that while consolidating and improving existing democratic institutions, democratic practices shall be introduced to more dimensions of social life, particularly to the issues highly concerned by the public and much involved with interest conflicts and "issues such as land contract, land acquisition and house removal shall be the content of grassroots democracy and be discussed by villagers meeting, villagers assembly and residents' assembly. The subjects, channels and realms of participation shall be expanded to meet the increasing participation demands of the people. Democratic participations shall be held in various forms focusing on major issues highly concerned with the people's vital interests so as to reduce the discord as much as possible and promote social harmony." Zhao Shukai says.

This is a Xin Hua News Bulletin based on the journalist's exclusive interview of the author on December 5, 2006 with the original title "Grassroots Democracy: Important Security of building Harmonious Society—An exclusive interview of Zhao Shukai, a researcher of Development Research Center of the State Council."

3.3 Social Foundation of Village Self-governance

Editor's Note of Chinese Cadres Tribune: On June 6, 2010, the journalist interviewed Zhao Shukai, a researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council on hot topics of present village self-governance.

The problem of village self-governance lies in governments' excessive intervention of self-governance affairs.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: China's village self-governance is strongly characterized by state-led effort. In terms of internal motivation, is there any strong aspiration for peasants to practice self-governance? And where is it from?

Zhao Shukai: The motivation of self-governance is from the demands of rural grassroots communities. Peasants expect to participate in public decision-making with their demands to express and safeguard their interests as well as improve their living conditions. For example, it is necessary for peasants to participate in land contract which cannot be decided solely by cadres or the country. Peasants need to express their demands of interests in grassroots public services such as water conservancy construction, circuit renovation, and land for housing distribution, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to set up a mechanism to coordinate and integrate various interest demands to maintain grassroots social order. This is one aspect.

In the other respect, China's grassroots democracy is called state-led democracy, to be exact, it is the country's response to peasants' demands and the external provision of institutional arrangements and designing of rules. These two aspects match each other and village self-governance is not imposed on peasants by the state regardless of their demands. In view of the occurrence and development of village self-governance, it is an institution created by peasants out of their own requirements which is recognized and promoted by the state power.

Of course, in the state's provision of rules, there are some problems the major one of which is that a number of issues within the scope of self-governance are treated as administrative affairs with excessive interference. For example, the management of village cadres including their salary standard, review, and assessment which should be up to peasants is at the hand of governments and villagers don't have much of a voice. Furthermore, county and township governments assign many tasks to villages with compulsory indicators and assessments which have nothing to do with peasants. Antagonized by obsessive state intervention of self-governance, peasants will refuse not only those tasks but also tasks to implement some policies and regulations that should not be resisted. For instance, there are some candidates who promised to stop family planning after being elected and many other similar cases.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Since a lot of people lack the confidence in peasants' capability of self-governance, is there anything reasonable in governments' intervention? And how do you evaluate Chinese peasants' self-governance capability?

Zhao Shukai: Self-governance is stratified into the community level, village level, township level, and local level. American democracy was developed from villager self-governance. Japan exercise local self-governance with three levels of

self-governance: city, town, and village which are independent to each other and responsible for their own subordinate. Such institution of self-governance was developed soon after the Meiji Restoration and earlier in America. Can't we even exercise self-governance at village level? Chinese people will not be that foolish. This is from the view of international experiences.

In view of the reality, peasants are totally competent because self-governance doesn't have much to do with education level. There is no need of much education to tell who will be fairer as a village cadre. Peasants are totally capable of making correct judgments on village affairs like repairing a road, fixing a water channel, distribution of land for housing. Historically, early in the era of China's Agrarian Revolution and Land Reform, peasants had strong awareness which should be stronger today. Village self-governance is first of all an issue of whether peasants can be trusted or not. There shall be no excuse for denying democracy or lowering the level of democracy.

As has echoed Max Weber's statement, the backwardness of a country lies in the backwardness of its elites instead of its people. The backwardness of elites expresses itself in their blame on "the backwardness of the people." The micro intervention from the government shall not be justified by the deficiency of peasants' self-governing capability and it is the government's responsibility to secure villagers self-governance running on a legal track by providing laws, norms and institutions.

A good institutional framework will make things easier.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: What is the performance of village management after over 20 years of villager self-governance?

Zhao Shukai: The performance of village self-governance should not be over-estimated though there is direct effect. Village self-governance is consistent with peasants' demands of power and participation and has resolved considerable problems in terms of their interest expression. Meanwhile, there is a very paradoxical situation: Democratic self-governance can resolve contradictions and express interests on one hand but there are increasing factors of instability and conflicts instead of declining contradictions in rural areas which are not incurred by village self-governance. It is true that there will be more conflicts without village self-governance. It is necessary to establish a system at state level to secure the improvement of village governance since village self-governance can only solve problems within its own scope, not to mention the effect and it is unable to solve issues such as cadres' corruption and land acquisition which will directly impact rural stability. It is not a problem of too early and too much self-governance but too insufficient self-governance at a very low level.

Villager self-governance needs to be matched with institutional framework and background without which it is impossible to solve all problems by self-governance and there will be no real self-governance. The lack of effective institutional framework has constrained the development of self-governance and made a lot of people pessimistic and disappointed. However, we shall not be pessimistic about peasants. Compared with 20 years ago, Chinese peasants' will and capability of self-

governance have improved a lot with broader horizon and the problem is rooted in the institutional designing in lack of the trust of peasants.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: In the election of Villagers Committee, there is excessive intervention from the higher level government on one hand and bribery and manipulation from the clan and vicious power on the other hand. How to evaluate the impartiality of the election?

Zhao Shukai: The past over 20 years saw the growing fairness and improving institution of election as a general trend. Competition, bribery and intervention from vicious power arise just because there is true election through which real power can be obtained. There is a great percentage of bribery in Villagers Committee elections, though not common. How to look at bribery then? Bribery is the right proof of a true election. Generally speaking, there will be high rate of bribery in case of genuine and competitive election. It is necessary for the government to well perform its own responsibility of fair elections free of manipulation. Just like market economy, democratic election in itself is a political market. The election process is a transaction about who is to be elected and who is not in the political market. Where there is a market, there must be regulations and rules. The will of the people shall not be interfered, while it is the government's responsibility to make rules, exercise control, and secure the people's will expression by legal means free of the intervention from external force or other factors. In this sense, the government is necessary for the election. Nowadays, local governments regard Villagers Committee elections as peasants' own business that should be handled by peasants themselves, which leads to many problems in the elections. Moreover, some local governments keep on interfering elections of Villagers Committees illegally for the purpose of land acquisition in collaboration with vicious forces. Such case, though not common, is nothing new. It has been fully proved by the cases of developed countries that with openness and transparency of elections, what the government needs to do is to fulfill its responsibility instead of worrying too much about bribery at election. The electoral system should be improved and well guided by the government and its process should be normalized by a whole set of laws and institutions, otherwise things will be muddled off.

Regarding clan power, it is hard to describe what it is in the first place or the word "clan" itself in rural areas of China today. In my point of view, it is not easy to define the influence of clan on the election because clan itself is not beyond any interest. Generally speaking, brothers and sisters of the same family will help each other, whereas people of remote relations will not support each other regardless of their own interests. Even brothers of the same family may support different family members. In view of the status quo of China's rural areas, I don't think clan relations have risen above individual and family economic interests. It is exaggerated to say that elections are interfered and distorted by clan power, particularly in modern society where social relations are much more complicated than traditional ones, people have multiple identities: One may be both the member of a family and a clan, meanwhile the member of an economic organization, a religious group, and a certain social class or group. It is hard to tell among multiple identities whether those of the family and clan will prevail over others.

Of course, the organizational network of families and clans will be developed and utilized because democratic elections are involved with mobilizations in which candidates will make use of various social networks. However, what really matters is not the utilization of social networks but whether the government can create an institutional environment for fair, open, and competitive elections. Otherwise, problems will arise one after another.

The right of election is peasants' most essential right

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Generally, people will associate village' self-governance with the democratic election of Villagers Committee. In fact, village self-governance consists of four aspects: democratic decision-making, election, management, and supervision. Is there more emphasis on election than on other aspects?

Zhao Shukai: In general terms, the four aspects are as one. In my view, however, they are not equivalent but of different weights. Basically, there is only one form of democracy called election which is the core of the democratic system. The best illustration of the level of democracy is the level of election which depends on whether the election institution is reasonable and going well. To some extent, the rights of decision-making, supervision and management are derived from the right of election. The former three rights will not be effective until the latter is secured. A false election right will compromise the rights of decision-making, management, and supervision, which is involved with a great divergence in the democratic research with two schools of opinions: One regards election as not so important only if there are plenty of participation and expression of various ideas; the other regards election as the core which I agree. If democracy means allowing people to freely express their opinions, there should have been great democracy during the reign of Emperor Taizong of Tang Dynasty. Provided there is no right to vote, there will be no right to manage unless the right is granted by the leader's personal will. Where there is the right to vote, the leader will be recalled by voting in case of his abuse of power. As a result of regularly held democratic elections, the term of office and expectation of next election will restrict the elected candidates. Hence, there is no equivalence among the four aspects of democracy and the right of election is surely at the core. No election, no democracy. Where there is democratic election, democratic decision-making, management, and supervision will catch up very easily though not spontaneously. Some people neglect democratic election while emphasizing the other three aspects because they are afraid of election and seeking excuse against election.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Does that mean current problems with democratic management and supervision are directly related with the poor-performance of election?

Zhao Shukai: Supervision and management will surely be affected by election which is not well guaranteed. Furthermore, villagers' supervision and management are also implicated by grassroots "party-government" relation. For example, the Secretary of the Party Branch still has the final say of village finance and land for housing affairs etc. The relation between self-governance organizations and governments is also a major influencing factor. What can villagers do when everything is controlled by governments? How can villagers exercise supervision and

makesupervision and make decisions when village cadres are only supervised by the government and public affairs are decide only by the Party or the higher authority?

Chinese Cadres Tribune: That is the reason for peasants' indifference to elections nowadays.

Zhao Shukai: Yes. It is also related to the election bribery. Knowing that any candidate elected will only be the second in command, peasants do not care about who will be elected but who will pay them money. Of course, this is in the negative sense. In the positive sense, if the person elected is incompetent, peasants will draw the lesson and change their future voting behaviors. For instance, if somebody elected is found unable to do good but bad things in his 3-year term, he will never be elected again. There are many similar cases in reality for peasants who used to be paid to vote but refuse to vote even with payment now. Why is this not a hard problem to solve? Because under the righteous procedure and complete institution of election, every vote is conducted in the secret chamber and there will be no intervention, even bribery will become useless. What is really bad is not election bribery but the government's delinquency.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Even if the election itself is righteous, is it possible that the elected candidate will rake in profits and leave like a once-for-all deal?

Zhao Shukai: Actually there is such a situation which makes democratic management important after the election. Presently, it is necessary to improve the whole set of institutions of Villagers Committee such as decision-making and financial institutions. There should be not only election but also follow-up management system. However, election shall be highlighted as the cornerstone.

Basically, voting in the election of Villagers Committee is often organized by the candidate himself, which will lead to individual speculative behavior. Western party system was developed against such backdrop. Provided that the candidate is recommended and voting organized by the Party which is relatively fixed, the latter has to restrict the former for the sake of the Party's participation in the next election campaign. However, China's grassroots election is different from that of the western, which needs to be guaranteed by other matching institutions.

There is no turning back for the development of grassroots democracy.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Villagers' self-governance is confronted with a dilemma in terms of institutional environment. On one hand, village self-governance is an election from bottom to top which requires the elected candidates to be responsible for voters, whereas the administrative system requires implementation of government decrees from top to bottom. What can we do to resolve such contradiction?

Zhao Shukai: This is a complicated issue. Grassroots self-governance is different from the building of state power and democracy at the national level is different from that at the community level. Though the problem of state power construction cannot be solved by grassroots self-governance, the solutions of these issues are interlinked. For example, self-governance will be even more difficult without the change of inter-governmental relationship and "central-local" relationship at the local level. However, there is a positive point that the public's democratic quality and demands are improving with their increasing democratic capacities, which will surely push democracy

forward. Without institutional guarantee, there must be problems and conflicts. Even if we can say the system is complete and the scope of democracy has been expanded, there is an issue of balance. If the institutional progress lags far behind the people's growing democratic desire, demand, and capacity, something will surely go wrong. Nowadays, governments are slow at conscious institutional improvement while democratic power and demand are growing. As a result, there will be no institutional improvement until something is wrong, which is a great challenge confronting current institutional building whether in rural or in urban areas. For example, when peasants were over burdened by agricultural taxes several years ago, it was supposed that the abolition of those taxes would relieve peasants' burden and reduce a lot of contradictions which would help maintain stability. However, since the abolition of agricultural tax, who dares to say rural contradictions have been reduced and replaced with greater stability? And who dares to say the number of petitions and mass disturbances has declined? Actually there have been increasing group incidents and pressure of maintaining stability. Something is wrong with the governance structure and institutional framework. Because of its well-established institutional framework, there has been no social turmoil in Japan which has been undergoing serious depression. A good institutional framework will contain economic and social issues at economic and social level from escalating into political issues.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: What is the specific expression of institutional framework problem confronting village self-governance?

Zhao Shukai: First of all, it is the relationship between the Party Branch and the Villagers Committee which remains unresolved. There is an opinion that Villagers Committee shall be led by the Party Branch. However, it is contradictory in logic for the Party Branch to lead Villagers Committee which is elected by and shall be responsible for villagers. To solve this problem, it is necessary to clarify the functions and power limits of the Party Branch and Villagers Committee. For example, Qing County of Hebei Province advocates the resign of the Party Branch from the leading post to the supervision of whether Villagers Committee has implemented policies and laws and rectifying infringements committed by Villagers Committee, which is a valuable exploration. Innovative efforts at the grassroots level shall be encouraged and experiences shall be refined without rushing into conclusions or carried out as nation-wide practices. Secondly, there needs to be clear rules on the functions of self-governance and the intervention of which is against the law and the legal requirements of the government which should be followed by self-governance organizations. The government shall manage self-governance organizations by law and self-governance organizations shall also work by law with clarified limits of power. In many cases, due to the government's meddling in what is not its business, self-governance organizations will resist the governments' administration against what is the government's business.

Villagers' self-governance will not be optimistic until these two problems are resolved. Nowadays in rural areas, there are contradictions in land acquisition and environmental protection. Moreover, democracy which is supposed to resolve contradictions has also become the growing point of contradiction when it is poorly carried out.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Self-governance shoulders the responsibility of path finding for China's democratic politics. What experiences and understandings can be generalized from over 20 years of self-governance?

Zhao Shukai: The first as well as the most essential point is that governments shall fully respect peasants in the development of market economy and provide them with a good institutional platform for their growing demands and capacity of democracy. Governments shall not replace peasants as decision-makers. There is a one-sided conclusion of experiences that peasants shall be controlled instead of being empowered. The fact is that they may be controlled this year but not next year, by one Party Secretary but not another. Therefore, such experience will not stand the final test.

Secondly, grassroots democracy plays a path finding and orienting role in China's overall democratization, however, it can never succeed alone. In the absence of a general institutional framework, it is groundless to talk about the success of grassroots democracy which is surely associated with the overall success of democracy.

Thirdly, grassroots democracy, though a small facet, involves multi-dimensions of China's political modernization with a series of issues such as the "Party-Government" and "government-society" relationship orienting the value of grassroots democracy, though it cannot succeed only by itself.

No. 4, the improvement of peasants' democratic awareness and self-governance ability and capacity is an irreversible process, which may not be mature but there is no turning back. Some people say that peasants are not capable enough to exercise democratic self-governance, but it will be even worse to stick to old way of management of 20 years ago. We should be keenly aware that the sprout of democratic demands closely related with interests will never be suppressed so long as there are unquenchable demands of interests.

I myself am quite optimistic in villager self-governance because I am optimistic in China's peasants who are endowed with infinitive creativity. There is no retreat and no way back in resolving the problems of grassroots management through the development of democracy.

Chinese Cadres Tribune: Thank you for the interview.

This is an article published in "Chinese Cadres Tribune" in July 2010, as an exclusive interview of the author with the original title "Full Confidence in Peasants: the Foundation of Villagers' Self-governance."

3.4 Innovation of Village Governance System

Recently, I was greatly enlightened by the research on village governance in Qing County of Hebei Province. Due to the short period of study, there have not been so many real experiences. Upon hearing all your speeches, I have gained a lot and I would like to share some of my opinions that are not so well developed.

I. The Occurrence Logic of Qing County Model

I think there is internal and objective inevitability for the concurrence of the village model of Qingxian against the background of rural development.

What is the motivation of the occurrence of Qingxian village governance model? Intuitively speaking, it is crisis. What kind of crisis? The power struggle between the village Party Branch and the Villagers Committee which has been going on since the issuing of “Organizational Law of Villagers Committee” and has almost become a nationwide problem. To solve this crisis, Qingxian created a new pattern of political power relation at the village level, i.e., to withdraw the Party Branch from the leading post of village affairs management to organize Villagers General Assembly to discuss important issues and Villagers Committee works at the frontline, which is an inspiring institutional innovation. As is shown by many village governance experiences such as the “Eight-Step Working Method” in Kaixian, Chongqing, it is crisis that leads to reform. What then leads to crisis? It is the unsustainability of the old style of leadership and management against the new demands of social economic development, changing social economic structure and adjustment of interest relation, which has led to conflicts inside village cadres and between peasants and cadres. To resolve these contradictions and conflicts so as to adapt to the changing village power and interest structure, the new Qingxian governance model emerges at the right moment.

From this perspective, Qingxian experience is actually an objective reflection of rural social economic development in grassroots political system.

Similar with household contract in economic sense, Qingxian village governance model was essentially created by peasants because peasants’ expression of rights broke former village power pattern and created new space of power structure. There may be no legal base for this creation judged from existing policy provisions, but its internal logic and objective basis is fundamental and unshakable. In this sense, such an experience shall not be easily denied no matter how people evaluate it. The key lies in its internal logic of occurrence, implicit in which are the rules of rural social economic development and organizational power structure evolution.

From the government’s view, the emergence of a new organizational mechanism or a new pattern is a test for the leader on whether he can make timely judgment and summary of the logic behind such experience with political foresight. In this sense, leaders like Zhao Chaoying, the Party Secretary of Qingxian County, with political knowledge, experience, and courage, perceived the early signs of grassroots political innovation and continuously refined and summarized and further normalized in practical work, which has formalized the new pattern of organizational institution. In this process, the real creators of experience are from the front line of rural work, while leader of the county Party Committee played the role of normalization and summarization.

II. The Reform Value of Qingxian Model

Qingxian Model is an important innovation of village organizational institutional arrangement. It is innovative because it has preliminarily solved a severe actual

problem in rural work concerning the role of the Party organization or how to deal with the relationship between the village Party Branch and self-governance organization. This innovation is significant in changing the style of the Party's leadership, which helps the Party organization to find its new position in rural governance.

Before and after the reform, the village Party Branch exercised direct control of village affairs on the frontline of village governance, which is far from the so-called political leadership. The problem lies in the village Party Branches' meticulous and straightforward control of village affairs which is negative for the Party's leadership. For a long period in most villages, the Party Branches have been controlling the business that should have been coped with by self-governance organizations, which has weakened the Party's role of political guarantee and neglected the Party's self-construction, which is not good for the improvement of the Party's leadership. From the perspective of cadres themselves, some of them wished to gain more benefits by taking control of more affairs. However, the Party's authority would be hard to maintain if this situation remained. How to transform the village Party Branch's style of leadership? Against such social background, Qingxian carried out the exploration and reform with great courage. What they mainly did is to withdraw from the frontline to the second line and transform the functions of Villagers Committee from virtual to substantial. As a result, Villagers Committee became the real governing organization of village affairs. In such a new system, the Party Branch Secretary holds a concurrent post of Chairman of the Villagers General Assembly and actualized the democratic decision-making of major village issues by organizing Villagers' Congress and Assembly as well as supervising the operation of Villagers Committee, which is not only an innovation of basic mechanism of grassroots Party organizations but also an all-round innovation of rural organizational institution, I think this is the value of Qingxian experience.

The withdrawal from the leading post has liberated the Party Branch from contradictions and conflicts while strengthening its role of leadership in the new direction, which is similar with certain case in the organization of grassroots election. In order to secure the victory of the selected candidate in the election, the organizer has to manipulate the election process, which will finally be the opposite against voters. Our Party and government leaders have committed such a mistake for many times in rural elections these years. On the contrary, when the Party Organization stick to its position of rule makers mainly responsible for the procedure and operation of fair and righteous elections which appears that the direct control of candidates has been given up and the role of the Party weakened. However, problems raised by various partakers of the game will be arbitrated and coordinated by rules as long as the Party organization is in command of rule-making and execution, which will in turn strengthen the role of the Party's leadership. Because of the change of leadership style, the village Party organization in Qingxian has found the correct position, improved its capability of village affairs management and increased its credibility. From this perspective, the Party Branch takes charge of major issues while reducing control over small things, in another word, withdraw in order to march forward, which has transformed the rural grassroots Party organization's governing style and enhanced the Party's authority.

When I was in one of the villages in Qingxian, I asked the village Party Branch Secretary: “What are you focusing on?” He answered: “I am focusing on the public’s mind.” By sending questionnaires to each villager, the Party Branch collected and integrated all villagers’ opinions including road repairing and public security, etc. to be discussed by Villagers General Assembly. He said: “To focus on the public’s mind means collecting the public’s demands, organizing Villagers General Assembly to express these demands and supervising the implementation through Villagers Committee, which is an issue of great importance in my point of view.” Based on the understanding of the public’s demands, the Party Branch shall integrate these interest demands through specific way of organization—Villagers Committee or General Assembly and translate these demands into the village’s important decisions which should be implemented by the Villagers Committee and supervised as well as secured by the Party Branch, thus the Party’s leadership will be strengthened and I think this is the proper meaning of what the Party should do job. It is the Party’s job to attract the public’s mind and gain the public’s support through political mobilization, which is the real exertion of the Party’s leadership in rural work. The innovation of Qingxian Model is essentially the transformation of the Party Branch’s style of governance, which has paved the way for the development of grassroots democracy.

III. The Improvement of Qingxian Model

Qingxian village governance model came into being early in 2003, which has attracted the attention of researchers. What is praiseworthy is that Qingxian county Party Committee has never been shaken for these 5 years, although there have been some arguments and even criticism from the higher level, especially Secretary Zhao Chaoying who has all along been persistent, which embodies a very rare spirit and the attitude of upholding reform and innovation. As is known, sometimes it is not difficult to start up a reform but very hard to keep on reforming. Hopefully, they will do better in their persistence. In my view, Qingxian model may represent the major direction of grassroots political reform because the Party’s working style and method in rural areas have to change as demonstrated by the changing social and economic reality, in another word, by the objective requirements of social and economic development.

Regarding personal ideas and suggestions, I think there should be continuous and systematic follow-up study and more specific generalization of Qingxian experiences. For my own observation, the summary of vivid experiences on how such model is working is till insufficient. There are more than 300 villages in Qingxian and this model must have met different problems in different cases of different villages, or it has encountered new problems following the settlement of old ones. There is still lack of understanding of the specific situation in the working of such model and what has been improved these 5 years? Therefore, I would like to suggest that country leaders should conduct more studies and in particular, village cadres should further observe and summarize the experience and understanding of the working of this institution, so as to improve this model and make better theoretic generalization.

Recently, there is a very popular book named “Making Democracy Work” which is mainly about the case of some place in Italy. Generally speaking, the principles of democratic institutions are similar with each other. However, democratic mechanism works in some places but not in other places; it works well in some places but poorly in other places, which is an important issue. I think it is not only about solving problems of Qingxian model but also about helping solve problems confronting different types of villages across the country to study problems in the specific operation of Qingxian model on the problem solving process as well as what has been enriched and developed in the village governance pattern. How will China’s grassroots democracy work? How to integrate grassroots democracy with the high-level democracy? The solutions to these questions are not imagined and designed by scholars but developed in the evolution of the social structure and the interactive game among multiple political forces.

For we scholars, existing studies are still insufficient, which requires more efforts in the observation of the real life and more practices of empirical analysis.

This article is the author’s speech at the Seminar on “Qingxian Village Governance Model” organized by the Rural Development Research Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Science on April 14, 2007.

3.5 Growth Requirements from Peasant Groups

Editor’s Note of Science Times: Affected by international financial crisis, some peasant-workers returned to their home villages and spontaneously set up organizations like green house watermelon planting associations and alike to reduce risks, save costs and enhance competitiveness so as to start new business in collaboration. So under the new circumstances, what is the status quo of peasant self-organizations? What is the role of these organizations in the development of Three Rural Issues? A few days ago, the journalist of Science Times exclusively interviewed Mr. Zhao Shukai, researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council.

Sciences Times: There was an article in recent edition of South Reviews which highlighted the powerful peasant associations in Taiwan embracing 99% of all peasants. These associations mainly consist of peasants with emphasis on the improvement of peasants’ quality and skills, including the protection of peasants’ political position and interests. The article attributed the important role of peasants today to peasant associations.

To promote the “Three Rural” development is a pressing issue for China. The ongoing severe drought on a large scale shows the desolation of water conservancy infrastructure and irrigation system following the implementation of the household contract system. Whether it is possible to recover and rebuild part of the infrastructure by the organizing effort through peasant associations? And even enhance peasants’ capabilities through such organizations?

Zhao Shukai: Basically speaking, it is the fundamental role of the government to provide rural infrastructure and public facilities such as school building, road repairing and water conservancy project construction, etc. Some small public facilities within the community can be solved by peasants themselves or provided by peasant associations. Against the backdrop of international financial crisis which has led to the returning of lots of peasant workers to villages, some water conservancy projects can certainly be done by peasants organized with certain amount of payment. However, I don't think it is the basic function of peasant organizations to provide public goods.

In my point of view, peasant organizations can be divided into two groups: One is economic organization; the other is non-economic. The economic organization can play an important role in production and sales such as necessary production cooperation, technical service, information exchange like group purchase of fertilizer and pesticide and seeking market, etc. Non-economic organizations usually negotiate some issues with the government or enterprises and other interest groups in case of disputes on behalf of peasants within certain scope.

Science Times: So far as I know, in the recent over 10 years, many rural land consolidation projects were basically trial projects or project-driven ones, the effect of which was hardly as good as water conservancy infrastructure such as dams and terrace built by peasants themselves in the past.

Zhao Shukai: This is about how peasants supervise the implementation of government policies. Requisition-compensation balance is the policy target for the government regarding land consolidation which is the important content of the basic state policy. Because the amount of arable land will be reduced by land acquisition for industrial purpose, it is primarily the responsibility of governments to reclaim desolated land into farmland.

The quality of governmental projects shall be supervised, examined, or inspected by peasants who can negotiate with the government on issues such as whether the price of land is proper and whether land consolidation is well done. These are the business of peasant organizations.

Science Times: In recent years, the country introduced many measures to secure peasants' interests. However, the result was not satisfying in some cases. Can peasant associations or cooperatives play their roles in this respect? And what is the general situation of peasant organization development?

Zhao Shukai: In general, the development of China's peasant organizations is still at a preliminary stage. Since the issuing of "The Law of Peasant Specialized Cooperative" on July 1st, 2007, peasant cooperatives have developed rapidly in some places including planting, breeding, and processing, etc., as well as organizing cultural life. Peasant cooperatives and peasant organizations have to some extent promoted the increase of wealth and production and enriched cultural life in rural areas.

The issuing of "The Law of Peasant Specialized Cooperative" aimed at economic organizations was confronted with an embarrassing situation because cooperatives registered with industrial and commercial department had to pay taxes. At the drafting stage of the Law, there was no coordination among relevant authorities on what kind of preference should be granted to such tax payment.

A problem confronting peasant economic cooperatives is their obvious difference from purely-commercial enterprises. Non-economic organizations such as those safeguarding rights, interests or undertaking cultural activities have no legal positions and there is no relaxed macro-environment for the development and growing stronger of peasant self-organizations. Nowadays, many people are appealing for the establishment of peasant associations including production cooperatives and rights protection groups. Some even advocate the peasant association organized in the similar style with the labor union. However, there has been no major institutional breakthrough.

It is a practical issue for peasants' rights and interests including environmental protection, land acquisition, all kinds of charges and grassroots election, etc. Peasants will organize in various forms when their rights and interests are violated. In fact, those organizations are increasingly driven by substantial demands.

Diversified forms of organization will emerge when peasants find their failures to safeguard their rights and interests single handed, which is worthy of attention. For example, group incidents are not all without organization because some incidents are organized at the early stage and others may "disorganized collective actions," these situations shall be highlighted in the study of stability maintenance.

Science Times: What do you think of the positive and negative effects of peasant self-organizations?

Zhao Shukai: There were considerable group incidents last year which will surely happen in the future. Generally speaking, non-governmental organization such as peasant self non-economic organization is a double edged sword for social governance. On one hand, organized peasants may lead to collective resistance which is more destructive; on the other hand, it is easy for the government to set up interest coordination and dispute settlement mechanism which will facilitate the negotiation and communication with peasants in case of problems.

What shall government do in dealing with the organized non-governmental interests? I think the answer lies in a controllable and constructive channel.

Moreover, something is wrong with the leadership system because power is hierarchical over-centralized at the higher level and internally over-concentrated at the Party Secretary's hands of the. In such a system, peasants will go directly to the Party Secretary who has become the focus of all kinds of contradictions. Otherwise they will appeal to the higher level from the village to the county, from the county to the province till the central government. To solve these problems, there should be proper decentralization of power, i.e., implementation of real institutional separation of power to clarify the limits of authority and obligations of different level of government with well-matched power and responsibilities, which will resolve problems and contradictions at the local and grassroots level.

Self-organization issue is also an issue of democracy which cannot solve all problems and may give rise to "Tyranny of the Majority." For example, when a rural woman gets married without transfer of her registered household, she will fall short of dividend and subsidies at both ends, which demonstrates that there must be a legal system above democracy.

Generally speaking, the quality of Chinese peasants is improving. Their awareness of their own rights is being strengthened through media like TV, radio, internet, newspapers, etc., after they enter the city. So to speak, democracy has been an irresistible trend of social development. Therefore, peasants' demands of democracy and self-organization shall be faced up to, which is one of the basic approaches to solve present rural problems. Otherwise, there will be more difficulties for China's rural development and governance.

This article is published in "Science Times" on March 9th, 2009 with the original title "Peasant Self-Organization: A Growing Demand" as an exclusive interview of the author by the journalist of Science Times.

3.6 Difficult Growth of Village Democracy

Editor's Note of CBN: With China's social and economic development, grassroots democracy has become an important issue which must be faced up to. What are the problems and challenges and which is the suitable path for China's grassroots democracy? To answer these questions, Mr. Zhao Shukai, researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council, who was the lecturer to the 36th Collective Study of the 16th Central Bureau of Politics, illustrated his opinions in the exclusive interview by CBN journalist recently.

Government reform should be pushed by democratic power.

CBN: Upon the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, is it possible to review the process of China's grassroots democratic development in a phased manner?

Zhao Shukai: From the rural perspective, the development of China's grassroots democracy mainly consists of 3 stages: The first stage is before 1988; the second is from 1988 to 1998; the third is post 1998.

The first stage is the early period of rural reform. There was no law on village elections. Since the Organizational Law of Villagers Committee was legislated and put into trial nationwide in 1988, there had been divergences for ten years until the official issuing and nationwide enforcement of the Law in 1998.

After 1998, petitions related with village self-governance increased, contradictions were intensified in many villages, and a number of problems began to arise. The Organizational Law of Villagers Committee is not complete and rigorous in some aspects which cannot reconcile contradictions in many situations. How to improve the law to meet the demands of grassroots management is a prominent problem.

CBN: What do you think of China's grassroots democracy since the beginning of reform and opening up?

Zhao Shukai: China's grassroots democracy has made great achievements since the beginning of reform and opening up. Nowadays, the major problem to be solved

in village self-governance is the clarification of legal boundary between the government and the self-governance organization. There shall be clear limit of power of the government to prevent it from arbitrarily interfering self-governance business. Reciprocally, the self-governance organization shall also undertake relevant governmental work. The establishment of legal boundary is the key to such problem. China's democratic development and government reform are confronted with unprecedented difficulties, whereas the public's demands are record high. Under such circumstances, how to respond to the public's need for democracy is an ordeal for the government's capacity of governance.

CBN: Many people think that grassroots democracy development can hardly be pushed forward considering its present situation. What is your opinion?

Zhao Shukai: Actually, there are some pessimists, but I am optimistic on the whole. We have been looking forward to making efforts to achieve legal breakthroughs in the village election. In my personal opinion, it is necessary not only to amend existing Organizational Law of Villagers Committee as soon as possible but also to consider issuing "Village Self-Governance Law," so as to address the bigger problem with the relationship between self-governance and the government by a clear division of power between self-governance and grassroots administration.

Due to the lack of legal basis, self-governance is frequently disturbed by administrative interference, which is the reason for disorder to some extent. The biggest problem here is individual power rising above grassroots social governance framework which must be addressed by a clear legal demarcation of rights and liabilities.

We should see the light with full confidence because both peasants and rural cadres are stepping forward. Peasants' awareness of safeguarding their own rights with legal weapon is becoming stronger now, which can be sensed by all grassroots cadres. Today's peasants who dare to resist are greatly different from those over 10 years ago. There is hope in the progress of peasants who will push forward the improvement of both the legal system and government self-construction.

The progress of the governments is fundamentally driven by the public's growth. The government has to change as the public is growing. However, government itself will be reluctant to reform because reform is involved with power. Therefore, government reform must be pushed forward by democratic forces.

CBN: In fact, whether the most concerned issue of rural democracy or grassroots democracy in a broader sense is developing on one hand and being confronted with various problems on the other hand. Is there any solution other than the improvement of legal system?

Zhao Shukai: The political effect of grassroots democracy is to solve the grassroots government leader's irresponsibility both for the people and for the central government, which will consolidate the foundation of institution and political culture to rectify the grassroots governments' operation deviating from the central directions and against the will the people. The expansion of grassroots democracy will increase social political participation channels, cultivate public spirit of officials and common people and establish a benign mechanism of interaction between the government and the society. Hence, government authority will be built upon the will of the people instead of political allegiance form bottom up.

The first step is to expand and improve grassroots direct elections not only at the village level but also at township, county and municipal level, so as to straighten out the relation between the grassroots Party and self-governance organizations and restructure power basis for the grassroots governments. No election, no democracy. Election is the essential content of democracy. All elections should be open and competitive instead of being controlled or even directed by higher authorities.

The second step is to develop citizens' multi-level political participation in diversified channels, particularly deliberative democracy. The development of grassroots democracy will make more and more members of the People's Congress truly competent representatives of the People's will and integrate more and more public opinion leaders into the system through election campaigns of NPC members, as well as encourage peasants to seriously look at elections of members of the People's Congress at the village and county level and seek to solve problems within the system.

Now it appears that the People's Congress system is the carrier and blue print of Chinese-style democracy. All reforms to implement, improve and strengthen the People's Congress system are the pushing forces for Chinese-style democracy building. It is only through the construction of NPC system can grassroots governments fully play their initiatives and creativities in the interaction within the government system, which will enable them to keep in line with the central government's objectives and actions as well as timely respond to social demands so as to meet the requirements of social environment.

Meanwhile, peasant organizations are worth of special attention, because the development of peasant organizations serves to integrate and express peasants' interests and establish negotiation mechanism between peasants and local governments, which will provide the public opinion basis for the dialogue between local leaders and higher authorities. If properly managed, the developments of peasant organizations will create a triple-win solution for peasants, local leaders and the central government. Presently, there are too many negative restrictions on peasant organizations which will weaken the people's confidence of the government and breed radicalism in politics.

While highlighting the development of electoral democracy, equal emphasis shall be given to deliberative democracy which can promote democratic ideals of information publicity and the people's participation in decision-making process. Centered on consultation, it can also cultivate and enhance citizens' capacities of rational discussion and deliberation.

There is no contradiction between grassroots democracy enlargement and upholding the Party's leadership.

CBN: Judged from lots of specific cases these years, has bribery become a common practice in the grassroots democratic election?

Zhao Shukai: The problem of bribery is very serious in current village elections. The government shall not deal with it in a laissez-faire style. However, bribery is not that terrible which can be resolved with the government's proper work. As a matter of fact, "buying votes" from villagers is an advance compared with "buying village official positions" from the town and county level superior. Furthermore, an

important reason for election bribery is the return of economic interests after the candidate is elected. Provided that village affairs management is formalized and there is no extra profit for village cadres to gain, they will no longer bribe. The government shall account for election bribery which will not be a hard issue if the government truly maintains the righteousness of election with emphasis on election process.

