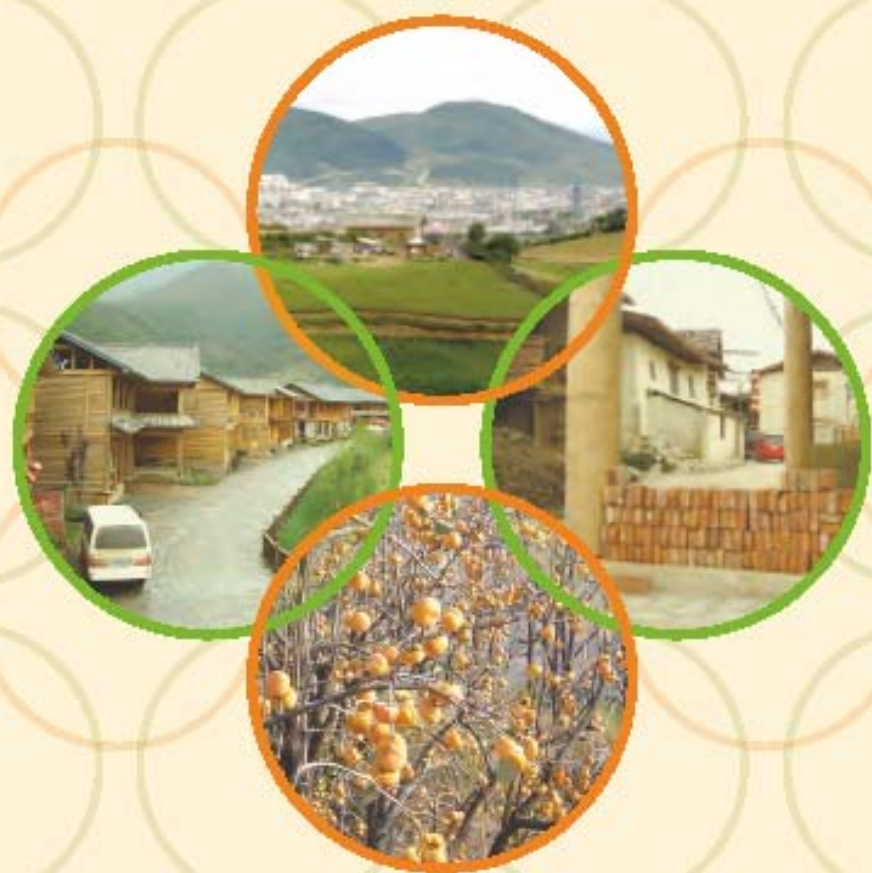




Rural Transformations and Development – China in Context

THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF POLICIES AND PEOPLE



EDITED BY

Norman Long • Ye Jingzhong • Wang Yihuan

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Preface and acknowledgements

The idea of assembling a collection of papers dealing with both theoretical advances and empirical findings on rural development and policy intervention, and spotlighting China, evolved out of the many conversations and seminar discussions that arose among a group of Chinese and visiting scholars at the College of Humanities and Development Studies (COHD), China Agricultural University (CAU), Beijing, from 2005 onwards. The group was already well established and widely acknowledged for its research and practical work in the field of rural development and agricultural policy.

Yet, despite this impressive record, which entailed a ‘reinvention’ of rural sociology and anthropology following the ‘opening up’ of China in the 1980s onwards, plus the implanting of many new contributions from western-based ‘development’ researchers and practitioners, the Beijing group remained convinced of the need for much more engagement with foreign scholars and institutions dedicated to the study of contemporary processes of rural transformation. Eventually this crystallized into the organizing of an international conference on ‘Policy Intervention and Rural Transformations: Comparative Issues’ held in Beijing in September 2007. The organizers were delighted by the response to their invitation to participate in this event from a distinguished set of foreign researchers – all high profile in regards to research on development and social change; and matched them with a roughly equal number of well-known Chinese scholars experienced in rural research.

The conference itself sparked off many lively debates on questions of theory and practice, and provided an opportunity – especially for foreign participants – to learn more about the intricacies of continuity and change in China itself. In addition, it stimulated the establishment of several new research and training initiatives involving both individual Chinese and foreign scholars and their respective university institutions.

This book then brings together a selection of contributions originally presented at the Beijing meeting but reworked for a wider audience. Its central aims are, in the first place, to offer an overview of current theoretical and methodological perspectives on contemporary processes of rural transformation and policy intervention, and, second, to explore empirically some of the specificities of the Chinese case.

Central issues discussed concern the impact of state policy and practice on rural populations; the emergence of patterns of diversification of labour and livelihoods; migration and the relationship between rural and urban scenarios; the role of cooperative or collective modes of organization; the significance of issues of 'value' and 'capital' for households and gender relations; the dynamics of state-peasant encounters; the issue of land ownership and sustainable resource management; struggles between administrative cadres and local actors; and the dilemmas of 'participatory' development projects.

As we indicated earlier, this book is deeply embedded in the history and commitment of a group of researchers and students at China Agricultural University, who over the past decade have built a strong research group – now widely recognized – dedicated to the study and analysis of rural change and development intervention. A key figure in initiating this programme was Professor Li Xiaoyun who is now Dean of the College of Humanities and Development Studies. The editors therefore wish to express their special appreciation of the many inputs he has made into consolidating these research goals.

The 2007 Beijing conference of course became an important step in linking the CAU group to a wider network of international scholars working on related themes. Our thanks go to all those involved in organizing this gathering of researchers, which turned out to be an exceptionally successful and enjoyable international event. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the fine-tuned planning and implementation of the conference organized by Dr Wang Chunyu, Dr Wu Huifang and Dr Dong Qiang (Senior Lecturers at the COHD), and Professor Zhao Xudong (Head of the Sociology Department) for his support in inviting various Chinese and international scholars. Of course neither the conference nor the publication arising out of it would have been possible without the generous continuing support provided by the China Agricultural University '985' Programme, for which we are most grateful.

A final heartfelt acknowledgement is reserved for Ann Long who has played such a central role in editing, advising authors and shaping up their contributions to this book. Ann's dedication and creativity in working with individuals and their texts is unsurpassed. She is linguistically and analytically mature in her judgments and without her this book would not have reached the light of day. We also wish to thank Felicity Plester and the anonymous reviewers of our manuscript for their useful suggestions.

Norman Long, Wickhambreaux, Kent, UK
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Introduction

Norman Long

CHINA IN CONTEXT

The aim of this collection is twofold: first, it offers a critical overview of current theoretical and methodological perspectives and debates on contemporary processes of rural transformation and policy intervention, and, second, it explores empirically some of the specificities of China's pathways to rural change and development.

Over the past two or more decades much intellectual effort has been devoted to surmounting the orthodoxies of earlier modernization, dependency and poststructuralist paradigms, such that now we have reached a point where many researchers are inclined to adopt a more 'actor-oriented' and 'post-development' perspective. This approach accords a central role to showing how, despite the vicissitudes and constraints of globalization, market liberalization and state hegemonic control, the multiplicity of actors involved are still able to negotiate some critical space for themselves and in so doing shape the nature and outcomes of external interventions. Although the treatment of these issues may vary from chapter to chapter, several contributions highlight the variability of outcomes and the blending of contingent and often ambiguous factors. This is a central theme running throughout the volume.

The second component of the book constitutes a series of well-documented case studies dealing with the dynamics of specific rural scenarios. While most of these pertain to recent Chinese ethnographic research, some raise interesting comparative dimensions, for example, in respect of patterns of rural-urban migration and its impact on family and gender relations, or concerning the survival or 'remaking' of peasant livelihoods. It is at these junctures, of course, that one encounters a central tantalizing – yet only partly answered – question, namely, how far do rural scenarios in China resemble or differ from those in other countries undergoing what appear to be similar rural trajectories? Stemming from this empirical concern is the more penetrating question as to whether development theories and practice developed in

particular socio-historical contexts are transferable to other locations, in this instance to China.

In summary, then, the volume is framed by a number of theoretical and substantive issues that allow for the exploration of topics relevant to the Chinese case. Central issues discussed are the impact of state policy and practice on rural production and socio-economic activities; the emergence of patterns of diversification of labour and livelihoods; the separation and overlap of rural and urban scenarios and class affiliations; the role of cooperative or collective modes of organization; the significance of issues of 'value' and 'capital' and their gender implications; the dynamics of state-peasant encounters; the issue of land ownership and sustainable resource management; struggles between administrative cadres and local actors; and finally, the dilemmas of 'participatory' development projects.

As Ickenberry (2008) has observed, over the past decade China has emerged as a formidable global player, both economically and politically. Its economy has grown fourfold since the beginning of the market reforms of the late 1970s and is predicted to double in the next ten or so years. It is now a major global manufacturing centre and consumes one-third of the world's supply of iron, steel and coal; and has accumulated massive foreign reserves, amounting (in 2006) to more than \$1 trillion. Paralleling these economic achievements is the expansion of its military services, which not only protect its frontiers but also play a major role in responding to natural disasters and emergencies of various kinds, as witnessed so graphically in May 2008 when the earthquake struck Chengdu, the capital of south-west China's Sichuan Province.

A recent report by the Carnegie Trust (Keidel 2008) identifies certain critical trends in the Chinese economy following the introduction of the Household Contract Responsibility System in 1978, which marked the shift from collectivized agricultural production and labour to a leasehold arrangement whereby the collectives (formerly known as 'brigades') distributed plots of land to individual households for self-management. This led quickly to a number of other agricultural reforms concerning marketing and farm services. From then onwards, the economy experienced periods of fluctuating economic growth. Agricultural food production boomed in the mid-1980s in response to the opening up of markets and the emphasis placed on growing a range of crops – not only grains, but also a variety of vegetables and cash crops. Thereafter, there followed a series of 'fast' and 'short' cycles of growth driven by imbalances in supply and demand, and characterized by a series of government interventions aimed at cooling off or slowing down the economy when it became 'overheated'. This was achieved by enacting lower food prices and pressuring farmers to devote more land to low-profitability staple crops. This strategy, however,

had the negative consequence of widening the income gap between urban and rural households. The eventual outcomes of this policy – even though some modest improvements were made in the 1990s – was that by 2006 the gap in per capita consumption between rural and urban areas had returned to what it had been in 1978 when the rural reform was first introduced.