CBN: There is still a sharp contradiction between the “Two Rural Committees” that should not be ignored. What do you think of it?

Zhao Shukai: Will the development of democracy weaken the Party’s leadership? This is an inevitable question. Intuitively speaking, the development of democracy will surely reduce or partly replace the decision-making management power of the Party and government and the answer will be Yes if that can be called “weakening.” However, another question is whether it is strengthening or weakening of the Party’s leadership in terms of the practice of no separation integrate the Party and government or replacing the government with the Party? Though many problems of the grassroots government are related with the impotency of supervision and monitor system of government itself, “weakness” of the society is also an important factor. There is an imbalance between the strong power of the government and the feebleness of the society. Therefore, the process of democracy is a process to achieve the balance of power between the ruling party and the public which will create a “win-win” solution both for the Party’s leadership and the public. It has been proved by empirical study that the practices of grassroots democracy in some places have successfully brought about benefits for both the country and the society, and also enhanced both villagers’ capacity of self-governance and the country’s capacity of implementing its policies in rural areas, which shows that the authorization of newborn social power does not necessarily weaken the country’s social management ability and there should not always be no zero-sum game between the country and the society. China’s civic power is relatively weak, which enables the government to have its full swing. With underdeveloped grassroots democracy and narrow institutional space for the role of civic power and NGOs, government accountability system can hardly be established.

CBN: In your point of view, is there no contradiction between grassroots democracy and upholding the Party’s leadership?

Zhao Shukai: Fundamentally speaking, there is no contradiction between the expansion of grassroots democracy and upholding the Party’s leadership. As empirical study shows, the better villager self-governance goes, the lower the peasants’ interest will be in the direct election of township leaders. Therefore, whether to implement grassroots democracy or not is about the choice of the Party’s leadership style instead of the choice of the Party’s leadership of specific affairs.

In the context of expanded grassroots democracy, winning the election shall be the primary responsibility of the grassroots Party organization. The Party organization should secure the victory of Party members in the equal and liberal election, otherwise, the Party leader shall be politically liable, which will gradually cultivate the ruling party’s awareness of campaign so as to sustain and consolidate the ruling party’s position based on the people’s authorization and

recognition and help to solve the impotency of the superior's control over the subordinate within the Party organization.

Regarding the trend of social development, both the diversification of social and economic interests and pluralism of political interests are inevitable. Compared with the improvement of compatibility of political interests such as the commitment of representing the people's interests as many as possible, it is more important for the ruling party to maintain an organic connection with the public through institutional construction and systematic innovation. Such a connection, which can only be maintained through the development of democracy, plays a vital role in securing the ruling party's leadership.

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3.7 When Elections Enter Villages

—A study of Villagers' Negative Attitude towards Village Elections.

This article holds that there is a social foundation for direct election in China's current rural areas and peasants have practical demands of taking part in village affairs management. However, there are big differences in villagers' attitudes and behaviors, particularly a sort of negative escape which is caused by many reasons, mainly the problem with grassroots governments and village cadres themselves.

These years, particularly since 1998, grassroots democracy building has become a very hot topic mainly characterized by the Notification of Enforcement of Village Affairs Publicity and Democratic Management in Rural Areas, which for the first time deployed grassroots democracy building with special document. In October 1998, the CPC Central Committee's Decision on Major Agricultural and Rural Issues was approved by the 3rd Plenary Session of the 15th Party Congress, which illustrated "the Building of Grassroots Legal System and Democracy" in four "comprehensive advances", i.e., comprehensive improvements of democratic election, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision at the village level. In November that year, the revised Organizational Law of Villagers Committee was officially issued by the NPC Standing Committee.

It should be noted that the emphasis on strengthening democratic institutions in rural grassroots work was not initiated by the 3rd Plenary Session of the 15th Party Congress, instead, it was repeatedly demanded in the period of the People's Commune that "each level of the People's Commune organization must firmly exercise democratic management, election of cadres and publicity of accounts" which had obviously not been truly implemented for several reasons and the most important of one is that such democracy was not contained in the basic institutional framework of the People's Commune. In another word, the People's Commune was maintained

not because it was democratic but because it was highly coercive. It would not be the People's Commune any longer if it exercised true democracy for peasants. With the abolition of the People's Commune system and the establishment of village governments, particularly since the issuing and enforcement of the Organizational Law of the Villagers Committee in 1987, there has been favorable social and economic environment for the building of rural grassroots democracy.

The upsurge of democratic institutional building in grassroots work took place in the mid-1990s, some counties, cities and even provinces regarded village affairs publicity and democratic management as important strategic measures to build closer relationship between rural cadres and the masses and maintain rural stability, which were directly named by some provincial Party and government authorities as "Fish and Water Projects." Such encouraging change was driven by increasing rural contradictions between grassroots organizations and peasants and the former's crisis of credibility and declining authority. As peasants' demands and efforts of taking part in village affairs increase, some local leaders come to realize that without integration of various rural social contradictions in the way of democratic participation, rural instability will be worsened and there will be power legitimacy crisis for some grassroots organizations. In this sense, democratic institutional building was initially used as a new social control mechanism.

In early summer of 1999, we organized a sample survey on peasant-workers at a square in Beijing and interviewed two persons. One was a young migrant worker in Beijing who was ready to return to his home village in Shandong Province to take part in the election campaign for the Head of Villagers Committee. He was inspired with enthusiasm in his talking as if he were being favored by chances because democratic election really took place in his home village. The other was a middle-aged peasant from Huaibei of Anhui Province who worked in Jilin Province and received a call from home that he had been elected as Head of the Villagers Committee and he would decide whether to assume office after returning home to take a close look at whether the village Party Branch Secretary is easy to cooperate with. In the survey, a minority of interviewees said that the credibility of their village cadres had been increased these years which was better than the past because they were elected by villagers themselves. Therefore, the startup of village democracy has actually encouraged peasants and enlarged public opinion foundation of grassroots democracy.

However, we also had a strong feeling that most of the interviewed peasants gave no high evaluation of their home village democracy because there was no improvement but even worse situation. They expressed a kind of plaintiveness about village affairs as well as helplessness about village politics. While acknowledging democratic election as the essence of democratic system, this article tries to analyze the reason for peasants' negative attitude and appraisal on village elections and further explore the social environment and restrictive factors for villager self-governance based on individual cases of university students' survey in their home villages.

I. Villagers' Evasive Attitude towards Elections

As widely promoted by the media, open election has become an important public affair in rural grassroots areas as well as a widely-known policy regulation for

peasants. Among 818 migrant workers in our sample survey, 88.9% answered “Yes” and only 11.1% said “No” to the question “Do you know the Villagers Committee will be illegal unless it is elected?” which shows their strong awareness of election. In contrast, these interviewees knew less about the newly issued Organizational Law of Villagers Committee with only 41.7% answered “Yes.” In terms of the way of producing cadres in their home villages, 21.5% answered “They were elected by villagers” and 51.7% said “Everything is decided by the superior and election is just pro forma,” 15.6% answered “they were directly appointed by the superior” and 2.8% said “their positions were purchased with money.”

The survey by university students demonstrates that many villagers hold negative attitudes toward village elections with plenty of reasons and explanations.

Villagers are indifferent to elections and most of them don’t care whoever is elected so long as it has nothing to do with their vital interests. In Rangchang and Tian Mushann Villages, Villagers Committees gave voters one yuan as the compensation for the loss of working time to boost their enthusiasm. In the survey to Rangchang Village, I found a number of villagers didn’t even know who the Head of the Villagers Committee was, which shows villagers’ indifference to elections.

(Zhou XX, undergraduate of Agronomy Department of China Agricultural University, “Survey of the Election of Villagers Committee,” Zhejiang Province.)

Why villagers lack the enthusiasm of election? A university student’s explanation as the result of investigation is as follows:

Lots of villagers are not interested in the election of the Head of Villagers Committee for three reasons. Reason No. 1: It doesn’t make any sense to be a cadre because the village has no much income but some debts; reason No. 2: Villagers have bad impressions of cadres, many villagers don’t want to offend too many people; reason No. 3: There is no use to be elected as the Head of Villagers Committee because the Party Branch Secretary has the final say of everything.

(Jiang XX, postgraduate of Law Department, Tsinghua University, XM Village Investigation, Hunan Province.)

However, in most cases, villagers’ negative protests against elections are originated in their understanding of village politics over a long period. They naturally regard election as useless which needs not to be taken seriously because they have never enjoyed true elections for a long time and are used to the so-called “democracy” which is a true game that has been falsified.

Many villagers do not quite understand specifically about village self-governance which they think is about the substitution of players without any other change. After I briefly introduced village self-governance and relevant democratic procedures to follow in the election, many villagers were still worried about the problem. What the Village Youth League Branch Secretary, a Party member said was representative: “Nobody would like to shoulder the responsibility because the village is so poor and there are problems with the town.”

(Gao XX, postgraduate of Social Development Research Institute, Beijing University, “Why peasants are so heavily burdened?” Shandong Province.)

In the eyes of peasants, cadres are exclusively fed by public grain and take control of the masses by holding meetings, collecting fees and issuing documents, whereas peasants are merely responsible for farming, turning in grain and leading their lives with few common activities. As promoted by administrative reform these years, there have been cadres associated with each village, which seems to have made the relationship closer, however, those cadres only hear reports and issue documents in their work and will not stay long in villages. There are merely some village team leaders who will communicate with villagers.

(Chen, undergraduate of Philosophy Department, Beijing Normal University, "A few Rural Issues in the Perspective of My Home Village," Henan Province.)

Peasants' negative behaviors and lack of initiatives can be commonly seen in the election process with diversified expressions characterized by evasive attitudes toward elections.

There is great difficulty for election work because few villagers are willing to cast that sacred vote. They regard it as a waste of time to take part in the election and will be more unwilling to go in case of busy season. Most villagers think that whoever is elected has nothing to do with them and they have to go farming. They feel indignant because in their eyes, they have to raise money to feed those village cadres idling about all days.

However, as stipulated by the superior, the election has to be conducted by voting and villagers are unable to dissuade village cadres' repeated requests in the end and each household sends an old person or a kid to vote on its behalf. In most cases, old persons are illiterate and will recklessly cast all votes on behalf of his family members. Those kids who are literate but have no voting right will elect the one who has an interesting name. Occasionally, there come some young men who have received a little of education and play games in the election by casting average votes to all candidates with the excuse that they are afraid of offending others. As a result, there will be few effective votes.

The Village Party Branch Secretary said: "In some villages, voting will be done solely by cadres who fill the names on the votes and turn in. I also want to do that but feel guilty of conscience. Although there are many problems with public elections, people will have nothing to complain about."

(Zhao XX, undergraduate of Electronic Department, Beijing Normal University, "Interview Record of the Village Party Branch Secretary," Anhui Province.)

Rural areas are different from each other and peasants have different attitudes towards village elections. In the perspective of policy designing and explanation, election is surely very good for peasants. However, peasants may not participate with great enthusiasm even if it is very good. Moreover, "democracy" did not really benefit peasants in the history as publicized and in reality, some superior leaders and village cadres with certain self-speculations often play tricks in elections, which has exposed much more of the negative side of democracy to peasants and led to their evasive attitude and even resistance to elections. This is not an exceptional case in one or two villages, however, it is not the problem of peasants themselves, nor can it be some people's excuse to deny the implementation of rural direct democracy in China.

II. Election Rules Destroyed by Organizers

Provided that the psychological sediment formed by the past living experiences or China's lack of rural democratic tradition is the historical reason of villagers' indifference to election, the election rules destroyed alive by organizers in the real village electoral process is the direct reason for peasants' negative attitudes. When they cannot see election seriously treated by superior leaders, particularly when they clearly see the election carefully arranged only as a ceremony, it is a wise choice for them to evade or to play it as a drama.

In the perspective of villagers, the organizers as well as destroyers of election rules are mainly village cadres who break the election procedure in most cases.

Village Party Branch Secretaries and village heads dominated the general election of Villagers Committee, which was in the word of villagers "they will not resign until they are full." They lawlessly ignored the superior's policy of open voting by villagers and arbitrarily asked several people to cast all votes. Surely they will occupy the Party Branch Secretary and village head positions and appoint other cadres in the Villagers Committee by themselves. There was a village head who came to each household to ask villagers: "Do you agree to elect me as the village head?" Though being angry, villagers dared not speak up because their disobedience would incur endless troubles. Some village Party Branch Secretaries held their positions for over twenty to thirty years without resigning and impoverished their villages, which aged villagers have got quite used to.

(Tong XX, undergraduate of Computer Science Department of the Central Nationality University, "What Are Village Cadres Doing?" Hunan Province.) (P94)

The village Party Branch Secretary who was appointed by the township Party Committee or Poverty Alleviation Group manipulated the election of Villagers Committee Head by nominating candidates and making arrangements single-handedly. What was even worse was that the vote teller himself was appointed by the Secretary. Therefore, villagers regarded the election useless and a waste of time with negative attitudes. As a result, there were only more than 30 villagers present at the election in my home village. The outcome of the election was at the hand of the Secretary because he could manipulate the floating votes of those migrant workers, illiterate and aged people accounting for one third of total votes.

(Li XX, undergraduate of Tsinghua University, "The Election in CP Village," Sichuan.)

The destruction of election procedure sometimes shows up as the direct control of election result. In this process, there is something wrong with village cadres, but township cadres play a more important role behind the scene. Under serious scrutiny, township cadres account for almost every problem involved with the election because all village elections are directed by officials appointed by the township and even the county authority.

In the morning of January 15, 1999, there was a general election meeting held in Dongkou Village to elect a representative of the people with a concurrent post as the new village head. The meeting was hosted by Mr. Sun, the old village head.

After the nine production teams had respectively nominated their candidate, Mr. Sun appointed Mr. Li from team No. 8 to join him in the final election. It was supposed that all villagers should come to the election, but the actual number was smaller because many young adults went out to work and some who were absent entrusted their votes to others. Those leaders of production teams only reported a forged number. There were 960 ballot tickets handed out and 912 turned in. The teller intentionally counted some of Li's votes as Sun's, which was seen through for four times by primary school students as onlookers. As a result, delegated village cadres renounced those four votes. Even so, Li still won the election with 10 more votes and the election was over at noon.

Theoretically, Li should have been elected. However, upon hearing the result, the township authority ordered re-election in the name of "less than half votes." At 6 or 7 o'clock that afternoon, the town sent cadres to Sun's home at Dongkou Village, insisting that the election result must be decided no later than that day. Instead of catching time to have a brief meal and hold the re-election as soon as possible, they were well-received at Sun's home with a big dinner and didn't start the re-election until 11 o'clock in the evening when most villagers had gone to bed. They woke up villagers from door to door and asked them to vote again. Some villagers unwilling to get up had thought to told them inside the house who they would like to elect but still elected Sun lest their choices were recorded by cadres outside their houses which would be unfavorable for them. However, there were still many villagers insisted that they would not change their votes in the day and if there must be a re-election, they would not care about who was to be elected. Cadres from the town only visited a small number of households without going to quite a few production teams. Even though they came to certain production team, they merely dropped in at one or two households. Thus they got the result: Sun got more than 620 votes which made him the village head again while Li only got over 220 votes. However, every villager clearly knew this election result was not true, which has seriously infringed their voting rights.

Li was not convinced and went to the township Party Secretary but the Secretary, instead of taking it seriously, said: "It is good that you want to be a cadre and we will invite you to attend our meetings in the future and you are very welcome to join us to serve the people. Could you please go home now?" Then, Li went to the county Party Secretary of the Committee who promised to investigate. He also appealed to Chongqing City for this case. However, there was no any sign of a positive outcome when I returned to my university on February 22nd.

(Ma XX, undergraduate of Environment Department, Beijing University, "Weird Election," Chongqing.)

The organizers destroy election rules in the following aspects or steps: No. 1 is the production of candidates. For example, it is obviously against the rule for one candidate to appoint another; No. 2 is the violation of rules in the voting process to allow people with no voting rights to vote and even allow the candidate to directly cast votes on behalf of voters; No. 3 is the infringement of rules in counting votes. Both the teller and drawer can be manipulated by certain candidate who can even directly tamper the voting result; No. 4 is the voting result directly denied and even

changed by the superior, which makes democracy a puppet in some leaders' hands. No. 5 is the disconnection between the production of village cadres and the election, which doesn't even need pro forma legitimacy. It is hard to tell accurately how common such situation is across the country, but in those problematic villages, what villagers have seen is "democracy" marked by elections with broken procedures and rules and the image of "democracy" is thus destroyed in peasants' minds.

As introduced by production team leaders, accountants and many villagers, the election of Villagers Committee was thus operated: all ballot tickets were concentrated at the hands of those team leaders who would ask one or several people to help casting the votes. What surprised me a lot upon the investigation of the local election was that there were a great number of villagers who had never seen a ballot ticket. Many villagers told us with anger that several years ago, they only got voters' certificates without seeing what the ballot ticket was like. Last year, they didn't even see their certificates which had been replaced by their ID cards. The team leader and accountant admitted that it had also been done by the team leader or several people "on behalf" of voters similar with the election of Villagers Committee.

In my home village, though there was a form of election and regulation that those who waived their voting rights should be fined, many villagers were still not willing to participate in the election and said: "It doesn't matter who will win the election, whether there is election or not has nothing to do with my business because everything has already been pre-determined. I'd rather go farming than to take part in the election."

(Liang XX, undergraduate of Philosophy Department of China Renmin University, "Rural Problems," Sichuan)

In today's rural areas, the production of village cadres or the performance of village elections mainly depends on township leaders' attitudes. What the township government does will decide the success or failure of the election as well as how villagers evaluate and participate in the election. So to speak, township leaders play a vital role in the destruction of election rules. If the leader of a town has no intention to organize a true village election, or if there is even a tiny deviation in the township government's pushing direction, village election will hardly be a success.

The list of limited number of candidates was discussed by the township government and Villagers Committee without villagers' participation. What would be the outcome? All candidates nominated were CPC members, i.e., a candidate must be a Party member. Who would be developed as Party members then? Except former older Party members, most of those new Party members were the sons and nephews of present village cadres. Was there any difference between this generation to generation control of power and heredity? It is just another form of heredity.

(Liu XX, undergraduate of Biological Department, Beijing Normal University "Investigation on Peasants Burden," Shangdong Province.)

In my home village, villagers have no knowledge of Villagers Committee and they still call the Villagers Committee Head "general team leader." When I returned home in winter vacation, the general team leader just took office not long ago with low public praise. There was a popular view among villagers that his position was earned through a deal. A member of his clan, one of the rich men doing construction

business in a neighboring country, intended to make him the Village Head, which was supported by the township government (villagers said so). Being asked of how they knew he had been appointed, villagers answered: “We didn’t know he had been the village head until we found the man collecting money had been changed.” In terms of the time he took office, the answer was: “Who knows that?”

In the eyes of villagers, their general team leader who is totally a grain and money collecting tool for the superior, is useless for other issues like dealing with village public affairs and representing peasant interests. But for his value as a tool, it will be obviously impossible for him to stay long in his position. There has already been a jingle spread in the village “turning in money and secure the position” which means the Village Head will turn in the money by loan to fulfill the superior’s task and then collect money from peasants only to maintain his position.

(Li XX, undergraduate of Economic Department, Beijing University, “General Team Leader in the Eyes of Villagers” Jiangxi Province.)

As demonstrated by some cases, the organization and management system of the people’s Commune particularly the production of Commune cadres has not only profoundly affected peasants but also directly influenced grassroots government leaders’ management of village organizations including cadres appointment.

China today is building rural democracy under the profound influence of autocratic tradition for thousands of years as well as on the basis of highly centralized power system of the People’s Commune for over 20 years. It is hard to imagine that flowers of democracy will bloom everywhere overnight as soon as a document is issued or a decision publicized like life-giving breeze and rain. Although villagers are in urgent need of democratized community lives, they have not received any training of building democracy under established procedures and rules. As a Chinese saying goes: “When the radish is popular, it can be sold quickly even with mud.” Treated in a movement-style, democracy has become half-cooked rice in the people’s eyes, which has profound negative impact.

III. The struggle among those who have claim on power

The villagers’ mass indifference towards elections doesn’t mean village cadre is a position nobody cares. In some places, such position seems to have lost its attractiveness as claimed by a peasant in the survey: “Whoever wants to be a villager cadre can be a village cadre.” (There was only one such case among all peasants in the over 700 villages we visited.) In most villages, it is still a hot choice to be a village cadre. Therefore, on one hand, many villagers show their indifference to and ridicule of elections; on the other hand, there are still intensified power contentions centered on village cadre elections.

The election of my home village Head was mainly held between Zhao and Shang, both female. Zhao was the former village Head, an old woman of 50 and Shang was a villager team leader. Zhao attracted 3/4 of all villager team leaders by hosting dinners with her advantage of being a village cadre for a long time and more familiar with village leaders. Shang’s parent’s family was a big local household the members of which would naturally elect her. Therefore, Zhao tried every means to make a woman from Shang’s parent’s family one of the nine candidates to reduce Shang’s votes.

On the Election Day, Zhao went to lobby those production teams under her control and said to them malign words about Shang. After the election, she reduced Shang's number of votes by modification. This secret was disclosed when a villager said that he knew clearly that over a dozen neighboring villagers had all cast their votes to Shang which meant Shang should have got at least over a dozen of votes but the result of counting was merely 9. When I interviewed villagers on this case, they all told me that there was gossip in the village that over 200 of Shang's votes had been held back.

Following the survey of my home village election, I went to visit other villages only to hear that elections were poorly-organized in most villages. In some villages, there were fights for village cadre positions which failed the elections. In some villages, candidates bought votes with money. In other villages, candidates promised villagers in secret with benefits if they won the election. Surely, the so-called "benefit" was something against laws and regulations. Of course, there were exceptions. In one village in the suburb, being a village cadre was not rare for most people and the established leading team maintained stable. In another village, there was overhauling re-election and village cadres dared not do whatever they wanted to because of hard-line villagers.

(Fang XX, undergraduate of Philosophy Department of Beijing Normal University, "Election Story of Villagers Committee," Henan Province.)

It is impossible for us to assume that everybody who wants to be a cadre is inspired by the spirits of Comrade Lei Feng and Kong Fansen (famous role models of modern China). What has been revealed by our investigation in the daily life of rural society is the true player behind village power struggle: the practical interests of individuals and clans.

A student from Beijing Normal University, whose uncles and cousin took part in the contention of village cadre positions, fully described with himself on the scene the inside story of struggle relentlessly in his research paper.

Different groups arose in the village: One was Wu's and the other was Li's. Villagers interested in village affairs joined their own group to "fight to the end." Those who were not interested naturally formed the third group to talk about the gain and loss of the two rivalry groups as entertainment. Rivalry groups were not divided all by family names. For example, Wu San who got no benefit from Wu, the present Party Branch Secretary, joined Liu, my uncle, in Li's group. It seemed that Gen was doing everything in the day light with an official seal. The proof material of my family's striking others in the first place was sealed and submitted to the county government. Gen used official seal to do anything he wanted and sent gifts bought with the money of the production team, whereas my family had neither money nor power but only some clan members not so well-united.

Why were there fights and quarrels? The true answer is the scramble for interests instead of contending for power. My two uncles used to seek private profits when they were on stage. However, most of the property was still used in village construction. When my uncle Goutou was in office, he overhauled a number of yards and organized a descent celebration for his father's 80-year birthday. Then Wang assumed the office and moved out from the gray-brick small yard at the west corner

into a spacious house with three sitting rooms and five bed rooms in the east end and bought a motorcycle and agricultural tricycle. My uncle Liu came in succession to Wang Xiaogen and bought a brand new “Yi Fa” truck. Following the setup of a woven bag factory, Wu took office with more over doings. He tampered with invoices when buying machines and gained about a hundred thousand yuan. An incident caused by the unfair distribution of interests among village cadres cost Wu his position. But Wu bought off the township and county officials and gained the position of the village Party Branch Secretary.

If the situation went on like this, Li’s clan would not only lose its position in the village but also be in trouble in the distribution of land for housing and even in getting permission of roadside selling. My cousin said: “The village is where we make a living and it is our headquarters of development. How can we be bullied here by others?” Guo has also got ready to be a village cadre with his shiny and smoothly combed hair with a big manner looked from the distance. Those who had their own speculations gathered for the sake of the situation at that time, which was the same case even with cadres of the General Team.” My mother said: “It just appears to be like that at present. There will be dog-fights among them no later than Spring Festival.”

People didn’t think there would be any benefit for their lives no matter who was in office, just as my mother said: “Why bother with that? Our family is poor and those ruling cadres will not care about us. No matter who is the Head, it will be equally difficulty to do business. Moreover, whoever handles the official seal will only eat with public money instead of buying our pancakes along the road side. What is urgent for me is to work hard to support your education as a university student.”

An earthquake is going to take place at the east end of the village, whereas the west is in total silence.

(Li XX, undergraduate of Beijing Normal University, “On and Off the Stage,” Henan Province.)

This case tells us a lot which can be interpreted from different needs and view angles. What is worthy of special attention is that if the power distribution is not conducted under a fair and reasonable institutional framework, there will be intensified interpersonal disputes out of order and jostling against one another for interests. As a matter of fact, there need to be orders and rules for peasants’ participation whether they are involved or not in the disputes. Generally, if there is no correct orientation by the local government, village elections will surely become power struggles among various village forces which may be carried out by families and clans or vicious forces or money politics.

Troubled by sickness and old age, the Party Branch Secretary of my home village decided to resign last year, but he appointed his second son as the new Secretary instead of transferring his power to another person. Being illiterate, his second son is capable of doing nothing, even his entering into the Party was arranged by his father. The former village accountant had never disclosed the account book for so many years and gave the position to his third younger brother after he resigned.

There has never been publicity of accounts in the village and the expenditure of so much deducted funds for so many years. For public facility building purpose, the

country expropriated 1080 mu (1 mu = 0.0667 hectares) of land west of my home village at 650 yuan per mu as compensation for peasants with a sum of over 700,000 yuan of which 400,000 was spent in building two cement road and the remaining amount of money was taken by the village and general team leaders and evaporated. It is also a myth whether the 200,000 yuan of debt to Xie Village has been repaid or not. With their demand for accounts publicity neglected by village leaders, villagers' disappointment turned into anger.

To protect villagers' interests, I consulted with several sub-team leaders and decided to reason with the village authority by organized efforts. At that time, those cadres were urging villagers to turn in public grain and we got support across the village with a "Request by All Villagers" signed by all villagers sent to village leaders as follows: "All villagers ask unanimously to publicize accounts of all these years, reshuffle village leadership and set up village finance team and council. We will not turn in public grain until the above issues are resolved."

The masses were more dissatisfied with Villagers Committee and determined to prevent those cadres from doing whatever they want to do by re-election according to the Organizational Law of Villagers Committee issued by the central government. When we consulted cadres of the township Party Committee, they said: "It is your right to elect, we won't hold you back if you want to do that." Thereafter, the masses of Xie Village held the election on July 5th, 1998 in accordance with the Organizational Law of Villagers Committee." I was the village head at that time and the township Party Committee also sent officials to the election as supervisors and instructors. All villagers were present except the old village Party Branch Secretary and his group members. However, the election result was neither recognized nor approved by the township Party Committee and then six of our representatives were summoned by the police. None of us went to the police station because we knew there would be little chance of return. Villagers were all enraged for their neglected and unrecognized rights and gave more response and support to their representatives.

(Sun XX, undergraduate of Economic Department of Beijing Normal University, "I just want to do something for the People," Anhui Province.)

This is a case on how peasants organized their own election by throwing away the direct control of grassroots government. The conflict between the grassroots government and peasants herein is very thought-provoking. The cadres elected by peasants themselves are legitimate for villagers but not for township government leaders, whereas candidates recognized by the latter can hardly win the election because of villagers' disapproval, which is called "Conflict of Legitimacy" in the village election. Such conflict is intensifying in rural areas, which has put forward an important issue for present grassroots democracy to find an institutional resolution to such conflict.

IV. Village Election and Social Environment

In our point of view, democracy will begin to grow as soon as the election is started. No matter how chaotic and manipulated the election is, it will bring some new democratic ideals to villagers and cadres, which is better than no election at all. Even if a cadre wins the election through bribery, it shows that he has clearly seen the

importance of votes in villagers' hands. As a result, he will consider the response of grassroots people consciously or unconsciously in his following up official work. To say the least, even if village cadres buy votes from villagers, it will be more positive than buying off official positions from the superior. It is not appropriate to easily deny election as a direct pushing force behind grassroots democracy just because there is chaos in the election in one way or another.

Chaos and disorder at certain degree are inevitable at the initial stage of village democracy building. Just like some unrest in the transition from planned economy to market economy, there will also be such a transition for the establishment of democratic institutions in China's rural areas. The idea that democracy must be carried out in a well-ordered way which will otherwise be the problem of peasants' low quality unworthy of democracy is actually an idealization of or direct objection to democracy.

Nowadays, there have been basis of interests to promote democracy in rural areas and peasants have practical demands to participate in community management but this does not mean peasants can naturally handle the democratic process. In China's autocratic feudalism society, state power reached as far as county level and villagers were ruled mainly by gentry. With the absence of direct control by state power, ruling by gentry can be understood as a kind of self-governance. However, ruling by gentry was not the self-governance in modern sense because it was only an authoritative self-governance representing the power of the distinguished and rich squires. Modern self-governance based on democracy represents the citizenship of each community member. In such a piece of land ruled by long-term autocracy in the history, it is not hard to imagine how complicated and zigzagging to establish a village self-governance system based on citizenship.

There are also some practical restrictions on village self-governance from the system. A general review of a number of research results in recent years gives us the impression that researchers paid more attention to election rules and procedures themselves with rich explorations and conclusions of technical issues, which is no doubt quite necessary. However, in my point of view, there are some problems beyond election itself, i.e., the social context which is not an environment in general sense but affected by many human factors among which the local government's especially a township government leader's attitude is essential. A Township leader will make the decision from a unique angle on whether to organize a real competitive election or a forged one as merely a formality. The choice of government leaders is oriented by the objective of the government itself. The core of such objective is to complete the tasks assigned to the village and to get what is demanded of the village by the government, which is the priority of government leaders' consideration in the selection of cadres. Obviously, governmental standards are not always consistent with peasants' objectives. To fulfill their objectives, some government leaders even appoint unruly and stupid villains as cadres in some cases. As a result, ruffians and rascals come into village power as described by villagers. In many cases, demands from villagers themselves are less important for township government leaders. Villagers' objective will not be prioritized until villagers express their interests in a very tough way. To put it more sharply, the problem is whether some local govern-

ments particularly township governments have real intentions to promote village democracy. In another word, if village elections can help to fulfill their objectives, they will actively push forward village democratization. What they worry about (such worry can become reality in some cases) is that the absence of direct control of village cadres by governments will surely weaken grassroots governments' control over villages and even threaten the fulfillment of township governments' objectives and the operation of governments themselves. Governments' conditional support of grassroots democracy leads to the violation of rules in grassroots election and management. Once the rules are trampled, peasants will see adulterated "democracy" which is no longer true and will become more indifferent to politics, which may be the biggest obstacle for the development of grassroots democracy.

In the development of grassroots democracy, if everything is under the control of grassroots organizations without peasants' spontaneous participation, there will be a lot of restrictions from cadres, which will make it hard to actualize and streamline peasants' participation. In many cases, peasants' spontaneous participation is regarded as making trouble and suppressed, which will incur a special form of participation crisis. If such a situation remains unchanged, grassroots democracy itself will become a ball of plasticine in the hands of grassroots governments. Moreover, there was an intention in policy designing aimed at coping with cadre-villager relationship and resolving grassroots contradictions by democratic means such as election and alike. However, grassroots government leaders' distortion of operational behaviors makes peasants more dissatisfied and indifferent to such deformed "democracy." As a result, grassroots contradictions remain unresolved and the growth of democracy is constrained.

It now appears that the following two conditions must be considered in order to achieve true success of village election: One is the reform and re-engineering of grassroots government system itself; the other is the growth of peasant organizations in the real sense.

This article is an internal survey report written by the author for the Development Research Center of the State Council completed in June, 1999. In November 1998, the author led a research team of the Agricultural Department the Development Research Center of the State Council and organized home-village-returning surveys in winter vacation completed by 96 students (including undergraduates, postgraduates and PhDs) from Tsinghua University, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, China Agricultural University, Minzu University of China, China University of Geosciences, which resulted in over 90 case study reports. This article is an analysis report on "Village Election" based on university students' individual case surveys.

3.8 The Second Round of Land Contract

—Operational Problems Concerning Household Contract Policy.

To take a close look at the micro operation of rural policies in a broader range, particularly to explore those areas with which peasants are most dissatisfied, we organized field surveys by students from some capital universities returning to their home villages which resulted in over 90 case study reports mainly about the narration of village hot issues concerning land contract, burden of peasants, village affairs management, general elections of Villagers Committee and cadre-villager disputes, particularly petition process. This article provides a perspective of the mutated behaviors of village cadres in the implementation of land contract policy which has disappointed villagers and led to negative social consequences.

I. Changing Distribution of Land Among Rural Households

The major problem lies in grassroots organizations' frequent changes of land contract pattern among rural households, which is neither in line with the Central government's principle of big stability (for more than 15 years) and small change (for no less than 5 years) nor consistent with most villagers' expectation.

The Fourth Production Team of Chen Village made some change of villagers' contracted land. However, such change took place again in July 1998. Repeatedly forced by the Village Party Branch Secretary, cadres and villagers of the fourth team who were not willing to change at the beginning had to give in. There were 23 households in this team with 92 villagers and 74 mu of arable land. A meeting attended by the Party members and representatives was held to discuss how to change land distribution and 12 days later, the change was completed by all cadres and villagers of the team.

(Chen XX, Philosophy Department of Renmin University of China, "Another Round of Land Distribution in My Home Village," Hubei Province.)

In the eyes of villagers, the Party Branch Secretary's enthusiasm in frequent changes of land distribution is driven by the pursuit of interests of cadres or village organizations themselves.

Following his coming into power, the land was contracted once a year, the measuring pole became shorter, area of land bigger and land price higher year over year. As a result, villagers' initiatives of farming became lower and lower. Collapsed terrace barriers and broken canals were left unrepaired, let alone deep plowing of the land. With the uncertainty whether investment this year would have any return or would be distributed to others next year, villagers input less and less into their land and even stop applying miscellaneous manures to the land, which led to a vicious cycle of dropping production year after year.

Land contracting price were increasing year by year. From 1995 to 1996, first-class land was only 200 yuan per mu which rose up to 400 yuan per mu in 1998. Moreover, only those who paid in advance had the right to contract land and those without money could do nothing. Remaining land would be contracted to peasants from other villages even though there were households of my home village who had

neither money nor land. Driven beyond the limit of their endurance, villagers rose up and jointly petitioned to the provincial Party Committee.

(Liu XX, Precise Instrument Department of Tsinghua University, "The Secretary was a Black Sheep," Shangdong Province.)

Such change of land contracting had direct negative impact which has compromised peasants' prediction of land stability, leading to their short-term behaviors with no interest of investment which affected the production. Psychologically, peasants have lost not only their sense of security of the new economic system but also their confidence in the policy. More seriously, some unreasonable change of land contract is actually a direct deprivation of some peasants' interests.

In 1980, villagers of the fifth cooperative planted some poplar trees which were contracted to each household when household contracting system was put into effect. In more than ten years that followed, those trees grew stronger and stronger under villagers' careful cultivation. However, after the general election of village leaders held in 1994, the new leaders elected signed a contract with Wang, a villager of the fifth cooperative and sold this wood to him without asking for the approval of other villagers. The next year, Wang chopped down 33,000 poplar trees in this wood and sold them to a timber processing factory and gave not even a cent of his income to other villagers of the fifth cooperative. Deprived of their trees and land, villagers had to pay agricultural taxes every year as before. As a result, they began their group petition.

(Gao XX, Department of Computer Science, China University of Geosciences, "Everything they do, they do it for land," Jilin Province.)

Peasants' complaints are also caused by the inequality in the change of land resource distribution. Manipulated by village cadres, those who should not have their share of land resource participate in the distribution of community resources, which is an obvious deprivation of the majority of community members.

As stipulated by the provincial family planning regulations: any household that commits over-production of one child shall not have responsibility field for 7 years and there will a 14-year suspension for over-production of 2 children. A villager of the Eighth Production Team over-produced 4 children two of whom had no registered residence. To escape from penalty, he got divorced and moved his wife's residence to another place. However, in case of second-time land contracting, village leaders insisted on dividing land to those three with no residence. Some villagers were not convinced and reported that to the township government, but the vice township Head said: "False divorces and residence transfers are very common in the town and such case is not the first one in your village. It is unreasonable for the villagers of the Eighth Team of your village to deliberately embarrass the General Team because there has not been any problem and complaint in other villages."