Keidel's analysis also reveals that the key stimulant to China's overall economic growth, which now spans some 30 years, was not (as some commentators have suggested) the intervention of foreign trade and investment in technology and management skills per se but rather the growth in domestic demand and production. Furthermore, in the past, the ups and downs of the Chinese economy did not coincide, for example, with the USA's growth downturns of 1991 and 2001–02 which impacted on a wide range of other countries. Following this logic, one might also argue that it seems unlikely, following the global financial collapse of mid-2008, that China will go down the same route to recession as have the USA, European and other Asian countries.

Indeed, as many commentators have emphasized, the more critical events affecting China's overall pattern of growth were essentially 'socio-political' by nature. For example, gross domestic product (GDP) expenditure data for China show that the most severe slowdown followed the Tiananmen political disruptions of 1989. Furthermore, while the position of China in the global economy is central to understanding certain patterns of change and development, this needs to be matched by an appreciation of the differences that exist across socio-economic sectors, regions and, especially, between rural and urban scenarios. It also requires acknowledging the danger of adopting too much of a 'western' slant on China.

A major handicap or shortcoming of 'western' scholars studying and pondering the social conditions and cultural make-up of China and the kinds of direction in which it might be said to be moving, is that all this is inevitably perceived and interpreted through the lens of western 'developmentalist' thinking and practice. This is even the case for those who espouse more radical 'postmodernist' or 'post-development' positions vis-à-vis contemporary scenarios of change, whose critique rests on the need to go beyond the simple notion of 'modernization' to embrace the idea of 'multiple modernities'.

While such a conceptual clarification has undoubtedly contributed to a better theoretical and practical understanding of change in what is now a global world, we are left with the more challenging task of coming to grips with the specificities of social change in various parts of the world that have remained much less affected by mainstream discourses of 'developmentalism' and 'globalization'. In other words, as Martin Jacques

(2009: 140–45) has recently argued, it is necessary that we grasp the full significance of this notion of multiple modernities by explicitly acknowledging how other advanced nations or ‘civilizations’ both embrace and yet contest ‘modernity’ western style. Of course, China is a striking example that requires detailed understanding of the nature of both its political economy and sociocultural bedrock. It is simply not enough to describe it as a ‘transitional’ or ‘emerging’ economy that is expected to catch up with and overtake the most powerful of ‘advanced capitalist’ regimes. This line of argument dovetails with Nonini’s (2008: 145) view that China practices ‘a hybrid form of governance that combines earlier Maoist, socialist nationalist and developmentalist practices and discourses of the Communist Party with the more recent market logic of ‘market socialism’ – or as they say in China, development with Chinese characteristics (*zhong guo te sede fazhan*).

AGRARIAN ISSUES

These brief comments on the trajectories of economic change and development in China highlight the significance of rural populations, livelihoods and state–farmer relations – a set of issues explored in relation to different types of risk by Christiansen in Chapter 5 of this book. China is a large country where agriculture remains an important source of income and subsistence for the majority of the rural population, although since the early 1980s rural livelihoods have progressively become more diversified. This change is explained by three elements. The first is the increase in surplus labour due to improved technology and productivity in farm production backed by local and/or central government funding. The second concerns the emergence of a great number of off-farm businesses run on a collective basis (often by township or village officials) and private enterprises (frequently owned by returnee migrants). The income earned by the owners and workers employed by these various enterprises now constitutes an important component of household income. The third element relates to the out-migration of villagers to the larger urban centres and the remittances they send back. Bryan Roberts (Chapter 7) provides an overview of different modes of rural urbanization, while Zhou Daming and Huang Xueliang (Chapter 8) describe the gradual shift from predominantly agricultural to rural/urban and migrant livelihoods in Phoenix Village, Guangdong Province.

Following the formation of the Peoples’ Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese government adopted (in the mid-1950s) a development strategy that promoted industry in urban areas based on capital-intensive

technologies. As explained by Christiansen, this was supported by mechanisms to ensure low-priced foods and other necessities as well as guaranteed employment with benefits for most urban residents. On the other hand, rural inhabitants were confined to production units where they produced agricultural commodities under strict state planning. Surpluses emanating from the agricultural sector contributed to capital accumulation in industrial enterprise and supported a system of urban-based subsidies, thus reinforcing the separation of China's rural and urban sectors. This separation was reinforced by the *hukou* system of residential registration whereby persons of rural origin are classified as separate from those of urban origin, each having different 'citizen' rights. Later government-initiated agricultural reforms began the process of attempting to correct the bias towards urban manufacturing and service industries. Agricultural prices were increased, the system of product procurement was abolished and restrictions on the movement of labour were lifted, at least from time to time when labour shortages occurred. An important development here (from the 1980s onwards) was the promotion of clusters of rural manufacturing and service industries known as Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs), whose aim it was to strengthen the link between rural and urban sectors.¹ Urban-based industries outsourced part of their production to TVEs in order to benefit from the cheaper labour force and technology, and to take advantage of the more relaxed enforcement of environmental, health and safety regulations characteristic of rural areas. A direct result of this was a notable increase in the productivity and income of rural households as some of their members secured jobs in these small industrial enterprises.

CHINA'S NEW RURALITIES²

Since the late 1990s, rural sociologists and anthropologists have addressed much of their research and publications to defining and researching a new agenda of work designed to document the kinds of changes consequent upon increased local/global scenarios (see, for example, Arce 1997; Buttel and McMichael 2005; Long 2001: 224–39; van der Ploeg 1997; Hebinck 2007: 1–13). The present volume aims to contribute to this reconfiguring of theory and practice by stimulating the convergence of new ways of thinking about and researching processes of rural transformation with a special emphasis on exploring the emerging new ruralities of China.³

Worldwide statistical trends and comparative case study data over the last two decades underline the increased involvement of small-scale agricultural producers in global commodity markets, either directly or through contracts with corporate organizations. Indeed a recent comparative study

van der Ploeg (2008) has documented the case for the resurgence of peasant forms of livelihood in both industrialized and developing countries in this era of global food empires. The predominance and reconfiguration of small peasant holdings throughout much of China of course provides an illustrative example. However, this has not been associated with increased homogenization of the rural economy, but rather with processes of diversification wherein the borders between agricultural, industrial and service activities or between rural and urban locations have become increasingly blurred. Bernstein, here in Chapter 3, theorizes such changes in terms of what he calls the ‘straddling’ of on- and off-farm activity, stressing that we should avoid talking about proletarianization and peasantization in a general sense since the vast majority of small-scale farmers fall into what he terms the ‘classes of labour’.

THE BLURRING OF RURAL AND URBAN: SPACE AND AUTHORITY

Alongside this differentiation of types of labour and livelihoods that cross-cut the rural and urban sectors of the economy is the division between, what one might call, the ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ of rural life, which is now much more ambiguous spatially and in terms of regimes of authority. Thus, while for many local inhabitants, the present-day township or town (*xiang/zhen*) may be conceptualized as being separate physically and administratively from the domain of the village (*xingzhengcun/zirancun*), its officials nevertheless retain a strategic degree of authority over such rural locations and their inhabitants. This is akin to what Jean Oi (1998) calls ‘local state corporatism’, which implies a strong pseudo-corporate integration at village and township level, and sometimes in opposition to central government.

Several chapters in this book provide highly revealing ethnographic accounts of the dynamics of village governance and the strategic interplay of relationships between villagers, village cadres and township officials. But they do not all entirely endorse Oi’s concept of local state corporatism. For example, a case in point is Chatelard’s case study (Chapter 14) of the implementation of a village-level project promoted under the ‘Construction of the New Countryside’ programme, initiated in 2006. Her main focus is to explore the multiple meanings of ‘accountability’ and the ways in which these are negotiated and renegotiated within a network of relationships involving villagers and officials. She concludes, however, that there exists no fixed coherent political order or set of alliances between the actors involved. Instead their actions and discourses are

shaped by ‘the necessarily incessant reinvention of the boundaries of the “legitimate”’ (p. 383), thus underlining the shifting nature of political and semantic components, rather than the more fixed notion of ‘corporativism’. In addition, Liu Jinlong’s research on the vicissitudes and obstacles entailed in the implementation of a village forest management project in NW China comes to a somewhat similar conclusion, though in the end he is inclined to the view that it is the alliance between long-standing village leaders and key township officials that permits a degree of gerrymandering that eventually undermines the project and the efforts of the implementers (see Chapter 13).

We also encounter cases where village collective enterprises have successfully retained their independence and consolidated their control over critical local resources. For example, Chan et al. (2009) provide a vivid account of how boundaries between villagers and outsiders or newcomers have been more sharply reinforced in a south China village as a result of the impact of over 20 years of industrialization, urbanization and globalization. Their study highlights how the original villagers, the ‘insiders’, who now control the bulk of the collective assets of the community, lead middle-class lifestyles supported by the proceeds from rental properties and underpinned by a mini-welfare system provided by the village government, while the much larger number of ‘outsiders’ or ‘newcomers’ work in the manufacturing plants that have taken root there.

LAND AND OTHER RESOURCES

Throughout the world social change in agrarian situations has been accompanied by conflict over land and resources in both rural and urban locations and China is no exception. These have sometimes resulted in modifications in or manipulation of existing legal frameworks affecting land ownership, use and management. Rural China itself is currently in the throes of dealing with complex land-related issues, which in many cases can be traced back to the introduction (in the early 1980s) of the household contract responsibility system based on the leasing out of collective property to individual households and subsequent sub-letting. Zhao Xudong, in Chapter 6, contextualizes these conflicts and traces their historical roots, which he believes is essential for comprehending the complexities and ambiguities of land ownership and use rights in the contemporary situation. He then applies his analysis to an understanding of land property rights and the leasing out and sharecropping of land in a south China village. As one highly influential recent study (Ho 2005: 7–11) demonstrates, the changes that followed Deng Xiaoping’s land reform resulted

in a mismatch between the ‘privatization’ of capital and, to a degree, agricultural labour, vis-à-vis the continued ownership of land exercised by the state and the collectives.