As the dispute between villagers and village cadres intensified, the township Party Secretary declared in the end: "According to Family Planning Regulations, he who held directly responsible shall be investigated and land distribution shall be carried out in line with the opinion of villagers' discussion." Finally, land distribution of the Eighth Team No. 8 was completed but the wheat planting time was put off for two months, and the latest wheat planting was done on February 20th.

It was too early to calculate the damage caused by the residence disturbance, but according to the estimation of an experienced old peasant: there was at least a reduction of wheat output between 20,000 and 25,000 kg in terms of the over 300 mu of land of the team.

Three months passed, the Party Branch Secretary and Villagers Committee Head went on as before and nobody heard the news of any responsibility investigation from the township government. Only the leader of the Eighth Team resigned and nobody took care of team affairs and nobody knew what would be the scene for public grain selling next time.

(Wang XX, Philosophy Department, Beijing Normal University, "Land Disputes caused by Residence Disturbance," Henan Province.)

Adjustment of land contract is the important power of village cadres. The direct motivation of their frequent changing of contracted land is the demand from a small number of villagers who asked of the village leading group for adjustment due to the increase of their family population and reasons alike, which has provided an official excuse for cadres' startup of land redistribution. However, in case of practice, cadres added part of their own demands of interest to the adjustment. Specifically, they may seize the opportunity to raise the contracting price to increase collective income; they may also intend to concentrate a part of land at their own disposal. Moreover, they may take such advantage to favor those who have special relationships with them, which will lead to unfair and unreasonable land contracting pattern among rural households.

II. Land Adjustment between Village Collective and Rural Households

The major problem is that land disposal rights are centralized in the hands of cadres, i.e., part of the land has become the special land directly at the hands of village cadres and will no longer be contracted. Such land is called by cadres as "Maneuverable Land," whereas peasants call it "Cadres' Land."

The reduction of arable land resource per capita has confronted some rural households with increasing hardship of livelihood:

A peasant who was against the policy of unchanged land distribution against the increase and decrease of family population said with anger: "The dead get fed whereas the alive get starved." He told me that in the beginning of the All-Round Contract, his family with four members contracted 48 mu of land at 12 mus per capita. In recent years, his two sons got married and the two daughters in law gave birth to children. There were 9 members in his family at that time and how to divide the land in case of family separation? As a result, each son got the land for 1.5 persons (3.6 mus in total) from his parents and left his parents with only 1 mu of land to support the education of their younger daughter. With no enough land, the two sons had to go outside to work who didn't return home even in Spring Festival.

Even so, village cadres didn't allocate land to those households in need but withdrew it to the village collective upon land adjustment. There was special "Cadres' Land" in the village which was not the contracted land of cadres but was operated or outsourced by these pests and thieves and the income was at their own disposal.

Led by a peasant, I went into the “Cadres’ Land” of my home village and was told by him that there was about 100 mu of land managed by former village cadres and most of it was transferred to the hands of the new group of village cadres after they came into power. The land was transferred to peasants at certain price and the income was spent as part of the village expenditure. What surprised me was that there were plastic greenhouses in some area while none in other area on the same piece of land. The old peasant explained to me: “The area with plastic greenhouses was the land ceded from old cadres and then contracted to some vegetable farmers; the remaining area is still at those old cadres’ hands.” I asked him with great puzzle: “Why some part of the land is ceded and the other not?” He answered: “Some of the newly elected village cadres are their relatives, so those resigned cadres can still have their land.”

(Jiang XX, Resource and Environment Department of Beijing Normal University, “Peasants’ Burden and Cadres’ Land,” Henan Province.)

The power of using “Maneuverable Land” is directly at the hands of village cadres with various ways of utilization. Some directly operate on the land to yield material income without any liability of collective deduction payment; some outsource the land to other villagers to generate their own extra income. Moreover, some contract the land to people of other villages or towns to avoid stirring the dissatisfaction of home villagers.

On occasion of the second round of land contract, the higher authority sent special working group and there was an additional thirty-year contract period based on the former contract according to the policy which was welcomed by peasants and quickly implemented. However, some administrative village privately raised fifty to sixty mu of land.

The village sells land every year and the income will be spent by those village cadres. Several mu of land and the brick kiln were sold to some people from Dasun Village after an agreement was signed. The Party Branch Secretary said: “This agreement will be valid as long as socialism exists.” Villagers said, even Hong Kong was ceded only for 100 years, there seemed to be permanent ceding of land in their village, which was obviously against Land Law and household contract policy.

In terms of policy requirements, under the principle of voluntary signing of contract between the collective and peasants, peasants are allowed and even encouraged to give up land contract, which is consistent with the central government’s intention to run the land in a relatively centralized and scaled way. It is peasants’ active selection of whether to contract or not, however, peasants are forced by collectives to contract in some villages.

In 1982 when the land was decentralized, every peasant household scrambled for land lest they missed it. Nowadays, their minds have changed. Some would rather go out to work and many households ask for retreating of the land. Village leaders made a rule that the land shall not be retreated to the village but to other households through villagers’ own negotiations. The policy of the village is “Desolated land is also tax payable”, i.e., a piece of land can be desolated, but the agricultural taxes and deductions on the land shall still be turned in.

In 1982, there were 6 members including 3 laborers in my family, therefore, we got 13 mu of land. Presently there are only 2 laborers at home actually planting 7 mu of land with 5–6 mu of land desolated. We have to pay agricultural taxes, and deduction fees to the village at the sum of about 130 yuan, which means a desolated piece of land will cost us over 100 yuan each year.

In my home village, except very few households, most households have more or less desolated land which is still tax payable usually at several dozen yuan with one or two exceeding 100 yuan.

(Gao XX, Economics Department of Beijing Normal University, “New Regulation of the Second-Round Contract: Desolated land is also tax payable,” Hubei Province.)

There are different reasons for peasants in some villages to give up part or all of their land contract rights. Some are not able to till the land due to the bounty of land and shortage of labor force, which is a very rare case because it is entirely possible for outsourcing if the land is profitable; some who have stable jobs other than agriculture give up the contract because the land cannot even provide their former contractors with basic guarantee; some are even threatened by bankruptcy because the deficiency of agriculture itself, specifically, too much input and too many taxes and fees adhering to the land.

III. Compulsory Plantation for Peasants

Peasants should have independent production and management power over their contracted land, which is the basic meaning of household contract policy. Furthermore, household contract operation has two practical roles: One is to standardize the distribution, i.e., peasants have total ownership of surplus products; the other is the autonomous right of production to decide independently what to produce and how to produce. However, recent years saw the continuous violation of peasants' autonomous production rights in some areas where peasants were forced to plant certain kind of crop.

Generally, the organizers of compulsory plantation are township governments motivated by increasing their tax income and generally characterized by the direct collection of special production tax. Village organizations play the role of assistant and operation. Of course, some of them are intended to increase peasants' income; some even claim that compulsory plantation is totally for the benefits of peasants with the slogan of “Driving Peasants to be Rich.” In fact, such compulsion is a serious infringement of peasants' interests, behind which is governments' pursuit of self-interests or some leader's personal interests of concerned with their official performance.

As is shown by this investigation, compulsory plantation mainly aims at the production of economic crops. Typically, peasants are coerced to plant greenhouse vegetable.

In the spring of 1997, the township government designated You Liangqiao Village as the greenhouse vegetable planting area. A “Greenhouse Plan” leading group comprised of county and township cadres, the village head and Party Branch Secretary went directly to the field and designated pilot testing areas. Then the well-digging team, power supply station, labor contractor team entered the field and began

digging wells, erecting power-line poles, installing voltage transformers and building greenhouse walls. In May, the frameworks of 40 greenhouses began to take shape, occupying nearly 40 mus of field with an expense of no less than 70,000 yuan (as estimated by villagers) including 18,000 yuan borrowed from the bank by the production team leader and agricultural technology station.

However, villagers were not willing to sign the contract and the greenhouses were laid idle for a year in 1997. In 1998, following the general election of the Villagers Committee, the new Party Branch Secretary dealt with these greenhouses as soon as he took office. Also in May that year, greenhouse walls were pulled down by bulldozers and the land was plowed by tractors and returned to former contractors. Villagers were asked to go on to plant grain but the season for grain planting had passed before the soil was prepared. Only several households planted corn in advance and 40 mus of field was laid barren until the end of 1998.

(Wang XX, Chinese Language Department, Beijing Normal University, "The Corruption of Greenhouse Plan," Ningxia Province.)

Compulsory plantation not only leads to the delay of farming season for peasants with expensive opportunity cost but also direct economic loss and even heavy burden of collective debt for the village.

There was a new Party Branch Secretary just appointed by the township government who was enthusiastic in promoting large scale greenhouse vegetable plantation to show his capability as a new leader with his fortune-making experiences learned from other places. A 100-greenhouse task was imposed on my home village 1.5 km from the highway with a population of 1600. Crops were destroyed and greenhouses were built up overnight. Each greenhouse occupied 1.3 mu of field with a sum of over 300 mus and each mu of field would be compensated with 450 kg of wheat each year. The labor cost of building each greenhouse was 1200 yuan. When the greenhouses were built up, nobody was willing to contract because of the high cost, difficult selling and low profit. Having no alternative, the Secretary had to pull down those greenhouses with a bulldozer each at the cost of 150 yuan. As a result, there was a loss of more than 200,000 in that summer.

Where to collect such a huge sum of money? Of course, peasants were not willing to afford. Moreover, many villagers participated in the greenhouse building or some should have got the compensation for land acquisition. Their refusal and resistance to pay that expense made a great trouble for public grain collection as well as deduction payment in recent years. However, only the Party Branch Secretary was pleased with himself who got promoted as the head of another developed town by the county government because of his boasted leadership performance of building so many greenhouses and making so much economic benefits.

In 1998, a task of planting 500 mus of hot pepper was assigned to the village production team by the township government. A repurchase at the price of 1.2–2.0 yuan per kg was scheduled but was not executed in the harvest season. With neither contract nor market, a huge amount of hot pepper can hardly be sold by villagers themselves in rural fairs even at 0.1 yuan per kg. Few people would buy hot pepper because all households planted it and piles and piles of hot pepper

which could not be preserved were dumped, which suffered poor and miserable peasants again with economic loss.

(Chu XX, Energy Department of China University of Geosciences, “Small Village with Many Troubles,” Shangdong Province.)

Besides compulsory plantation of economic crops such as vegetable and fruits, tobacco plantation is the most intensified complaint in some places. Township governments promote the planting of tobacco because it is of the highest tax value generally accounting for around 50% of the total price which is the best stimulant to the increase of fiscal revenue.

The biggest puzzle for peasants was why they were forced to plant tobacco. From 1995, the township government ordered all peasants of the town to plant tobacco with high-quality fields and 40% of each mu of field must be used for tobacco planting. If tobacco was not planted or the task was not completed, each mu of tobacco field would be charged with 248 yuan of tax.

Recent years saw sluggish market and depressed price of tobacco, particularly the suppression of quality level and the price of tobacco leaves in 1998 when peasants suffered a great loss. However, In late 1998, the township government issued a “new policy” that each rural household must plant mushrooms cultivated in bags distributed according to the their amount of field area and the failure of completing the task will be subject to tax payment, which was similar to tobacco plantation. The material for mushroom cultivation was sold to peasants by the township government which promised to provide them with technical instructions and the products would be sold by peasants themselves. However, there was no any technical instruction and anybody in charge after some peasants bought the material at 2.5 yuan per barrel. Finally, all mushrooms were rotten and discarded and there has been no one giving any explanation up to now. Peasants all complained that: “This is totally planned for the township government’ profit!”

Against peasants’ complaints and the superior’s criticism, some village cadres felt themselves wronged and claimed that they practice the compulsion in consideration of peasants’ interests. The problem is how can they compel peasants and deprive their autonomous right of production? As repeatedly demonstrated by historical experiences and lessons, negligence of peasants’ initiative and creativeness can hardly lead to the success of doing anything. Therefore, compulsion shall never be exercised whether it is good or not for peasants, which is not only the basic right endowed to peasants by the household contract policy but also the rules governing the relationship between grassroots organizations and peasants. Any trampling of this rule is the trampling of the order established by the new system, which will do fundamental harm to peasants in spite of some temporary and partial benefits.

IV. Excessive Occupation of Contracted land by Cadres’ Households

Generally speaking, peasants tend to have arable land as much as possible which is a basic economic resource. It is an important form for some grassroots cadres to occupy excessive arable land upon the distribution of community resources with their public power.

Due to the openness of contracted land distribution and the strong supervision by peasants' in rural areas, it is a rare case for village cadres' to directly occupy of excessive land. Usually, it is operated in a disguised form that is not the most outstanding issue.

There were 2.4 mus of land contracted to each villager in my production team but the team leader and his wife had 10 mus. Therefore, villagers protested and appealed to the township government. As explained by the team leader, he was doing farm work on behalf of his elder sister's family with four people whose residence was registered in this village with their contracted land.

Villagers claimed that this family only had residence here without any house and they didn't live here unless they paid a visit to their relatives once or twice a year without fulfilling any obligation as villagers. However, the team leader who was in charge of making specific prolonged contracting plan distributed his sister's family with land for housing, land for grain ration and land for contract and put them under his own control, which was in villagers' eyes an unreasonable practice totally for individual purpose by taking advantage of the policy loophole. For such household that only had residence, it was a question to be discussed whether it should have its share of land or not. Even the answer was "Yes," it should only have land for housing which should be integrated into the production team's whole portions and distributed in a unified way. There was no ground for the team leader to monopolize the land.

Moreover, villagers complained that instead of making decision on affairs like increasing households and residents in secret, cadres should have consulted with all villagers because the land belongs to all members of the village.

(Ju XX, Mechanic Department, China University of Geosciences, "Disturbance of Measuring the Land," Jiangsu Province.)

V. Discussion and Judgment

Present agricultural household contract system is created and established by peasants themselves. It is necessary for peasants to maintain the stability of such a basic contract system which has profound social basis. In terms of the period of land contract, particularly the 30 year policy warrant is generally consistent with peasants' request of a stable contract system. However, there are different demands in terms of different family situations and different types of jobs. Some peasants request that land contract shall be timely adjusted in accordance with changing family population, which is the reasonable ground for village cadres' redistribution of land within the long-term contract period. The problem is that some cadres have their pursuit of self-interest in the operation of land contracting by taking advantage of such opportunity to raise land contracting price or occupy part of the land as "collective owned," or do favor to those from their clans or relatives, which has violated the public's interests. Therefore, contradictions in land contract are in fact the conflicts of interests between some village cadres and villagers.

As shown by our sample survey of 818 peasants in May 1999, 92.1% of the interviewees knew about the new regulation on the 30-year additional period for land contract; 62.8% answered that the extra 30-year contract had been signed in their villages. In terms of evaluation of several adjustments from the beginning of land

contract, 58% interviewees regarded it as more and more reasonable, 32% said that it was more and more unreasonable. Others thought it remained as before or they were not quite clear of it. Thus it can be seen that peasants are generally satisfied with the implementation of land policies.

In our point of view, the problem with current land contract is grassroots organizations' changing of behaviors in operation which is not led by the lack of understanding of relevant policies but driven by cadres' special self-interests. It is necessary to pay close attention to such behavior change of cadres in the study of policy implementation.

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3.9 How Did Tax Burden Become a "Problem"

—An Analysis of Peasants' Over Burden in some places.

From 1990s, particularly in recent years, the central government paid more attention to the alleviation of peasants' burden and issued several important documents with more and more strengthened measures and meticulous regulations and requirements. However, instead of fundamental improvement, the problem seemed to get more serious in some places.

During the spring vacation of 1998, this research group organized a field investigation of village affairs by nearly a hundred capital university students returning home. The investigation mainly focused on interviews and narrations of hot issues within villages including land contract, peasants' burden, village affairs management and general elections of Villagers Committee, cadre-villager disputes and so on. Among the 90 survey reports, peasants' burden was the most concerned issue. Based on the analyses from these reports, we understand to some extent how peasants feel, recognize and treat the burden of tax and fees.

Though villagers have a limited horizon and they cannot see government power behind those who collect money and property directly from them, they are doubtlessly most clear about grassroots cadres' problems in this process with the deepest experiences. What is more important, peasants' experiences will directly affect their attitudes and behaviors toward the government.

I. Peasants' Experience: the bigger the reduction, the bigger the burden

For peasants of certain areas, their burden began to increase from early 1990s.

A university student from central Henan Province described the changing process of peasants' burden in his home village as follows: Li Zhuang is a typical agricultural village. Most villagers began to feel difference from 1992: their money earned with hard work was all taken away by village cadres. Peasants' income is said to have increased since the Reform and Opening up, however, most peasants engaged in agricultural production actually felt themselves in a more and more difficult position. Villagers said that those years saw a transition period when township enterprises, fund raising and quotas were increasing year by year in China's Central Plain.

In 1996 when the country adopted protective price of grain and abolished grain purchase quotas, peasants began to feel better. However, due to the popularization of Nine-year Compulsory Education, construction of village roads and offices, etc. villagers felt very great pressure in recent years and there were some incidents involved with group petitions. In 1997, public grain was deducted once for all by the village overall plan, leaving peasants with merely IOUs. In October that year, the township Party Secretary implied or asked every village to suspend the collection of withdrawal and retaining fund to maintain stability before he got promoted as the deputy head of another county, which delayed the village work for the shortage of money and brought hidden trouble for the next year.

Then came the general inspection of family planning, river-digging and channel-repairing projects. As a result, the collection of village deduction fund was put off to the spring of 1998 when the Secretary had transferred to other county.

In early 1998, spring plowing began and peasants were busy investing, sowing and short of money to pay deduction fund which had to be put off to post-autumn to collect together with the fund of 1998. However, the sum of the two-year fund exceeded a hundred yuan per mu. Additionally, the county authority issued a regulation that there should be no petition in any village under any circumstances and the offenders should be penalized, which led to strong antagonism of villagers. As a result, there was an over 200,000-yuan shortage of deduction fund with a sum of public grain, seeding grain and education grain for over 50 kgs per mu for the summer season. Peasants reached an agreement privately that they would only turned in public grain. Finally, village cadres had to collect grain house by house and then sent to the town. According to the village Party Branch Secretary, the county government had appealed to the Provincial Procuratorate on whether it was necessary to exercise coercive measures to collect the deduction funds owed for two years across the county.

(Li XX, undergraduate of Management Department, Beijing Post and Telecommunications University, "Peasants' Burden of Li Zhuang Village," Henan Province.)

This university students' narration is full of historical sense and villagers' experience is a reflection of changing macro situations. Major factor affecting peasants' burden is that the development and opening factories in the over-heated economic process demand peasants of certain funds and upgrading and standard attainment in a multitude of names also have direct economic pressure on peasants. Meanwhile,

grassroots leaders will put off or even give up some compulsory actions under specific circumstances as the central government enhances its effort in reducing peasants' burden. The problem with this village is actually a common problem in a wide range, i.e., on one hand, peasants' share of burden is increasing and on the other hand, the difficulty of collection work is also increasing for village organizations. As a result, more and more peasants default on reasonable or unreasonable payment, confronting grassroots organizations with increasingly heavy financial pressure.

Peasants' burden began to increase in 1990s. In 1980s, peasants only turned in 20 yuan for each mu of field equal to 85 kg of grain per mu (estimated with the national purchase price of grain in 1981); now the price has been raised up to 215 kg of grain per mu with various expensive additional taxes. Of course, quotas collected from peasants have become relatively stable these years because they have reached the break point of peasants' endurance. Faced with so many rural quotas, lots of peasants resisted but the result was the stronger they resisted, the more money they had to turn in. This village ruled that those who failed to turn in quotas in time must turn in double amount. Village cadres would clear the quotas account at the end of each year and compulsively collect quotas house by house in collaboration with county judicial officers, policemen and jobless people in the society. For those peasants who didn't pay up, they would move away their valuable staff, scrambled for their pigs and cattle and even their raw and cooked rice. Confronted with these swaggering state judicial officers and aggressive people without fixed duties, peasants indeed became more obedient.

(Wang, Postgraduate of Biological Department, Beijing University, “Magical Effect of Burden Card,” Hubei Province.)

The situation of this village is a step further than last village. The village organization could no longer endure peasants' procrastination and exercised to some extent violent measures which subdued them and resolved the intensified conflict with intensified means.

II. Peasants' Dissatisfaction: Exaggerated Income

The central government's documents and regulations on reducing peasants' burden are becoming more and more meticulous and specific with increasing efforts. However, these regulations have not played their expected role for many reasons. First of all, peasants' income has been exaggerated. To restrict the arbitrary increase of peasants' share of burden, the central government issued a clear regulation that the burden on peasants within the contract (three deductions and five plans) shall not exceed 5% of the net income per capita of the previous year. Additionally, the quota shall not change for three years. Throughout 1990s, the issue of burden was the highlight of rural work, but the performance was poor. The major problem lies in the lack of authenticity of average income submitted by local governments themselves. For grassroots cadres, exaggerated income will not only be justifiable to increase peasants' quotas but also highlight their own official performance with the effect of achieving two things at one stroke.

In the spring of 1998, our research group organized an interview and survey at Beijing Railway Station and Beijing West Railway Station on 873 migrant peasant

workers with 818 valid questionnaires. These 818 peasants were from 22 provinces, 434 counties, 636 towns and 779 villages. 23.3% of them knew the average income data submitted by village cadres and 76.7% didn't. Villagers' ignorance of their reported average income demonstrated the weakness of their supervision, not to mention the authenticity of the income itself. Whether peasants regarded these numbers as true or false was also a problem. Among those who knew the reported income, 81.7% thought it was exaggerated, 0.6% thought it was underestimated, 2.1% thought it was consistent with the real income and 1.6% said they were not clear of it.

Peasants' income has been a mess these years. For instance, there were at least 3 different numbers for the net income of my home town's peasants in 1998: No. 1 is 2400 yuan reported to the higher authority; No. 2 is 2252 yuan announced by the township Party Secretary in the Party Congress and No. 3 is 1673 yuan declared by the Township Head in the Township People's Congress.

There were also three numbers for the paddy field of the Fourth Production Team of Anning Village: No. 1 was 46 mus claimed by the township government as the basis of assigning grain task (including grain tax in kind); No. 2 was 35 mus recorded by the village and the Fourth Team before the household contract responsibility system was put into effect; No. 3 was 29 mus measured per Zhang (a unit of length equivalent to 10/3 meters) with a pole at the length of 1.2 Zhang following the implementation of the system, which was actually a common practice of self-deception. The township government had been collecting agricultural grain tax based on 46 mus of field. From 1994, all villagers of the Fourth Team began to refuse to turn in agricultural grain tax excessively collected except two households (village cadres). Some villagers even refused to pay regular grain, tax and double-deduction fund and the township government could do nothing about it.

(Peng XX, PhD of Physics Department, Beijing Normal University, "Income and Burden of the Peasants in Anning Village, Sichuan Province.)

What is worthy of attention is that all data of income per capita in this case were introduced to the investigators by village cadres who frankly admitted that these numbers were higher than actual ones because of the forgery of township government cadres or claimed that township leaders should be held responsible for not being practical and realistic.

The local government makes false reports of peasants' income to the superior. For example, peasants' income per capita is no more than 1500 yuan but township cadres boast it as 2500 yuan, which will virtually increase peasants' burden. Village cadres then listed several numbers to me: A middle-sized household with 5 people and 2 mus of field per capita who plant no economic crop but three crops of grain each two years with a cow of 2000 yuan and a pig of 1000 yuan will get an annual income of 2000 yuan per capita. But after the deduction of fertilizer, pesticide, machine cultivation and sprinkler irrigation expenses, the income per capita will be no more than 1500 yuan. The income per capita of some difficult households is less than 600 yuan. Due to the severe draught this year with higher irrigation expense, the cost for each mu of crop will be at least 250 yuan.

(Liu XX, undergraduate of Precise Instrument Department, Tsinghua University, "Interview of the Village Party Branch Secretary," Anhui Province.)

In terms of income per capita, the number released by the township government was over 1800 yuan, whereas the Party Branch Secretary Tao and villagers were crying bitterness without ceasing. They complained that annual income of villagers varied in a wide range from several ten thousand yuan to three or four hundred yuan, most of which were below 1000 yuan. In Tao’s point of view, one reason was the superior authority’s need to boast of its official performance, but the major motivation was to increase the burden of peasants.

The resources of my home village’s income mainly consist of two parts: One is the money remitted by migrant workers or earned from small-size business which was lesser to the village’s overall income; the other is the agricultural production income such as selling grain, feeding pigs, ducks and selling collective woods, etc. The income of non-agricultural industries such as township enterprise and tertiary industry is almost zero.

(Chen XX, undergraduate of Law Department, Minzu University of China, “Why My Home Village Remains Poor?” Hunan Province.)

The next problem is that competent township department is not able to make any forgery without the numbers reported in written form by village cadres because as government working procedure goes, the confirmation of any village’s income data by any township government must be based on the village’s report of peasants’ income from bottom up. Then, why do village cadres report exaggerated income when they know that it is not true and peasants will complain? Or how did the township leaders make village cadres willing to exaggerate? As demonstrated by individual case, there is a kind of inter-dependent relationship between village cadres and township governments through which township leaders exercise their control over villager cadres based on a sort of exchange of interests.

As shown by our sample survey, the central government’s dissemination of the “5% Limit” is more effective with 57.3% interviewees knowing about it which can be called a policy deeply rooted among the people besides the additional 30 year of contract period. However, peasants give no high appraisal of the practical performance of such regulation. When asked of the role of that regulation in reducing peasants’ burden, 9.2% of those who knew it answered “great” and 17.7% answered “little”; 70.1% answered “no use at all” and 3% answered “not clear.”

III. Peasants’ Puzzle: the Burden is a Mess of Accounts

There are very clear regulations on peasants’ burden in the central government’s documents such as national statutory taxation, “three deductions and five plans” within contract and other fund raising and quotas with definite method of calculation, means of collection and procedure of approval. However, in the real practice of grassroots organizations, these regulations become an integrated mess which peasants are not able to tell and to resist.

My fifth uncle said when he took out the account book, turning page by page: Present taxes are classified only by names such as agricultural tax levied on farming population, slaughter tax on the number of slaughtered domestic animals, pastoral tax on the amount of livestock raised. Due to the difficulty of statistics and the all-round contract exercised across the county based on money instead of quantity, the

land was distributed per capita and taxes are collected according to the proportion of field area which has actually imposed taxes on each villager regardless of old people or new born children. The amount of tax is decided at the county level and the task will be assigned to township governments in charge of collecting taxes from peasants.

(Han XX undergraduate of Biology Department, Beijing Normal University, "The Change of My Village," Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.)

In many cases, even village cadres know nothing about the calculation of burden which is a process from top to bottom bewildering villagers a lot. As introduced by village cadres, they don't know how agricultural tax and tax on agricultural and forestry specialties are calculated because the task of peasants' turning over is stipulated by the township government. Village cadres and peasants know the "Three Deductions and Five Plans" are calculated based on 5% of income per capita last year, but in practice, this 5% is collected on peasants' annual net income per capita estimated on the basis of quotas decided by the township government instead of their real net income.

In 1998, not all agricultural and forestry specialty tax and the "Three Deductions and Five Plans" money were collected. For the 33000-yuan task of "Three Deductions and Five Plans," only 22,000 yuan was collected. 20–30 households didn't turn in with three kinds of excuses: it should not be turned in; the burden was too heavy and they didn't have the money to pay. As a result, the village had to borrow a loan of 20,000 yuan from the bank to fulfill the demand of the township government.

(Gao XX Postgraduate of Social Development Institution, Beijing University, "Why Peasants' Burden has Become So Heavy?" Shandong Province.)

In this case, every head of household must be an expert of taxation who clearly knows the exact number of the payable agricultural tax, specialty tax and pastoral tax for his family; otherwise he will have to turn in all taxes muddle-headedly as required.

Provided that the names of institutionalized taxes and fees are legal, the problem lies in the amount that is too large and the miscellaneous quotas and fees from various departments that are disordered. Nowadays, licenses and plates of Villagers Committee are increasing both in number and price. Family planning, Villagers Committee, Health and Medicine, Party Construction, Public Security Committee and Women's Committee, etc. are all required having licenses and plates which are issued all by the superior.

In 1997, a medical license cost 450 yuan and a Party Construction plate 800 yuan. There were more than ten similar licenses and plates for the general team and the expense would be apportioned to peasants themselves in the end.

(Han XX, undergraduate of Biology Department, Beijing Normal University, "The Change of My Home Village," Inner Mongolia.)

What puzzles peasants more is that some charges are like plundering for them without any reason: On the second day after I got home, I was picking clothes in the town market when the crowd burst out and people scurried around on bicycles. Later I knew that it was the storm troop organized by the township government to collect bicycle fees on the streets for 5 yuan each. A bunch of peasants were caught as if

they were press-ganged. Several days later, the street market became desolated and depressed and people no longer dared to go to market. Pressed by peasants’ complaints which were heard “on every street,” the township government had to cease all activities. Such monstrous absurdity happened in broad daylight and who would investigate and hold those responsible for their misbehaviors?

(Xu, postgraduate of College of Food Science of China Agricultural University, “Distribution of the Relief Fund of My Home Village,” Anhui Province.)

IV. Chronic Disease of Burden: Compulsion

As indicated by the Central documents, large-scale compulsion began to take place in early 1990s. Documents prior to 1990 (including the notification issued by the State Council in 1990) mainly focused on positive requirements of burden reduction without emphasis on the compulsion in burden execution.

In 1993, the CPC Central Committee General Office and General Office of the State Council jointly issued an urgent notification which indirectly pointed out the compulsion issue. Considering that there had been some vicious cases including striking and hurting people which even led to deaths and group violent conflicts, the document highlighted that “Those vicious cases led by over-burden of peasants shall be seriously investigated and treated with no exception. Those concerned with vicious cases shall be brought to justice.”

In December 1996, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued “Decision on Earnest Reduction of Peasants’ Burden” consisted of 13 provisions most of which reiterated former regulations and the No. 8 provision was most striking, “Collecting money and properties from peasants by any dictatorship instrument and means is prohibited; coercive seizure of domestic animals and belongings from peasants’ houses is prohibited; forcing peasants to turn in money and properties with illegal means including withdrawal of contracted land, etc. is prohibited.” Obviously, those new prohibitions were issued not because those practices were allowed before but because grassroots cadres’ compulsion of peasants was intensifying. Compulsion of peasants in some places has not been resolved these years. As our investigation shows, 78.2% interviewed peasants claimed that there were coercive collections of grain and money by village cadres in their home villages in the following ways: taking away family belongings, detaining family members, striking peasants and cutting off water and electricity supply, forcing loans on peasants, transforming payable fees into loans, withdrawing land and depriving children of their education, etc. Several similar cases were also reflected in university students’ winter vacation investigations.

A young cadre told the university student conducting survey back in home village her personal experience with the tax collection team: The team came first to Wang’s house and found only Wang’s wife sick in bed. She said her husband had gone out to borrow money because they didn’t have enough money to pay. There was nothing except several pieces of worn out furniture which revealed their strenuous economic condition. However, the tax collectors were not convinced but said: “Today is the deadline and if you don’t pay the money, you will be taken and shut up in the Population School.”

Wang's wife implored the team to give her two more days until her husband returned but those tax collectors didn't agree. She said in desperation: "All right, before I go with you, I have a bottle of medicine to take, please wait me a minute." Then she went in a room and took out a grown bottle which was recognized by a team member as a pesticide bottle instead of a regular one for medicine. The team member immediately told the team leader: "Look at what kind of medicine she was holding!" Reminded by this word, the team leader grabbed the bottle and found it a bottle of pesticide. Being annoyed, the team leader said to her: "What on earth are you going to do?" Wang's wife answered: "I don't have money but you force me to pay. What else do you think I can do?" The team leader became more agitated and said: "How dare you say that to me? Who do you think I am?"

Just then, Wang returned but only borrowed 40 yuan which was still not enough. Knowing that the money would not be screwed out, the team leader said in the end: "Ok! Pay us 40 yuan now and make it up later!" Wang and his wife thanked him with their hearts overflowing with gratitude.

The team finished their job in several households and then came to Li's, a poverty-stricken household. Li's wife appealed in a tearful voice for several days of moratorium, which was rejected by the team.

Li Bing (a cadre assigned by the regional authority) had compassion for her and pulled the village Party Branch Secretary aside and paid 200 yuan for her with his own money in secret. Following the departure of the tax collection team, Li Bing's deed was widely spread over Liujia Village and complimented by all villagers. The news also reached the township government and Li Bing was summoned there and questioned by the township Party Secretary: "Do you know what you have done? It is an obstacle for us to carry out the work! Even though you can pay 200 yuan for Li's household, can you pay for the whole village?"

(Ma, undergraduate of Philosophy Department, Renmin University of China, "the Burden of Peasants in a Village," Anhui Province.)

It is a relatively mitigated means of compulsion as well as an innovation for many grassroots organizations to force peasants to fulfill their payment of taxes and fees through borrowing and loans. The prohibition of such practice was first seen in the Notification on Earnest Reduction of Present Burden of Peasants jointly issued by the CPC Central Committee General Office and the State Council General Office in July, 1998: "Forcing peasants to pay any tax and fee with borrowed money or loan is prohibited."

As was also presented in university student's winter vacation survey:

Wang Jia, the Vice Village Party Branch Secretary calculated such a bill for us as follows: Peasants' production depended on the weather. Even in case of a good harvest year, the net income of a mu of grain is only about 100 yuan with deduction of expenses of land contract, irrigation, fertilizer, pesticide and seeds, etc. In case of bad weather such as severe draught the year before last and flood last year, there was only loss for farming. Moreover, peasants had to pay agriculture sideline products and specialties tax and they will be fined for failure of completing yellow tobacco planting and pig feeding quotas etc. The burden for a common peasant household this year will be at least 300–400 yuan including the "five plans" at 110 yuan per

capita. According to Wang Jia, during the fund raising period this year, about 160 households of the 380 households of his village were forced to pay with loans.

(Ren XX, undergraduate of Beijing Normal University, “Village Affairs Spoken by Vice Secretary of the Village Party Branch, Shandong Province.)

Village collective borrowing and loans is another form of payment led by rural burden which is different from peasants’ individual borrowing and loans. Sometimes, it is a helpless choice for cadres when they cannot collect money from peasants or it is driven by cadres’ self-interests.

To encourage village cadres to expediting the collection of various funds, the township government set up a bonus of 500 yuan to those Villagers Committees which fulfilled the money collection task within prescribed timeline. The Party Branch Secretary of Li Village borrowed a loan of 12,000 yuan from the Cooperative Fund in the name of the Villagers Committee and paid off the money owed by the village to the town and got the bonus, which was kept a secret until the accounts were inspected. There were different versions of speculation and explanation among villagers. When the truth came out in the end, villagers didn’t trust it because they regarded it as inconceivable and would rather believe that this fund had been used in dining and wining or embezzled by cadres.

(Peng XX, PhD of Physics Department, Beijing Normal University, “Income and Burden of Peasants of Anning Village, Sichuan Province.)

V. Peasants’ Resistance

The most common expression of villagers’ dissatisfaction to village cadres is the refusal to pay various expenses. In another word, refusing to pay expenses has become the most frequently used tool for their interest expression. In most cases, these refusals are scattered and spontaneous without the feature of collective action. However, under certain conditions, peasants’ organized resistance will begin to grow. What first comes to peasants’ minds is to express their demands within existing policy and institutional framework such as appealing to superior authorities to draw their attention and solve the problems. Resorting to law is an ideal means but there is little chance of success. In most cases, the court is not willing to accept peasants’ lawsuits but there was a successful case in a university student’s survey.

The majority of villagers of the Fourth Team regarded the taxes and fees task assigned by the township government as too heavy. Liu, a villager of the Fourth Team who worked in the county town happened to know Wang, chief of the county Agriculture Economic Station at that time and was told by Wang the following provision of “Peasant’s Burden and Labor Service Management Regulation” issued by the central government and “Peasant Burden Management Regulation of Sichuan Province”: Peasants’ burden shall not exceed 5% of their net income per capita of last year. Liu returned to Anning Village with these regulations and consulted with several villagers of his group. Since there were regulations as the legal basis and the support from the chief of the county Agricultural Economic Station, they decided to file their complaints to the court. Meanwhile, they appealed first to the Villagers Committee and village Party Branch with the expectation to find a solution without litigation. However, all village cadres stayed aloof from their complaints and nobody

believed that they had the courage to file a lawsuit against the township government. Some cadres regarded it as an action against them and tried to persuade and intimidate villagers. I interviewed several village cadres and to be honest, they also thought the burden was too heavy and inconsistent with the regulation. Moreover, they also had their own shares of burden but how dare they offend their superior for defending the villagers' interests and their own? At that time, cadres were not democratically elected by villagers and furthermore, part of the increased burden was a result of their extravagant eating and drinking. Therefore, these cadres feared and suffered at both ends.

Afterwards, villagers came to Chief Wang of the general office of the County People's Congress and gained his sympathy. Chief Wang recommended to them Lawyer Wu of a law office in the county and they won the lawsuit in the end, but Chief Wang was elbowed out, demoted and removed from his former position thereafter. Villagers felt themselves owing a lot to Chief Wang.

(Peng XX, PhD of Physics Department, Beijing Normal University, "The Income and Burden of Peasants of Anning Village, Sichuan Province.)

Peasants have another means of resistance which is effective but disturbing. A peasant elected as Head of Villagers Committee in the election organized by villagers themselves recounted his story of leading villagers' collective resistance.

From January 24th, 1999, the township government organized a gang of local ruffians and rascals and began to collect grain, oil and money from each village. Anyone who refused them will be forced to pay money and grain regardless of his financial situation. Many people got injured; some of them still lie in the hospital for treatment and they had to pay their own medical expenses. In collaboration with other villager team leaders, I organized all young adults in the village which were divided into several groups to keep on watching day and night. In case that the township government sent ruffians to scramble our grain, all villagers would take action as one to defend their common interest. At the sight of the strong unity and strict defense of villagers, the township government changed their strategy into playing mind games. All peasants from other villages who were relatives to our villagers were forced to persuade and educate our people; even threatening measures were used on them. The children of our village in middle school were driven back home and forced to ask their parents for money to pay public grain, or they would be banned to go to school. However, our villagers wouldn't give in, instead, they asked for the respect of their opinions, approval of their demands in the Villagers' Requests and recognition of their own election result, otherwise they would not hand in public grain.

(Liang XX, undergraduate of Philosophy Department, Renmin University of China, "I Want to Do Something for Villagers," Sichuan University.)

As the survey shows, conflicts between villagers and grassroots organizations have been increasing these years. For most peasants' choice, their crucial means of interest expression is not confrontation particularly not organized resistance. Confrontation is neither an political tradition of old-time peasants nor the behavioral feature of new-age peasants. Briefly speaking, peasants in the past would first choose litigation and present ones prefer petition. All of them intend to seek an external

power which will uphold justice for them. According to our special research on several cases of peasant petition to Beijing, confrontations from peasants particularly organized ones will take place following the failure of scattered and moderate petitions. Once problems are not resolved through petitions to Beijing, peasants will either give up their original demands or seek to solve problems by their own power including self-organization.

VI. Problem Discussion

Among all documents issued by the Central government concerning peasants' burden throughout 1990s, the most important one should be the Urgent Notification of 1993 and the Thirteen Provisions of 1996. An important change can be seen in comparison of regulations in these two documents: the former emphasized more on the problem of superior authorities mainly about the clearing and abolition of documents involved with quotas, fund raising, target hitting, administrative and undertaking fees and fines issued by the central and provincial governments. The latter paid more attention to the problem of grassroots organizations highlighting the correction of various behaviors of grassroots organizations arbitrarily increasing peasants' burden, particular those violating peasants' legal rights and interests and intensifying contradictions. In 1993, the Urgent Notification jointly issued by the CPC Central Committee General Office and the State Council General Office pointed out the over-burden of peasants was rooted at the higher level and made great efforts in clearing and abolishing burden-increasing charges prescribed by higher level departments. We should say that such clearing-up was successful in its abolition of over a hundred of regulations on charges made by governments. However, it is surprising that in the several years that followed, the problem of grassroots organizations became more prominent with more clever and diversified methods and items to increase peasants' burden as well as more powerful compulsion and violence against peasants that led to increasing vicious cases and peasants' organized resistance, which became the focus of “Decision of an All-Round Reduction of Peasants' Burden” in 1996. It now seems that grassroots cadres should be held more responsible for peasants' burden, but the problem is why grassroots organizations have become the tools of some superior authorities to increase peasants burden instead of being “Strong Bulwarks” effectively implementing policies and regulations of the CPC Central Committee to reduce peasants' burden and protect peasants' interests. In light of the serious situation of peasants' burden, there is an important inspiration: Rural grassroots organizations themselves don't represent peasants' interests, at least for the issue of peasants' burden, considerable grassroots organizations have failed to represent peasants' interests.

In another word, if village cadres truly represent villagers' interests, they should have resisted the behaviors increasing peasants' burden whether from the superior or themselves. However, in some places and some cases, they have become violators of peasants' interests, or under certain circumstances, grassroots cadres' exploitation of peasants in the name of government authority and the community is actually a direct plunder of peasants' interests. From the beginning of 1990s, the conflicts between grassroots cadres and peasants became interest-oriented. Of course, most

rural cadres are still regarded as good. However, the assumption that grassroots organizations will surely or even naturally represent peasants' interests doesn't hold ground and peasants should have independent mechanism of interest expression.

If the above-mentioned understanding is reasonable, the thinking of grassroots organization construction should be adjusted with great strength.

It now appears that the more important issue is the education of grassroots cadres but education itself is far from enough. For a very long time, the main drawback in organizational construction is over-confidence of indoctrination and emphasis on the transformation of outlook of life instead of institutional building. Everybody including a good person may make mistakes which can only be well resolved by institutions. Therefore, the key is to restrict cadres from abuse of power through the building of a new system and institution.

Besides existing grassroots organizational structure, perhaps the development of a representative organization of peasants themselves can also be conceived. In case of the grassroots organization's deviation from the central policies, such organization will have such an organization to negotiate with or speak to the government, which will not only greatly enhance peasants' self-protection capability but also effectively restrict the attempt of the grassroots organization and the higher authority to violate peasants' interests.

This article is an internal survey report written by the author for the Development Research Center of the State Council completed in June, 1999. In November 1998, the author led a research team of the Agricultural Department the Development Research Center of the State Council and organized home-village-returning surveys in winter vacation completed by 96 students (including undergraduates, postgraduates and PhDs) from Tsinghua University, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, China Agricultural University, Minzu University of China, China University of Geosciences, which resulted in over 90 case study reports. This article is an analysis report on "Peasants' Burden of Taxes and Fees" based on individual village case study materials.

3.10 Why Did Village Affairs Management Crisis Occur?

—An analysis on village affairs management crisis in some areas.

It is commonly seen that there is an inexplicable situation for some village organizations which appear to be sound and efficient with complete organizational structure and staff configuration as well as various offices such as village affairs publicity office, the Party members' activity room and all kinds of statues and rules. However, there are only limited number of public services provided by these organizations with low quality, high management cost, weak internal normalization and low credibility among villagers, which we call "Organizational Decline" that will be elaborated in this article.

In the winter vacation of 1998, our research group organized surveys by over a hundred of university students returning their home villages. Among nearly a

hundred survey reports delivered by them, about 50% are specially accounts of or involved with the operation and function playing of village organization, particularly records of a number of common villagers' narrations and comments, which provides us with some specific and meticulous insights of the occurrence of villager organizations' decline.

I. Village Organizations as Agents

The policy designing of village organizations' functions appears to be perfect. On one hand, they will handle village public affairs following the rules of self-governance; on the other hand, they will assist township governments in their work. Generally speaking, they are representatives both of governments and peasants. However, they do poor representative job for both sides in many cases and places. In the eyes of peasants, they only collect money and grain on behalf of township governments and perform administrative functions which are to some extent in conflict with peasants' individual interests. Meanwhile, from the perspective of township governments, they are incompetent in fulfilling tasks and even make some troubles and conflicts. Judged from a higher requirement, a village organization which is only effective and successful in extorting peasants in various ways without providing services accordingly is surely not an ideal organization. What is worthy of attention is that some village organizations are becoming pure "agent tools" for grassroots governments, which even have only the function of extorting peasants on behalf of the higher level governments or by themselves. In another word, some village organizations only have the administrative function to implement their superior's instructions instead of their due role of community service.

Such change has also been clearly sensed by some village cadres themselves.

Li, Vice Secretary of the village Party Branch said that village cadres have not been working with due diligence. From late 1980s to early 1990s, village cadres engaged in production management as organizers and propellers of agricultural activities. For example, in the season of wheat harvest and autumn planting, they organized peasants to rush in the harvest of wheat before the rain and plant corn before draught. But later, they began to get busy coping with their superior's assignments and engaged in the economy of their own households. As a result, they were all doing their own business with nobody caring for collective public welfare, which is in his word: "Those who are dragons play with water; those who are tigers climb the mountain." Except coping with the superior's inspections, they care nothing about village affairs for peasants.

(Ren XX, undergraduate of Philosophy Department, Beijing Normal University, "Village Affairs Spoken by Vice Secretary of the Village Party Branch," Shandong Province.)

A university student signed with profound meaning in his survey report.

Rural cadres of the Party have "degenerated" here into characters like tax collectors!

During the investigation, I went with cadres of the Villagers Committee to two cooperatives to press for the payment of various taxes and fees and deeply experienced their embarrassment and helplessness. The Committee Head told me in a

doggerel that their most difficult job was to collect money: “The Township Head awaits, the Village Head orders and the Production Team Head runs.”

(Peng XX, PhD of Physics Department of Beijing Normal University, “Income and Burden of the Peasants of Anning Village, Sichuan Province.)

What is more worrying than “Tax Collectors” is that some township governments assign a certain number of money collection tasks to village cadres with an additional commission for them at a certain percentage of the money they collect. The more money they collect, the higher commission they will get; one-off payment and payment in advance will be given additional bonus; specific ways of collection are not restricted. Therefore, village cadres will make various supernormal efforts and even borrow money as the payment, etc. Under such circumstances, village cadres have actually turned into a new type of “Tax Farmers.”

Because township governments take care of nothing but payment of taxes and fees, some village cadres quickly transform public power into their capital for personal interests.

There is a total population of 2000 in my home village with the annual income per capita of 1000 yuan. Cadres of the last 5-year term guzzled 390,000 yuan through extravagant eating, drinking and embezzlement.

Each villager paid 100 yuan as the expense of digging well for tap water and the well was not dug but the money was gone. Villager cadres’ striking and scrambling behaviors led to villagers’ group petition. Because the county government didn’t solve the problem, petitioners sent telegraphs to the central government for 7 times. However, their petition was passed level down level back to the county and township authority, which reduced a big issue into a small one and a small one into nothing. Not a cent of embezzled money was refunded at the end of those village cadres’ term and the problem remained unresolved. As a result, petitioners were retaliated and dismissal was the only punishment for those who committed embezzlement beyond remedy.

I had thought to write about peasant petition, but those desperate petitioners were not willing to tell the truth for fear of retaliation. They didn’t think my investigation would be of any use, nor did they think anyone could solve their problems.

As demonstrated by the word “Dismissal will be the only punishment for those who have committed abominable embezzlement,” many higher level government leaders have exercised no strict governance over village cadres. Those who were dismissed can still be peasants, which is less serious than state cadres removed from their official positions. Therefore, the risk of such corruption is not big for those corrupt village cadres themselves.

Villagers’ confidence is shaken by their helplessness to cadres’ corruption before their eyes, which will have more profound damaging impact on rural social stability in the long run.

II. Village Cadres as Brokers

Village cadres with very real experiences truly understand their own roles and status. They are very clear not only about their embarrassment and distress but also about the direct cause of those conflicts. Moreover, they knew why they have become an

unpopular group among villagers. However, they will not inspect their own problems but ascribe all problems to township governments. Considerable cases shows that villagers are not satisfied with township governments and they know some of the township leaders' practices are not reasonable or even against the policies.

The village Party Branch Secretary told me that his main job was to convey the superior's instructions and collect taxes and fees.

The Secretary said: "Rural work is so difficult to do that I have racked my brain! The superior think that I have not done a good job because I didn't collect all the money; peasants think that I am oppressing them in collaboration with the superior. In fact, I am a peasant myself!" "There are few meetings held in the village because each meeting will be a burst of complaints and quarrels with villagers speaking loudly or even acting "walk-out."

The village Head doesn't understand why he is regarded as a bad person by peasants and is more confused why the policy of tax collection based on real development situations announced by the county government will be changed every time into compulsory quotas by the township government?

(Yin XX, undergraduate of Electronics Department of Beijing Normal University, "The Village Party Branch Secretary in Dilemma," Hubei Province.)

A village Party Branch secretary interviewed talked about the relationship between village cadres and township cadres and think poorly of the township government as follows:

What is the relationship between villagers and cadres? The Secretary said that village cadres are led and directed by township cadres with their interests seemingly consistent but contradictory. As village cadres, we are peasants in the final analysis, but township cadres who are separated from the land only know collecting money from peasants and it is almost impossible for them to automatically reduce the burden of peasants which will constrain themselves.

The Secretary said, every household has its own difficulty, but we village cadres have to listen to the command of township cadres and what else can we do even if they are issuing wrong orders? Frankly speaking, township cadres are so powerful that the town management is beyond the reach of state regulations.

The Secretary complemented that most of the increase of peasants' income these years should be attributed to peasants' diligence and the flexibility of central and provincial policies, whereas village cadres only seem to make countermeasures to cope with the superior's policies so as to maximize their interests.

(Li XX, undergraduate of Economic Management Department of Beijing Post and Communications University, "Peasants' Burden of Li Village," Henan Province.)

Secretary Lin said, the township government has never conveyed the central government's documents to the village since 1990, and peasants know nothing about the central policies. Upon some Party members' request of studying the central documents, the township Party Secretary claimed that it was unnecessary to convey those central documents which were inconsistent with local situations.

(Gu XX, undergraduate of Plant Protection Department of China Agricultural University, "Those Village Cadres," Jiangxi Province.)

The township government doesn't do specific work and is deaf to sincere advices but approve more of those villages licking its boots without consideration of impoverished households and many charges are paid by village organizations for peasants.

Secretary Li also said that the reduction of burden should be started from reduction of staff size of the township government which had about 50 cadres. For example, the expense of township cadres' meals in their work at villages should be cut. The income increase year by year boasted in all kind of reports was not the real increase and the income per capita of each village was stipulated by the township government's budget which was submitted to the superior as peasants' income without any field investigation to real situations.

(Luo XX, undergraduate of Mechanics Department of Tsinghua University, "Village Affairs Spoken by the Village Party Branch Secretary," Jiangxi Province.)

Village cadres are clear about their roles, knowing that they are basically peasants and most of them will never get the identities of state cadres throughout their lives within the system. From this perspective, the cadre stimulating mechanism within the system is invalid for them and they will not expect promotion of their positions or integration into the system of government officials. In turn, grass-roots government leaders will not promise them with promotions as rewards for their work performance.

However, just as they said, it is an unspeakably miserable job to be a village cadre who will have to do what the township government asks them to do though they know it is against the policy. A very important question is: What is their self-stimulation or why do they risk themselves to do so many things which will lead to peasants' endless complaints?

Here is a university student's explanation based on his survey of an individual case.

In 1998, the annual reward for cadres of my home village was 1000 yuan for the Party Branch Secretary, 900 yuan for the village head and the accountant, 800 yuan for other cadres (including members of Villagers Committee), which was too little for a cadre. Then why village cadres and the township government can be implicit in increasing peasants' burden?

I find in my survey that first of all, village cadres can get some benefits in social relations and some convenience for themselves and their family members through their close connections with township cadres like employment of their children etc. Moreover, village cadres' (particularly the Secretary's) interests are obviously controlled by the township government who set up a specific scoring system of bonus and penalty the main content of which is as follows: The salaries of the Village Party Branch Secretary and Head of a special committee such as Head of Family Planning Committee are subject to the township scoring system. In case of the failure of fulfilling tasks, their scores will be deducted equivalent to their salaries at 10 yuan per point. Therefore, to secure their wages, village cadres have to do their best to complete the tasks. However, this is not the most fundamental reason because an annual salary of 800–1000 yuan can hardly be counted as the compensation to their loss in their tense relation with villagers and being scolded.

The key role here is played only by the village Party Branch Secretary. Why does the Secretary do his best to fulfill the tasks assigned by the township government at the risk of being blamed? He answered that it was a cadre's due obligation as well as the Party's requirement, but it may be better explained with another example: On the first day of a lunar new year, a small paper doll was placed in front of the Secretary's door to curse him; the trees outside the wall of his yard was once secretly peeled off by others; for another time, the east room of his house was set fire by somebody. Of course, these incidents may be involved with some personal hates and bias but they also reveal how big the pressure is for a Secretary. Therefore, a 1000-yuan salary will in no sense make a Party Branch Secretary work with so strong enthusiasm.

I heard from a member of village finance team that the township authority would reward the village Party Branch Secretary with money every year. He gave me an example of a Secretary of the neighboring village who got a bonus of 4000 yuan each year, which was certified by the village accountant but he didn't know the specific amount either. Village Party Branch Secretary empowered to manage village affairs will have various other tangible or intangible benefits or gray income.

(Gao XX, postgraduate of Social Development Institute of Beijing University, "Why Peasants' Burden is so Heavy?" Shandong Province.)

This case has strong explanatory power which helps us to understand why many village cadres are still willing to follow their superior's instructions though they are clearly aware that some practices are against the central policies or even national law. There is no ground for blame on village cadres' self-interest inclination in their behaviors, but such inclination should be normalized, which is about the issue of restriction and supervision. Without effective normalization and restriction, people's self-interest will be improperly enlarged or undesirably extended.

As the survey shows, township cadres apply an incentive mechanism for village cadres, accurately speaking, a give-and-take condition or an unofficial commitment that village cadres shall conform to various assignments from township governments and township cadres will satisfy the former with certain practical interests. There are three forms of incentive: No. 1 is the economic reward other than institutionalized subsidy like bonus in various names; No. 2 is the work relationship between the superior and subordinate as an important social resource for village cadres which will bring conveniences to their families and even their relatives; No. 3 is the township cadres' tacitly consent to village cadres abuse of power for personal gain to some extent, which is in the positive sense "protection of village cadres' work initiative." With such an excuse, they have to tolerate village cadres' power abuse behaviors in village affairs management and irregularities in specific working methods which are in their words: "We have to back village cadres up; otherwise they will lose their enthusiasm of working." As a result, in case of the conflict between peasants and village cadres, township cadres will consciously or unconsciously stand with the latter and under such circumstances, the latter will have to depend on township cadres. Thus, village cadres' dependence is transformed into a special type of control by township cadres. In our point of view, the existence of such dependence-

and-control relation which is destructive to institutions and norms is the fundamental reason for multiple contradictions of rural society.

Due to such relation between township and village cadres, some village affairs management problems tend to become crisis which is not led by township cadres' ignorance and incompetence but their unwillingness to deal with many problems. Township cadres need to exercise certain indulgence in exchange for village cadres' implementation of their assignments. In another word, if village cadres are over-restricted by township authorizes, they will not listen to township leaders. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why incredible problems often take place at the grass-roots level. In the eyes of peasants, these problems are caused by officials shielding each other. Therefore, in many cases, peasants would rather appeal to the higher level or protest directly than to rely on their immediate township leaders to solve their problems.

Such control-dependence relationship pattern reveals the special role of village cadres who pursuit not only governments' objective but also their own in their activities as governments' agents, i.e., the process of being agents is also the agents' materializing of their own interests. Further speaking, the relationship between village cadres and township governments has become a "brokerage relationship" in modern sense and some village cadres have become a new type of "brokers," which can be regarded as a transmutation of China's traditional social brokerage pattern between government and rural gentry.

III. Stagnant Village Administration

Presently, peasants' major complaint to village affairs management in some places is the direct violation of peasants' interests led by village cadres' self-interest behaviors instead of their failure to provide services demanded by peasants.

First, institutions and norms become superficial. From early 1990s, "Village organization supporting facility construction," "Village Affairs Management Standardization" and "Villages ruled by Law" began to be widely promoted in rural areas. Particularly these years, there have been regulations on normalized management and all kinds of organizations for every village. Most villages have met various requirements as described in the reports of competent departments.

Provided that it is true, how can we understand peasants' unceasing dissatisfaction and increasing conflicts?

The village accountant said: "there are only two people who have the final say throughout the village: the village Party Branch Secretary and the village Head. Others are merely responsible for running errands and doing specific jobs. There are considerable poverty-alleviation funds (locally called project funds) from outside, but I have only kept one account of 25,000 yuan as poverty-alleviation fund allocated by the county. There is no account of any other fund which has been spent by the Secretary and the Head of the village." He claimed with certainty: "The superior gave us over a million yuan in the past two years. Everything will be clear if the project accounts are examined."

(Liang XX, undergraduate of Philosophy Department of Renmin University of China, "Rural Problems," Sichuan Province.)

The Villagers Council has become merely a formality and the engendering of council members is unreasonable in itself. Those council members are appointed by the village Party Branch Secretary and most of them do not have enough awareness to truly represent the opinions of all villagers. Being afraid of trouble, those council members will unanimously pass village leaders' proposals in public voting. Moreover, if the Vice Secretary has different opinion on certain issue, the Secretary will prevaricate with the excuse that "it has been passed by the Villagers Council" and hide behind the council as a shield to hold back the objections from those insightful people and validate many unreasonable things.

Village affairs publicity bulletin used to be an important means of democratic supervision. However, such publicity is merely on the surface. "Those which can be publicized will be publicized, those which cannot be publicized will not."

There is only one expense truly publicized: the price of land contract which is auctioned in front of all villagers and sold at the highest bidding price. Since no one can hide the price, everybody knows it. However, it's hard to tell about other charges. What can peasants do to supervise? The only way is to resist the payment of deduction and fund raising.

(Lang XX, undergraduate of History Department, Minzu University of China, "Survey of Donggao Village, Shandong Province.)

Against the background of weakened supervision, resistance of fund raising and deduction has become peasants' tool and even the only effective means to express their dissatisfaction, which demonstrates that peasants burden is unaffordable not only because the huge amount but also other problems with village affairs management and cadres' behaviors.

Moreover, village finance management is in chaos, which has led to various embezzlement problems.

In 1996, Li borrowed a loan of 100,000 yuan in less than a year after he came into power as the village Party Branch Secretary. The money which has not been entered into the account book with any record of usage was claimed to have been paid off as village cadres' salaries. Without any consultation with the two Committees, the Secretary himself made the decision of loan borrowing which should have been collectively discussed. A lot of details were not reported when officials of the Anti-corruption Bureau came to investigate but immediately after they left, many unreasonable bills were entered into accounts in the name of reception of those officials.

The management of contract fees was also disordered. In recent years, there was neither ledger nor cash keeper for collected contract fees and deductions which were shared by members of Villagers Committee and became individual property when the Committee was out of order. Moreover, there was a piece of land claimed by the village leaders to build greenhouses excluded from villager's management but was cancelled later, which led to no harvest of grain. The village promised to compensate but only for those cadres and nail households.

Except those who were poor and weak and those who looked to the village for help to get married and build houses, etc. most peasants refused to pay money for deduction and raising fund.

Up till now, the village has been totally bankrupted, being unable to borrow loans and collect deductions. As the bulletin shows, each household owes the village money and the village owes cadres their salaries.

(Lang XX, undergraduate of History Department, Minzu University of China, "Survey of Donggao Village" Shandong Province.)

No. 1: village financial crisis. Both the township and village cadres generally feel the increasing difficulty of doing grassroots work. In the most intuitive sense, there has been a serious problem of deteriorating village finance and increasing village debts these years. What has given rise to such financial predicament? A university student's survey provides the explanation.

There is only one newly-established village free of debt among over 20 villages in my home town. All other villages are burdened with different debts from over 1 million to 100,000 yuan, with an average number about 500,000 yuan. Where are these debts from?

No. 2: village cadres' eating and drinking. Village cadres often eat and drink in restaurants at different levels from those in small towns to luxury ones in the county town and they have become regular customers of these restaurants. The expense of cadres' eating and drinking for a village with a less than 1000 population is counted with 10,000 yuan as a unit. To deal with these creditors, Villagers Committee keeps accounts with an interest rate of 3% which is several times higher than the bank rate.

No. 3: village cadres' traffic. In some villages, 3-4 cadres are equipped with motor-cycles which are use both for official and private purposes and even lent to others with gas expense afforded by villagers. Some village cadres (including their family members) employ round-trip tricycles at least 10 yuan each time to the town market to buy food.

No. 4: village cadres' squandering. Most village cadres' families are well off in my home village with newly-built houses and some even have storied houses. Most of them get rich by their own hard working, however, not all of them are clear of pocketing public money. So far as I know, village affairs "publicity" carried out in rural areas can hardly play any role of supervision but force peasants to pay several thousands yuan to make a bulletin for village affairs openness.

No. 4: The more frequently village cadres change, the more the village's debt will be. Generally, each term of Villagers Committee will increase the amount of village debt which will lead to the difficulty of village work and cadres' timidity and reluctance to be village Party Branch Secretary. For some villages with Secretaries unchanged for over 10 years, the amount of debt is relatively small.

No. 5: The more loans are borrowed, the bigger the loss will be. In many cases of villagers' urgent needs or debt payments without cash, they have to borrow loans from financial departments such as credit cooperatives, banks and foundations.

No. 6: the loss of village enterprises. Most village cadres have good intentions to lead villagers to achieve prosperity and search for various ways to get rich. Enterprises were set up in many villages but most of them failed and suffered loss for many reasons including technology, management and product quality problems, etc. which also become village debt.

No. 7: sending gifts at public expense. All divisions of the county and sections of the township government are all superiors to Villagers Committee which is an organization at the most basic level and has to deal with and relay upon them for the sake of work.

(He XX, undergraduate of Precise Instrument Department, Tsinghua University, “Who is to solve the indebtedness of Villagers Committee,” Hubei Province.)

Indebtedness has a very profound impact on village organizations and even threat the existence and operation of organizations themselves. In case of the difficulty in collecting money from villagers or income falling short of expenditure, village cadres will choose borrowing to turn over taxes to the higher authority or for village expenditure. The borrowers will promise very high interest without even considering follow-up repayment because there will be successors anyway. Borrowings term after term lead to the collapse of village organization’s credibility, not to mention paying off. With former debts unpaid and new loans hard to borrow, regular village finance can hardly sustain. Failures to fulfill the supervisor’s assignment and pay cadres’ salaries lead to the damage of the cohesion of cadres team itself. As a result, no one is willing to be a village cadre any longer and the existence of village organization is also endangered.

A student of Minzu University of China from Shandong Province reports that there is no village Party Branch and Villagers Committee in his home village and 6 neighboring villages where villagers are leading their lives without cadres. In case of handling necessary public affairs such as electricity and water supply, one or two villagers will temporarily call up others and everything will remain unchanged after the job is completed. Cadres sent by the superior authority will not be received by villagers and no one is willing to be appointed as a formal village cadre as intended by the township authority. Even somebody who has the intention dares not be a cadre.

The problem with the village organization is typically expressed in its relationship with villagers i.e. the sharp decline of public trust and crisis of credibility. There are multiple negative consequences of the lack of credibility, mainly villagers’ reluctance to cooperate with village cadres characterized by villagers’ resistance to pay money for deductions and plans and even the misinterpretation of village cadres’ intention to do something good.

IV. The necessity of rebuilding normalized management of village affairs

In our point of view, the difficulty in operating village administration can only be overcome by rebuilding normalization the core of which is to build a new pattern of village power which will transform village organizations’ responsibility from bottom to top into that from top to bottom (villagers), and turn the restriction of village cadres’ power by the superior into that by villagers so that village cadres will exercise their power responsible for villagers in a normalized relationship. Such thought of power relation adjustment was proposed many years ago which was formally worded by the 3rd Plenary of the 15th Party Congress as “The Four Democratic,” namely, democratic election, democratic decision-making, democratic supervision and democratic management. Now the problem is how to make these norms run and how to resolve the management shock in the establishment of norms.

(i) **How can peasants become village masters?**

Theoretically, peasants are masters but that's not enough because their position and power as masters must be guaranteed by procedures. Without specific and restrictive democratic procedures and norms, it will be impossible for peasants to effectively exercise their democratic power. Therefore, the rebuilding of norms shall be focused on the institutionalized expression of villagers' rights to make it feasible for villagers to participate in the direct management of village public affairs. The rebuilding of norms is the publicizing of village management, which has to be pushed by peasants' participation at a very height. Disorder is inevitable to some extent in the redistribution of power resources and transformation of management pattern. Hence, there is no surprise for some problems caused by villagers' conscious behaviors of participation.

The establishment of peasants' independent economic position and the divergence and manifestation of interest subjects in the rural society have laid the foundation for building a new system of village management norms. In this sense, the real social and economic structure can accommodate and expedite the institutional framework featured by democracy and openness. Therefore, both theoretical circles and practical work departments highly appraise some villages for their successful explorations oriented by democracy with plenty of confidence in the prospect of development. However, the result is unsatisfactory on the whole or at least far from the expected objective of resolving village conflicts. The main problem is that the new norms are merely regarded by township leaders as democratic "flower vases" showing off on the wall of their offices instead of being the internal operating rules of grassroots organizations. Therefore, the key question is how to make textual norms the real code of conduct in grassroots organizations' dealing with public affairs and the true track on which power runs.

(ii) **Existing Order Shaken by Village Democracy**

Village democracy is not merely the business at the village level and it is too naive to think that democracy can run smoothly at the village level and the running of state power above the village level (township and even county level) will remain stable. Village democracy will strongly shake the operation of grassroots governments i.e. township governments and have a profound impact on the power activity mode of grassroots Party organizations. A Villagers Committee produced by a real-sense election will inevitably lead to the following logical results.

First, the emergence of a new village power center. Although no one claims to reduce the power of the Party Branch, the production of Villagers Committee elected by people provides a broader public opinion basis for its power legitimacy and the Party Branch's power centralization pattern and even its monopoly of everything begin to loosen and are even challenged. Villagers Committee will inevitably ask for its own portion of power, such as collective property management, rights of contract letting and adjustment (of land and village enterprises).

In the second round of land contract, some newly elected village heads put the Party Branches aside and organized contract letting by themselves. They also asked

for relevant financial management power, essentially the power to sign expenditure accounts which used to be signed by the Party Branch Secretaries. To settle the disputes of the power to sign, some county and city governments issued documents which require the signing of both Party Branch secretaries and village heads for payment or refund. In terms of personnel power, such as the arrangement of important positions of accountant, storekeeper and electrician there are also increasing contradictions between Party Branch secretaries and village heads.

Second, the “direction” from township governments will be weakened. In the past, major village cadres were directly controlled by township Party Committees, particularly Party Branch secretaries were directly appointed. With their power granted by the superior, village cadres are mainly responsible for higher level leaders especially in case of conflicts between the superior’s requirements and villagers’ demands and such bottom to top responsibility feature is becoming more and more obvious. In regular management, villagers are not able to supervise village cadres but as soon as real democratic elections are put into effect, the empowerment of Villagers Committee cadres will be shifted from the superior to the public which will lead to tremendous change of village power structure. Elected by villagers, village cadres’ official behaviors will be more oriented by villager’s intentions and they will be more inclined to villagers in case of conflicts between the superior’s requirements and villagers’ demands and even resist higher level governments. Some village head candidates even use the exemption of “three deductions and five plans” for peasants as their campaign slogan. Thus, there will be inevitably be shock and it is imaginable that there must be adjustment of the whole Party and government leadership system accompanied by village democracy.

(iii) Peasants are confronted with difficulty in their participation in village affairs management.

The problem is whether township and village organizations can consciously integrate peasants’ power into village affairs management under existing brokerage relationship between township and village cadres and even actively break up the brokerage.

Peasants surely hope to enter the power stage of rural society and if existing holders of power keep on preventing peasants from entering into power activities at least in a legal and orderly way, those peasants with strong demands to participate will insist on and conflicts will be inevitable. It has happened in many places that peasants put aside government system and organized elections by themselves and then managed village affairs. The dilemma of making the choice is that the government system will inevitably be out of control to some extent if self-organization of peasants is allowed. However, if such self-organization is prohibited from participation, it will be impossible for grassroots democracy to develop in some places. Many peasants would rather regard such democracy as a fraud than to believe in the government. Therefore, instead of smooth progress, there will be twists and turns as well as turbulences for the rebuilding of village organizational norms.

This article is an internal survey report written by the author for the Development Research Center of the State Council completed in June, 1999. In November 1998, the author led a research team of the Agricultural Department the Development Research Center of the State Council and organized home-village-returning surveys in winter vacation completed by 96 students (including undergraduates, postgraduates and PhDs) from Tsinghua University, Beijing University, Beijing Normal University, China Agricultural University, Minzu University of China, China University of Geosciences, which resulted in over 90 case study reports. This article is an analysis report on "Village Affairs Management" based on university students' individual case surveys.

Chapter 4

Peasants and Social Construction

4.1 Stability Maintenance and Political Reform

Editor's Note of Phoenix Weekly: Recently, the chief editor of Phoenix Weekly interviewed Zhao Shukai and had a discussion on present and future social stability issue.

Phoenix Weekly: Following 2008 which was an eventful year, 2009 is still a special year for China as the anniversary of several historical events of great significance: the 90th Anniversary of “5.4” Movement, the 50th Anniversary of Tibet Liberation, the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. In such a “big year,” how to resolve social contradictions and prevent frequent mass disturbances and maintain social stability has become the spotlight of public opinions. What is your idea of China's current social situations?

Zhao Shukai: Generally speaking, people like talking about the anniversary of some event but I don't think an anniversary is the same as a social and political circle. Social stability situations and historical events are not so much involved with anniversaries, even they are said to be related with each other, it is just a coincidence. What truly matters is the change of social and economic situations over a certain period, mainly the accumulation of contradictions. We held several symposiums on current social situation and reached with consistent conclusions that conflict of interests is at the core of the social contradiction and stability has become a more and more prominent social problem for China. There are increasing growing points and diversifying tendency of social contradictions such as employment, land acquisition and house removal, environmental protection and grassroots election, etc., which are easy to transmit and spread to social stability dimension. There are a lot of discussions on this issue but hardly any solid survey analysis report.

Phoenix Weekly: As violent conflict between common people and the local government, when did mass disturbance begin? What has changed in its nature since the first occurrence?

Zhao Shukai: The beginning was marked by Renshou Incident in Sichuan Province. Early in mid-1980s, peasants began to complain about too much burden and the situation began to change with individual resistance transformed into group incidents. In terms of stages, Renshou incident was the landmark of mass disturbance and another one was Wanzhou Incident in 2004. Why? Because in Renshou Incident, peasants refused to pay the grassroots government's charges, while in Wanzhou Incident, there was "indirect interest conflict," i.e., those involved were not violated of their direct interests but their lack of trust in the government which has accumulated in their past experiences and triggered by the incident. Additionally, the constituent of participators changed which involved many young people, particularly students.

It is early to say whether incidents that happened in 2008 can make up a new phase. From the perspective of these incidents themselves, the roots of conflicts became diversified and complicated; the scale and intensity of conflicts were enhanced; the number of participators increased with more complicated composition, which demonstrated that these people's declining confidence with governments has to extent escalated into the political level.

Corruption is an important cause of indirect interest conflict.

Phoenix Weekly: In July 2005, Zhou Yongkang pointed out in his analysis that so many mass disturbances at so large scales, so broad scope, and so large strong intensity were caused by government organizations or officials in collusion with businessmen in violation of the public's interests particularly in rural land acquisition, urban house removal, enterprise restructure, and resettlement of affected residents. As China's social bluebook in 2009 shows, 39% people are not satisfied with the government's anti-corruption work. How much is the proportion of corruption in incurring mass disturbances?

Zhao Shukai: In terms of the direct cause, it is not a big part. On the surface, those corrupt officials neither embezzle the money of specific individual nor violate any personal interest. However, corruption serves as a major inducement or a producing factor of indirect interest conflict. Corruption is more about the destruction of the public's confidence and the government authority, impressing people with a sense of tyranny. Personally, I regard corruption another form of tyranny because it turns public power into private tool and public interests into private interests, which is to some extent deprivation of the people's interests and rights. Corruption will weaken the government's legitimacy because the people accept the governance not because the government represents their interests and bring them benefits, but because it has power and even mighty power and they have to be subject to its governance.

Tyranny destroys the people's confidence and makes them feel unjustified and unreasonable. Why do the public still have so many complaints and such low level of trust in the government though there are so many policies benefiting people and strengthening social security? Corruption is a very important reason. People's unsatisfactory emotion will explode when the basting fuse is lighted. Such overstocked dissatisfaction is caused by corruption to some extent.