Whether in China or elsewhere – and whatever the policy measures adopted by the state or regional government – major agrarian and social reform tends to acquire its own momentum. That is, it becomes relatively self-generating in the sense that change can never simply be imposed or dictated by outside authorities or power holders. The different actors involved – peasant smallholders, village collectives, commercial farmers, agricultural workers, private companies, government bureaucrats, party officials, property developers and, in some cases, city folk moving into the countryside to enjoy a more rural lifestyle – all struggle to advance their own particular interests and to have a say in what happens to rural resources over the short and longer term.⁴ In recognition of this, rural research in China (and elsewhere) has moved towards addressing these complex, actor-driven and negotiated processes. One interesting Chinese case study is Murphy (2002). She underlines the dynamic role played by migrant returnees (including women) in investing in the local economy in Jiangxi Province, lobbying for changes to local tax policies, generating opportunities for more diversified livelihoods and thus contributing to the overall development of rural towns and villages in the region.

In similar vein, Augustin-Jean’s (2009) study of the Chinese sugar industry demonstrates that, despite the strong official discourse on introducing market mechanisms into the production, processing and commercialization of sugar, it is inter-organizational social practices and key actor networks that articulate with state bureaucrats that explain how the industry actually works. Here the essence of China’s so-called economic ‘liberalization’ measures are revealed as consisting of a series of interlocking actor projects that are negotiated across different domains, thus showing how the central state, local governments, private and state-owned enterprises interconnect and come to terms with each other so that the costs and gains are distributed among the key players. Frequently, these outcomes run counter to what appear to be the best market options. The outcomes also impact (sometimes positively but also negatively) on the agency of farmers and local groups. This example also warns against reducing issues of producing, processing, marketing, retailing and responding to consumer demands to a process of adding economic value to commodities. Rather it constitutes a series of arenas of struggle in which the various parties involved contest notions of ‘quality’, ‘convenience’ and ‘price’.⁵ Villarreal in Chapter 4 expands this perspective to cover the larger questions of how, in fact, to reconceptualize theoretically ‘value’, ‘capital’ and ‘financial practices’ – all central to developing a better grasp of peoples’

everyday livelihoods, needs and well-being. The latter are, of course, likely to be shaped by gender difference and by the sociocultural components of economic transactions in general. Her approach therefore has much to do with how peasants, families and individuals cope with their necessarily limited life circumstances, and thus suggests connections with many of the other chapters of this book.

Another critical point is the fact that farmers and agricultural workers sometimes fear that heavy commitment to outside markets and institutions will threaten or marginalize their interests. In such circumstances they may show strong allegiance to existing lifestyles, and jump to the defence of local knowledge and livelihood practices. On the other hand, if intervening parties, such as transnational companies, the state or retail organizations, fail to take seriously the ways in which people mobilize and use resources through existing social networks and cultural commitments, then they run the risk of being rejected by, or distanced from the life experiences and priorities of local producers and consumers and their families. It is important, therefore, to be alert to the dangers of assuming the potency and driving force of external institutions, interests and narratives – whether global or national – since they represent only one set among a large array of actors who shape outcomes.

LOCAL AUTONOMY VERSUS HEGEMONIC CONTROL

The results of these processes are complex and varied and highlight the many ways of organizing and creating space for negotiation or increasing autonomy. While many previous studies on rural China have stressed the centralist character of the state and its capacity to impose policy ‘solutions’ on various sectors of the rural population, in recent years this has given way to a burgeoning of field studies that have challenged this simplistic interpretation.

Among such studies are a series of detailed ethnographies of village politics and the subtle manoeuvres devised by both township- and village-level leaders and their supporters to successfully subvert or re-channel funds towards their own pet projects. For example, Wang Yihuan (2003) explores the non-linear nature of ‘participatory’ development intervention, in a case funded by a German non-governmental organization (NGO) offering to finance local household-based credit schemes in Hebei Province, north-west of Beijing. This is rejected by all local leaders in favour of using the funds to upgrade their existing water supply system. So, in the end, the donor has to back off and give way to local wishes. The

project is particularly interesting because – in true ‘participatory’ spirit – the researcher herself was a main figure in the participatory intervention team. This, as it were, allowed her to act as the candid camera of the project and thus the means by which to question a number of accepted wisdoms, both theoretical and practical, characteristic of participatory projects in general. In fact, the agreements reached and the organizational forms that result from such situations are built upon a set of interlocking actor ‘projects’ generated by the encounters, negotiations and accommodations that take place, even though some actors may never in fact meet face to face (Long 2001: 49–72; Long and van der Ploeg 1994). The influence of actors who are remote from the action situation is especially pertinent in an age where information technology increasingly penetrates into everyday life. In some instances, farmers now communicate through mobile phones with colleagues and maybe farm workers in the fields, and some possess computers that can directly access national and global commodity markets for up-to-date information on prices and product turnover.

MIGRATION AND HOUSEHOLD-BASED PEASANT ENTERPRISES

Wage-earning migrants living outside their communities of origin constitute an important source of information and capital. Their remittances not only subsidize the incomes and livelihood activities of family and other kin at home, but they may also be crucial for establishing new income-generating activities and enterprises and sustaining new lifestyles in their places of origin. The designation of these rural industries as ‘Township and Village Enterprises’, mentioned earlier, suggests an association with the earlier ‘commune’ and ‘brigade’ enterprises of the collectivization period, thus emphasizing their ‘collective’ nature, and many scholars have indeed simply assumed this to be the case. However, recently this has been clarified by in-depth archival and survey data compiled by Yasheng Huang (2008: 73) who argues that the TVE category was primarily used as a locational concept to indicate that they were enterprises found at both township and village levels, but were not necessarily organized by the village or township collective. In fact he shows that the vast majority of these enterprises (even at the early stage of the reforms) were privately owned businesses or workshops (Huang 2008: 77–8). In 1985, they were reclassified by the ministry of agriculture into three ownership categories: collective, privately run and self-employed household businesses. At that time, there were 1.57 million collective enterprises as against 0.53 million private ones, and 10.1 million classified as household businesses. Broadly speaking, this

distribution remained the same up to 1996 when the number of private TVEs overtook the collectively owned or managed ones. It is also worth underlining that throughout these years household businesses accounted for between one-third and one-half of all those employed by TVEs, thus attesting to the central role played by smallholder peasant families in the economic diversification and urbanization of the countryside.

Murphy's (2002) detailed study of enterprises established by returnee village migrants in Jiangxi Province, east China, adds more detail to this picture by exploring differences in the operational styles and backgrounds of the founders of 81 manufacturing and service sector businesses. She distinguishes between the large-scale, more formalized urban factories and the smaller-scale enterprises operating on a 'familial petty commodity mode of production'. Most of them had set up independent privately owned and managed businesses, while a few had purchased or were contracted to run existing collective or state enterprises. Only a few operated agricultural businesses, focusing, for example, on the cultivation or rearing of specialized food products (such as bullfrogs, eels, pigeons, fruits and tea). One of her more interesting findings was that only 13 women (that is, 15 per cent) in the sample were running TVEs. This smaller number of women entrepreneurs roughly paralleled the male/female ratio of out-migrants from the research area. According to a 1993 survey conducted in the same area, some 22 per cent of out-migrants were women. Murphy also notes that enterprises are often joint ventures between husband and wife.

Ye's 2002 study also gives examples of initiatives jointly undertaken by spouses. One couple started a clothes making enterprise producing the latest fashions for the city markets (2002: 210–18). Women are often involved in weighing up the value of different kinds of activities and entrepreneurial ventures, but it is usually the men who return to start up the small enterprises, whereas women mostly return to marry or to care for family members, though some use their experiences working in manufacturing to start entrepreneurial activities.

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF INDUSTRIAL LABOUR

This capacity to maximize the benefits of living in city environments and working in assembly-line factories or service delivery firms is graphically illustrated in a study of factory girls in Dongguan, an industrial city in the Pearl River Delta (Chang 2008). The account is woven around the lives of two unmarried youngsters who seek work and social advancement outside the confines of village life. The work and conditions were

arduous – 13 working hours a day with two short breaks for meals and the nights spent in over crowded bunk rooms – receiving only 400 yuan (or \$50) a month, though the pay was often late, and deductions would be made for ‘bad behaviour’, such as talking on the job. Yet most girls stuck it out, their progress depending largely on their ability to stand up to supervisors and demonstrate their work skills. Those with a modicum of education and good level of literacy would then gradually be promoted to more responsible positions and thus increase their earnings. But accumulating savings necessitated avoiding the temptation to overspend on luxury items such as stylish clothes, make-up and a busy social life, and instead required devoting some of one’s earnings and spare time to attending classes on useful skills such as computerization, bookkeeping and other administrative techniques. In addition, most workers attempted to learn some English, which they found especially useful if employed by a transnational firm.

The study also reveals how during the 1980s and early 1990s village migrants set off for the city with relatively little knowledge of what they might meet. They were ‘often driven by a family’s need for cash and the desire to build a house back home’ (Chang 2008: 105). The early migrants were mainly seasonal workers who returned home to provide much needed labour for harvesting the crops and, eventually, once they had accumulated what they judged as a reasonable amount, they would marry and settle back in the village.⁶ Then in later years, we witness not only the out-migration of younger and better educated migrants but also a constant stream of both older single and married persons and sometimes the entire nuclear family, but mostly as couples or the husband or wife alone. This absence of family members – sometimes lasting for several years – puts considerable pressure on both sides, leading also to what has been described as the problem of the ‘left behind children’ (see Ye Jingzhong et al. 2005; Chapter 10, this volume).