Phoenix Weekly: According to some analysis, there is great pressure for the central and local governments in stability maintenance and the most direct pressure is from petition. What is your opinion from the perspective of your long-term study of petition issue?

Zhao Shukai: Petition is one of the indicators of social contradiction and stability. However, a big number of petitions do not mean sharp social contradictions and a small number does not mean social contradictions will intensify. It is possible that the problem is more serious when there are few petitions because peasants have gone beyond petition management system. If they are totally disappointed with the government, they will not choose petition. Petition is a sign of their confidence in this system that the government can solve their problems. If they resort to underworld organizations in desperation, why would they bother themselves for petition?

The observation of situations shall not be limited to the number of petitions and the rate of exposed cases. Immersed in those petitioners, one will see 100% of unresolved problems. Those whose problems have been solved will no longer petition. I began to study petition issue from mid-1990s by staying with petitioners and saw serious problems. Then I worked for the local government and found lots of problems solved by this system. Of course, there are many defects with this system. Therefore, to see where the problem is in a big picture, one needs to stand outside the problem.

Recently, a county cadre said to me that there were so many petitioners who directly went to the county Party Secretary instead of the Bureau for Complaints. As they claimed “There is no use to go to the Bureau of Complaints. In our county, only the Party Secretary has the final say. Even the county head doesn’t work.” What is that problem? It is a problem with the system in which contradictions are centralized and politicalized. Common People are not idiots and they know that the higher level government leads the county Party Secretary. Therefore, when they come to the county Party Secretary and fail to solve their problems, they will appeal to the higher level to Beijing, which shows the characteristics of existing system: superior power centralization and individual power centralization. There will be increasing petitions bypassing the local level when such characteristic is reflected onto the grassroots society. As a result, a very simple issue which should be solved by regular operation of the administrative system will be subject to political pressure and politicalized. Those which can be solved separately by individual department are shuffled to the hands of the Party Secretary and centralized.

There are more bursting points of social contradictions than ever before.

Phoenix Weekly: The recent international financial crisis has had a great impact on China’s economy, with a lot of enterprises closed down, worker unemployed, peasant workers returning home, and university students unable to find jobs. If such an impact extends from economic level to social level, what will happen to social security? Will these people become the potential force of mass disturbances?

Zhao Shukai: Generally speaking, the government’s political credibility should increase with economic development and the improvement of people’s living conditions. However, people’s political trust of the government has never been fundamentally improved all these years despite of continuous economic growth, increasing

minimum living standard, and improved living quality. From this perspective, I don't think stability is so much related with economy. It is very reasonable to initiate the scientific outlook on development and building of a harmonious society. According to Huntington's research, many fast developing countries are confronted with stability problems in their dealing with various interest relations. On the contrary, there will be relatively stable interest relations and fewer social conflicts with relatively slow economic growth and social change. The public's confidence in the government continuously runs off because many interest relations and social contradictions are not properly dealt with in fast economic growth. Under such circumstances, those unemployed groups with no means of living have become the social foundation of the burst out of such distrust and the potential force of disturbance.

There are some young people idling away their time with no occupation and they will act without delay upon hearing some incidents in the county town or something like shop robbery. When people have no means of living, they will take party in the robbery with others for no clear purpose but their depression and unhappiness. With neither political motivation to resist the government nor extreme discontent with the society, these people have no moral bottom line which is subject to their value and life style.

Phoenix Weekly: From this perspective, mass disturbance is merely a way to express interest demands or feelings instead of political actions aimed at state power.

Zhao Shukai: There are very few people with plans and political considerations beforehand and most people have no political intentions. The problem is that the majority has prepared social power for the minority. From the national perspective, it is necessary to be on guard against peaceful evolution. In Color Revolutions, such social power may have been utilized by some well-educated people with different political ambitions and that is where the real danger is.

It is not the time to say what kind of great event will immediately happen but the probability of social conflict is very high and there are more burst-out points of contradictions than ever before. Let's take employment as an example, some university students who cannot find jobs after graduation complain with the government: The enrollment is so much expanded and our parents have spent so much money supporting our education. Some peasants sold their land for housing to support their children's education and build huts alongside their contracted fields, whereas the government doesn't care whether those graduates can find jobs or not. What is the government doing? It is imaginable what their mentalities and extreme emotions will be out of dissatisfaction with the society and government. As foreign study shows, the main forces of Color Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia were university students who couldn't find jobs.

Additionally, there is the peasant-worker problem. Some of those unemployed peasant workers return home but others stay outside. For those back at home, if they remain jobless for a long time, underworld organizations will grow. According to some local surveys, about half of those home returning peasants will go out to work again because they are no longer used to village life and are not willing to farm even if they have land. What is going to happen in such situation?

Presently, the high-level authority is paying great attention to this problem and studying how to resolve the contradiction. However, ideological preaching and empty slogans of governing for the people are not enough. There are a lot to do to find out where the growing points of contradictions are, how instability factors accumulate, and how instability forces grow up so as to understand the relationship among unemployment, politics, and social stability. In my personal view, there are many variables and changing directions of change with a high rate of problems in changing social situations, but it is hard to predict in what form the problem will arise.

There is another feature of current social situation, i.e., the rising political demands from the intellectual community and there is another tendency that some intellectual elites are organizing social movements by safeguarding rights. Moreover, safeguarding rights in a general sense will derive the safeguarding of political rights. It is natural for peasants to doubt whether government officials are doing good things if the compensation for land acquisition remains unresolved. What can peasants do? The first choice is to endure; the second is to seek for help from underworld organizations; the third is to influence the government through elections. Nowadays, there are some lawyers acting as agents for property owners while running for members of the People's Congress members with political demands. Besides, there are volunteers and NGOs playing the role of safeguarding rights and expressing public opinions, which shall not be underestimated. This may be a very important new variable in social stability worthy of attention.

Social stability is the result of the overall governance system.

Phoenix Weekly: Some media think that the society of China is at the height of a period of mass disturbances and confronted with more contradictions and conflicts, which is more challenging for the government's ability of governance. However, some scholars point out that frequently occurring mass disturbances are led by the problem of China's micro governance environment instead of institutional recognition and its severity shall neither be over-estimated nor casually regarded as equivalent with the Party's governance ability.

Zhao Shukai: Governance ability shall not be casually associated with social stability. From the macro and institutional perspective, social stability is the demonstration of governance ability, but in terms of a specific place, instability doesn't mean something is wrong with governance ability which is the overall performance of a governing group as a general concept. The idea that instability is led by poor governance ability will lower the level of a high-grade concept, which is to some extent unreasonable and unjustified. Fundamentally speaking, social stability is the outcome of the operation of the overall governance system and many problems which appear to occur in small-scale and at local level come into being in bigger institutional environment. For instance, the county Party Secretary and county Head's incompetence cannot be absolved in their improper dealings with environmental pollution caused by promoting business and investment and mass disturbances incurred by land acquisition. However, this problem is much involved with the practice of cadre assessment from top to bottom based on investment promotion and GDP growth. I talked with some grassroots cadres who were very clear about which demand from

peasants was reasonable and which was not; what cadres had done was right and what was wrong. Then, why would they do something to intensify contradictions?

First of all, grassroots cadres have no command over themselves. Their role in the governance system decides their behavioral mode. A machine has to run in the way as it is designed. This is a part of responsibility which shall not be ascribed to cadres themselves, particularly, high-level leaders shall not blame grassroots cadres of their poor governance ability for the instability, otherwise, everybody will shuffle his responsibility to others from the provincial to the county, from the county to the town and from the town to the village level, which does not make any practical sense. Of course, I talk about governance ability from the view of overall ability of executive system to address the importance of system and institution but not to undervalue the role of grassroots governments' behavior in specific governing process. In fact, there is plenty of space for their working potential under the same system.

Second, there are interest conflicts between officials and the public. Many problems of the local government's investment promotion, land management, family planning, and environmental protection are caused by local officials themselves in their profit-making and fees collecting for their salaries. For example, the family planning organization is responsible for collecting social support fees and the competent cadre will worry about his living when there is no over-production. As a result, he will actively sell the second-child quotas and solve his own income problem. Therefore, the relationship between social stability and governance ability shall not be simplified and vulgarized. What is worthy of reconsideration is why there are so many problems in such a period of fast-growing economy and what is wrong with our governance system? How does this system respond to social demands?

Phoenix Weekly: Some scholars claim that statistics from the survey conducted by a professor of Sociology Department of Harvard University shows that the rate of common Chinese people's satisfaction with the central government is high at 90%. The occurrence of mass disturbance is a demonstration of people's dissatisfaction with local governments and the lack of confidence in grassroots cadres. Particularly, since a series of social policies were issued following the abolition of agricultural taxes, what peasants have seen are good central policies deformed by local governments' implementation. What do you think of this problem?

Zhao Shukai: So far as my recent study of the "central-local" governmental relationship is concerned, there are tensions, distrust, and complaints. The lack of mutual trust among the central and local governments and peasants is a problem that shall be solved by the central government so as to run the whole government system more effectively and unitarily and make governments an integral body in the eyes of peasants to achieve social stability, instead of a lot of requirements from the top level which cannot be fulfilled at the grassroots level but make peasants measure local governments' performance with central standards and lead to many contradictions.

Phoenix Weekly: What is the main reason for such "obstruction"?

Zhao Shukai: In terms of the administrative system, the central and provincial governments have given too little power to grassroots organizations. In the Tiao-

Kuai relation (Central–local government relationship), higher level power centralization is dominating and there is no autonomous power at the grassroots level.

In the political sense, political democracy is yet to be developed and the higher level's distrust in the grassroots level leads to power centralization which take back power and control departments' money and approvals of grassroots projects, so that grassroots cadres have to depend on their superior, which is unreasonable to some extent. However, there is a question in turn: Are all those cadres of the central government departments reliable? With power in their hands and everybody asking for their approval, they also have self-interests. Such a situation leads to not only grassroots governments' practice of "Begging the Central Departments with Money" but also the damage of peasants' interests. For example, 300 thousand yuan has to be spent in getting the approval of a project of 1 million yuan and only 600–700 thousand yuan will be remained, which will inevitably lead to people's suspicion. It is the system that has caused peasants' distrust in local governments and local governments' distrust in the central government. This problem began to become prominent from late 1990s.

What shall we do? First of all, we shall reconsider the reform of the governance system to properly deal with the relationship between the higher and grassroots level governance systems. The key is to transform present accountability pattern from top to bottom by pressure into grassroots governments' accountability to grassroots people. On one hand, there should be power decentralization; on the other hand, lest local governments should abuse their power and make troubles, common people should be "endowed with power" to supervise local government and establish political accountability mechanism between the former and the latter through democracy, openness, and government legalization. Namely, where power is decentralized, democracy shall be established so as to resolve the problem of poor implementation of good central policies by local governments.

The way out is to establish new interests coordination mechanism.

Phoenix Weekly: The above discussion is involved with political system reform. What do you think is the relationship between political system reform and social stability maintenance?

Zhao Shukai: It is necessary to have a broad vision of stability. Why are there so many factors and variables of instability? Is there any unclear situation? Even though everybody is in the dark, there is at least a point of common sense: So many problems and contradictions do not repudiate the direction of reform and the people approve the basic direction of the reform and selection of governance objective. Why are there so many problems? It is because something is wrong with the operation of governance system in lack of a sound mechanism to resolve contradictions and interest conflicts.

The operational rules within governance system have not been adjusted to accommodate the new labor–capital relationship, new social groups, and various complicated situations. Meanwhile, institutional interest expression channel has not been set up to meet the challenge of diversified interests. Therefore, I think the fundamental way to resolve contradictions and maintain stability is to establish a new

coordination mechanism of interests instead of fast economic growth, and a three-dimensional government reform of accountability is the way to establish such a mechanism:

No. 1 is the reform of accountability system from top to bottom which will designate subordinate governments not only with responsibility but also certain political power; No. 2 is the reform of accountability system within government at the same level to prevent excessive centralization of individual power. No. 3 is the reform of accountability system concerning governments and the society to enable the public to supervise local governments and officials. With such an institution, people will know what is the central government's responsibility and what is the local's and they will not appeal to the central level when the problem is caused at the local level. Even if the problem is not solved, they will not have serious doubt of the whole system. Knowing that it is not the central's problem, they will go to specific county and village cadres.

Besides, the limits of government functions need to be clarified on what is and what is not governments' business. In some cases, the central government appears to be in universal love and willing to be responsible for everything whereas local governments take it as an opportunity to expand their own power, which will increase governments' space of seeking rent by power. Some contradictions among civil affairs subjects evolve into the public's dissatisfaction of governments because of governmental interference. Governments need to know that they cannot and will not control so many things properly and shall not involve contradictions which should be solved by judicial and other means into governmental functions.

Phoenix Weekly: Is there any specific idea and reform measures in your point of view?

Zhao Shukai: First of all, government legalization shall be promoted. Several days ago, I went to a place and saw many contradictions caused by financial publicity at the yearend which led to the dissatisfaction from peasants who went to the county Party Secretary for help. From the perspective of democracy, publicity is the best supervision. There is Regulation of Government Information Disclosure and there are documents concerning administrative affairs and village affairs openness issued by the central government; however, there are only some slogans and general requirements in these documents and many specific regulations are not clear. For example, how to deal with those which are not disclosed but should be disclosed? Upon requests of disclosure, relevant departments shall be responsible, but which department is relevant?

It is the similar case for the election of Villagers Committee when peasants are not satisfied with inequitable election procedures, they appeal to "relevant authority" but their appeals are shuffled from the township government to the county People's Congress and then to the Civil Affairs Bureau. There is a process of legalization to these problems by laws and regulations which may not be related with democracy.

Another aspect is involved with democracy to enlarge citizen's political participation. In Vietnam, "Credibility Voting" is practiced at the township level and those cadres with insufficient credibility at certain degree will be dismissed. There are some trials in China for peasants to decide the salaries of village cadres and township

cadres designated to villages, which is a very good experience. The governance system shall be supervised by the public through democratization of grassroots politics. In the word of political science, public power shall be locked in the cage. Presently, the grassroots government is just in the cage of its superior's functions and power where the superior has authority to control it but is not able to see its behaviors. It is responsible for serving the public but beyond the public's restriction. The one who can restrict it may not know the public's demands. The establishment of a good governance system means smooth, effective, and decentralized channel of interest coordination. The disorder in a county will not spread to the provincial level, not to mention the national level.

In conclusion, I think the fundamental way to resolve contradictions and maintain stability is not only expediting economic growth but also building new interests coordination mechanism through the reform.

Phoenix Weekly: As you mentioned before, increasing political demands from intellectual circles including social movements pushed by safeguarding rights have become the feature of social stability at present stage. What do you think is the focus of ideological orientation and specific measures concerning this issue?

Zhao Shukai: To study political development and social stability, it is necessary to take various elements of newly rising forces and influencing factors into consideration. In terms of ideological orientation, I don't think it will be the solution to orient public opinions only by encouraging people to look forward with confidence. Public opinion space or social public space shall be expanded to enhance social power and citizens' voice. To strengthen citizens' power, institutionalization shall be consolidated to provide institutionalized expression channel for all interest groups to speak what they want to say. Moreover, such interest expression can produce active and benign response to the governance system. This reform is very important for further openness of media and social expression. In case of the failure of cracking down on corruption, the openness of the media and public opinions is of particular significance to strengthen the supervision. The media shall be responsible for its misreporting and official shall be responsible for true exposure by the media, just as a saying goes: "Whatever people speak, the sky will not fall."

Recently, I wrote an article named "Wan Li and Rural Reform" about Wan Li's political stand of insisting "Double Hundred Guiding Principles" which he proposed in 1986. In his point of view, political issues and academic issues are inseparable and nobody will be clear of whether "Hairui Dismissed from Office" written by Mr. Wu Han is a political or an academic issue. In some cases, politics accounts for 30% and learning 70%; in other cases, academics accounts for 30% and politics 30%, which should be open to argument to debates what the problem is and it is not reasonable to regard the problem as a political one which cannot be open to discussion.

This article is issued as Vol. 4 of Phoenix Weekly in 2009 with the original title "The Fundamental Way out to Maintain Stability is to Expedite Government Reform: An Exclusive Interview of Zhao Shukai, Researcher of the Development Research Center of the State Council" as Maya, a Phoenix Weekly journalist's exclusive interview of the author.

4.2 The Chess of Petition System Reform Is Out of the Game

Editor's Note of Oriental Outlook Weekly: Since the beginning of the new century, petition has become a more prominent rural issue. In Zhao Shukai's point of view, the rise of petition groups is merely a situation on the surface, whereas the key to such a problem lies in the government reform and grassroots democracy construction. The discussion of petition must be started from a stand point beyond petition itself.

Major leaders of the Party and governments should not turn into "Specialists for Letters and Visits."

Oriental Outlook Weekly: In July 2008, Grand Reception of Petitioners by county (city, district) Party secretaries was held nationwide. A year later, it worked well as introduced by relevant officials of the State Bureau for Letters and Calls. How to evaluate the Grand Reception?

Zhao Shukai: In present institutional framework and the system of government and superior power centralization, Grand Reception is an effective means. However, it is possible to steer problems toward the higher level.

As can be seen in retrospect of the development of peasant petition, China's rural conflicts are presenting new features in the twenty-first century. First of all, conflict subjects have obviously transformed into peasants and grassroots governments instead of disputes over resources and interests among rural households, villages, and cooperatives. Second, peasants' ways of organization are becoming more and more modernized and new-type organizations and channels of peasants' interest expression are sprouting. Third, resistance within the system (like petition) is still peasants' major behavioral feature, whereas actions beyond the system (such as violent confrontations) are obviously increasing.

Grand Reception by county Party secretaries began immediately after Wongan Incident. Generally, former regulation on major county leaders' reception once a month or irregular arrangement was changed into once a week or even more frequent receptions. Such a practice achieved obvious effect because these grassroots leaders with substantial power would easily find and solve problems face to face with petitioners group.

Meanwhile, petition management authorities strengthened their work by expanding staff size and budget; some even considered upgrading the administrative level. Both the procedure and normalization of petition management work were improved, playing an important role in resolving grassroots conflicts.

Though the large-scale reception is effective, it is not the fundamental way to solve the problem because it is abnormal for major grassroots Party and government leaders to spend a lot of time and get tired and exhausted in receiving visitors and coping with petitions, which will turn county leader into "Specialists for letters and visits."

In our grassroots survey, those leaders felt helpless in case of such a situation with some complaints. A county Party Secretary said that he agreed with the argument that “80% petitions are reasonable” so far as his personal experiences concern but how to deal with the other “20%” which are either “unreasonable” or beyond the grassroots organization’s competency even if they are reasonable.

Contradictions are centralized

Oriental Outlook Weekly: During our interview, grassroots politics and law sector generally complained that there have been great pressure and demanding tasks of grassroots stability maintenance since 2005 with declining grassroots authority. In this process, the petition system has been obviously affecting grassroots work. What is the root of this problem and how to solve it?

Zhao Shukai: Yes, there is very great pressure at the grassroots level. The passive situation of petition is rooted in the nature of government system: superior and individual power centralization.

In terms of power relation pattern among different levels of government, there is excessive superior power centralization. Nowadays, grassroots cadres generally feel the superior governments’ distrust of them. In case of problems at the grassroots level, the superior will take the power back and practice vertical management which is duplicated level down level. As a result, there is less power but greater responsibility and higher political risk at the grassroots level.

In fact, power centralized at the superior’s hands will not necessarily lead to a well-done job. Even worse, it will increase the vested interests of higher level government officials and may lead to corruption, which is similar for the relationship between the Party Committee and the government.

In terms of the power structure of leadership system, there is individual power centralization. In my recent survey, a county cadre told me that many petitioners would never go to the Bureau of Letters and Visits but directly to the county Party Committee to find the Secretary and some even lived in the office of the Committee.

Common people are not idiots and they know who has the final say, therefore, they go to the county Party Secretary and they also know who is superior to him. If the county Party Secretary cannot resolve their problems, they will go to the higher level till Beijing, which reflects the nature of our system: superior power centralization and individual power centralization.

Oriental Outlook Weekly: Recently, some scholars proposed an idea of “Fixed-point agencies and officials designated to the local level by the central government” concerning the reform of petition system. Is it feasible?

Zhao Shukai: The question is who will supervise these supervisors?

As indicated by various surveys, the central government currently has higher credibility than the local with the latter’s credibility decreasing, which can be easily sensed in the daily life. For example, such a complaint is often heard from peasants: “Though central polices are good, grassroots cadres are too bad.” and alike. It is necessary to observe and study the internal mechanism and political consequence of this phenomenon. In another word, there will be something wrong or even dangerous

in the long term if the central governments' high credibility remains higher than that of grassroots governments among common people.

Under such circumstances, the central government's high credibility will not be sustainable in the perspective of grassroots people and there will be something wrong with the central-local government relationship, particularly declining mutual trust and central authority.

People's Congress Representatives shall be integrated into the petition system.

Oriental Outlook Weekly: "Spending money for stability" is becoming a common practice nowadays and counteract against competent cadres by the so-called "Cheeky Petitioners" who are challenging existing operating mechanism of petition management. Against this backdrop, there is stronger and stronger voice of strengthening petition governance. However, many scholars worrying about this issue propose to abolish the petition system. What will be the destiny of petition?

Zhao Shukai: Considering present government system, the institution of petition cannot be abolished. On the contrary, it should play a more important role. However, there needs to be a new point of strength for the construction of such a system.

Under current framework of the government system, the "chess" of petition can only be moved towards upholding and even expanding large-scale reception to increase agencies and personnel of competent authorities and strengthen assessment and one-vote veto of this job. One cannot say lightly of abolishing the Bureau of Letters and Visits, otherwise, social contradictions will increase and widely spread.

On the contrary, if the government system has fundamentally "changed" and there are multiple social channels which can effectively reconcile interest conflicts, the petition management authority will be of little importance and perish of itself.

In 1999, after systematic research, I suggested in my report to the central leaders that People's congress members should be introduced into petition management so as to promote the reform of the People's Congress and now I still hold on to this idea. Existing petition system appears to be supervised by the people from outside but it is actually supervised by the state power itself from inside.

A possible way worthy of consideration is to set up complete and strong petition agencies under all levels of Standing Committees of the People's Congress, which will integrate petition supervision with Standing Committees' supervision of governments and other authorities as well as integrate the handling of petitions with regular enforcement inspections by the People's Congress members and authorities.

What is particularly necessary is to establish institutional link between People's Congress members and peasant petitioners, i.e., the latter can appeal to the former in the first place and the former shall actively work for the latter.

The grassroots People's Congress members at the grassroots level, mainly those from the township, county and district People's Congress all have their respective electoral areas with definite group of voters. So to speak, grassroots petitions and all kinds of interest demands are from these voters. These People's Congress members can serve as a direct channel connecting grassroots people with governments in terms of whether existing designing of the state politics system or the realistic possibility of knowing situations and solving problems.

From another perspective, if these People's Congress members can stay away and even be indifferent when there are conflicts incurred by public interest expression within their own electoral areas, there must be something wrong with their role as representatives of public opinions.

This is an article published on August 10, 2009 in *Oriental Outlook Weekly* with the original title "The Chess of the Petition System Reform is beyond the Game" as the journalist's exclusive interview of the author.

4.3 Governments' Role in the Labor Market

The incident of "Violent Request of Owed Salaries" in Xin'an County of Luoyang City, Henan Province is being dealt with by justice. The labor contractor's illegal back pay and negligence of peasant workers' rights and interests ought to be condemned and punished but peasant workers' extreme way of getting back their due pay was also against the law. Moreover, the trend of violent request of owed salaries exposed by the incident sounded the alarm for local governments.

Compared with the past, governments have done a lot in safeguarding peasant workers' rights and interests with good effect and reduced back pay, but similar incidents still repeat every year and there are various reasons among which the major one is the poor implementation of a number of good institutions. Governments' crack down on the back pay party is powerless with light penalty and excessive emphasis on principles which are hard to practice.

Peasant workers' requests of owed salaries are focused on construction industry; however, there are countless ties between some building projects and governments and even government officials themselves as revealed by our surveys. Under the influence from local protectionism, governments' crack down on back pay will be inevitably weak.

First of all, government shall serve as "nigh keeper" of the labor market and prevent back pay from the source. Labor employers shall be restricted upon the establishment of labor relations. The prevention of back pay shall be prioritized instead of clearing up at the end of the year and salary guarantee institutions shall be well implemented.

Second, governments shall secure the effective operation of rights-safeguarding mechanism with flexibility at low cost. Generally speaking, peasant workers can protect their rights through channels such as labor inspection agency, labor union, labor arbitration agency and lawsuit, etc. However, there are very few peasant workers choosing legal means which is expensive and time-consuming and many of them anchor their hopes on government inspection authorities.

Government inspection authorities shall improve their work efficiency and service quality, enhance their initiative and intensity of accountability, meanwhile, and reduce their evasiveness, prevarication, and ignorance.

Third, peasant workers safeguarding their rights shall be taught “how to fish.” The key to safeguarding rights is to “arm” them with legal means and teach them to actively ask for the help of the labor union and other organizations alike in safeguarding their rights. In the incident of “Violent Request of Owed Salaries” in Xin’an County of Luoyang, the county labor union intervened to help peasant workers to safeguard their rights, which is commendable. I sincerely hope that various levels of labor union can play a more and more important role in the settlement of labor disputes.

This article is published on January 28, 2010 in the People’s Daily with the original title “Government shall act well as the night keeper of the labor market.”

4.4 Institutional Innovation and Social Integration

The large-scale flow of rural population whether in rural or urban areas has impacted existing social management and social order and led to considerable obstacles to social integration. To solve this problem, it is necessary to vigorously push forward institutional innovation.

4.4.1 “Floating Population” Has Become a Major Challenge for Grassroots Management

As the concomitant of reform, the flow of rural population was initially concerned only for the floating group itself. As the situation developed, children floating into cities were highlighted in mid and late 1990s and have become prominent since the beginning of the twenty-first century as a hot topic across the society nowadays. So to speak, the difficulty of living and emotional suffering for floating peasants with their children into cities and those children left at home are not only affecting people’s conscience and concerns but also striking and tearing apart the weak public order of the society.

It is imaginable that if a social group accounting for a big percentage of the population lives in anxiety and many people wonder about homelessly, the society can hardly be prosperous and peaceful. Considering humanistic care or social harmony, particularly the “People First” governing philosophy, this problem shall not be ignored.

4.4.2 The Key to Social Transformation Lies in Cities

Since there are a large number of children left at home in out-flow areas, governments should provide them with good quality service to reduce the harm to their growth caused by left-behind life. There is a creative and inspiring experience in Shuang-feng, Hunan Province where the grassroots government paid great attention to left-behind children and establish socialized service system for those children by exploring new work mechanism and improving the level of service management.

The work at in-flow areas is more fundamental. It shall be governments' major objective to reduce left-behind children in rural areas and make them stay with their parents in the city as long as possible, which is an issue of the social management system. Such a system is unjustifiable in itself when cities only absorb peasants' labor and contribution but refuse their children.

4.4.3 Cultural Estrangement and Institutional Defects as the Obstacle of Social Integration

Presently, cultural estrangement and institutional defects are two major issues obstructing social integration. The solution of cultural estrangement is involved with the long-term cultural transition and a common way is to enhance the communication, mutual understanding, and assistance among different social groups. For example, the social gathering for local people and outsiders organized by the urban community is also an important means of promoting social integration. Similarly, I think institutional arrangement is more vital. Many rural children brought into cities by their parents cannot enter urban public schools or are not allowed to take part in senior high school and college entrance examinations even if they are enrolled by those public schools, which is a typical institutional barrier. In many cases, cultural estrangement is based on or strengthened by the institutional barrier.

It is important for governments to initiate equal treatment to peasant workers and call upon the whole society to care for and support them, but it is more important to focus on breaking up the fence of institutional arrangement and promote institutional integration.

4.4.4 Institutional Supply at the Macro Level is Indispensable to "Integration"

Basically, the problem of "floating population" can be solved neither by "out-flow" nor "in-flow" areas. Instead, it is about the reform of the whole social management system. Social integration problem incurred by peasant flow is involved with the overall social management reform, which requires the work of governments of both

out-flow and in-flow areas, both the grassroots effort and top-level designing to push forward the whole reform of social management system. In this sense, I totally agree with the commentary opinion of the People's Daily: "Top level designing shall be connected with the grassroots exploration" to provide "macro-level institutional supply" as the solution to the floating population issue

It is only in this way that tragedy like "the Suffering of Xiao Meng" (A little girl of Shuangfen County, Hunan Province who had stayed with her dead grandma for 7 days at home before she was found by other people) can be prevented and better social integration in a floating era can be promoted and achieved.

This is an article published on Dec 8th, 2011 in the People's Daily with the original title "Dissolving Social Estrangement with institutional innovation—floating times in perspective of the suffering of Xiaomeng".

4.5 Narration by Protesting Peasants

—A Preliminary Analysis of 196 letters from Peasants.

Reform has fundamentally changed the basic rural power structure and most village cadres' power has been withdrawn from direct production and operation with cadres' ability of control over resources greatly weakened. It is true that such power relation adjustment pushed by the system reform has eliminated peasants' former personal bondage to cadres and reduced conflicts between peasants and cadres. In a broader sense, the economic development and social progress over the past 20 years have provided plenty of material foundation for the coordination of such a relation.

However, the truth is that the improvement of the relationship between village organizations and peasants which appears to be logical has not been fully realized. On the contrary, their mutual distrust is increasing, various forms of conflicts are intensifying and there are some upsetting vicious incidents from time to time in some places, which we call "community conflicts."

There is special difficulty for the study of rural community conflicts and this report is based on 196 letters from common peasants which reflect village cadres' problems known as "Suing letter." The major intention of this report is to interpret the general rules of present community conflicts through peasants' narration of their protest for rights by focusing on main issues as follows: the source of conflicts, the development and evolution of conflicts, the growth of peasants' awareness in conflicts and the fundamental impact of conflicts on the construction of new rural community power pattern. We believe that though increasing rural community conflicts affected rural social order and stability, they have created important historical opportunity for rural political modernization and evoked institutional transition which will push forward rural political development.

4.5.1 *External Features of the Letters*

These letters were received by “Peasants’ Daily,” a domestic newspaper especially for rural areas at the central level from Nov 1997 to April 1998. Of course, these letters do not cover all that were received by the newspaper office. Those letters on grassroots organization problems considered to be publicized were screened upon reception by Mass Work Department of the newspaper and transferred to relevant editing departments or issued on newspaper, which are not included in this analysis.

(i) **Regional Feature**

These letters are from 25 provinces (cities, autonomous regions), most of which are from Jiangsu (25), Hebei (26), Hunan (18), Hubei (15), Shandong (13), Anhui (10), Shanxi and Zhejiang (8), Jiangxi and Guangxi (6) and there is none from Shanghai, Liaoning, Qinghai. There are less than five letters from Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and other provinces. In our point of view, there are two factors directly affecting the number of letters: One is the real conflict situation of specific region, the other is the amount of “Peasants’ Daily” newspaper distributed in different areas but it is hard to tell which factor ranks the first. What is worthy of attention is that all letters from Jiangsu Province are from its northern part and there is no such an obvious regional feature for other provinces. There are three letters only inscribed with the name of towns, villages and it is hard to tell which province and county they are from because their covers were lost.

(ii) **Signing Feature**

There are 153 letters with signatures accounting for 78% of all letters. Anonymous letters with virtual signatures such as “all villagers,” “villager representatives,” “Party members representative,” etc. account for 22%, which is different from common sense that suing letters mainly consist of anonymous ones. Among 153 signed letters, 73 are with single signatures and 80 are co-signed. Among those co-signed letters, there are 31 signed by 2–5 persons, 13 by 6–10 persons, 7 by 11–20 persons, 12 by 20–50 persons, 9 by 50–1000 persons, and 9 by over 100 persons. The biggest number of co-signers for a letter is 470, and the signatures occupied eight pages. Among all signed letters, only 12 are with printed signatures and the other are with handwritten signatures accounting for 92%. 19 letters are affixed with the writers’ finger prints and 15 with personal seals and some marked with the writers’ specific family addresses, contact phone numbers and hard copies of the writers’ ID cards or card numbers, which demonstrates to some extent the writers’ sense of responsibility for the contents of their letters.

(iii) **Pointing Feature**

Pointing means the objectives directly accused by peasants’ letters, which consist of four parts: Village cadres are ranked as No. 1 with 69 letters. Township cadres or other officials are not mentioned though they may be directly involved with problems

reflected by those letters. Township cadres are No. 2 with 36 letters among which 29 are about the township Party and government leaders and 7 about relevant township authorities such as family planning office, grain station, land management station and police station, etc. Township and village cadres are No. 3 with 32 letters which clearly point out the problems co-produced by competent township and village cadres. Some of these letters directly disclose the titles and names of township and village cadres. Others are No. 4 including 15 letters about county authorities which all point to Construction Committee, Land Bureau, Public Security Bureau, Court House and Procurator, etc. except two letters to the county and city major leaders. There are 6 which point to rural schools focused on excessive charges and others pointing to enterprises and individual superior authority, etc.

What is newly discovered from such pointing feature is the emergence of both township and village cadres as the direct objective of peasants' resistance.

To facilitate the analysis, both the Party organization and government organization at the township level are called "township government" and the Party organization and Villagers Committee called "village organization" because these power authorities at the two levels and in the four forms are highly integrated. In some cases, they will be called grassroots governments to highlight rural community organizations' administrative function. What needs special note is that the analysis in this report is based on the facts provided by peasants' letters with no further verification of their credibility. In light of such a situation and to facilitate the writing, letters quoted in this report will be marked with their sorting-out numbers with no mark of the authors' names and specific areas.

4.5.2 The Source of Conflicts: Exploitation

According to the facts claimed by those letters, the most direct reason for peasant petitions is economic exploitation. There may be some cases which are not exploitative in nature or it is not village organizations themselves but deeper-level institutions and the higher level governments that should be held responsible. However, the report's task is not to sort out numerous factors but to depict where peasants' strong sense of being exploited comes from based on their narration and the so-produced antagonism between peasants and village organizations. In sociological theory, exploitation is usually divided into absolute exploitation and relative exploitation. Absolute exploitation is involved with the living conditions of social members at the bottom-level while relative exploitation is about the difference among social members' development conditions. As is shown by facts, what is sensed and complained by peasants is mainly about absolute exploitation. In terms of specific forms of exploitative behaviors, there are two types: one is rural grassroots organizations' direct extortion on peasant households and individual peasant which is called direct exploitation, the other is the erosion of the interests of peasant households and individual peasant by certain covert means.

(i) **Direct Exploitation**

48 of these letters complain about community organizations' collection of taxes and fees and exclusive accumulation of wealth, among which 21 are exclusively on these problems. The analysis with reference to the central documents and decisions on reducing peasants' burden has made us more and more confused about "peasants' burden." The writers bear so many kinds and playful tricks of extortion which can hardly be explained by the common "burden." As prescribed, there are two types of burden for peasants: One is the burden within the contract, i.e., "the 3 deductions and 5 plans" accounting for 5% of net income per capita; the other is the three items, i.e., payment of taxes, turning in of collective contract portion and various quotas and fund raising. However, in the real practical economic situation, it is hard to categorize numerous ways of extortion on peasants by any standard.

1. **Mutation of State Taxes**

State taxes in rural areas mainly consist of agriculture tax, special product tax, slaughter tax and vehicle and vessel tax, etc. There are clear regulations on the amount and means of tax collection but they are decided by community organizations in practice. Numerous extra community charges are under the disguise of state taxes and it is too hard for peasants to understand what is attached to those taxes. The common practice of community organizations is to increase the amount to collect and simplify collection means considering neither peasants' affordability nor the fairness of distribution among rural households. For example, pig tax is collected per capita instead of upon the number of sellable pigs. Special product tax is collected upon contracted land areas per household instead of the amount of grain. There are too numerous cases to be counted.

2. **Disordered Price of Public Goods**

Community public goods mainly consists of production infrastructure building such as water conservancy, road and power supply and so on because these projects are initiated by community organizations themselves which demand the labor and money from peasants, fund raising and charges are arbitrary for the poor level of normalization. As claimed by letter No. 55, the village raised a fund of over 100,0000 yuan in 3 times and spent less than 50,000 yuan but another 10 yuan per capita was raised for building transformer house immediately after the cabling. According to No. 32 letter, the village raised a fund of 60 yuan per capita 2 years ago in the name of building an asphalt road and demanded another round of fund raising for 15 yuan per capita for well digging and water conservancy construction prior to the beginning of road building.

3. **Excessive Quotas**

It is the main feature of fund raising to be nominally legal and justified but of excessive amount, whereas quotas are featured by improper names and unreasonable amount. Letter No. 7 complains that village cadres will pass on the burden of their own aged insurance to villagers because the village collective had no money. As

Letter No. 9 claims, the township government will collect 300 yuan the name of “balance fee” from those recruitable young people who are not enlisted into the army. According to letter No. 25, each new-born baby will be charged for 60 yuan as household registration fee.

4. **Disordered Fining**

Prevalence of fining is also a big problem with the rural society. Among all village fines, family planning fine which is poorly normalized incurs the strongest dissatisfaction from peasants. According to letter No. 99, there are four kinds of local family planning fine: No. 1 is the receipt sealed by provincial finance Department and city Finance Bureau; No. 2 is the receipt sealed with “Management fee of XX town”; No. 3 is an IOU; and No. 4 is nothing but collecting money and the collector will say “You can pay less money if there is no receipt.”

(ii) **Indirect Exploitation**

Before the reform, the focus of grassroots organizations work was to organize peasants’ production, but after the reform, the emphasis was transformed to the management of collective property, mainly collective-owned land together with some enterprises and other properties. Such management is partly commercial with direct economic purpose and partly public with services for villagers’ production and livelihood. There are various contents of grassroots organizations’ management behaviors and the loss of peasants’ economic interests caused by the management itself incurs peasants’ strongest dissatisfaction, which will evoke all villagers’ senses of economic exploitation regardless of the motivation behind. We call this loss of interests “indirect exploitation” because it is different from community organizations’ direct collection from peasants. There are totally 63 letters reporting this kind of problem which mainly occurs in the following cases:

1. **Land Contract**

Grassroots organizations don’t implement central policies on land contract or break up and redistribute land in the second round of contract, or forcibly suspend unexpired contract, or practice the “two-field system,” or storage of excessive maneuverable land. There are 21 letters concerning this problem. Letter No. 153 claims that in the second round of land contract, the village took back peasants’ formerly contracted land and let contract again based on present population. As a result, former contractors’ input of well digging (4000 yuan per well) and land leveling came to nothing.

2. **Land Acquisition**

The main problem is about excessive land acquisition endangering peasants; survival or land acquisition without proper compensation which is almost plundering. There are 16 letters concerning this issue. According to letter No. 152, field per capita in 1998 was 0.5 mu but now only 0.11 mu after four rounds of land acquisition. The writer’s question is what will they feed on?

3. Destruction of Arable Land Resource

There are eight letters on this issue and letter No. 170 said that the expanding township-run quarry has directly destroyed 50 mu of arable land of the village with the erosion of water and soil of over 70 mus. Villagers organized group petition and the township government sent people to arrest villagers instead of solving their problems.

4. Approval and Usage of the Land for Housing

There are 12 letters complaining about the unreasonable and unfair approval of the land for housing. Some applications which should be approved will be denied. As claimed by the writer of letter No. 194, his family has to move out of their dilapidate house in case of typhoon climate and his application of building a new house has not been approved for 5 years because he used to expressed his opinions of village cadres. Some applications which should not be approved will be arbitrarily allowed. Letter No. 161 complains that his contracted sugarcane field was sold by the village to people of other villages to build houses and cost his family a loss of 20 tons of sugarcane.

5. Management of Other Collective Property

There are seven letters on the improperness of collective property management which compromised villagers' interests as a whole, or violated some villagers' legal interests. Letter No. 120 claims that the village Party Branch secretary didn't contract the village-run brickyard to the one who offered a price at 1,000,000 yuan but to another at 800,000 yuan. According to letter No. 108, village cadres contracted the building of classrooms of a primary school to the one bidding 90,000 yuan instead of another bidding 150,000 yuan.

(iii) Capitalization of Rural Public Power

Rural grassroots organizations' direct extortion and indirect erosion of interests in public management belong to a kind of organizational behavior, sometimes even a governmental behavior, not to mention individual motivations and even illegal operations behind. What is more infuriating for villagers is some cadres' abuse of public power as the tool for self-interests and their "capital" to accumulate personal wealth, i.e., seeking private gain through power and trading power for money. Such capitalization of public power is completely an individual behavior no matter how close its content is linked with extortion an management and there is obvious distinction between them because the public management is open and organized which can only be said to be possibly nurturing corruption behind, whereas public power capitalization is secret and private, which can be regarded as direct corruption. The most direct expression of such corruption is village cadres' embezzlement and squander of collective wealth, which is reported by 51 letters. Letter No. 97 is from a village accountant on the village Party Branch Secretary's frequent embezzlement: In the spring festival of 1997, the secretary embezzled 2922 yuan in the name of buying gifts for township leaders at 3000 yuan. In July 1997, the Secretary shared 4171 yuan

with the village head secretly in the name of buying gift for the land management Bureau which was actually not spent as verified by the accountant. There are another nine receipts of 1.15 million yuan in the name of gift expense totally signed by only the secretary with no handler and witness. From 1996, the village collected over 200,000 yuan at 50 yuan per household in the name of pig-slaughtering tax without any receipt and account record. When asked by the accountant about where the fund was, the Secretary said that he needed the money for a few days but the money has not been entered into the account of a year. From 1993 to 1997, there were 471 people charged 500 yuan per capita for registered residence of the village with a total collection of 250,000 yuan which could only be signed and collected to the Secretary himself excluding any other people. However, there is only 100,000 yuan entered into account. In the spring of 1995, the Secretary brought his daughter and niece to attend a purchasing meeting in Wuxi and spent 100,000 yuan in one day, which was reimburse with an IOU on the village-run industry account. The 140,000 yuan of banquet and reception expense was taken all by the Secretary himself and settled with IOUs absent of any handler and witness. As a result, the village owed a debt of 180 million yuan during that Secretary's 4-year term.

Even if such a cadre reported in the letter is just an exceptional case, the problem of village finance management is very common as the letter described. In most villages, the approval of spending is decided only by the Party Branch Secretaries themselves without any rigid restriction from outside. In some villages, Secretaries even hold accountant positions concurrently. On the national scale, the practice of township-governed village accounts well-promoted these years is not so effective because income and expense still take place at villages with finance approval institution unchanged. The village democratic financial management being carried out at present is something of a fundamental solution. However, the problem lies in the low level of institutionalization. Villagers usually can't understand what is put on the bulletin or what is publicized is not real and the internal financial management mechanism remains unchanged in many other places. In more places, there is even no such form of open supervision.

The capitalization of village public power is certainly the exploitation of villagers which is relative in appearance but absolute in nature. It may be proper for some research to regard the capitalization of power as relative exploitation in a macro social environment but it is not true in terms of the rural community. Since village collective property is a kind of property with limited owners and clear boundary, illegal acquisition or use of which in any form by village cadres will be absolute exploitation of other villagers. Therefore, villagers' dissatisfaction in this aspect is not the strife for interests caused by "bottom-level members' doubt of the legitimacy of existing distribution pattern of rare resources in an unequal system" (Coser 1989); instead, it is the bottom-level members' direct safeguarding of self-interests. In China's rural areas, peasants don't recognize the legitimacy of such a resource distribution pattern.

4.5.3 *Escalation of Conflict: Compulsion*

In some cases, grassroots organizations' behaviors lead to peasants' resistance which will be confronted by village cadres with compulsion as the basic means. Such compulsion followed by villagers' further resistance is the general form of escalation of conflict. As revealed by peasants' letters, compulsion is highly related with but not totally caused by incidents such as improper language, family planning, and peasant petitions can also directly incur compulsion. In terms of form, compulsion from village cadres can be divided into non-violent and violent compulsion. As claimed by letter No. 84, "The tuition fee of my village has been raised from several dozen yuan to more than 300 yuan and children will be checked to make sure whether all charges are paid before the enrollment, which deprives a lot of children of education." Moreover, in case of peasants' failure to pay various fees, the village will shut off their water and electricity supplies. All these measures belong to non-violent compulsion.

Most accusations from these letters focus on the compulsion supported by direct violent means and there are 56 letters involved with or directly reporting various forms and scales of violent incidents. Specifically, there are violations of villagers' property rights and personal rights. The violation of property rights mainly includes breaking into peasants' houses to take away their grain, moving away their household articles including furniture, household appliances, pulling away agricultural tools and machines and even destroying houses. The violation of personal rights is mainly about beating up, tying up and taking custody of villagers which even lead to the so-called vicious incidents. Based on different organizers, violent actions accused by peasants can be put into three categories: No. 1 is the violence at the township level directly organized by township governments called township violence which has occurred for 31 times; No. 2 is the violence independently organized by village organizations called village violence for 12 times; No. 3 is organized by individual village cadre called private violence for 13 times. Both township and village violence belong to organized violence which is practiced in the name of certain grassroots organizations. The most distinctive feature of organized violence at the two levels is strong internal unity expressed in the inter-dependence and mutual complementation between the township and village violence.

(i) **Township Violence**

Strictly speaking, there is only one resource of formal violence in rural society, i.e., the organs of state power at the grassroots level with official forms and legal status such as police stations and court houses established at the township level. However, these agencies are not the constituent parts of township governments which have no direct jurisdiction and are not authorized to use these agencies in general administrative and judicial activities. Particularly, state judicial agencies shall not take part in the fund raising and money collection of village deduction, township plans, and other public welfare undertakings, which is clearly stipulated by the central government. However, in some places, grassroots cadres adopt a powerful means in the

form of “state violence” to confront peasants’ reluctance to cooperate and even resistance. Specifically, such violence is organized by one of the township Party Committee and governments leaders leading the staff of police station and township court or in collaboration with staff members of informal judicial agencies set up autonomously at the township level (such as squad, work team, and public security team) supported by members of the village organization.

(ii) **Village Violence**

Village violence means the violent activities independently organized by village organizations to cope with peasants with no direct participation of grassroots governments. Generally, there is little violence directly organized by village organizations not only because they lack the authority and position to practice violence but also because violence within a village acquaintance society will hurt their reputations and will be vulnerable to retaliation. However, village organizations still have their own resources of violence mainly consisting of crime watch team, public security team and alike, the members of which are neither official nor professional. They are valued by village leaders because of their special conditions such as close personal relations with community leaders, powerful family force background, or valiant and unruly rascals in the eyes of villagers. Village organizations’ ability of using violent resources is mainly decided by village leaders’ personal influences and staff members will be changed with the change the village Party Branch Secretaries and Heads, which is more affected by affinity factors. In case of direct conflicts between village organizations and villagers, these people will be dispatched to settle the problems with compulsive means.

In many cases, village organizations adopt the means of borrowing official violence. As claimed by letter No. 113, village organizations concoct various pretexts with incremental charges. If villagers refuse to pay, the village Party Branch Secretary will ask officials from the township judicial office to collect and 10% of the money collected will be deducted to the judicial office. Some village cadres employ court staff to collect money from peasants with a commission of 50 yuan per household. Violence will be expanded when village cadres organize violent activities of large-scale and higher intensity mainly because villagers’ petitions particularly group and multiple petitions are suppressed by village cadres with violence.

(iii) **Private Violence**

According to these letters, the violence peasants suffered does not appear all in the form of organization. It is partly from individual village cadre. Such violence is led by non-economic issues, mainly inter-personal contradictions related with the role and behaviors of village cadres and the cadres themselves and their relatives are those who commit violence. In some villages, major village cadres’ governing abilities are based on their clan forces. As claimed by the writer of letter No. 55, his chatting with others about the village finance which had not been publicized for many years and the Secretary’s suspected embezzlement was overheard by the son of the Secretary. The next day, he was besieged and knocked out by the Secretary’s three sons when he was walking on the street. Then the Secretary told the village Public

Security team leader “Send him to the police station because he passed out leaflets (against the 40 yuan fund raising per capita).” He was carried on a tricycle and sent to the police station and beaten up there once more. When he was sent to the hospital, he lost one eye in the attack and another eye sight seriously declined, which cost him over 6000 yuan for treatment and was tested by the judicial doctor as serious injury. He went out to petition everywhere but has received no disposal for 3 months. According to letter No. 124, the village Party Branch Secretary is engaged not only in gathered gambling but also in organized robbery of passers-by. They robbed a driver of 3200 yuan in cash and a fish dealer of his fresh fish valued 2000 yuan. Moreover, the victims were beaten by them. The eight accusers were cruelly beaten by thugs hired by the Secretary’s three sons for many times with some of them injured, one life-long disabled, and their water and power supplies shut down.

4.5.4 Conflicts and the Growth of Peasants’ Awareness of Rights

Disordered behaviors of grassroots organizations result in village conflicts, which demonstrate the backwardness of rural community organizational construction particularly organizational and institutional innovation in the fast economic transition. Peasants’ clear-cut awareness of criticism of these disordered behaviors and their actions to resist in certain cases, particularly their organization resistance symbolize the leading force of rural political modernization, which shows peasants’ quickly growing political awareness and strengthening ability of expressing rights. Such improvement is focused on peasants’ increasing participation in rural public affairs, which is expressed in the following aspects:

(i) New concept of the source of cadres’ power

More and more peasants have come to realize that the source of village public power should not be the superior government or leaders themselves but villagers. In their eyes, villagers are the ultimate owners of village public power who have the rights to select and supervise cadres. There are 13 letters which directly point out that the appointment of cadres is against the regulation and procedure and power represented by those cadres is not legitimate. These peasants express their strong dissatisfaction with some practices of superior authorities and directly demand their own democratic power in their letters.

Letter No. 50 complains that township leaders appointed new village Party Branch Secretary and the group of village leaders without public appraisal and election. The new leading group began to spend extravagantly and exaggerated as soon as they come into power, which led to villagers’ group petition to the provincial government for 3 times. However, the county and township working group stuck to superior appointment without election. As a result, villagers expelled those appointed leading group for 3 times within 1 month. The letter clearly points out: “Let us elect good

leaders who can truly lead us to become rich in accordance with Tentative Regulation of the Election of Villagers Committee of Hebei Province and truly implement the Provincial Party Committee's Institution of Village Affairs Publicity."

(ii) Self-protection with effective use of policies

These letters pay great attention to policy basis particularly on burden and land issues. Most of them can clearly state the regulations issued by the CPC and State Council and even point out the issuing number and date of documents or the date of publication by certain newspaper and TV station, based on which they forward their comments and critiques of local grassroots organizations' wrong-doing in the implementation. Letter No. 169 is from a 74-year-old Party member who claimed that when the storm troop consisted of over 20 armed policemen, judicial cadres, village cadres, and militia soldiers led by the Vice Village Party Branch Secretary broke into the village to collect the money of deductions and plans and remaining debts of various quotas and raid villagers' house for corn, wheat and TVs, I cried out loudly to them: "You are violating the Three Central Regulations on Reducing Peasants' Burden as well as the Tenth Provision of the Regulation on Peasants Burden jointly issued by the provincial Discipline Inspection Commission and the Supervision Department: Any collection of peasants' burden by any means of organized squad, storm troop and mobilization of staff member public security, armed police, security guard and any use of guns and batons are prohibited. Any illegal arrest, manacle, custody of people and extortion of peasants' family properties shall never be tolerated." I took out the first issue of "The Party Members" magazine of 1996 and read the "Three-Point Law" announced by Vice Premier Jiang Chunyun on the reduction of peasants' burden, which was echoed by some of the dozens of people gathering in and outside the yard. The storm troop led by the Vice Village Party Branch Secretary was unable to find a word to justify themselves and sullenly left.

(iii) Quick improvement of self-organizing ability

It has become peasants' conscious or unconscious inclination to resist various unreasonable and even illegal behaviors with organized efforts. Co-signed letters particularly those signed by more than five persons account for a big percentage of all letters, which is a demonstration of peasants' organizational effort in conflict with cadres.

The government authority generally regards 5-person collective action as a great impact on the village organization and there are 49 group letters (accounting for 22%) co-signed by more than 5 persons and 30 (accounting for 22%) co-signed by more than 5 persons, and 30 (accounting for 15%) by more than 20 persons. It is imaginable that there must be a developed organizational system for several dozens or even a hundred peasants in a village to write co-signed letters. Moreover, the collective action thus organized will be a greater pressure for grassroots organizations and a bigger impact on governmental behaviors. Peasants' self-consciousness of petition is improving and some peasants have insightful opinions on petition. Letter No. 87 says "Petition is also supervision." The story begins with the petitioner's bitter experience of being refused and reprimanded by certain department with poker-faced

attitude even when he had the note of provincial Bureau for Letters and Visits. “Frankly speaking, petition itself is miserable enough. Where is their conscience when they shut me out so easily? Where is justice and fairness when a petitioner is refused even with the superior’s note whereas others can enter?” “It is approved by the law, the Party and the government that injustice and corruption shall be accused, which is the supervision of law enforcement.” “Petition is an important way for the people to report problems to the Party and government as well as the people’s specific supervision of power. Dealing well with petition is totally consistent with dealing well with the Party affairs, the county and the people. Just because there is no channel for petition and no result for accusation, corruptive cadres can be bold enough to do every sort of evil thing against the law.”

There are increasing collective actions organized by peasants. Generally speaking, cadres’ behaviors in the conflict are sort of organizational in the name of the government with not only nominal legitimacy but also violence support. Peasants’ behaviors are individual and relatively weak. To enhance the effectiveness of their resistance, peasants will strengthen the collectiveness of their resistance as much as possible in multiple ways. Besides the commonly used joint-signature in petition letters, there are two highly organized efforts: One is collective petition in the form of action, i.e., the so-called group petition with the common practice as follows: Those villages who support the petition elect their representatives and raise fund for the petition, which will negatively impact the working performance of township governments because the amount of group petitions is an important indicator in the county (city) governments’ assessment of the township governments and a petition with the size of over five persons will be regarded as a group one. Another is the organization setup to protect their self-interests. For example, some villages established “Burden Reduction Associations,” some set up anti-embezzlement and anti-corruption teams. According to letter No. 90, an “Anti-corruption” team was established by nearly 1000 villagers in his village with the objective “to severely punish corrupt cadres inflicting peasants with the support from both the new term of the Central leading group headed by President Jiang Tzeming at the top level and toiling people at the grassroots level.” These highly organized collective behaviors usually have qualified leaders at the core with high authority.

4.5.5 A Brief Discussion

The reality of conflicts presented by nearly 200 letters from peasants is thought-provoking in the following aspects:

(i) Social consequences of rural conflicts

The report argues that present rural conflicts are not the rivalry of fundamental interests between the two rural social groups, which is different from both old China and pre-reform China. On one hand, such kind of conflict has been regarded as a sort of social morbidity basically characterized by peasants’ communication suspension and

confrontation which will have destructive and disruptive social consequence. On the other hand, conflicts can also have important and active consequences, i.e., positive or constructive function which is helpful for the integration within the group and a stimulant for the building of new norms and institutions. Just as Lewis Coser said: "Through the correction of destructive factors in power and authority as well as the establishment and revision of those public norms which are important for both parties, conflicts make it possible to re-evaluate relative power and bring about certain reform, as an important balancing mechanism for the society."¹ In this sense, though present increase of rural conflicts cannot be said to be a good thing, it will effectively push forward rural social integration if properly dealt with, particularly, it will expedite the historical process of rural democratization because truly stable rural areas are those governed with democracy.

(ii) The necessity of building sound mechanism to address conflicts

China is in the fast transition toward market economy. A society of market economy is the society with multiple interest subjects and complicated interest relations as well as fully unwrapped conflicts. Against such a back ground, there are fast increasing social conflicts which have revealed the maladjustment of the government system and grassroots management mechanism. Since conflicts are inevitable, what is important is how to deal with them. One way is simple suppression which will infiltrate and accumulate conflicts beneath social surface and conflicts will burst out in the form of violence with destructive consequences. The other is to institutionalize, normalize, and formalize conflicts through the building of effective conflict settlement mechanism by institutional and organizational innovation which will make conflicts predictable, controllable, and highly adjustable as positive power to improve the organic character of social structure. Presently, it is particularly important and urgent to improve the adjustability of conflicts with effective measures. As a means of control, adjustment of conflicts is conditional, i.e., the two conflicting parties set up a public institution based on structural conditions to settle disputes and mutually agree to follow some formal governing conflicts.

The key problem is the lack of an institutional channel the direct communication and on-the-spot settlement for conflicting parties. If peasants as one of the parties cannot endure, petition, and accusation will almost be the only way out, which will lead to consequences with the following features: No. 1, there will hardly be any effectiveness for petitions without bypassing immediate leadership; No. 2, most petitions will disappear like a pebble dropped into the sea with very few expected results; No. 3, many petitions will serve as the beginning of the escalation of conflicts and intensification of contradictions instead of achieving their objectives. Even though some petitions are settled to peasants' satisfaction, there will be considerable negative influences. In a word, the major characteristic of such means is to intensify conflicts first and resolve them second. Therefore, it is necessary for the exploration of an institutional arrangement to resolve conflicts at the preliminary stage and prevent corruption from growing so as to

¹[America] Lewis Coser: *Functions of Social Conflicts*, Hua Xia Press, 1989, p. 8.

encourage the supervision of power and suppressing power abusers, which means the cultivation of real democracy, i.e., using common peasants' strength to make peasants the subjective of public power supervision.

(iii) The key is to build a new pattern of power relationship

Building a new pattern of power relationship means the transformation of village cadres' power from and responsible for superior authorities to that from and truly responsible for community members, which is a change of dimension of grassroots organizations' power as well as the core of village democracy.

It is an important issue how to understand and deal with peasants. Some people deny peasants of their political participating abilities and their demands of participation. They don't think there are sufficient conditions for peasants to effectively supervise village public power in an institutional framework of self-governance. In our basic point of view, peasants have rich and broad demands of participating in community affairs management with enormous potential to materialize such participation which has been very well-performed in some places. The priority for the government is to reform the old government management system and working method by actively building new institutions and mechanisms to provide institutionalized platform for peasants to express their demands and safeguard their rights. To accommodate peasants' growing demands of rights, the government must continuously adapt to and integrate peasants' expression of interests and keep pace with times to innovate, otherwise the existing system will collapse as a result of the eruption of peasants' power.

It is a great test of governments' work and the political system whether there are timely, active, and strong echo to and satisfaction of peasants' growing demands of rights.

This article is an internal survey report written by the author to the Development Research Center of the State Council in October, 1998 with the original title "Community Conflicts and A New Type of Power Relation—An Preliminary Analysis of 196 Letters from Peasants" which is incorporated in "Research of China's Development—Selections of Survey Reports of the Development Research Center of the State Council (1999 Edition)" (China Development Press, May, 1999)

4.6 Protesting Peasants in Beijing

—An Investigation and Analysis of 30 Peasant Petitions to Beijing.

Peasant petition is a concentrated expression of various contradictions in rural society which has become a major difficulty of grassroots work in some places. Based on the analysis of 184 petition cases, this article tries to explore internal rules of peasant petition and ways to resolve rural conflicts with the preliminary opinion that there are some problems with petitions and it is necessary for the petition system to be properly adjusted.

The author has specially analyzed 196 petition letters from peasants collected by “Peasants’ Daily.” If writing letters is a gentle form for peasants to express their demands, the petition to Beijing is more action-oriented, which will directly impact both urban and rural stabilities. To deepen this research, a special investigation was carried out from the second half of 1999 with the following methods: (1) Consulting the registered records of petitions from the Social Public Division of “Peasants’ Daily” in 1998 and 1999. (2) The author’s personal receptions and in-depth interviews of petitioners in the news paper office, including the interviews of 15 batches of peasant petitioners (30 person times) and 15 individual case reports based on voice recordings within 1 month.

4.6.1 Petitioner: The Emergence of Elite Style Figures

(i) Population feature: Petitioners to Beijing is a peasant group mainly consists of men and middle-aged people.

There are 184 petitions registered by the newspaper from 1998 to 1999 with 91 in 1998 and 93 in 1999. Considering some unregistered letters, the actual number of petitions should be bigger.

In terms of gender, there are 150 men and 23 women and 11 with no mark of gender. Among the 15 petitions we directly interviewed, there are 14 by men and 1 by women.

In terms of age, middle-aged peasants from 35 to 60 are the majority which are recorded for 125 times accounting for 67.9% of the total number. The eldest is 73 and the youngest 24. Among all petitioners we received, the eldest is 62 and the youngest 26 with an average age of 48.

(ii) Change of scale: The first half of 1999 saw fast increase and the second half saw sharp decline compared with the same period of the last year.

According to the registration, the change is not obvious year over year at 90 times or so. However, the variation is apparent within the year. There were 32 times recorded from January to July and 59 times from August to December in 1998, while there were 65 times recorded from January to July, 1999, two times bigger than that of the same period of 1998. However, the number from August to December in 1999 sharply declined to only half of the same period in 1998. As the interview shows, such variation is not regular. In the second half of 1999, the number of petitioners was suppressed because the control of petitioners was strengthened in Beijing and across the country for the crackdown on Falun Gong and preparation of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

(iii) Regional Distribution: a broad Range of Petitioners’ provenance.

Among the 184 times recorded, there are 179 involving 25 provinces, autonomous regions and cities directly under the central government except 5 with no mark of

petitioner's address, among which 36 are from Henan, 34 from Hebei, 17 from Shandong, 11 from Hei Longjiang, 9 from Sichuan, 9 from Hubei, 8 from Anhui, 6 respectively from Jilin, Inner Mongolia and Shanxi, 5 respectively from Chongqing, Liaoning and Jiangsu, and 1–4 from other provinces, and none from Hainan, Tibet, Shanghai, and Guangxi. The difference of person times is obviously related with geographical distance but there are other factors at the same time.

(iv) **Occupational structure: Common peasants are the subjects of petitions.**

Most petitioners to “Peasants’ Daily” are peasants with different occupations. Among the 30 peasants related with the 15 petitions, there are 22 common peasants, 1 village teacher, 1 forest contractor, 2 village doctors and 4 private businessmen, 1 villagers’ team leader, and 1 village enterprise worker. In terms of educational level, among the 15 chief narrators, there are one graduated from technical secondary school, three from senior high school, 10 from junior high school, and one from primary school.

(v) **Individual Performance of Petitioners: Common Peasants and Elite peasants**

We had an over-two-hour individual talk with each petitioner involved with the 15 petitions and dined with some of them. These petitioners can be divided into three types according to their individual performance in the interview:

No. 1 is “rational type” accounting for nearly half of the total number with the following basic features: preparation of certain amount of written materials for petition, ability of clear narration with complete and orderly reflection of problems, preliminary knowledge of relevant policies and laws with certain legal and policy basis, self-confident but not so tough attitude.

No. 2 can be called “intuitive type” which is a minority in number with the following basic features: generally no preparation of written petition materials; feeling of something unreasonable but lack of clear policy and legal basis; consultative petition to some extent, with some petitioners directly claiming: “We petition because we don’t know about any law.”

No. 3 can be called “elite style” which is also a minority accounting for 1/3 of the total number with the following basic features: being familiar and experienced in how to petition; clear, logical and orderly statement of problems; skillful quotation of laws and policies and ever the ability of reciting some original texts of policies and regulations with surprising comprehension of relevant policies and laws. In terms of attitude, they are highly self-confident, very motivational with tough standing.

Our strong feeling in the interview is that increasing petitions, complicated petition experiences, and enduring petition process these years have tempered some “petition masters” who are good at expressing some peasants’ interests and can be regarded as another kind of village elites. They are not only different from those “accusers” crying out their grievances in the old society but also totally different from those petitioners redressing unjust, false, and erroneous cases in the early stage

of the reform because first of all, most of their petitions are not for their own grievances but representative for a certain number of villagers and supported by specific groups. Second, they have better understanding and grasp of relevant policies and laws, some of them even have certain knowledge of modern politics. Third, they have strong mobilizing abilities among villagers and serve as the major negotiation opponents of grassroot governments. Many of them had organized and planned large-scale collective actions before their petitions to Beijing. For example, Li XX, a peasant from Henan, had organized a petition of over 400 villagers to the regional Party Committee. Jiang XX, a peasant from Jilin, had organized a petition of over 200 villagers to the provincial capital. They frequently sighed about their weakness but firmly claimed their standing with the self-evident truth. Therefore, in case of failures of regular petitions, they will not avoid speaking of making more strengthened efforts.

Some people are often regarded by local officials as “petition masters,” “ruffians,” and alike. It now seems that what is important is not how to morally evaluate these people but what kind of instigating ability they have in villages. Regardless of personal virtues of these petition elites or their individual petition purposes, as representatives of petitioners, they have not only knowledge and experiences with insights of the common interests of those peasants but also courage to realize organized expression of peasants’ separated common interests. Therefore, they are elected by a considerable number of peasants as representatives. When these people integrate themselves with public interests and collective power within certain scope, their influences in the rural society are worthy of attention. Therefore, it is necessary to highlight the observation and analysis of this group of people in the research of collective resolving mechanisms to resolve rural conflicts.

4.6.2 Petition Demands: Group Expression of Interests

(i) Major content of demands

Peasant petition issues are involved with various aspects of the rural life, many of which are comprehensive. For example, the issue of burden is directly related with the issue of land and the land issue directly contains corruption. These issues can be classified based on the direct origins of conflicts as follows:

1. Peasants’ burden (63 times), among which there are 52 times on unreasonable apportionments and excessive charges; 2 on dishonest collection of agricultural taxes; 7 on issuing IOUs, depreciation of product level and price, violent collection of grain and so on; 2 on electricity charge.
2. Land (51 times), among which there are 19 times on governments’ illegal acquisition of land, village cadres extravagant spending of money, and unjustifiable compensation for peasants; 17 on improper utilization of land such as illegal use of arable land as the land for housing; field pollution caused by industry and serious loss of water and soil, etc; 11 on land contracting, mainly the infringement

- of peasants' rights of their contracted land and forest; and 5 marked only with "land issue" with no specific content.
3. Village cadres' embezzlement, corruption, and abuse of power for personal gain (24 times).
 4. Illegal village election (4)
 5. Rural education (4) such as the ignorance of dilapidated village primary school, default of village teachers' salaries, etc.
 6. Attack and retaliation (30), including personal injury and illegal custody of petitioners inflicted by cadres with their power. Among the 15 case we interviewed, there are 12 concerned with different levels of petitioners' being attacked and retaliated.
 7. Politics and law authority (12), the main problem is with local judicial authorities engaged in malpractices and perverting with the law or unjust judgment. For example, Yang Shutao from Jilin Province whose son was murdered was asked by the public security authority to "settle in private."
 8. Other problems (3), such as the county seeds company selling fake seeds, unreasonable streamlining of organizations and clearing over-staff, "five-guarantee" families suffering from starvation in the village, etc.

(ii) **Organizational form of petitions**

In terms of petition representatives' interest background, there are generally three situations:

No. 1 is the petition for the interest of a single person or a single family called "personal petition," which is mainly practiced by a single person. The petitioner himself is the one whose interest has been directly violated such as his divorce, his family member injured by the village head, and his land contract torn up arbitrarily by village cadres.

No. 2 is the petition for the common interests of a certain group. The petitioner claims himself as representing some other villagers with their signatures and even fingerprints on the petition materials submitted, which we call "represented petition." The group here is an uncertain range which means some of the villagers with common and violated interests. Some group consists of a villagers' team; some consists of several dozens of contractors; some contains several dozens of households whose land has been expropriated; some consists of several households of an administrative village; and some is a special group with common interests. For example, a mother of an active-duty soldier from Qiuxian County of Hebei Province complaining about the pensions withheld by the township government for 2 years as the representative of 70 families of active-duty soldiers.

Among the petitioners of the 15 cases directly received by us, there are 2 "personal-style" and 13 "represented type" petitions. The main feature of represented petition is a group of petitioners with generally 2-5 persons together. It is hard to calculate the specific number of persons in each petition because only the chief petitioner will be registered in the newspaper office's reception records. According to the head of mass work division, there are about 2/3 of petitions with over two petitioners.

No. 3 is the petition joined by several or the majority of peasants with common demand of interests, which is collective in terms of both interests and behaviors typically featured by the scale of action as the indicator of the intensity of demand. We call it “collective petition” which is different from “group petition” commonly used by grassroots governments in that the latter means any petition with five or more persons regardless of the size of interest group behind. Among the 13 represented petitions we received, the biggest group had five members, which was what we define as a collective petition. However, there had been collective petitions prior to the eight petitions to Beijing with various scales from 60 to 400 persons, among which there were four at the township and county level, two at the regional (municipal) level, and two at the provincial level.

4.6.3 *Petition: A Rational Appealing Process*

In the direct interviews, we didn’t come across any petitioner with trouble-making inclination or anyone deliberately provocative. The receptionists of the newspaper agency introduced that they had encountered only one or two persons persisting in being unreasonable or psychologically weird. Most peasant petitioners appeared to be moderate and rational who could easily communicate and talk with interviewers. Those petitioners showed relief and gratefulness to our patient listening and told us they had never been so carefully heard by any staff member from any other department before.

(i) *Petitioners’ Road to Beijing*

1. Most petitioners go to Beijing level by level. Among all petitioners we interviewed, there was only one who went directly from the town to Beijing and said he didn’t know the prohibition on the petition bypassing immediate leadership. All the other 14 petitions were carried out level by level from villages to towns, from towns to counties and cities and to provinces.
2. Raising petition expense. There are two ways for the raising of represented petition expense. One is all expense at the representative’s own, which is a rare case. Kang XX, a peasant from Hebei said: “I petition for all villagers who trust me and I don’t need them to raise money for me, instead, I can afford it by myself.” LiXX, a peasant from Liao Ning Province said: “I have spent all money I earned by selling Korean snacks these years.” Another is collective fund raising with two forms: One is equal share afforded by all peasants supporting the petitioner, for example, 50 yuan each household. The other is voluntary contribution from 30 to 50 yuan with no limit on each household.
3. Copies of materials prepared by peasant petitioners including accusation letters, villagers’ signatures, and relevant proof materials will be sent to various departments and offices.

4. Peasants' petitioners know about laws, regulations, and policies mainly through the following ways: TV and other news media and self-bought books; a petitioner claimed that he bought over 300 law books for petition and another showed us a book named "Land law Explanation"; materials provided by relatives, friends, and enthusiastic people. Zhang Jinhe, a peasant from Shanxi Province said: "I get these documents (Organizational Law of Villagers Committee) from my friend who is a cadre."

(ii) **Petitioners in Beijing**

1. Peasant petitioners generally visit over three central departments or new agencies in Beijing and they will go around all relevant departments they know about.
2. Petitioners in Beijing lead their lives mainly in four forms: living in cheap hotels at 10–20 yuan per day; staying with relatives or friends; staying with fellow-villagers; making ends meet by working and scavenging without affixed residence. Petition has to some extent become their way of life which is different from emigrant peasants for employment purpose.

(iii) **Mental Preparation following petitions to Beijing**

There is a question for almost all petitioners: What will they do if their problems remain unresolved after their petitions to Beijing? This was also the question we asked and discussed with them directly. According to the answers of over ten petitioners, there are four choices:

Choice No. 1 is to continue the petition. Li XX from Liaoning Province said: "I am unshakable in my determination of petition and will never give up unless the problem is solved. There will be no regret for me even if I spend all my life petitioning. We know the importance of stability for the country, but we peasant petitioners are with concrete proof and genuine evidence including pictures, audio and video records."

Choice No. 2 is to give up the petition and turn to confrontation. Jiang XX from Jilin Province said: "we villagers have made the decision of dismissing present village head from his post according to Provision 16 of the Organizational Law of Villagers Committee, but the township government refused to approve, so he is still in power. If necessary, we will exercise our citizenship rights after we go back." Li XX from Henan said: "Now I see Organizational Law of Villagers Committee" and I am ready to motivate the masses of our village to legally elect the real manager for villagers."

Choice No. 3 is to evade and move: evasion and emigration to other places. Donghui, a peasant from Anhui said: "I think it over and am ready to move if it really doesn't work this time. Since I work in Hubei, I will move my whole family to Hubei. Household registration and children's education will be considered later step by step and I should get out of here first."

Choice No. 4 is to accept of the reality of failure and give up petition. Yang Rongjiu, a peasant from Inner Mongolia said: "This problem has been procrastinated for over 3 years and remains unresolved, what can we peasants do? Our petition has come to an end without any other solution!"

4.6.4 Escalation of Petition: Conflict Accumulation Factor

(i) Escalation Mechanism of Petition

Most petitions are originated from the conflicts between peasants and rural grassroots cadres. Petitioners' journey from their hometown to Beijing is the demonstration of escalated petition. According to our direct interviews, there are two escalation mechanisms:

No. 1: Petitions incurred by the infringement of direct interests at the early stage which cannot be solved level by level till Beijing with the following feature: The conflict was intensified at the beginning but not expanded or further intensified in the follow-up petition despite unresolved problems. In such process, the main problem of the grassroots government is delinquency.