THE CENTRALITY OF *HUKOU* STATUS

At this point it is important to re-emphasize that relations between rural and urban spaces in China are influenced by the *hukou* system of residential registration whereby persons of rural origin are classified as separate from those of urban origin, though, on the other hand, seen in welfare terms rural registration is a safety net when unemployment strikes (see Christiansen, Chapter 5 and Zhou Daming and Huang Xueliang, Chapter 8, both in this book). The main implication of this is that migrants from rural areas working in urban zones are not entitled officially to remain

there indefinitely, nor do they receive the same level of rights to education, health and housing as do urban-registered people. On the other hand, rural *hukou* status gives the right to farm village land, acquire a plot on which to build a family house, and gives access to educational and minimum health services. Nowadays, and mainly due to the increase in the number of workers and residents of rural origin in the urban areas, the *hukou* system is under pressure. Moreover, since the economic downturn in the autumn of 2008, followed by the laying off of thousands of industrial workers and the like, there have been much larger numbers of people seeking to secure the benefits of a basic survival strategy back in the home village.

For a long time the *hukou* rural/urban system of registration was the single most important obstacle to the advancement of rural livelihoods and aspirations. Although countless rural migrant workers have made a great contribution to the development of cities, they do not enjoy the same level of rights and treatment as urban citizens and this makes it virtually impossible for family members to accompany migrant workers, especially dependent children. Furthermore, children who have studied in rural schools are unlikely to compete effectively with urban-educated children for places in city high schools and in any case, the costs entailed for rural migrants would be prohibitive, since such workers find it difficult enough to meet their own daily expenses. So, in the end, the majority of workers from rural backgrounds spend considerable periods in urban areas, while their dependents remain in their rural home community. This strategy enables them to respond to the heavy economic pressure placed on their families in respect of education, health and rural taxation (Wang Yanbo and Wu Xinlin 2003), though the latter has now been mitigated to a considerable extent by the state's decision to phase out rural taxes and levies over the period 2002–04.

Clearly then, it can no longer be taken for granted that rural space equals agricultural space or that the central problems for analysis can be reduced to what was called the 'agrarian question', namely, the debate concerning the significance of proletarianization versus peasantization of the countryside that was a major preoccupation of agrarian social scientists during the 1970s and 1980s⁷ or even the recent debate about the usefulness of the concept of 'repeasantization' in an era of globalization (see van der Ploeg 2008; and Bernstein, Chapter 3 in this book). That is, we should not privilege agricultural production over other income-earning livelihood activities; and we should go beyond agricultural production and resource issues to look more generally at the utilization of countryside resources. This means a concern for landscape and environmental dimensions, recreation and leisure time pursuits, and the management of forest and water resources.⁸

ECOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

In the Chinese case it is acknowledged that in the past rural space was identified with collective/village land, designated primarily for the production of staple grains, and worked by peasants under exploitative conditions and associated with a policy of rural industrialization, and in the past with poor concern for conservation and sustainability. In contrast, in recent years, discourse has revolved around issues of ‘ecological stewardship’ of land and natural resources, and the encouragement (wherever possible) of the production of ‘high-quality’, ‘high-yield’ and ‘high-priced’ products, such as those cultivated organically or collected in the countryside (medicinal herbs and ‘exotic’ mushrooms), combined with the promotion of leisure zones and farm tourism. With the growing prosperity among certain sectors of the urban population, there is a growing demand for recreational activities in the countryside, and farmers and communities in areas of natural beauty in particular are responding to this.

These ecological and environmental issues raise central questions about how to attribute value to ‘nature’ and ‘landscapes’ (Liu Jinlong 2006) and how best to manage land and natural resources on a sustainable basis, both of which will depend on achieving some kind of farmer consensus and cooperation. So what would be the ‘natural’ groups or the best ways of doing this in China?

It is at this point that Jan Douwe van der Ploeg’s (Chapter 2) case of farmer organized and initiated territorial cooperatives for managing farming, controlling carbon emissions and preserving valued landscape in a particular area of Holland becomes relevant. Of course, local actors (for example, farmers and traders) and outside professionals (for example, agricultural extensionists, pollution officers, conservationists and research scientists) may differ in their assessments and priorities. They may also differ in the way they represent ‘nature–man’ relations and the ‘environment’ more generally. There is also the more pragmatic question of what measures to use in promoting more sustainable management of natural resources – as for example Liu Jinlong’s attempts to introduce more sustainable forest management in Chapter 13.

A central issue here becomes how the state attempts to control people and territory as against how people *in situ* go about utilizing and conserving resources and biodiversity. For example, indigenous peoples often have quite different conceptions of their rights and relationships to territory than do national governments. And, in the current context, governments are thus faced with the choice of implementing ‘centralized’ as against ‘decentralized’ modes of control – the latter implying some community involvement in natural resource management. Nowadays

environmental policies are hedged around by a host of regulatory prescriptions and subject to pressures from powerful conservationist lobbies at national and international level. Moreover, coupled with these environmental and conservation issues is a booming ecotourist industry, which is often, as suggested above, critically important for the livelihoods of many rural inhabitants. All these elements and dilemmas are readily seen in different ecological zones of China.

A further way in which rural space is being reconfigured concerns the movement of rural producers and families from comparatively disadvantaged localities or regions to more resource-rich rural locations. While this may be driven by economic incentives or ecological pressures of one kind or another, the construction of large-scale development projects is associated with processes of social dislocation, the rebuilding of livelihoods and the social reconstruction of communities and groups. This is the case with the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in central China, and resettlement in more favourably endowed habitats (whether voluntary or forced, planned or not) This challenges policy practitioners to find ways of resolving the problems in accordance with the expressed wishes and adaptive capacities of the groups affected.⁹

ORGANIZATION OF THE VOLUME

From the discussion so far, we *see* how closely the chapters in the book reflect the theoretical and practical issues of new ruralities. The volume is organized around four themes:

1. Theoretical perspectives on agrarian development and change.
2. Peasant livelihood issues.
3. The urbanization of the countryside and migration dilemmas.
4. Politics of policy and participation.

Part I identifies critical questions – both theoretical and empirical – that occupy four well-known social researchers studying issues of rural development. These range from broad concerns about the ways in which agrarian life is reshaped by global and state-inspired interventions, to detailed accounts of how various agrarian actors respond to and reshape the sets of relations and scenarios they find themselves in. The contributors differ in their theoretical points of view, but grouped together they offer useful insights into contemporary issues of rural transformation.

Arturo Escobar (Chapter 1) opens by tracking historically and critically how ‘development’ as both discourse and practice emerged following

World War II, which together with the phenomenon of ‘euro-modernity’, came to form the basis of modernization theory and its many variants. By the late 1980s, this theoretical paradigm was seriously criticized for its unilinear, externalist and top-down presumptions. As Escobar spells out, the attack on such dominant modernity models was first mounted by Latin American scholars, and later by other ‘third world’ and ‘western’ researchers, eventually crystallizing into what became known as the ‘post-colonial’ debate. The latter introduced the notion of ‘alternative modernities’ or, more penetratingly, ‘alternatives to modernity’, upon which Escobar outlines what he calls ‘a framework for thinking about and beyond development in terms of ecological, cultural and economic difference’. His discussion concludes with an attempt to explore briefly the applicability of these issues to Chinese rural development contexts and processes.

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg’s contribution (Chapter 2) concentrates on the emergence of ‘territorial cooperatives’ developed by farmers, which are area based and bring together various types of farming units (arable, horticulture and dairy farming). Such cooperatives serve the interests of their members (mostly family farmers) by developing programmes that aim to enrich and strengthen the ecological and social resources of a given area, and in so doing to improve livelihoods and employment opportunities. Van der Ploeg explores these issues through an analysis of the formation and workings of the Northern Frisian Woodlands cooperative in the Netherlands. But his account goes beyond the particularities of this case to argue that these ‘new’ territorial cooperatives represent a ‘peasant-like’ response to the many difficulties that small-scale farmers now face throughout the world, including China.

Henry Bernstein (Chapter 3) stresses the need to engage with issues of class differentiation when analysing the pattern of rural poverty, its causes and the role played by specific policy alleviation interventions. In order to pursue this, he provides a synthetic overview of the politico-economic ‘coordinates’ of agrarian transformation under different historical circumstances. His analytical approach focuses on issues of commodification and the interplay of commodity and non-commodity value. He stresses that in the present context it is centrally important to understand the ‘straddling’ of on- and off-farm activity as well as working for self and others. He also suggests that we should avoid talking about proletarianization or peasantization in a general sense since the vast majority of small-scale farmers in developing countries fall into what he calls ‘classes of labour’. That is, they are not in possession of the necessary means to reproduce fully their own mode of living, nor are they fully dependent on wage employment. This he maintains is just as important to China as it is to other parts of the

developing world, since many of the labouring poor survive across different sites (rural and urban) of the social division of labour.

The final contribution to this part, by Magdalena Villarreal (Chapter 4), critiques the meanings attached to the concepts of 'value' and 'capital' in the literature on development intervention, drawing upon detailed ethnographic data from Mexico that highlight the significance of gender difference. Her analysis explores the array of meanings and calculations applied by women vis-à-vis certain kinds of 'capital' assets, transactions, and livelihood activities in such a way that it raises fundamental doubts about the treatment of the concepts of 'value' and 'capital' in existing studies.