No. 2: Escalation of petition led by petition itself. After the initial petition, the source problem remains unresolved with increasing new conflicts which will lead to more petitions. For example, the custody of petitioners, dispelling petition groups with violence, and other attacks and retaliations stir up peasants' stronger dissatisfaction which will result in further petition. In this process, the main problem of the grassroots government lies in its improper dealing with the petition incident itself.

(ii) The role of petition management authorities

There is no doubt that petition authorities at various levels have done a lot of work with great contributions to rural stability. However, we also found through this survey the deficiency of the petition management authority's role in resolving conflicts and problems. Petition management staff regularly works in the following ways: No. 1 is to keep peasants' petition materials, transfer them to other agencies with a letter and ask petitioners to go back; No. 2 is to call the cadres over from originating area of petitions and ask them to bring petitioners back and solve problems by themselves. The transfer of letters will solve no problem and handing over petitioners to grassroots cadres is merely down-passing of contradictions. On one hand, materials are passed level down level; on the other hand, peasants are going level up level. As a result, petitioners will "return from the end to the start point," which is not petition management staff members' individual problem but the problem of various limits on petition authority from the system. For instance, some peasants appeal to the county petition bureau on illegal acquisition of arable land, whereas land acquisition exercise by the Land Bureau itself is approved by the county government. Under such circumstances, the county Bureau for Complaints can do nothing about it and peasants have to go upward.

(iii) The role of judicial authority

Some local leaders' interference of judicial authority has seriously affected the enforcement of law. A peasant from Inner Mongolia complained that over 20 mus

of his village team's land was illegally sold by village cadres, which they sued to the court and was told by the judge: "Of course you have won, even the verdict has been written, but I can't pronounce the judgment because that will cost my job."

(iv) **The role of the media**

More and more petitioners flock to the media and entrust the media to uphold justice for them, which is an abnormal case demonstrating the incompetence of administrative and judicial authorities. Without substantial power, the media has its own way of operation and emphasis on the value of "news," even highlights the need of "speculation" sometimes and is subject to some rules and restrictions. The media plays a very important role of public opinion supervision, but exposure by the media should not and cannot be an institutionalized method to resolve social conflicts.

4.6.5 Peasant Petition: Understandings and Proposals

(i) **Positive Understanding of Petition**

Petition shows various conflicts and disharmony in rural areas. In this sense, petition is negative. For grassroots cadres, petition is a kind of challenge and even resistance to their authority. Therefore, they cannot tolerate it and are even hostile to it. However, there are conflicts in any society, which requires a regular resolving mechanism. In our point of view, there is positive sense for petition. The fundamental point is that petition is neither rebellion nor political resistance in common sense but a form of demanding interests within the system or even positive political participation in the existing system.

Peasants' petition is a kind of resistance against the grassroots government; it is also the resistance relying on the existing system and policies instead of direct confrontation against the government, not to mention the purpose to shake the legitimate foundation of the government. Considering their own interests violated, peasants seek for help within existing social political system in line with existing policies and law instead of direct antagonism, which shows that they have confidence in policies, laws, and the government with certain sense of political efficacy. This should be what the Party and governments are pleased to see. For the government, what is the most important is to maintain petition as an effective channel of resolving conflicts so that most petitioners can solve their own problems within the system instead of being forced to adopt solutions beyond institutions.

(ii) **Proposals on the Improvement of the Petition System**

The key to the success of petition system lies in the effectiveness of the supervision of government power. The problem is that the petition authority is mainly established within some administrative departments which are its superiors. Obviously, it is difficult for the petition authority to correct these departments' problems which are accused by peasants. Therefore, peasants have to go on to petition but the superior

authority has the same problem. Though present petition system appears to be externally supervised by the public, it is actually supervised by the power authority as an internal mechanism. Petition should essentially embody the people's rights of supervision and there will be effective supervision only when the power is supervised by its franchisor. Therefore, a possible way of change to be considered is to establish complete and powerful petition organizations under various levels of Standing Committee of the People's Congress to integrate petition supervision with the Standing Committee's supervision of governments and other power authorities as well as integrate the handling of petitions with the Standing Committee's regular inspection of law enforcement.

This report suggests that it is necessary to set up an institutionalized connection between members of the People's Congress and peasant petitions to fully play the role of the people's representatives at all levels in resolving peasants' concerned problems and difficulties. Peasants can go to the people's representatives for their demands and the representatives shall actively work for peasant petitioners. In case of petitioners' unreasonable demands, representatives shall well explain to them with pacification. In case of their reasonable demands, representatives shall help them to solve with enthusiasm. Representatives can proceed with peasants most concerned issues in the process of collecting the people's opinions, representing the people's will and exercising the people's power, particularly those leading to peasants' petitions. The running of such petition system can resolve a number of conflicts at the grassroots level and put the representatives under the real supervision of the public. Moreover, it will establish closer links between the respective and the people and enable the representatives to truly perform their responsibilities.

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4.7 How Do Peasants Watch TV?

—A Brief Analysis of Questionnaire Survey of 1047 Peasants.

For peasant households, the role of TV is obviously different from that for urban families. A peasant household is not only a consumption unit but also a producing unit. Therefore, with restrictions such as transportation and communication, the role of TV becomes more important for peasants as the information media to connect with the outside world.

In order to study the interaction between peasants and TV as well as understand peasants' audience situation and their opinions and demands of special rural TV programs, we carried out a questionnaire survey in collaboration with the "Field" program of CCTV by interviewing chief members of peasant households in charge of production and management. There are 1047 valid questionnaires and the sample covers 460 villages and 30 provinces, regions and cities with two typical features:

No. 1: The average sample age is 41 as a middle-aged peasant group; No. 2: Women account for 16% and male peasants are the majority of the sample.

As found by this survey, though the owning rate of TV has nearly reached 100% in rural areas, the development of TV network is still obviously lagged behind mainly in the following aspects: the failure of peasants' TVs to receive some established channels because of the weakness of network coverage or deficiency of management, which has led to enormous waste of TV information. The basic contents of special rural programs provided by TV media have met peasants' demands. However, the volume of programs is seriously deficient and the distribution of time needs to be adjusted. In our point of view, it is necessary to substantially increase the volume of special rural programs and even consider setting up specialized rural or peasant TV station.

4.7.1 The Hardware Level of Peasants' TVs

1. TV has been basically popularized.

On the national scale, the data from Statistics Department shows that TV owning rate is over 90% in rural areas. As this survey indicates, TV has become common place in peasant households. Among various home appliances and agricultural machines, TV owning rate reaches 96.2%, much higher than that of washing machine, telephone, VCD, refrigerator, etc. Regional statistics shows that the owning rate of home appliances and production equipments in China's east is higher than that in the central and west of China, but the gap is not so big.

2. TV hardware levels differ a lot.

Although most peasant households have TVs, their TVs differ a lot in terms of hardware condition. No. 1, nearly half of their TVs were bought in early 1990s and earlier and the peak of TV purchasing was around 1990; No. 2, among all TVs, colored ones account for 55.3% and black-and-white ones 44.7%; No. 3, the specification of TV is low with 14-inch TVs accounting for 22.3%; 18-inch and below accounting for 49.3% and 21-inch and below accounting for 80.2%; No. 4, low coverage rate of cabled TV network at 28.3%. The first three facts show that peasants' TVs are in faced with the pressure of upgrading and updating which will create vast space for the TV manufactures' development of rural market. The last fact reveals the backwardness of rural TV communication network construction.

3. Deficient utilization of TV channel resources.

As the survey shows, the TVs of interviewed peasants can receive the programs of eight TV stations in average. The average number of TV station that can be received is 9.42 in the east, 8.76 in the west and 7.25 in the central part of China. Most of the TV stations watched by peasants are local ones and the receiving rate of CCTV varies

Table 4.1 Average number of TV watching days of respondents

	Number of people	Percentage
Every day	821	78.4
Once each 2–3 days	121	11.5
Once each 4–5 days	28	2.7
Once each 6–7 days	16	1.5
Almost never	31	3.0
Uncertain	30	2.9
Total	1047	100.0

a lot among different regions. Except CCTV-1 and CCTV-2, the other CCTV channels have low receiving rates and are limited in cable TV users.

In terms of receiving rates of CCTV channels, Channel 1 is best received at 89.2% and Channel 2 is the second at 59.0%. Channel 7 is the so-called agriculture channel (it shares the same channel with children's program and military program. Purely agriculture program accounts for 1/3 of the total channel time) which can only be received by 34.7 of peasant households. It is worthy of attention that 2/3 of peasant households cannot receive CCTV agriculture channel, which will be of no significance at all for these peasants no matter how good the programs of such a channel are.

4.7.2 TV Watching Behavioral Features

1. TV and Leisure Life

As the survey shows, in the slack farming season, watching TV is peasants' most popular content of life. Among multiple choices, 78.9% interviewees choose such behavior. Doing housework is also an important leisure activity. The rate of reading books or chatting or playing with other villagers ranks the second. Regional statistics shows a higher rate of watching TV in the slack season in the west than in the east and central part of China.

2. Watching Habit and Frequency

As indicated by the survey, 18.4% interviewees watch TV everyday as the most loyal TV audience (see Table 4.1) against the background of highly scattered attention of urban audience. Due to peasants' work and rest time, 76.9% interviewees spend no more time watching TV on Saturday and Sunday than at ordinary weekdays. 45.4% interviewees watch TV no later than 10 PM and 69.7% no later than 11 PM.

Compared with urban people, peasants have stronger dependence on TV, mainly characterized by the following features: No.1, peasants watch TV longer every day. As indicated by the audience rate survey of the CCTV Survey Center, average urban people watch TV for 120 min each day while average rural people 166 min, 46 min

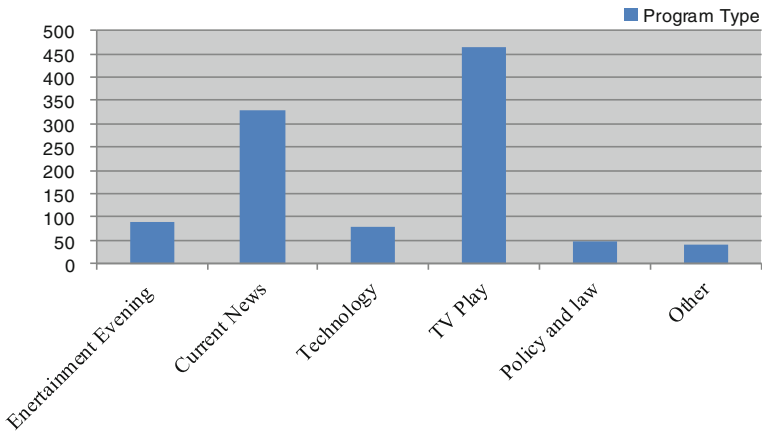


Chart 4.1 Most favorite programs of peasants

longer than the former; No. 2, peasants switch channels less frequently than urban people do, i.e., they do not change channels as frequently as urban people do and the former’s average switching interval is 2 min shorter than the latter’s. From this view, TV programs play a more important role in rural areas than in urban areas whether in terms of entertainment and leisure or learning and publicity.

3. TV Program Preference

As indicated by this survey, peasants’ most favorite TV programs are successively: TV play, current news, arts and entertainment program, technology program, policy and law program, etc. (see Chart 4.1). In terms of audience trend, entertainment and social concerns rank the first such as variety art shows and current news; the second is specific application trend, such as agriculture technology, policies and market information, etc. Regional statistics shows that the ratio of watching technology program as the most favorite one in the east is higher than that in the central and lowest in the west part of China.

4. Watching Behaviors of Rural Programs

Among all kinds of TV programs concerned with rural life, peasants’ most favorite programs are successively as follows: TV plays on rural life, agriculture technology, rural news, rural policies program, etc.

As the survey shows: Most interviewees watch agricultural technology program by chance with 19% peasants actively watching it and 61 watching when they happen to see it, which demonstrates that learning science and technology through TV has not been most peasant’s self-conscious behaviors. 19% peasants will watch program parade before watching rural technology program.

Table 4.2 Popularity and audience rate of the CCTV rural programs

Program name	Known		Watched	
	Number of people	Percentage	Number of people	Percentage
The golden land	376	35.9	286	27.3
The field	314	30.0	240	22.9
CCTV-7	212	20.2	147	14.0
Agricultural education and technology	181	17.3	137	13.1

Table 4.3 Why respondents watch the field

	Number of People	Percentage
Useful technology information with direct help	119	49.6
No direct help but interesting	40	16.7
Watch rural affairs by chance	63	26.2
Just have a look with no intention	15	6.3
Other Reasons	3	1.2
Total	240	100.0

As the survey shows: 35.9% respondents know about the special agriculture technology program and they can tell the TV stations providing such program without hint successively as follows: CCTV-2, CCTV-7, Shandong TV, CCTV-1, Jiangxi TV, Shanxi TV, and Liaoning TV.

Regarding CCTV rural programs, The Golden Land, The Field, CCTV-7, Agricultural-education and Technology rank from high to low in terms of popularity and audience rate (see Table 4.2).

4.7.3 Basic Assessment of the Programs

In terms of watching purpose, peasants watch rural TV programs mainly to seek information assistance. As the survey shows, useful technology information available in those programs with direct help is the main reason for respondents to watch them (see Table 4.3).

In terms of watching behaviors, most people watch rural programs randomly. Only 13.8% watch every set of the program. Among all respondents who have watched The Field, only 13.8% nearly watch every set but most of them (72.5%) only watch by chance.

In terms of the overall assessment, nearly half of the respondents who have watched “the Field” are positive about the program: very good. Five of them think it just so-so, and one of them gives definite reason why he doesn’t think it’s good: Time is too short.

In terms of specific column assessment, among the seven sections of “the Field” program, “Technology” is the most favorite section for 60.8% respondents. “Important Agricultural News” is the most favorite section for 10.0% respondents, which demonstrates the No. 1 demand of rural TV program content is the demand of technology.

Among all respondents who have watched “the Field,” 51% watch it completely, 49% only watch part of it. Those who choose to watch partially prefer “technology” section.

Among those who watch rural programs selectively, over half choose to watch “technology” (55.6%), which shows most peasants special preference to such program.

4.7.4 The Program’s Direct Help for Peasants

Rural programs help peasants in various ways which can be divided into indirect and direct help. Indirect help is mainly about the inspiration of ideas and values without specific boost of production and management or it has inspired peasants but such inspiration has not developed into application level. For example, some peasant said: “Though the crop introduced by the program is not suitable to plant here, I am more confident of agricultural production after watching, it is a mental help for me.” Direct help means the program has directly influenced peasant households’ production and management with specific application effect.

As the case shows, there are four kinds of programs directly helpful to peasants. No. 1 is the help of planting technology, such as the adoption of new breed, protection of plants, new cultivation skill and production, etc. accounting for over 2/3 cases of direct help reported by interviewees; No. 2 is the help of breeding technology, such as new methods and new forage for raising chickens and pigs; No. 3 is the help of market supply and demand information, such as providing the interviewees with direct channels for purchasing or selling their products; No. 4 is the help of information on processing skills of agriculture products. The number of helpful cases on plantation ranks the first, however, interviewees complain a lot on this issue mainly because many agricultural technologies introduced by TV are not applicable in their places. As a TV station with nationwide coverage, this is an invincible difficulty for CCTV considering China’s vast territory and big regional differences of agricultural resources (such as soil, climate, etc.) and variety of crops. A specific new technology introduced by TV can only have partial compatibility. In this sense, there will be better effect if local TV stations make more efforts in this respect.

4.7.5 Peasants' First Opinion About TV Network and TV Programs

Peasants' first opinion is about TV network construction. Despite the high owning rate of TVs, the utilization of TV channel resources is very poor. As a result, peasants cannot watch plenty of TV channels and programs. Moreover, peasants complain about existing programs for the lack of enough contents and high quality.

(i) Poor coverage of rural TV channels and networks.

The main problem is the low ratio of cable TV. According to the survey, only 28% peasant households use cable TVs and many TV channels and programs cannot be received. A student investigator from Henan Province wrote in his report: "In my home county, cable TVs have been popularized in the county town, but there is almost no cable TV network in the village and only CCTV-1, the provincial station, county station and some city stations can be received in rural areas. Many villagers have never watched or even heard of agricultural programs such as *The Golden Land*," *The Field*, and so on. There is no signal of agricultural programs of CCTV-7 which had been rebroadcast by the county station for some time but stopped later for some unknown reason. Peasants claim that they enjoy this channel but there is no way to watch." Generally speaking, the audience rates of the three existing rural programs are very low in rural areas and something is wrong with the programs themselves which have not played their due role. However, what is more dissatisfactory for peasants is the deficiency of the network and many people cannot watch the programs.

The building of TV networks is not an issue of peasants and even TV stations themselves can solve. It needs the plan and coordination of the government. In our point of view, the local government should focus on not only the popularizing rate of TV but also the coverage rate of TV networks in rural areas to provide peasant households with TV channels and programs as many as possible when they have got TVs.

(ii) Some unofficial grassroots TV Stations' abuse of channel resources.

Those so-called grassroots TV stations are mainly set up by some towns and even by villages and are privately contracted in many places. Without their own channels, these TV stations depend on insertion into some CCTV or provincial channels for survival, broadcasting programs such as local news including township leaders' speeches and activities in brief, a lot of local advertisements, profitable VOD (such as birthday and wedding celebrations and alike), and action and sentimental TV series. As a kind of popular culture consumption, such a situation has its reason of existence, but those programs should have their own channels instead of disrupting the CCTV or local TV station's programs and denying many peasants' access to agricultural technology program and alike. Therefore, it is important to rectify these TV stations in the building of rural TV networks.

(iii) Deficiency of specialized rural content of TV programs.

Many university students in their postscripts talked about an opinion from interviewees: China has a great rural population but few specialized TV programs for peasants. Peasants have many aspects in common with urban residents in terms of TV program demands, however, they have many special needs and concerns due to the special rural environment. For example, programs on agriculture technology, demand and supply of agricultural products, rural policies on burden collection, village affairs management and grain purchase, etc. are just common social news for urban people but are of direct application value for peasants.

Interviewed peasants proposed as follows: (1) Increase special rural contents in CCTV-1 and CCTV-2, open new columns and increase the volume of current programs; (2) Make CCTV-7 a specialized agriculture channel apart from present one which shares with children and military programs for 1/3 each; (3) Increase the content of TV program on rural policies and open a specialized program on rural issues similar with "Focus Interview"; (4) Set up a specialized rural TV station to produce and broadcast various programs on rural areas and peasants which will increase peasants' opportunities to take part in TV activities. In our point of view, these suggestions are not all feasible but peasants' strong demands of TV programs must be emphasized in whatever sense, which is related with not only rural economic development and invigorating rural market but also peasants' speaking position of speaking in China's society.

(iv) Present rural programs need to be improved.

No. 1: Program contents shall be enriched. According to the assessment from interviewed peasants, current rural special programs are consistent with peasants' demands in terms of basic contents. However, peasants also have some suggestions to further enrich programs generally in three categories: One is about technology dissemination that technology introduction should be more specific. For example, some peasants said: "It is necessary to increase specific details because we don't understand something too professional." "There should be more slow-motions because it is too fast for us to catch up with." "Please increase lectures on agricultural machines application," "Please increase lectures on agricultural machines application," "Please increase something we can put into use after watching." "Please increase the contact addresses of the researchers of new species and new technology," etc. Another is mainly about market normalization programs which can help peasants to improve information identification ability such as "Falsified Agriculture information advertisement should be disclosed to reduce the loss of peasants," "There are too many fakes and we don't know which we should trust." "How to know whether a new product or a new technology is true?" and so on. The third is about promoting social justice. For example, some peasants suggested "publicize of national policies in the form of short plays," "increasing legal system content," "disclose more of some local taxes that are too heavy and speak for us," "Village cadres' corruption shall be more severely exposed and combated," and so on. Some peasants required "Peasants' images shall appear more frequently on the screen."

No. 2: extension of program time. Peasants proposed quite a lot on this issue to ask for prolonged program time and more replays such as “Replays shall be increased and it would be best for one program to be replayed 4–5 times per week so that we can watch the next one if we have missed this one”; “It would be better if the program could be broadcast at dinner time,” “the program time shall be televised a little bit later”; “The program schedule shall be adjusted with seasonal change to be consistent with peasants’ work and rest time,” etc. It is found by the analysis of questionnaires that there is no way for CCTV programs to be televised in a “best” time for peasants from various regions. For example, in terms of current “Golden Land” program broadcast at 6:30 PM, peasants have three different opinions, i.e., “too early,” “too late,” “just Ok” and many peasants suggested that “It would be better if rural programs could be placed next to the morning news.” In our point of view, the effective way to satisfy peasants’ demands on program time is not to advance or put off the schedule within current program length but substantially enlarge the total volume of programs, not only replay times but also the length of each program shall be increased and some new columns shall be established. Therefore, time arrangement is connected with the expansion of program content. In this sense, it is necessary to establish specific rural or agricultural TV stations because there is no way for a TV station in faced with both urban and rural audience to broadcast rural special program in prime time; however, it is not a hard task for a professional TV channel.

No. 3: improvement of program style. Peasants also proposed a lot on the style of program which is generally regarded as “too rigid and lack of vividness” and the problem with the hosts is “ineffable.” In our analysis, the main reason is many rural program writers’ and directors’ lack of understanding of neither rural problems nor peasants, they even hardly go to villages and rural households and hosts can’t find the “feeling” of communication with peasants in their hosting but express rural contents in urbanized styles. Some announcers use rigid tones to introduce certain technology, which make the audience feel estranged. Therefore, in the perspective of TV station, the key to produce famous-brand programs and improve rural audience rate is to discover and cultivate a group of program staff not only good at observing rural areas and understanding but also sensitive in understanding peasants.

This article is an internal survey report written by the author for the Development Research Center of the State Council. In December, 1999, the research team of Rural Department of the Development Research Center of the State Council led by the author organized over 150 students of China Agriculture University from rural areas to carry out interviews with questionnaires in the winter vacation. The sample was selected on a nonrandom base and the investigators selected heads of common peasant households with middle-income from their home villages and neighboring villages as survey objectives. There were 1312 questionnaires recovered and 1047 valid. The investigators also submitted 130 survey reports recording peasants’ conversation contents and their own thoughts, upon which this article was completed.

4.8 How Do Peasants Learn Technology?

—A brief analysis of the questionnaire survey of 1047 peasants.

This article is a brief analysis of the sample survey of 1047 peasants. As demonstrated by the statistics, merely 10% interviewed peasants regard farming as a way to become rich but 90% of them think new technology is necessary for farming and have clear demands of learning agricultural technology. The problem lies in peasants' technology demands which can hardly be satisfied. Technology services provide to peasants by the society particularly by grassroots agricultural technology sector are not only poor in quality but also deficient in quantity.

The sample of this survey covers 460 villages of 30 provinces (cities, regions). Because the survey mainly selects members in charge of household production and management, the sample has two typical features: No. 1: the average sample age is 41 representing a middle-aged peasant group; No. 2, the sample mainly consists of male peasants with women accounting for 16% of the total number. The result of this analysis is not intended to refer to the whole peasant population due to the improbability of the sample survey. Our main objective is to observe peasants' behaviors and demands of technology services based on a larger sample population.

4.8.1 12% Interviewed Peasants Think that “Farming is the Most Likely Way to Become Rich” and 11% Think that “Being a Cadre is The Most Promising Way to Become Rich”

Generally speaking, the strategic position of land has dropped in rural households' economic development. In terms of vocational choices to realize family prosperity designed by interviewees themselves, only 10% of peasants regard farming as their first choice, whereas 90% peasants focus on their realistic directions of becoming rich in non-agricultural activities.

In answering the question “what is the most likely way to become rich?” The first choice of interviewees is sideline production, the second is doing business, and the third is migrant working (see Table 4.4). There are only 12.1% who choose farming and most peasants don't think farming will lead to prosperity. This is a preliminary verification of empirical phenomena which cannot prove the fundamental change of the actual role of farming in rural households' economic activities but can strongly demonstrate the declined position of land in peasants' awareness.

What is thought-provoking is that nearly 11.8% peasants regard “being a cadre” as their best choice of becoming rich which is equal to those who choose farming. In present institutional framework, there is limited and even unstable income for rural cadres who have hardly any opportunity to become rich overnight under regular circumstances. However, the fact that so many peasants regard being a cadre as their

Table 4.4 Respondents' ideas of the most likely way to become rich

	Regional distribution						Total	
	East		Central		West			
Sideline production	111	31.2%	152	32.4%	69	31.1%	332	31.7%
Doing business	103	28.9%	143	30.5%	72	32.4%	318	30.4%
Migrant working	40	11.2%	64	13.6%	19	8.6%	123	11.7%
Farming	43	12.1%	46	9.8%	23	10.4%	112	10.7%
Being a cadre	42	11.8%	40	8.5%	26	11.7%	108	10.3%
Opening a factory	5	1.4%	5	1.1%	3	1.4%	13	1.2%
Other	12	3.4%	19	4.1%	10	4.5%	41	3.9%
Total	356	100%	469	100%	222	100%	1047	100%

first choice to achieve family prosperity demonstrates that there is a considerable amount of public power used by cadres as their personal “capital,” which is not merely an economic problem.

4.8.2 54.5% Respondents Are Willing to Farm for the Primary Reason that Farming Can Solve Food Problem. As the Survey Shows: Peasants Seriously Lack the Initiative of Farming with 54.5% Respondents Willing and 45.3% Unwilling to Farm

Considering diversified factors influencing peasants' intentions of farming, multiple choices are set up for this question in the questionnaire, which enables interviewees to list multiple reasons in their own ideas. For those peasants willing to farm, farming is merely a low-level means of living. 65.6% of respondents think that “farming can at least solve food problem”; 39.4% of them think they can earn some money by farming. Those peasants who are not willing to farm show obvious pessimism of farming; 74.5% respondents think that “farming is not profitable, it may result in loss instead.” In terms of the question “Are you willing to farm if there were plenty of land for you?” Only 45.9% respondents answered yes. The second reason for the unwillingness of farming is non-economic, i.e., “Farming is an arduous job that doesn't make any sense,” which shows a considerable number of peasants are tired of farming as a life style.

This survey finds that farming is a helpless choice for nearly half interviewees for the main reason that farming income is too low. Compared with international experiences, the main reason for rural labor force particularly young people of some other countries and regions to leave agriculture and rural areas in the fast industrialization and urbanization is their preference of life styles, i.e., those people chose to abandon such a life style instead of complaining about the poor income of farming,

because the farming income in those countries and regions is not lower than that of non-farming jobs. China's peasants nowadays are suffering not only hard lives but also poor income and the influence of the double factors may stir up stronger inclinations of more people to leave agriculture and rural areas.

A university student wrote in the postscript of his survey report: "I am astonished by the fact that there are few peasants willing to farm and they said that it was not because of the hardship of farming but depressed grain price against rising commodity price and deductions, plans, educational fund, road repairing and seedling cultivation fees. Peasants will suffer loss once they plant crops, not to mention natural and man-made disasters. As a result, they are afraid of the land. I think the moment has come for so many charges to be reduced to improve peasants' initiatives in farming."

4.8.3 91% Peasants Regard New Technology as Necessary for Farming But There is No Smooth Channel for Technology Supply

Nearly half peasants expressed their unwillingness to farm, but 91% respondents think new technology is necessary for farming. Many peasants said: "The old way of farming doesn't work any longer. Let's take fertilization as an example: In the past, fertilizer was abused and ammonium, ammonium nitrate, urea, American diammonium were all put in use with ill-controlled quantity and poor performance. Now we know how to fertilize in proportion and have made better performance by reading books," which shows that peasants' understanding of the relationship between land management and science and technology has gone beyond that of the era of traditional small-scale peasant economy and they are clearly aware of the important role of technology in agricultural production.

The problem can be divided into two aspects from the view of technology supply: One is the most effective way of supply in peasants' perspective and the other is the practical way of supply in reality. Now the major problem is that what peasants have got is not what they think as the most effective supply, which demonstrates the great gap between agricultural technology disseminating mechanism and peasants demand. It also shows one of the directions for governments' agricultural work.

The survey shows that the most effective ways to learn technology in peasants eyes are successively: on-the-spot instruction by township technicians, watching TV, and reading books and newspaper (see Table 4.5).

In fact, peasants' crucial ways to get new technologies are successively: watching TV, reading books, and newspaper and learning from other villagers. 52.7% respondents think the most effective way is "on-the-spot instruction by technicians," however, this is the major obtaining way for only 24.6% peasants. Technology services regarded by peasants as most effective such as technicians, specific directions in field, organizing various technology training classes are not developed and even

Table 4.5 The most effective technology-learning way in peasants' perspective and actually way

Technology learning and obtaining way	Effective way of learning technology		Actual way of obtaining technology	
	Number of people	Percentage	Number of people	Percentage
On-the-spot direction by technicians	552	52.7	258	24.6
Watching TV	527	50.3	595	56.8
Reading books and newspaper	508	48.5	521	49.8
Learning from other villagers	440	42.0	512	48.9
Attending training classes	439	41.9	191	18.2
Listening to village radio broadcast	136	13.0	111	10.6
Other	50	4.8	67	6.4

deficient in present rural areas. This is the problem which can neither be solved by peasants themselves nor by the market mechanism but the full play of the role of grassroots governments.

4.8.4 29.3% Respondents Have Received Grassroots Technology Services with Mainly Positive Assessment of the Quality of Service

The major grassroots agricultural technology service organization is the township Agricultural Technology Service Station. There are technology service stations in all towns because they are important parts of township organizations in terms of sectors setting up. However, they are playing different roles. Some of them are greatly helpful for peasants and the others exist only in names. A good township agricultural technology station must be the one widely recognized by peasants, particularly for its substantial assistance to peasants' production. Therefore, we designed the question "Is there a township agricultural technology station staff member who has recommended you relevant services?" to study the functioning of such an organization.

29.3% respondents answered that township agriculture technology stations recommended them service in 1999. Among these respondents, 72.8% adopted recommended services and 27.2% refused. Among those adopters, 46.6% thought the effect was obvious; 32.0% thought it was just so; 7.2% thought it was poor; and others answered that there was no effect. Generally speaking, nearly 80% (46.4 and 32.2%) of respondents who adopted recommended services positively assessed the

results of these services, which shows the good quality of such service supply. For those who refused, the main reasons are successively: 28.9% for expensive costs and 25.32 for unsuitable services.

It is a basic job for grassroots governments to promote agricultural technology station, stock station, forestry station, water conservancy station, etc. which should have wider range constantly introduce some advance production and management service to peasant households. However, as revealed by the result of this survey, merely less than 30% respondents received technology services; over 70% had no contact with grassroots agricultural technology agencies, which shows the obvious deficiency of such service.

Why do peasants mostly favor direct the instructions from technicians? A student said in his summary report following the survey: “Most villagers complain about technology information services introduced by the newspaper and media in three aspects: First of all, they can’t understand the meaning of many contents and words, not to mention self-experiment. Secondly, the exaggerated effect of advertisement and there are too many counterfeits in today’s society that are hardly reliable. Thirdly, they can’t afford the high expenses of some services with good technology and they count more on the technology popularization by government agencies.”

Peasants’ adoption of new agricultural technology consists of learning and application and the latter is a more significant stage. Now the problem is that peasants can have preliminary understanding and illumination by watching TV and reading books at the first stage; however, they will be perplexed as soon as they turn off the TV and put down the books and go into the fields. In faced with specific problems, they will be at a loss what to do because the application is more complicated. In this sense, professional technician’s direct instruction is an indispensable and vital link.

4.8.5 22.2% Respondents Received Different Forms of Technological Trainings and Expert Lectures in Villages Are Most Popular Among Peasants

22.2% respondents received different forms of agricultural technology trainings for 2.46 times per capita in average and the first way to get training is various kinds of training classes; the second is newspaper, books, radio broadcast, and TV. Regional statistics shows that the training ratio of the west is obviously higher than that of the east and the central with the lowest ratio in the central part of China. Nearly 1/5 of peasants took part in different forms of technology trainings in last year, which shows that a big number of peasants actively seek or even create opportunities to learn agricultural technology. These opportunities are provide partly by the grassroots agricultural technology service sector (township agriculture technology station, villagers Committee, etc.), partly by various urban and rural market organizations (such as enterprises) and partly by peasants’ own professional technology associations.

Over 90% peasants regard new technology as necessary for farming, whereas only 20% peasants have participated in technology training, which demonstrates that most peasants have been aware of new technology's importance to agriculture but they lack the self-consciousness of learning. In another words, they don't know how to learn new technology. Judged from the cases provided by survey reports, peasants have several attitudes: No. 1, some peasants are waiting for direction and inspiration instead of active searching; No. 2, some peasants actively seek for the way of learning but there is neither direct instruction from technicians nor suitable or even receivable TV program and they have difficulties in reading books due to their poor education, so they have on proper way of learning; No. 3, some peasants see the new technology and are greatly interested but dare not approach and even doubt them because they have suffered heavy loss caused by the arrival of "new technology." Some even claimed "I would rather not make fortune than to easily trust new technology." Who should be responsible for such an embarrassing relationship between peasants and new technology? It seems now the key is to coordinate the relationship between peasants and new technology and improve peasants' action ability to accept new technology, which can be solved only by the market mechanism. Governmental organizing effort should be strengthened and peasants' self-organization should be developed and cultivated.

Agricultural experts' lectures to village are most popular among interviewed peasants and 83.5% peasants are willing to "actively participate in the lectures and carefully study agricultural technology."

In terms of the training and dissemination of new technology and new seeds, interviewed peasants complain more about the charge, i.e., new technology is too expensive for them. Many students mentioned this problem in their postscripts of survey reports with the many proposals that the country should consider differential treatments to the expenses of new agricultural technology, i.e., since peasants of well-developed rural areas can afford new technology and new species, the country should provide special support to under developed areas and even "lend" the technology to those peasants in the early stage.

4.8.6 Peasants Have Comprehensive and Strong Needs for Information and TV is the Most Convenient Channel to Get Information But the Inter-Villagers Dissemination and Influence Are Worthy of Special Attention

To know peasants' current needs of information, we designed the question "What kind of information do you need now?" and the statistics show that over 2/3 respondents think what they mostly need are purchase information, selling information, and technology information. The overall needing intensities of the three kinds of information are basically the same but the need for the information on the purchase of

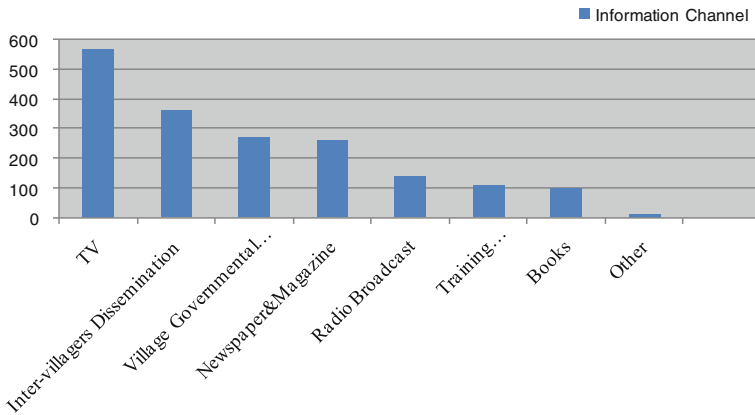


Chart 4.2 The most convenient accesses for peasants to information

relevant products and services is stronger. Meanwhile, over half peasants are in need of “policy information.”

Peasants’ comprehensive and strong need for information shows the fact that rural households’ production and management are obviously restricted by the weak circulation of information, particularly the poor rural information system construction. Peasants’ lack of information is mainly affected by two factors: One is the problem with peasants themselves. For example, they are neither good at communicating with the outside world actively nor good at obtaining useful information by carefully and effective utilization of multiple channels. Another is the problem with external conditions which is a more important reason in our perspective mainly with the following features: backward hardware infrastructure of rural information dissemination; obvious negligence of rural areas and peasants in the information content of mass media; and severely poor development of information service system provided by the public sector. In this sense, the government should play a bigger role in the information services particularly technology information services of agricultural production and management.

The accesses regarded by peasants as the most convenient to information are successively watching TV, inter-villagers dissemination, township governmental publicity, newspaper, magazine, and broadcast (see Chart 4.2).