In Part II the book focuses upon livelihoods, well-being and land issues. Flemming Christiansen (Chapter 5) explores the intersection of peasant livelihoods and state intervention in China following the implementation of the household contract responsibility system of land holding that grew out of a series of experimental measures carried out by peasant farmers in Anhui Province. He points out that the idea of the household responsibility system appealed especially to liberal economists of the period for its emphasis on 'individualistic incentives for peasants and the efficiency of the peasant household as a production unit', with increased productivity and agricultural growth rates, even though land ownership remained in the hands of the village collectives. In contrast to the communes, it was now the individual household that was expected to bear the full weight of risks such as crop failure, ill health and other calamities. It was reasoned that building a strong family-based mode of farming would also mitigate some of the problems caused by the mass movement out of agriculture as peasants sought work in the expanding cities. On the basis of these kinds of structural changes, Christiansen enters into a discussion of peasant livelihood strategies, highlighting some of the intricacies and dilemmas that are generated for families and their kin, illustrating this by analysing the changes associated with preferred patterns of exogamous marriage, bridewealth and dowry practices and pointing to evidence of migrant daughters improving their status and bargaining power vis-à-vis family and other assets.

Zhao Xudong (Chapter 6) extends Christiansen's contribution by exploring the issues surrounding land ownership, land use and symbolic value. He begins with the ongoing debates in China regarding land reform and privatization, arguing that there is a strong need to examine in detail what is happening in specific agrarian situations. This he illustrates through a village study in south China, documenting how farmers deal with land issues and how they trade, rent, sharecrop, sublet and in other creative ways use their land. He also shows the connection between these processes and off-farm activities and investments.

In Part III we move to issues of the urbanization of the countryside,

introduced by Bryan Roberts's review of contemporary patterns of urbanization in the developing world and their implications for rural development (Chapter 7). Two aspects are salient, namely, migration and the administrative and economic de-centralization that accompanies urbanization in much of the contemporary world. He discusses patterns of rural urbanization whereby rural settlements are gradually integrated into a larger regional system of urban and industrial centres of production, bolstered by government and private (often foreign) investment. His mainly Latin American examples serve well for depicting similar processes in China.

Zhou Daming and Huang Xueliang in their chapter on Phoenix village provide an example of this process by which the village becomes part of a larger township and regional setting (Chapter 8). The study is particularly interesting since the village was the site of detailed anthropological work on the Chinese peasantry in the 1920s. Their re-study thus makes it possible to depict the extent to which the social and economic life of the village has been transformed. Their discussion concentrates on how urbanization of the village has led to changes in village lifestyles, cultural orientations and organizational forms consequent upon its incorporation into the surrounding network of towns and cities in the Guangdong area of China, where industrialized forms of production have taken root since the 1970s. The study provides interesting everyday life material on food habits, transport connections, entertainments and communication media, providing a snapshot picture of generational differences. It concludes by discussing the meanings and implication of talking about 'villages in townships' or cities in the Chinese context.

The next two contributions, by Gail Mummert (Chapter 9) and Ye Jingzhong et al. (Chapter 10), are also closely related. They deal with the series of problems and dilemmas affecting Mexican and Chinese families that suffer separation due to members migrating for work or other reasons. Mummert focuses on children and the elderly, whereas Ye et al. concentrate on the difficulties for children and guardians (mothers, grandparents and others) of children left behind in the village. Hierarchical generational and gendered relations coupled with family ideologies figure largely in the work of Mummert, and frame what women and men, mothers and fathers, or sons and daughters expect of each other and how this changes over time and in relation to context. She also discusses whether the state ought not play a bigger welfare role. Ye et al. focus more on the vulnerabilities, and emotional, physical and educational needs of left-behind children and how the absence of a parent or parents can affect the well-being of both children and carers or guardians. Their study attempts to give children and their guardians a voice and thus increase awareness of the plight of left-behind children by state officials and public institutions.

Part IV consists of four chapters that deal with issues of policy intervention and local participation. Alberto Arce (Chapter 11) opens with the more general question of how to frame and conceptualize the notion of development invention. In doing so he takes a strong actor and interface perspective. He provides a historical overview of policy thinking and critically reviews different analytical approaches to understanding the policy process. Throughout, he attempts to demonstrate the case for including and giving more attention to the ways in which local actors and organized groups define the problems they face, draw upon various narratives of democracy and devise strategic modes of response. A central thread throughout is the need for policy to give space for civic participation.

Li Xiaoyun and Liu Xiaoqian (Chapter 12) focus on questions of participatory development, reviewing the history and dynamics of the Chinese experience. Participatory development was introduced in China by international organizations in the 1990s. It aimed to facilitate change in China's system of top-down planning and bring about a more 'people-centred' discourse. However, empowerment remains limited. The chapter looks at participation in relation to village poverty alleviation schemes. The authors explore the methodology used to ensure that funds allocated reach the poor, highlighting its shortcomings. Subsequently, targeting was moved from county to village level. The chapter highlights the problems and contradictions involved in implementing such a participatory method in a situation where there is still a degree of hegemonic control by the party and local government officials.

Relating to this same participatory theme is the chapter by Liu Jinlong (Chapter 13). The case study presented is located in a forest region of Gansu Province, northwest China, where the natural forest protection programme had been implemented. His aim as a forestry researcher himself was to establish a pilot European Community (EC)-funded project to establish village committees for forest management planning. The case study again highlights the continuities and transformations in the structure of power and authority in present-day rural China.

All the struggles and conflicts that followed the attempt to form a planning committee in the ten project villages were conducted in the name of forest management, but in reality they had little to do with forests at all, but with alliances between village and township leaders and their attempts to control the committees and fund allocation.

The final contribution, by Solange Guo Chatelard (Chapter 14), explores the theoretical implications of the currently vogue notion of 'accountability', together with a specific local case study of a Chinese government project that falls under the national programme for the 'construction of the new countryside'. This ongoing programme focuses on the improvement

of living conditions and livelihoods and the creation of conditions for a more ‘harmonious’ and social society. She shows that the project comes to fruition (that is, in the form of new amenities and administrative building and car park), thanks to a ‘multifaceted concert of individual and collective negotiations, and through the long-standing but permanently evolving social practice of Guanxi’. In the process she discovers there is an implied semantic field of possible complementary concepts that can be associated with ‘accountability’ which do not exist per se in Chinese. This chapter then ties together a number of strands – semantic, social, political and symbolic meanings around the idea of ‘development’.

NOTES

1. For a detailed analysis this type of enterprise and its performance levels, see Huang (2008: 68–85).
2. A condensed version of this discussion appears in Long and Jinlong (2009: 64–71).
3. For a comprehensive overview of China’s recent agricultural performance and rural development initiatives, see Sonntag et al. (2005). The report also gives useful information on markets and fiscal policy, farmer associations, public services, off-farm activities, labour migration, agricultural research, extension services, water management, land security, rental markets for cultivated and environmental problems. China had achieved a high level of food security and food production capacity.
4. To understand fully the dynamics and outcomes of such social struggles necessitates coming to grips with the problematic of resistance to hegemonic authority and the centrality of a theory of agency (see Long 2007: 69–89).
5. See Long and Villarreal (1998) for an analysis of maize husk commodity networks that span the Mexican–US border. Maize husks are used for making *tomales*, a characteristic Mexican food speciality. There is a scarcity of maize husks in the USA because a proportion of the maize crop is directly processed into animal feed.
6. I cannot here elaborate but this issue raises the important question of the kinds of change that marriage customs have undergone since the 1980s. There have been substantial shifts in the scale, attributed meanings and practices associated with marriage payments which often allow the bride herself to achieve greater control over asset bargaining and use. There is also the intriguing dilemma that the migrant married woman may face, namely, whether she should favour her husband’s household or that of her natal home in respect of remittances and any other gifts she may wish to give them. A second highly pertinent dimension is the extent to which their access to outside earnings (and perhaps substantial savings) carries with it the possibility of negotiating a better deal in respect of their status in both their husband’s family as well as vis-à-vis their own parents and siblings. Chang (2008: esp. pages 369–76) provides a perceptive account of how an unmarried migrant woman, who returns to her home village to attend a cousin’s wedding and to visit her family, leads to a consolidation of her status position in the family and village such that she is able to dictate family affairs and wield a high degree of power. Her ability to do this rested firmly on what she had learnt and what she had accumulated in cash and experience during her working years in Dongguan.
7. See Kautsky (1899), de Janvry (1981), Harriss (1982), Goodman and Redclift (1981) and many articles in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.
8. Adopting this broader view of rural space and activities requires finding ways of bridging evident disjunctures between distinct bodies of research, for example, those of rural sociology and economics, and those of ecological and environmental studies. Whereas

the former have generally focused on issues of production, consumption and commodity values in the context of state intervention and globalization, the latter have principally concerned themselves with the conceptual issue of how to relate natural resource and environmental issues to social phenomena. Here there is a need to synthesize these contrasting perspectives so as to achieve greater insight into questions of diversity and change in the countryside.

9. Government-initiated resettlement schemes abound throughout rural China and much debate about how one should classify them (that is, as 'spontaneous', 'voluntary', 'compulsory' or a mixture). Lin Zhibin (2003) provides an interesting comparative analysis of two contrasting cases of resettlement in Ningia Autonomous Region and Yunnan Province.

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PART I

Agrarian Development and Change in an Era of Globalization

1. Histories of development, predicaments of modernity: thinking about globalization from some critical development studies perspectives

Arturo Escobar

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to imagine what to write about development and rural transformations that could be meaningful to Chinese colleagues and situations by drawing on experiences in those parts of the world that have been most deeply affected by western-style development. One would actually hope that the range of topics that would be meaningless to current Chinese processes were far greater, since this could give us (those instructed in western development, and critical of it) a sense of hope that China's transformations might go in a rather different direction. For somebody so utterly ignorant about China as myself, it would be easier to write about what has not worked in other parts of the world, so that one would have a measure of hope that history might be somewhat different (as Marx put it, 'History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce', or one might recall Satanyana's less dialectical but equally compelling dictum: 'Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it'). Of course, from some perspectives history is never the same, from others it always repeats itself. The bottom line is that the orientation to be given to development in this important country is something that only Chinese academics, intellectuals, policy-makers, movements and communities are in a position to decide. I write this chapter from the perspective of reporting on some alternative thinking in other parts of the world, particularly Latin America, in case they are of some relevance to the current interest in alternative rural development in China at present.

I remember reading about Chinese agricultural development in my international development classes at Cornell University in the USA in the

late 1970s. At the time, Cornell was a hotbed of international development, particularly concerning rural development, agriculture and food. Discussions about the role of local organizations in development were just beginning, and the Chinese had unique lessons in this regard, such as the famous ‘barefoot doctors,’ which influenced the primary health care movement and the Alma Ata declaration of 1976. During those years, one read Hinton’s *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, a quasi-ethnographic description of daily life in a Chinese village undergoing rural transformation and land reform under Marxist-Leninist and Maoists principles. I do not remember much about the book, and I can only wonder what an ethnographic approach to a ‘Chinese village’ akin to Hinton’s Long Bow would look like today, in the context of rapid changes of quite another type. One would have to start by pondering whether it would even be possible to study a well-demarcated ‘village’ in the way in which they were studied in Hinton’s time, or about the contrasting guiding ideologies in both periods, or the set of forces impinging upon the village (today much less sheltered from globality).

Even my superficial knowledge suggests that the conditions for the rural transformations of the 1950s are dramatically different from those of the past two decades. Could one say that China went from being a ‘world economy’ in and of itself, through the time of the Cultural Revolution, to progressively becoming an integral component of the global capitalist world system, to use world systems theory concepts? Or what would it mean to say, in a more mainstream fashion, that China has finally, and dutifully, ‘joined the global economy’ (including one of its key markers, the World Trade Organization, WTO)? What is the current context for ‘constructing the socialist countryside,’ and what has ‘countryside’ come to mean? What changes have taken place in the understanding of nature, landscape, rural economy, peasant life, ‘village,’ property, and so forth? What has happened to food and agriculture as land has become commoditized? How do urban imaginaries impinge upon rurality? I can only ponder about the relevance of these questions at this point. Are they even relevant within current Chinese development discourses? Should they be?

Section 1 of the chapter makes some general historical observations about development as discourse and social practice; it presents some elements for thinking about development as both a recent (post-World War II) historical process and as grounded in a longer historical matrix (Euro-modernity). Section 2 reviews various scholarly positions on modernity, particularly from Latin American perspectives, outlining the notions of alternative modernities and alternatives to modernity. Section 3 presents the outline of a framework for thinking about and beyond development in terms of ecological, cultural and economic difference. Section 4, finally,

summarizes some of the arguments about post-development, and introduces a few general remarks about their potential applicability to Chinese situations and concerns; it imagines some questions that might be of relevance in terms of rural development issues in China. I want to emphasize that the remarks made here are shaped by both my present location in the US academy and my observation of, and engagement with, social processes of development in Latin America.

1 DEVELOPMENT AS POST-WORLD WAR II CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PROCESS: FROM MODERNIZATION TO POST-DEVELOPMENT

Development is a concept, an imaginary, a set of theories and, of course, a social practice – that is, a set of concrete policies and interventions. It is hard to disaggregate these various aspects; conventional approaches assume that there are objective theories on the one hand and more or less effective applications on the other, and that applications will be improved as theory is progressively refined. This assumption itself has been challenged by critical approaches to development, and by poor empirical and policy results. As concept, theory and practice, development can be said to have emerged in the 1940s–1950s, although of course there were some predecessors. By the late 1980s, criticisms of various kinds had mounted, and some had begun to talk about ‘post-development’.

To fully understand the emergence of the notion of post-development and how it has functioned in the international development studies debate, it is important to locate it briefly within the development studies field. The conceptualization of development in the social sciences has seen three main moments since its emergence, corresponding to three contrasting theoretical orientations: modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s, with its allied theories of growth and development; dependency theory and related perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s; and critical approaches to development as a cultural discourse in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s. Modernization theory inaugurated a period of certainty in the minds of many theorists and world elites in the West, premised on the beneficial effects of capital, science and technology; this certainty suffered a first blow with Latin American dependency theory, of Marxist orientation, which argued that the roots of underdevelopment were to be found in the connection between external dependence and internal exploitation, not in any alleged lack of capital, technology or modern values. For dependency theorists, the problem was not so much with development as with capitalism; the solution was nationalist and socialist-style development. In the

1980s, a growing number of cultural critics in many parts of the world – largely South Asia, the USA and Europe and Latin America – questioned the *very idea of development*. They analyzed development as a discourse of western origin that operated as a powerful mechanism for the cultural, social, and economic production of the Third World (for example, Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1994; Rist 1997; Sachs 1992). These three moments may be classified according to the root paradigms from which they emerged: liberal, Marxist and post-structuralist theories, respectively. Despite overlaps and more eclectic combinations than in the recent past, a main paradigm continues to inform most positions at present, making the dialogue difficult at times.

The Post-structuralist Critique

Since the notion of post-development emerged directly from the post-structuralist critique, it is instructive to give a brief account of the main elements of this analysis. In keeping with the overall questioning of realist epistemologies of post-structuralism (see the work of Michel Foucault for the best statement on this theoretical tendency), the main thrust of this critique was not so much to propose yet another version of development – as if by progressively refining the concept theorists would finally arrive at a true and workable conception – but to question precisely the ways in which much of Asia, Africa and Latin America came to be defined as ‘underdeveloped’ and so in need of development. The question the post-structuralists asked was not then, ‘how can we do development better?’ but ‘why, through what historical processes, and with what consequences did Asia, Africa and Latin America come to be “invented” as “underdeveloped” and “the Third World” through discourses and practices of development?’ The answer to this question included many elements, among which the following:

1. As a historical discourse, ‘development’ emerged in the early post-World War II period, even if its roots lie in deeper historical processes of modernity and capitalism. It was in this period that development ‘experts’ started to land massively in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, giving reality to the construct of the ‘Third World.’
2. The development discourse made possible the creation of a vast institutional apparatus through which the discourse became an effective social force, transforming the economic, cultural and political reality of the societies in question. This apparatus included Bretton Woods institutions (for example, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, IMF) and other international organizations (for

- example, the United Nations system) as well as national planning agencies and local-level development projects.
3. The discourse of development operated through two principal mechanisms: the professionalization of development problems, which included the emergence of expert knowledges to deal with every aspect of ‘underdevelopment’ (including the field of development studies itself); and the institutionalization of development through the vast network of organizations already mentioned above. Strategies such as ‘rural development’, for instance, could be seen, from this perspective, as a systematic mechanism for linking expert knowledges of agriculture, food, and so on with particular interventions (green revolution, extension, credit, infrastructure, and so on) in ways that – even if appearing to be the ‘natural way of doing things’ – resulted in a profound transformation of the countryside and peasant societies along the lines of modern capitalist conceptions of land, agriculture, farming, and so forth.
 4. Finally, the post-structuralist analysis pointed at the forms of exclusion that went along with the development project, particularly the exclusion of the knowledges and concerns of those whom development was supposed to serve: the poor of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Idea of Post-development and the Ensuing Debate

It was these series of analyses, plus the increasing discontent in many parts of the so-called Third World with the results of development, that led some theorists to suggest the idea of post-development and a ‘post-development era’. This meant an era in which development would no longer be the central organizing principle of social life (Escobar 1995) – one in which, to paraphrase a well-known paper of the period, focused on the sub-field of women in development – development would not take place solely ‘under Western eyes’ (Mohanty 1991). Others added to this characterization a re-valorization of vernacular cultures, the need to rely less on expert knowledge and more on ordinary people’s attempts at constructing more humane and culturally and ecologically sustainable worlds, and the point of taking seriously social movements and grassroots mobilizations as the basis for moving towards the new era (Esteva and Prakash 1999; Rahnama and Bawtree 1997; Rist 1997; Shiva 1993).

To ascertain in more detail the differences between the post-structuralist and the more well-known modes of analysis (liberal and Marxist), it is instructive to review how they answer differently to a series of questions (see Table 1.1). In this context, the idea of post-development refers to: (a) the possibility of creating different discourses and representations which

Table 1.1 Development theories according to their ‘root paradigms’

Issue \ Paradigm	Liberal theory	Marxist theory	Post-structuralist theory
Epistemology	Positivist	Realist/dialectical	Interpretivist/ constructivist
Pivotal concept	Individual Market	Production (for example, mode of production) Labor	Language Meaning (signification)
Object of study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ‘Society’ ● Market ● Rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social structures (social relations) ● Ideologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Representation/discourse ● Knowledge-power
Relevant actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Individuals ● Institutions ● State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Social classes (working classes); (peasants) ● Social movements (workers, peasants) ● State (democratic) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ‘Local communities’ ● NSMs, NGOs ● <i>All</i> Knowledge Producers (including individuals, state, SMs)
Question of development	How can societies develop/be developed through combination of capital and technology and individual and state actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How it functions as a dominant ideology ● How can development be delinked from capitalism 	How Asia, Africa and Latin America came to be represented as ‘underdeveloped’
Criteria for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ‘Progress’, growth ● Growth plus distribution (1970s) ● Adoption of markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transformation of social relations ● Development of the productive forces ● Development of class consciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transformation of political economy of truth ● New discourses and representation (plurality of discourses)

Table 1.1 (continued)

Paradigm / Issue	Liberal theory	Marxist theory	Post-structuralist theory
Mechanism for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better theories and data ● More carefully tailored interventionist 	Social (class) struggle	Change <i>practices</i> of knowing and doing
Ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How culture mediates development and change ● Adapt projects to local cultures 	How local actors <i>resist</i> development interventions	How knowledge producers resist, adapt, subvert dominant knowledge and create their own
Critical attitude concerning development and modernity	Promote more egalitarian development (deepen and complete Enlightenment Project of modernity)	Reorient development towards satisfying requirements for social justice and sustainability (Critical modernism: delink capitalism and modernity)	Articulate ethics of expert knowledge as political practice (Alternative modernities and Alternatives to Modernity; decolonial projects)

are not so mediated by the constructs (ideologies, language, premises, and so on) of development; (b) the need to change the practices of knowing and doing and the 'political economy of truth' that defines the development regime; (c) hence the need to multiply the centers and agents of knowledge production – in particular, to give salience to the forms of knowledge produced by those who are the 'objects' of development so that they can become subjects in their own right; (d) two particularly useful ways to do this are, first, by focusing on the adaptations, subversions and resistance that local peoples effect in relation to development interventions (as with the notion of counterwork explained below); and, second, by highlighting the alternative strategies produced by social movements as they encounter development projects.