Due to the popularization of TV in rural areas as well as the nature of TV technology itself, the outstanding role of TV in information disseminating system has been widely recognized by peasants. Therefore, in the survey, peasants’ opinions on the building of information system are mainly about TV. Many problems that are not problems at all in urban areas become very big issues in rural areas. For example, the poor coverage ability of rural TV channel networks has led to peasants’ failure of receiving and watching relevant TV programs. The relationship between peasants and TV media will be analyzed in another report.

“Inter-villagers dissemination” ranks the second among the most convenient accesses to get information in peasants’ eyes, which is a finding of strong applicable sense for the building of rural information system. As the study of modern mass dissemination shows, the phenomenon of “opinion leader” has been found as a rule. Modern dissemination tools, particularly those dissemination activities with definite purpose of mobilization such as election, product promotion, and technology popularization, and so on will play a key role in influencing common audience when they are interpreted or used by those public figures with special advantages and influences. These people are called “public opinion leaders” or “opinion leaders” in the media study. In order to strengthen the building of rural information system and the effective supply of information to rural residents, it is necessary not only to emphasize the application of modern high new dissemination technology but also to discover and cultivate some “opinion leaders” good at collecting and making use of information from peasants.

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Chapter 5

Peasants and Local Officials

5.1 A Municipal Party Secretary's Peasant Standing

For me, Mr. Lu Zixiu is both an elder and my “colleague.” In terms of seniority, I am surely a junior because he is in his eighties and I am just over fifty; in terms of career, both of us served as Mr. Wang Yuzhao’s secretaries, i.e., subordinates of the same leader in different years. What is more important is that both of us are engaged in rural research and know each other well.

From 1978 to 1982 when Wang Yuzhao was the Party Secretary of Chuxian Prefecture, Lu Zixiu served successively as the director of Secretariat office, director of the General Office and vice Secretary General of the prefecture Party Committee. In the period of the sprouting and hard growing of agriculture household contract system, Lu Zixiu was Wang Yuzhao’s capable advisor and assistant. Several years later, Wang Yuzhao mentioned Lu Zixiu every time when he talked about the All-round Contract in those years whether in public or on internal occasions. My impression of Lu Zixiu has gradually become clear: he firmly stands on the position of peasants when he is reflecting on rural policy issues without being restricted by any doctrine and theory. With very strong language ability, he is able to clearly and skillfully transform the ideas of reform into working documents. Moreover, he is a glamorous man of action with super organizing and coordinating abilities. Wang Yuzhao mentioned for several times that when he was transferred to the post of provincial governor, he carefully considered to appoint Lu Zixiu as the Party Secretary of Chuxian Prefecture, which will best benefit the further reform and fast development of Chuxian.

In 1983, Lu Zixiu was promoted from Vice Secretary General to Vice Party Secretary of Chuxian Prefecture Party Committee. One year later, he became the Party Secretary of Chuxian. Five years later, Chuxian prefecture was transformed into Chuxian City and he resumed the post of municipal Party Secretary for 8 years until he became deputy director of the Standing Committee of Provincial People’s

Congress. In his term, Chuxian's reform and development indeed reached a higher level and ranked the second in the province in terms of economic strength. It is very hard to describe the logical relation between regional development and the chief governor himself. However, there is still fair and just social evaluation of not only his work performance but also his capability and virtue for a local principal leader who left his post 20 years ago. Such public praise is obviously more valuable than the review comments from the department in charge of cadres.

Historically speaking, what is important for the evaluation of a figure is not what kind of official he has been but what he has done. From ancient to modern times, there have been innumerable officials like passing clouds, however, there have been few praised by the people, which is a general principle. In modern China, there is a broader view angle to observe an official's behaviors, i.e., his performance both on and post duty. In present China, official positions are not permanent but officials' identities are. Due to the so-called "rejuvenation" requirement, many officials have to leave their offices in the prime of their lives and become de facto "retired" officials. Some middle-level section leaders will retire at their fifties at the prefecture level. If an official's conducts are more decided by the requirements of his "position" and "official role," then his retired state of living demonstrates his inner natural character and better reflects his spiritual pursuit, just like an actor who will be a more real self only when he is off the stage.

For the past 20 years, as a retired official, Lu Zixiu has been active on a broader stage and dedicated to the survey and study of rural issues and pushing forward rural policy innovation. By constantly visiting villages and rural households, collecting rural problems and listening to peasants' voices, he keeps writing diligently. His reports have been continuously adopted by the top level as "internal references" and many are approved and forwarded by central leaders. As a long retired local official, he is invited by central leaders to take part in panel discussions on rural policies and be present in various academic symposiums on rural issues from time to time. His observations and views are always refreshing and innovative, which surely requires formidable hard working and thinking beyond the imagination and reach of common people. In the past over 10 years, he had five treatises published symbolized by *Balance of the Three Rural Issues*, *Reflection on Three Rural Issues in the New Century* and *The Third Liberation of Peasants*, etc. He is the chief editor of many works such as *The Rural Labor Transfer Employment and County Economic Development*, "Peasants' Entrepreneurship, Income growth and the New Rural Construction." Lu Zixiu is concerned with peasants' fate and keeps studying rural development, whose research achievement has become a significant landscape of China's "Three Rural Issues" research field.

I am strongly impressed by Mr. Lu Zixiu's deep concern of peasants, particularly his diligent writing. When I am with him, we continuously focus on rural issues whether in meetings, in villages or even in chatting. Bai Zhenya, one of his old colleagues wrote in an article: "One year when he was at his seventies away for the summer vocation at Shiguan of Yuexi County, his companion ate, slept and played mahjong everyday but he was restless and tramped over mountains with Madame

Zhao, his wife to visit village by village and house by house with a walking stick in hand. Later, the survey material was sent to Zhong Nanhai and highly addressed and praised by Premier Wen Jiabao." He wrote in addition: "In early April this year, I went back to the village with him to offer birthday congratulations to Mr. Xu, his primary school teacher, but he availed himself of every opportunity while he was walking to ask old cadres and peasants about their opinions of land property right for the preparation of his part-taking in the central symposium to be held in May in Beijing." What his old colleague exclaimed about him is actually the regular status of his life of research. For so many years after his retirement, he has been insisting in rural survey research and dedicated to the development of rural study. While carrying out high-quality surveys and writings, he organized several important academic activities with his personal social influence. His life achievement has been improved by his concern and study of rural issues.

On February 4, 2005, Bao Jian, a famous journalist wrote an article in the People's Daily to praise Mr. Lu Zixiu as "a man speaking the truth for peasants all his life." His virtue has been reported and applauded by the media at both the central and local level, which brings to a basic point of the social value of his rural research in his late years: an advocate for peasants. In current China's society, even though the reform has been going on for 35 years, the biggest restriction for peasants is still "voice expression." In current system framework, there is no effective and smooth channel for peasants to express their interests. Peasants do not have their own organizations and enough freedom to express their demands. As the most important tool for interest expression, the role of election itself is very weak. Therefore, the deepening of political system reform becomes more vital and pressing at such a point and how to incorporate peasants' circumstances and demands into the top-level policy agenda has always been a key issue against this backdrop. Many departments and public figures think they understand and represent peasants, actually, their interest position often drift away from peasants. There is obviously something wrong with the fact that peasants who lack due position of power within the institutional pattern cannot represent themselves in the country's political life but are represented by various government departments and officials. In such circumstances, peasants' interests need to be advocated by some specific figures and Mr. Lu Zixiu's surveys and writings serve as the precious advocacy for peasants.

In the author's perspective, an excellent advocator should have three qualities: No. 1, he should have plenty of conscience with true affection for peasants; No. 2, he should have insightful experience and observation with true and thorough understanding of peasants themselves, their lives and demands; No. 3, he should be excellent at expression which can strongly influence social recognition and policy agenda. Generally speaking, the three qualities should be highly integrated. He who has no true feeling of peasants can hardly understand them; he who truly understand peasants but is weak at language expression can hardly produce any social political influence and will thus lose the significance of advocacy. In the author's eyes, Mr. Lu Zixiu is a rare advocator for peasants and he well understands not only the rural life and peasants' demands but also government operation and policy mechanism. Moreover, he is good at powerfully expressing policy views in peasants' position by making use of his

personal advantage. In current system, such advocacy and expression with more realistic political efficiency are very important. What is fundamental for the reform objective is to deepen rural political system reform at the grassroots level and open up enough space for peasants to represent themselves instead of being represented by others. However, in a period of system reform, powerful advocates for peasants are necessary for system innovation. In general, two groups of peasant advocates are required by times: One is social or nongovernmental and the other is within current system or with official position. These two groups of advocates correspond and cooperate with each other and will become an important driving force to open up a new era of peasants' rights. From such a historical perspective, the social value of Mr. Lu Zixiu's rural study becomes more clarified and outstanding.

What I want to emphasize is that Mr. Lu Zixiu's moral writings and career spirit are more commendable. Though there are so many officials who have attempted and accomplished nothing in China, newly increased and promoted groups of officials are still flooding. The problem lies in not only too many serving officials but also too many retired officials. As a special group, these "retired officials" are still "officials" enjoying all sorts of official treatment but for their retirement, which is quite common considering China's social tradition from ancient to modern times. However, it is obviously "less modern" and quite unreasonable against the background of a modern state system and in the social condition of building a modern government. In developed western countries, there are not so many leaders from the central to the local level and those "leaders" will not enjoy permanent official treatment when they leave their positions. These years, the learning and using of western experiences of market economy management have been addressed by the top level. In fact, western experiences of government officials management are also worthy of learning. The enormous and enclosed group of officials has become the major burden for social development. However, it is reassuring that there are a few officials enthusiastic and working hard to demonstrate their different lives. These people are actually heralding an exuberant future of the reengineering of the official system and Mr. Lu Zixiu is obviously one of them. Mr. Lu Zixiu's rural study shows a lofty pursuit of life, the reason of which I can't accurately explain but there is an explanation among his friends that he love survey and writing for his work experiences. He worked for local newspaper when he was young and then entered the policy research department of the Party Committee and was promoted from an assistant to an official in charge. He has long been engaged and "addicted" to writing. This explanation sounds reasonable. However, a further problem is why there are so few people doing this among so many with similar experiences? As we can see, there are a lot of officials who started from writing regard study and writing as inferior and are reluctant to get involved again. There is another explanation among his friends related with Mr. Lu Zixiu's early experiences. He was born in a rural family with a full taste of the hardship of life from childhood, particularly in the Great Famine of early 1960s, his grandma and father starved to death, which is heart-breaking and has naturally affected his concern and feeling of peasants. This explanation is also reasonable, however, the development of one's philosophy and pursuit of life is a complicated process that even oneself is not clear about. What I want to say is

that maybe these explanations are not as important as the social value produced by such a life pursuit.

Many colleagues and friends expressed their respect to Mr. Lu Zixiu upon his 80-year birthday with considerable excellent and impressive works to be compiled into a book as they proposed. By reading these works, I've got much inspiration.

As Mr. Lu Zixiu's forget-the-age colleague, I am surely aspired to express my sincerity and write this article as a prelude to the book as invited by the chief editor to show my respect and humility to Mr. Lu.

October 30th, 2012

This article is a prelude written by the author for the book "Lu Zixiu in My Expression" (Anhui People's Press, March, 2013).

5.2 A County Party Secretary's Feelings of Writing

Nowadays, it is popular for leading cadres to pursuit not only diplomas but also publishing works. Many of them have articles issued in the newspaper and even treaties published. I often receive articles and works sent by some local leaders which I will skim though to find something valuable, but most of them are disappointing because they are nothing different from official documents following old routines full of conventional phrases. However, reading Mr. Li Kejun's manuscripts gives me different experience. Obviously, as a local official, he is writing in another style.

I appreciate Mr. Li Kejun's writing for both his writing activities and writing achievements. He had been the Party Secretary of two counties (city) for 9 years before he was promoted to be in charge of the provincial Party Committee Inspection Team. As a leading cadre, he is dedicated to the study of "Three Rural Issues" and spends all his spare time in thinking and writing, which represents a spiritual state and his career feelings and life pursuit. When so many officials are enthusiastic about official communication and indulged in the enjoyment of power, he just delves into the survey and research of rural development, which is supported by his belief concerned with rural development as well as understanding of the value of life. Reading his manuscripts, I am impressed first by a kind of spiritual force.

Mr. Li's writing achievements consist of two parts: First, his experience and understanding as a county (city) Party Secretary; second, his research and observation after he left the post of county (city) leader. His observation and reflection cover most major fields of rural development mainly represented in the ten sections of this book, including grain production, land institution, agricultural structure, rural industrialization, rural cooperative economy, New Rural Construction, rural financial support, villagers self-governance, township reform and village governance, etc., which shows his acute observation and original understanding of rural issues based on his long-term local work experience and knowledge accumulation through diligent study.

In reading his manuscripts, I am constantly inspired with some perceptions and strongly impressed by two points. One is the plainness and sincerity of his writings and arguments. It is the basic requirement and regular standard for an article to be true and sincere, which is called "refining language to establish truth." However, in modern official circles, such standard has become more and more precious and scarce and speaking insincerely seems to be the regular way, just as complained by many officials: "It is more and more difficult to speak the truth." Li Kejun, the author of this book said that local leaders in their positions "only see scenes of prosperity, only hear good news about excellent situations, only study issues of the superior's interests and only write red-tape articles." The author is still in the officialdom and he does not write red-tape articles but speak the truth, which is very precious. Another point is his insightful analysis of village governance. The book's content appears to be loose in terms of text structure, however, the principal line is very clear and distinctive from the author's view angle and basic perception. Actually, all discussions in this book focus on a basic topic, i.e., grassroots governance. The author's sharp analysis and deepened observation based on plenty of materials have reached a height which is untouchable for common scholars.

I very much agree with the author's basic analysis on village governance. He claims that the drawbacks of the "fully controlled" governance pattern are becoming more and more obvious which has to be changed; the governmental actions of "forcing people to get rich" have brought about many negative consequences; some measures to centralize power and strengthen the building of grassroots organizations have met urgent needs but intensified governance disorder; Government performance evaluation enhanced the incentive mechanism from top to bottom but encouraged the eagerness for quick success and instant benefits as well as formalism, which has taken the grassroots government more and more distant from the service-oriented government; "Burden reduction" and "Stability maintenance" sustained by political pressure from top to bottom can alleviate contradictions of the moment but can hardly achieve long-term stability for its weakening of public supervision and ignorance of the dignity of law; various "education activities" characterized by political movement playing a feeble role in combating corruption, upholding integrity and bringing people together but indulged the malpractice of "false, big and empty words" and the inclination of public political indifference. Therefore, he proposes to review and examine the success and failure of grassroots governance and break away from the blind mind-set of "enhanced centralization." He insists on "an integrated approach of centralization and decentralization oriented by decentralization," which is actually the transition of governance as well as the major issue of modern China's government reform and socialistic democracy development.

It seems that Mr. Li Kejun's writings can hardly be categorized by the general standard of classification. In my view, his writings are basically informal essays on rural work or rural policies. Writings are for conveying the truth and a good article shall not be bound by any form or style. Nowadays, some publications appear to be "blockbusters" but are vague and empty; some pieces of "works" are bluffing for their seemingly profound forms which appear to be very "academic" and "theoretical" but make no sense at all. With the lack of "social and historical contents"

described by Engels, they are not different from those red-tape articles. I bring out these facts and reasons not to highlight the excellence of this book because every reader will have his own judgment in terms of the specific evaluation. However, I would like to point out that the key of a good article does not lie in what theme or category it belongs to. In terms of the valuation of practical issues research, forms like writing style and length are not so important, what matters the most is whether it is talking about the real problem demonstrating the real situation and expressing the real thought.

Generally speaking, writing style is the reflection of a party's conduct. It is not easy to define what a party's conduct is, however, writing style is the reaction of a specific political system against a broader historical background, particularly from an international perspective. In short, a leader's articles and speeches must be plain and popular if the government power is produced by open democratic election. To better express public opinions and fulfill the will of the electorate, a politician must speak in a natural and plain style which can be clearly understood. He will not and dare not speak awkward-sounding and esoteric words because if he purposely makes a mystery of simple things and confuses the public, he will surely be abandoned by the public in the political competition as Habermas said: Legitimacy crisis will arise when politicians lose their abilities to communicate with the people. Current style of writing indeed has much to be reconsidered and reviewed. There are so many "theories," "concepts," four- or six-word sentences and parallelism sentences which are cast in the same mold from top to bottom level. They are readable for leaders themselves but make no sense to audiences at all, which is similar with Su Dongpo's (a great poet of Song Dynasty of ancient China) criticism of Yang Xiong's (a famous writer of Han Dynasty of ancient China) articles "using abstruse words to elaborate simple and easy ideas," which is an ability merely on petty things. Such kind of deliberately mystifying style of writing is rooted in the stale and empty content of thinking, which is described by ancient people as "Perished law leads to the corruption of writing." It is necessary for writers to be innovative in their writing, however, it is more important to push forward the political reform for the establishment of a new style of writing for the whole society.

This article is a prelude written by the author for Li Kejun's book "Village Vision—Survey and Reflection on the Three Rural Issues" (Xinhua Press, August 2010).

5.3 The Portrait of a Township Party Secretary's Governance

It is a very interesting phenomenon in rural research circles that there have been a number of articles written by township leaders these years. Some Party and government leaders' articles can also be seen in government reform study at other levels such as county leaders talking about county reform and city leaders about municipal reform, most of which are official—style articles expounding main themes and slogans and

even flaunting work performance. However, some township leaders' articles have totally different contents and key notes full of incisive expression of village problems and filled with insights of various system problems. I have learnt a lot from these writers by reading their articles and talking with them on many occasions. On one hand, I am perplexed with their questions such as where the road for the township government is? Who will leave and who will stay regarding township cadres? These questions are puzzling both them and me. On the other hand, I am surprised by their incisiveness and keenness. Township cadres see the advantages and disadvantages clearly in their observation of the grassroots government's operational logic. Every time when I read township cadres' articles or talk with them, I will always have a big harvest of information on situations as well as ideas and inspirations.

The book named "Extraordinary Self-Narration: A township Party Secretary's Dream and Pain" is written by a township Party Secretary focusing on major aspects of rural work such as peasant petition, Villagers Committee election, township enterprise management, emergency, settlement and township administrative management, etc. This book is different from other township cadres' writings for its rich and solid content and outstanding feature of realistic writing which comprehensively, vividly and calmly shows the governance process and operational mechanism of a township government.

This book is a plain record of township governance with the author's moderate attitude and simple language, which presents us the operational process and governing scenario of a township government. Its basic structure is oriented by the governing activities of the town instead of preset theoretical perspectives or policy proposals. Usually, many township leaders' articles published in the media are voices of discontents under the pressure of work, or deliberate venting of their grievances or defending themselves with too clear purposes. These articles can surely move readers by well-explaining or analyzing specific problems, however, from a comprehensive and calm perspective of the operational mechanism and internal logic of the township government, those articles with strong pertinence of arguments are insufficient because they often neglect the description and analysis of the township government's operation. The author gives an account of his two-year governing period in a town with detailed description and incisive observation. However, he does not express himself on purpose or does not try to convince readers of anything, instead, the book leaves plenty of room for readers to extend rich imagination and deep reflection.

This book shows the political ecology of the township government. Many scholars are studying township issues but most of their achievements come from "surveys" and are even forged by skimming over the surface. I myself am also conducting surveys and I do not have the slightest intention of depreciating other scholar's works. However, I'd like to point out that the limit of "survey" has to be recognized, particularly the limited role of "survey" in the study of governments. I have surveyed peasants and governments and I find that peasants are the easiest and governments the hardest to study. Peasants will always be frank and honest to introduce their own livelihood in case of door to door interview, whereas township governments have to consider so many external factors before they decide how much information they

can tell you. Nowadays, there are a lot of scholars studying township governments with more articles. After all, surveys are only surveys and many of them are not solid, which give the readers a feeling of looking on at other people's trouble with indifference. What is more important is that many scholars are merely good at "synthesizing" and "abstracting" or easily form their own opinions, as a result, many so-called studies produce "theories" and solutions before they grasp the key of township governments' operational mechanism and know something about the cause and effect of government behaviors. This book is distinctive not in presenting opinions but in demonstrating the township government's ideas and means of observing, judging and coping with village problems. In that sense, this book embodies the rich, fresh and alive content of village political life in the period of change.

The author does not deliberately argue for his own ideas of reform, however, he has pertinent and incisive judgment and understanding of a series of issues with no disguise of his own thoughts. Instead of speaking at great length about concepts, the author bases his arguments on his personal governing experiences following the narration of cases, which is very persuasive. When talking about "Whether township governments should be revoked?" a hot issue discussed across the society, he points out from his work experience: "My opinions can be summed up in one word: The key to city, county and township reform is to reduce middle segments, enhance grassroots service awareness and directly provide grassroots services. Party committees and governments with improved functions shall be established at the level which can directly serve the grassroots under the principle of integrated power and responsibility so as to improve administrative efficiency and satisfy peasants, urban residents and enterprises." In my point of view, this is not the author's evasive wording. On the contrary, he has grasped the core of this problem. Following the narration of his "forty days and nights" organizing the general election of Villagers Committee, he talks about his opinion of democracy and the Principle of the Party in charge of cadres: "We must uphold the principle of the Party in Charge of Cadres, which cannot be changed. However, we can introduce some competitive mechanisms to nominate more candidates to be elected by representative themselves. There is no need to make great efforts to produce a margin and prevent someone from being elected. Why bother like that? Is it true that someone must be elected because there is no any other talent who has equivalent ability and qualification within the Party? Isn't such pro forma democracy disgusting to the people and negative for the progress of grassroots democracy?" Some false democracy games in grassroots work are neither reasonable in theory nor practicable at work, which, however, are prevailing in the real political life, such separation and paradox in real life are worthy of further observation and study. Grassroots cadres' understanding of the author as a grassroots cadres comes from every of his personal experiences both funny and annoying in his work. The existence of such phenomenon itself is a significant issue not only for township reform study but also for the reform of the whole government system.

Generally speaking, there are vast amount of documents and fruitful achievements in current township study, however, many research activities only generalize common problems in a careless way, or generalize problems but seriously talk about reform opinions of no importance instead of pressing close to

township governments, not to mention entering them. In my point of view, the book's publication is an inspiration for scholars of township study: More efforts should be focused on the analysis of the township government's behaviors; solutions should be proposed upon further exploration of township operational mechanism and logic as well as further explanation of the problems. Such strategy of study is represented in this book which is commendable. The author's description of common and trivial township work full of historical sense and ideological content can be attributed to his insight and understanding of villages in a transitional period, which is based on his excellent academic accomplishment, enriched experience and a real sense of social responsibility.

This article is a prelude written by the author for the book "Extraordinary Self-Narration: A Township Party Secretary's Dream and Pain" (Xinhua Press, January, 2006).

5.4 A Township Party Secretary's Career as a Scholar

Mr. Chen Wensheng is a scholar with extraordinary background. About 10 years ago, he was the Party Secretary of a town in Hunan Province at the frontline of grassroots work and he began writing on the Three Rural Issues with many articles published. Later, he entered Hunan Provincial Academy of Social Science as the Secretary General of New Rural Construction Research Center. He is dedicated not only to the study but also organizing academic activities. He took charge of the establishment of a website and published series of books named "Discovering China's Villages" as the chief editor. Moreover, he organized the annual "Three Rural Issues" Forum of Hunan Province. Obviously, he is still a courageous man of action in his new post.

As is known by many people, the biggest challenge for the township government was peasants' tax burden and township debt from middle and late 1990s to early this century, which is the theme of Mr. Chen Wensheng's first book focusing on the occurrence and change of township debts and how they distress the grassroots government. Because the author himself is in the problem or he is writing about his own life, the book is very meticulous and moving. Things change, rural development steps forward and the "Three Rural Issues" are in constant evolution. Under the circumstances of New Rural Construction, some problems such as peasant taxes and fees no longer exist but some remain the same such as stability maintenance pressure.

This book discusses New Rural Construction from a grand and wide perspective concerning the issues of grain, land, peasants' income, villager self-governance, rural public service, township reform, public security, village education, etc. The author's description and analysis are based on some large-scale surveys he organized with his own thoughts and views of many problems, which shows his quickly growing problem consciousness and continuously expanding horizon. It is pointed out in this book that China's rural development and reform have not entered a plain and direct way since the beginning of New Rural Construction. On the contrary, economic

growth, political ecology, and social environment problems have entangled with each other and become more complicated. It appears that rural areas have not stepped over the most important "threshold" in modern transition and many problems are concentrated in governments themselves and the management process.

The author's perspective is unique and the problems he proposes are thought-provoking because of his rich experiences as a grassroots leader. As he points out: "The abolition of agricultural tax has greatly reduced the opposition and conflicts between peasants and grassroots governments, as a result, township governments' work can hardly trigger any group incident. In the past, township governments spent 80% effort in tax collection, but now they have time to do other things. However, the problem is that cadres used to contact frequently with peasants for collecting money and grain and now they obviously lack the motive to deal with peasants because they get salaries from the county instead of peasants and have no need of peasants. In the past, there was a mechanism which drove village cadres to deal with peasants' problems with no hesitation lest peasants should refuse to pay taxes out of discontent, however, now there is no such a mechanism for village cadres to do something for peasants which will benefit cadres themselves." Obviously, it is about the accountability of grassroots governments. The reality of village life in the past is that the existence of agriculture tax served as grassroots cadres' de facto accountability for peasants, but how to build a new accountability system without agricultural tax? This is a significant issue. From the international view, the relationship between tax and government accountability is the basic issue of political development. In China, it seems that such a relationship has not been fully unfolded whether in realistic reform or in academic study.

Township governments themselves are faced with new dilemma in an era of New Rural Construction, which is another finding revealed to readers by this book. "According to the real township situations and the author's surveys, township governments can hardly satisfy 80% of peasants' expectations; 80% of township governments' work is not popular among peasants and the initiative of 80% cadres and peasants cannot be stimulated. In terms of finance, serious village debt problem is the concentrated reflection of the contradiction between the supply and demand of rural public goods. In terms of politics, township governments comply with superior governments instead of the will peasants within their administrative regions." It is the reality we have to face that several years of township reform has not changed the basic logic of township governments' behaviors and there are still many problems with township government operation. The relationship between township governments and peasants and that between township governments and superior governments appear to be more misted and embarrassing, which needs to be further observed and discussed. Mr. Chen Wensheng also takes note of an important issue, i.e., finance and he claims: "It has been inevitable for the reform of various financial institutions on funds appropriation and alike. The first step is to reform current financial allocation institution including transfer payment. Items, standards and amounts of money allocation shall be publicized like grain subsidies. Funds shall go directly to villages and intermediate links shall be reduced as many as possible. The second step is to improve the supervision of power by the township People'

Congress. As the representative institution of township power authorities and villages; the township People's Congress must exercise the power of deciding and supervising financial budget execution." These problems embodied at township level are all involved with the macro government system. Thus it can be seen that the township reform under the context of new rural construction is confronting new and complicated circumstances.

Mr. Chen Wensheng also notes an important situation in the township reform, i.e., a township Party Secretary doing a concurrent job of township head or holding a two-in-one position, which is promoted in some places as an experience. He points out the advantages and disadvantages of mono-exclusive Party and executive practice: "It can reduce the staff size and position-related consumption and intermediate links and improve work efficiency but have more disadvantages. It will enhance township Party Secretary's power centralization and autocracy which can be restricted by nobody. If there is a township head, there will be a kind of invisible supervision which requires the Party Secretary to solicit the opinions as a procedure and the township head can object to the Party Secretary's personal leadership by the Organizational Law of local People's Government through transparent and democratic decision-making by the Party and executive leading group in case of obvious decision fault. However, under the mono-exclusive Party and executive system, the Party Secretary can absolve himself from the responsibility in case of accountability and he can monopolize power when seeking private interests."

In my point of view, the author's observation will not have been so sharp and penetrating without his long-term personal experiences as a township Party Secretary. Obviously, this is a problem worthy of attention higher level leaders and researchers whether people agree with the author's criticism of such practice or not.

This book also proposes how to deal with peasants. Peasants' self-behaviors have not been respected on an equal basis and peasants' initiatives have not been stimulated to create their own lives whether in rural political and economic construction or rural social and cultural building. On one hand, peasants are depending more and more on the government and society and losing more and more independence and creativeness. On the other hand, the more subordinate peasants are, the smaller will be their opportunity to get away from government control, urban culture and industrial civilization. What is the worst for present rural areas is that poverty has become the capital to bargain with the government and society. "Because I am poor (regardless of the reason of poverty, even it is caused by penalty of criminal offence, gambling and laziness), it is irresponsible for the government and immoral for the society not to satisfy my demands." which is thought-provoking. Is it a peasant problem or a government problem? What has made peasants like that? It is necessary to further explore existing interactive mechanism between the government and peasants.

In reading this book, I always feel the impact from village life and am inspired by its thought-provoking ideas. I hope that it will be more beneficial to readers.

October 8th, 2010

This is a prelude written by the author for Chen Wensheng's book "Hot spots, Difficulties and Focus of New Rural Construction" (China National School of Administrative Press, January, 2011).

5.5 A Township Party Secretary's Extraordinary Official Career

Sheng He, the author of this book and I are old friends knowing each other very well. I met him two times in Beijing when talking about his writings these years, I repeatedly encouraged him to publish a book. Upon his invitation, I write the prelude for his book with pleasure.

About 20 years ago, I made acquaintance with Mr. Shenghe at a high-level meeting in Beijing jointly organized by the Development Research Center of the State Council, Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Agriculture on the issue of peasant worker. At that time, he accompanied the county head to the meeting as the Secretariat Section Chief of the county government general office mainly responsible for writing speech drafts and articles for the county head. We talked excitedly about the practices and experiences of Xiangshui County in rural labor-service export which he knew a lot and we became friends thereafter.

About one year after our first meeting, I led several colleagues of Agriculture Department of the Development Research Center of the State Council to Xiangshui County for survey and he was the head of a town at that time. We stayed there for nearly one week, held symposiums at both the county and township level and carried out a sample questionnaire survey and an in-depth interview of individual cases in villages. Sheng He made meticulous arrangement for our survey and accompanied us throughout the journey. Before long, he became the township Party Secretary and was promoted as Vice county Head one year later. Though I have never been back to Xiangshui County since then, I meet him every time he comes to Beijing and we keep in touch regularly by phone.

About 3 years after he became the Vice County Head, he entered the provincial Research Office and served successively as the vice director, director and deputy director general of the provincial Research Office. I knew that in advance but was still surprised by his job transfer from the county to the province that year because it was quite different from regular officialdom trajectory. His new job at a pure writing post is to provide writing service for provincial government leaders. Working in such a position proves him an excellent writer which I know about. What is more praiseworthy is his courage of restarting the writing career and facing up to the challenge of the new task. Generally, grassroots leaders who started from grassroots secretaries will hardly be willing to return to do writing. I knew about many city or county leaders with such experiences who regard the job of writing as a painful memory. It is unimaginable for them to provide writing service after they enjoy

others' services for a certain period as leaders, even in the high-level governmental organizations. However, Mr. Shenghe has made the choice which many city and county leaders do not understand but deeply admire and so do I.

I have kept in close touch with Shenghe for over a decade because both of us work for government research institutions with the convenience of meeting in Beijing and Nanjing. If it is true that he made impressive achievements in his official career those years as a township and county leader, then his work in the provincial research office these years is characterized by outstanding "writings." This collection of survey reports to be published represents a part or the summary of his writing performance over these years.

In China, writing is an enormous profession for various levels of Party and government organizations. Those practitioners are distributed not only in research office system such as policy study office, research office and alike but also in comprehensive administration system such as comprehensive division of the general administration department, secretariat division, and alike. There are so many writers because of so many leader's speeches and official documents, which is different from western countries where frequent speeches at great length are usually from parliament debates and governments base more of their actions on the bills approved by parliaments. In China, a huge amount of leaders' speeches and official documents are the basic carriers of governing activities. Moreover, the Party and government leaders publish signed articles in key newspapers and magazines. Some major county and city leaders will use 2–3 hundred speech drafts each year. All these manuscripts are from this specific group of writers. So far as I see, such group can be classified by different levels of practice. Some people do writing as their occupations but basically regard writing as a "skilled job" or even a "handicraft putting words together" because there are many skills or easy ways of the writing of leaders' speeches, whereas some people dedicate more thoughts and responsibilities to writing and even write with certain passion and obligation. Such difference of level is embodied not only in the direct writing of leaders' speech drafts but also in some special surveys. Obviously, these two levels have different heights. In my view, Mr. Sheng He, the author of this book's writing is at a higher level.

This book is a collection of some of the author's surveys and writings or his own works. Due to his position, most of his writings should be direct services for leaders. Generally speaking, the output of these services is group writing achievements such as provincial government work report submitted to the Two Sessions (the NPC and Chinese Political consultative Conference-CPCC) and the provincial governor's speeches on some important occasions. Even if an article is not group written, the property right does not belong to any specific writer. Many writers of leading governmental organizations name their work as "survey and research" but actually they are writing speeches or articles according to leaders' intentions with no essence of "survey and research," because real survey and research basically requires clear problem consciousness, specific research method and independent thinking and analysis, instead of following existing standards, statements, formulas and routines. In recent decade, Mr. Sheng He was tirelessly dedicated to thinking, investigation

and writing with high-quality survey reports continuously published to reflect themes of the times and grassroots innovative practices, which I admire very much.

Compared with the situations over 20 years ago, the scope of Mr. Sheng He's survey and writing has been far beyond the study of "Three Rural Issues" in those years and entered a more macro and broader economic and social fields. Those survey reports collected in this book are concerned with important and hot issues in China's current development including technological innovation and enterprise development, open-style economy, agriculture, rural areas and peasants, regions and towns and social management innovation, etc. Due to the lack of my knowledge and limited coverage of research, I am obviously not able to comment on the research achievement of each problem and I believe that readers have stronger capacity of evaluation and judgment. The main idea of this article is to give an account of Mr. Sheng He and his writings as I understand with the hope to be of some help for readers.

December 16th, 2012

This article is a prelude written by the author for Sheng He's book "Practical Exploration and Theoretical Innovation—Survey Reports from the Forefront of Development" (to be published by the Press of the Party School of the CPC Central Committee).

Postscript

The primary concern of this book is peasants' role and position in China's social and political reform. Peasants' behaviors in the real life are the basic content of the author's analysis. Meanwhile, the author takes into account both historical review and future prospect.

This book includes 33 articles which can be divided into 4 categories in terms of style and form.

No. 1, interviews by the media and public speeches; No. 2, research reports based on empirical surveys; No. 3, academic papers and No. 4, informal narration essays and review articles.

At the first glance, it seems weird and muddled for writings of different forms and styles to be put together, however, such an arrangement is the result of careful deliberation. The author hopes to discuss a highly integrated theme in different styles of language, different ways of expression from different perspectives and through extraordinary textual structure so as to stimulate intensified and active clashes of ideas.

Articles in this book were written between 1998 and 2012. In these 15 years, the fate and circumstances of China's peasants experienced dramatic changes, which can be divided into three stages synchronous with the change of government for three terms. The first five years saw frequent faults and failures of policies and deteriorating situations of peasants with the arising of "Three Rural Issues" as widely concerned problems; in the second five years, a number of new rural preferential policies were issued and "taking more and giving less" was transferred to "giving more and taking less". Moreover, peasants' rights were more respected and institutional discrimination was obviously weakened with a seemingly optimistic outlook; the last five years saw the ongoing preferential policies and continuously improving livelihood. However, new troubles arose with new tensions between governments and peasants with rural areas and peasants distressed by various conflicts. Nowadays, peasant issues have gone beyond generally concerned employment, income, education and medical care, etc. and are pointing to deeper issues such as property right, equality right and political participation right. Obviously, China is faced with new and profound challenge in rural management, particularly in dealing with the relationship between peasants and grassroots

governments. Against such a historical background, the author as a scholar long dedicated to peasant issues focuses his attention on peasants' pursuit of well-being and concentrates the reflection on the change of peasants' fate and continuously expresses these observations and thoughts in writing. This book is the output of part of the author's writing activities.

The author hopes to demonstrate through these writings disputes of policy thoughts and confrontations of ideas which occurred in recent decades centered on a series of social and political problems related with the Three Rural Issues mainly about peasants' rights and position in various perspectives and writing styles as well as express the author's own puzzles and thoughts.

It is acknowledged by the author that this book may not be accurate in its narration and may not be correct in its consideration of problems. However, the author is convinced that whether these expressions are correct is not so important and what is important is that a scholar should "write with true feelings" and express what he has seen and thought earnestly and seriously because only when everyone bears such an attitude in expressing his observations and thoughts will the research of peasant issues be continuously pushed forward and will there be a promising future for the prosperity of ideas market.

Zhao Shukai
April 16th, 2013