The debate over post-development has contributed to create a lively climate for more eclectic and pragmatic approaches (for example, Arce and Long 2000; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Schech and Haggis 2000; see Escobar 2007 for a fuller account and literature). These trends are

producing a new understanding of how development works, and is transformed. Arce and Long (2000), for instance, have outlined a project of pluralizing development and modernity by focusing on the counter-work performed on development by local groups; these authors focus on the ways in which the ideas and practices of modernity are appropriated and re-embedded in local life-worlds, resulting in multiple, local or mutant modernities. By counter-work they mean the transformation that social actors perform on any development intervention as they necessarily reposition the said intervention (project, technology, form of knowledge, or what have you) into their cultural universe to make it meaningful for themselves; counter-work, in their view, often involves the recombination of elements from various social and cultural contexts and traditions in ways that significantly transform the intervention. It thus becomes possible to identify and foster those forms of counter-work that are most culturally meaningful and politically empowering.

Bebbington (2000) has called for a notion of development that is at once alternative and developmentalist, focused on the concept of livelihood; he has also underscored how the ‘uneven geographies of poverty and livelihoods’, are related to both historical political economies and culturally inflected patterns of development intervention (Bebbington 2004). Other authors find in gender and poverty a privileged domain for weaving together elements of post-development, post-colonial theory, political economy and feminism into a new understanding of development, while maintaining a critical eye on the ethnocentrism and exclusions that often characterized earlier developmentalist representations of women (for example, Gardner and Lewis 1996; Marchand and Parpart 1995; Schech and Haggis 2000). Basic issues of paradigmatic differences have also been usefully brought to the fore (Pieterse 1998). De Vries (2007) has pointed at an issue that has remained largely unexamined. Most critiques of development, he argues, have overlooked the desires for development that many people already have; these desires exist between the gap of promises and meager actual realizations. Treating development as an object of discourse, or chiefly in terms of governmentality, amounts to a disavowal of the subjectivity of people in many Third World communities. In de Vries’s view, many critics fall into a position of cynicism, as if saying: ‘we know development is an apparatus of power, and we do not believe in it, and yet we do it anyway for pragmatic reasons’. For him, ‘the desire for development both masks its impossibility and reveals a utopian dream that goes against the historical project of capitalist modernization’ (de Vries 2007: 16). The implication is ‘an ethics of sustaining the capacity to desire, to keep searching for what “is” in development more than itself, for demanding for what development offers but cannot deliver’ (ibid.: 19). One may

add the following question: How could the very development apparatus be used to cultivate subjects of *diverse developments* and *diverse modernities*?

A final trend is based on the ethnography of development projects; influenced by both actor-oriented development sociology (for example, Long 2001) and actor-network theories, authors in this trend suggest that ethnographic research could be used to understand both the social work of policy ideas and the transformation that locals effect on the projects, and that this understanding could be utilized to link more effectively 'the emancipatory intentions of policy and the aspirations and interests of the poor' (Mosse 2005: 240; *see also* Mosse and Lewis 2005). This goal requires a detailed understanding of the relation between policy and practice as it is played out at many sites by a diversity of actors. The hope is that, given the reality of development, the critical ethnographer could illuminate the conditions for a more effective popular appropriation of the projects. Referring to India, Sinha (2006a, 2006b) has underscored that this process of appropriation also goes on at the national level, where political imperatives are crucial for negotiating development agendas; these agendas, indeed, have multiple lineages, some of which might even have little to do with western intervention *per se*. Closer attention to the interaction between state and civil society organizations, he adds, should give us a more nuanced account of the flows of power than in previous post-structuralist analyses, underscoring how development operates as a multi-scale hegemonic process that is transformed and contested all the time.

As we entered the present decade, the panorama of development theory in western-inflected debates was thus marked by a wide array of positions and growing inter-paradigmatic dialogue. This could be seen as a positive result of the sometimes acrimonious debates on post-development during the 1990s. As the first decade of the twenty-first century unfolds, the problems of development in many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America continue to be as challenging as ever. On the one hand, economic globalization has taken on such a tremendous force that it has seemingly relegated the debates over the nature of development to the back burner. On the other hand, global social movements and the deepening of poverty continue to keep issues of justice and development on the agenda. For most of these movements, it is clear that conventional development of the kind offered by neo-liberal globalization is not an option. There are, indeed, many alternatives being proposed by movement activists and intellectuals. At the very least, it is becoming clear that if 'Another World is Possible', to appeal to the slogan of the World Social Forum, then another development should, indeed, be also possible. The knowledges produced by these movements have become essential ingredients for rethinking

globalization and development. In this way, post-development has also come to mean the end of the dominance of expert knowledge over the terms of the debate.

2 GLOBALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND THE QUESTION OF MODERNITY

There is no doubt that the intensification of globalization processes in the past few decades has modified significantly development debates, and both are inextricably mediated by the question of ‘modernity’. There are two main tendencies at present: those that assert that globalization entails the universalization of western-style modernity (Euro-modernity); and those (very few at present) who argue that globalization presents us with the opportunity for thinking about and constructing radically different worlds, based on the idea of multiple modernities and even alternatives to modernity. Let us review very succinctly the range of positions in this regard.

Positions on Modernity

In attempting a state of the art of discussions on modernity from the perspective of international cultural studies, Grossberg (2007) has suggested that perhaps the key problematic of our time is not globalization, as it is most often assumed, but the status of modernity. Why? Because discourses of globalization are, themselves, subsidiary to visions of modernity and stuck in modern terms, including the binary between the local and the global. Globalization, in other words, is an expression of the more fundamental problematic of modernity and modernity thus becomes the most important political and cultural question. Of course, the question goes both ways. As Blaser (forthcoming) states in thinking about Latin American indigenous peoples, the present can be described as a generalized struggle to define and shape an emergent order, globality. Will this order be ‘modernity writ large’ (as in most established views), or can globality be rather imagined as an alternative to, rather than a continuation of, modernity? If there are competing visions of globality, so it must be because there are competing visions of modernity.

Schematically, and following Grossberg (2007) and Restrepo (2007), there could be said to be three main positions regarding modernity: (a) modernity as universal process of European origin (intra-Euro/American discourses); (b) alternative modernities (locally specific variations of a somewhat universal modernity); (c) multiple modernities, that is, modernity as multiplicity without a single origin or cultural home. In this latter

view, modernity emerged from multiple intersecting processes, did not have a single origin, and has followed multiple trajectories. The modern, in this way, is an always ongoing struggle to define the real in terms of articulations of time and space, presence and change, lasting structures and the experience of the everyday. A given modernity might have emerged, say, in some parts of Asia in the tenth century and intersected with western modernity; with the colonization of Africa, multiply originated modernities initiated their painful process of adjusting and articulating across power and difference. In other words, not all modernity is Euro-modernity, and *multiple modernities* can thus be reclaimed as an ontological and political project. By de-essentializing modernity more radically, Grossberg opens up new possibilities delinking modernity from the tight embrace by the West, and locating possibilities for remaking it everywhere.¹

There is a fourth perspective on modernity that has emerged in the last decade in Latin America, that it is referred to as the ‘modernity, coloniality, decoloniality’ perspective (MCD). This perspective is grounded on a series of operations that distinguish it from established theories (see Escobar 2003, 2004, for a more complete account; *see also* the special issue of *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 2007, devoted to MCD). These include the following: (a) locating the origins of modernity with the Conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, rather than in the commonly accepted landmarks such as the Enlightenment or the end of the eighteenth century; (b) a persistent attention to colonialism and the making of the capitalist world system as constitutive of modernity; (c) the adoption of a world perspective in the explanation of modernity, in lieu of a view of modernity as an intra-European phenomenon; (d) the subalternization of the knowledge and cultures of groups outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity; (e) a conception of Eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality – a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself. The main conclusions of this conceptualization are, first, that the proper unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality – in sum, there is no modernity without coloniality, with modernity/coloniality encompassing modern colonialism and colonial modernities (in much of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean). Second, the fact that ‘the colonial difference’ – the differences suppressed by Eurocentrism and that assert themselves today with social movements at the borders of Euro-modernity – is a privileged epistemological and political space. As one of its proponents put it, MCD

is useful, on the one hand, as a perspective to analyze the hegemonic processes, formations, and orders associated with the world system (at once modern and

colonial), and, on the other, to make visible, from the colonial difference, the histories, subjectivities, forms of knowledge, and logics of thought and life that challenge this hegemony. (Walsh 2007: 234)

For Dussel (for example, 2000), the corollary is the possibility of ‘trans-modernity,’ defined as a project for overcoming modernity not simply by negating it but by thinking about it from its underside, from the perspective of the excluded others. For Mignolo (2000), the project has to do with the re-articulation of global designs by and from local histories. Many insist on the need to work with social movements operating from the colonial difference towards political projects grounded in a degree of autonomy on the social, cultural, economic, and epistemic spheres, including those movements that explicitly discuss a *pensamiento propio* (the movement’s own thought), such as the Zapatista and many indigenous and black movements in Latin America at present. These struggles are seen as political and epistemic in character, as attempts at thinking other thoughts for other world constructions. In emphasizing their own life projects, indigenous peoples, for instance, speak from the position of the subaltern or colonial difference, although they also affirm their own ontological project. It could be said of them that they stand ‘in the way of development’ (Blaser 2004). This means, first, that they affirm their life projects; these have to do with maintaining their networks of reciprocity and relationality, their ontological commitments, their ecological, economic and cultural difference. They, second, relate to development from this perspective to resist it, tolerate it, or even go along with it when it supports this or that aspect of their life project.

One can conclude from this that it is possible to speak both about alternative modernities but also of ‘alternatives to modernity’ or transmodernity: a discursive space in which the idea of a single modernity has been suspended at an ontological level, particularly in its universal versions; where Europe has been provincialized, that is, displaced from the center of the historical and epistemic imagination; and where the examination of concrete modernities and decolonial processes can finally be started in earnest from a de-essentialized perspective. This leaves us with a view of ‘multiple modernities’ or ‘multiple MCDs’ as coexisting theoretical possibilities, to be maintained in tension. It might take some years to settle the score on these various perspectives.

Imperial Globality and the Possibility of a Transition

In this context, one may pose the question of development as follows: what is happening to development and modernity in times of globalization? Is

modernity finally becoming universalized, or is it being left behind? The question is all the more poignant because it can be argued that the present is a moment of transition: between a world defined in terms of modernity and its corollaries, development and modernization – a world that has operated largely under European hegemony over the past 200 years if not more; and a global reality which is still difficult to ascertain but which, at opposite ends of the spectrum can be seen either as a deepening of modernity the world over or as a deeply negotiated reality that encompasses many heterogeneous cultural formations – and, of course, the many shades in between. This sense of a transition is well captured by the question: is globalization the last stage of capitalist modernity, or the beginning of something new? As I have suggested, intra-European and non-Eurocentric perspectives give a different answer to this set of questions.

As an imaginary, moving ‘beyond modernity’ seems impossible to fathom under current conditions of world dominance. In many parts of the world, exclusion has become terribly accentuated, with ever growing numbers of people thrown into a veritable ‘state of nature’. The size of the excluded class varies of course with their location of the country in the world system, but it is particularly staggering in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia (although the new ‘middle classes’ in China and India put a question mark on the argument). For a prominent critic and one of the architects of the World Social Forum process, the current condition is one of social fascism as ‘a social and civilizational regime’ (Santos 2002: 453). This regime, paradoxically, coexists with democratic societies and operates in various modes: in terms of spatial exclusion; territories struggled over by armed actors; the fascism of insecurity; and the deadly financial fascism, which at times dictates the marginalization of entire regions and countries by the IMF and its management consultants (ibid.: 447–58). This is, in sum, the world that is being created by globalization from above, or hegemonic globalization.

Imperial globality is also characterized by the willingness to use unprecedented levels of violence to enforce dominance on a global scale. In Alain Joxe’s (2002) compelling vision of imperial globality, what we have been witnessing since the first Gulf War is the rise of an empire that increasingly operates through the management of asymmetrical and spatialized violence, territorial control and ‘cruel little wars’, all aimed at imposing the neo-liberal capitalist project. It is an empire that does not take responsibility for the well-being of those over whom it rules. As Joxe puts it:

The world today is united by a new form of chaos, an imperial chaos, dominated by the *imperium* of the United States, though not controlled by it. We lack the words to describe this new system, while being surrounded by its images . . .

World leadership through chaos, a doctrine that a rational European school would have difficulty imagining, necessarily leads to weakening states – even in the United States – through the emerging *sovereignty* of corporations and markets. (2002: 78, 213, original emphasis).

From Colombia and Central America to Algeria, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East these wars take place within states or regions, without threatening empire but fostering conditions favourable to it. It is clear that this new Global Empire ('the New World Order of the American imperial monarchy', *ibid.*: 171) articulates the 'peaceful expansion' of the free-market economy with omnipresent violence in a novel regime of economic and military globality – in other words, the global economy comes to be supported by a global organization of violence and vice versa (*ibid.*: 200).

Despite these predicaments, or precisely because of their depth, it has become possible to assert that modernity's ability to provide solutions to modern problems has reached a new limit, making discussion of a transition beyond modernity feasible, perhaps for the first time (here, of course, the recent public debate on global climate change is an important referent). The discussion of a transition beyond the current order brings together those who call for new anti-capitalist imaginaries, such as long-term critics Anibal Quijano (for example, 2002) and Samir Amin (for example, 2003), with those emphasizing non-Eurocentric perspectives on globality, such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the advocates of decoloniality, or Boff's (2002) call for a new paradigm of re-linking with nature and each other. What these have in common is an acute sense of modernity's inability to tackle today's problems, such as massive displacement, ecological destruction, and poverty and inequality. Boaventura de Sousa Santos has perhaps most pointedly captured this predicament:

The conditions that brought about the crisis of modernity have not yet become the conditions to overcome the crisis beyond modernity. Hence the complexity of our transitional period portrayed by oppositional postmodern theory: we are facing modern problems for which there are no modern solutions. The search for a postmodern solution is what I call oppositional postmodernism . . . What is necessary is to start from the disjunction between the modernity of the problems and the postmodernity of the possible solutions, and to turn such disjunction into the urge to ground theories and practices capable of reinventing social emancipation out of the wrecked emancipatory promises of modernity. (2002: 13)

As we know, the Latin American MCD perspective suggests that transformative practices are taking place now, and need to be epistemically and socially amplified. This group argues for the need to move towards a 'decolonial turn' or project. This concept widens the framework of analysis to

include – as central to the inquiry and to social transformation – the historical and contemporary experiences of thinkers and movements that might be considered decolonial, that is, those which resisted European hegemony and which always maintained another thought because they were grounded on a different experience. These groups could be seen as the basis for an epistemic decolonization (a decolonization that emerges from a different configuration of knowledge and thus seeks to move beyond the modern epistemes). The decolonial turn is thus seen as going beyond the great narratives of Euro-modernity, including liberalism and Marxism. One might wonder whether the notion of constructing a genealogy of decolonial thought, and the articulation of decolonial projects, would make sense for the case of China, with its centuries-old traditions of non-European thought. (Some western authors, for instance, find today support for some of their non-Eurocentric proposals in traditions such as Taoism and Buddhism, but the question of decoloniality from and within China from the perspective of transforming the modern/colonial world-system, of which China today is such a central part, certainly goes well beyond that.)

Back to Development

To get back to development one more time. Some recent ethnography-based works attempt to locate the role of development within the global dynamic just described. The most important element is the emergence of new aid regimes, promoted by the IMF and the World Bank, that bring together donors and recipients in partnerships geared towards poverty reduction strategies. A shift in discourse towards ‘good governance’, ‘partnership’, ‘ownership’ and overall rational action is clearly identified ethnographically by these researchers, particularly for cases in South Asia and Africa but also the poorer countries in other world regions. Very interestingly, some authors (for example, Gould 2005), *see* in this shift a more refined modality for the dispensation of global inequality. This regime ‘not only gives expression to the deep-seated will to civilize, it does so in a way that reaffirms sacred values of the aid domain: modernity, rationality and political neutrality’ (ibid.: 69). Gould’s conclusion for some African countries has relevance for other parts of the world: ‘Strip away the moral buffers of “poverty reduction” and “good governance” and the aid domain appears as a game-like struggle among competing actors and interests’ (ibid.: 81). To paraphrase: scratch an international development management scheme, and you will find a power struggle, even if couched in terms of rational action.

The ethnographies of development have done much to bring into visibility the transnational expert communities whose training, interests, tastes,

orientations, and economic and political goals coincide enough to keep the development actor-networks going, and often well oiled. As the environmentalist and activist Larry Lohmann put it in the context of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's important What Next project (<http://www.dhf.uu.se/whatsnext/>), 'at each stage, specialists in new fields are called in to create their own roles in the story of the global application of expertise' (2006: 150); hence the need for a renewed awareness of the politics of expertise that leads to a practice of 'forming working alliances that can engender complexes of new practices' (ibid.: 175). As Lohmann says, we need to call standard rationality, common sense, and pervasive dualisms into question through 'a performance art requiring practice, experience, intuition, flexibility, improvisation, sensitivity to historical and political circumstances, a sense of what lies over the horizon, and the ability to handle unforeseen consequences' (ibid.: 156).

Lohman's call implies changes at the level of desire and subjectivity that are rarely debated in development studies. These are also issues that might become applicable as development studies and development practices (via the state and NGOs) take on greater salience in China. How will the politics of expertise take place in this context? Which epistemic communities are being formed around development in China? What specific form will the managerial and governmental logics take in this case? And so forth.

3 AN ECOLOGY OF DIFFERENCE

In many places, local groups engage in struggles against translocal forces of many types to defend their place. People mobilize against what they perceive as the destructive aspects of globalization from the perspective of what they have been and what they are at present: historical subjects of particular cultures, economies and ecologies; particular knowledge producers; individuals and collectivities engaged in the play of living with landscapes and each other in particular ways. In many world localities, people engage in the defense of place from the perspective of the economic, ecological and cultural difference that their landscapes, cultures and economies embody in relation to those of more dominant sectors of society.

I have found it useful to think about the colonial difference under three interrelated rubrics: economic, ecological, and cultural difference (Escobar 2006). This is so for several reasons. First, the transformation of regions and places by imperial globality entails a triple transformation; of local diverse economies, partly oriented to self-reproduction and subsistence, into a monetized, market-driven economy; of particular ecosystems into modern forms of nature; and of place-based local cultures into cultures

that increasingly resemble Euro-modernity (again, whether any of this is happening in places within countries such as China is an open question; are, for instance, ‘market-oriented individuals’ that might be culturally closer to the modern individual being socially produced by ongoing market reforms?). Enrique Dussel has similarly suggested recently that the political field is traversed by the three domains I have just described: the ecological, the economic and the cultural. For him, the primary end of politics today is the perpetuation of life on the planet (Dussel 2006: 55–61, 131–40). Second, even if the transformation of places and regions in many parts of the world never stops, it is never complete. Academics have thought about these processes in terms of resistance, hybridization, accommodation, and the like. These have been useful notions, yet they have tended to obliterate the potential of difference for worlds and knowledges otherwise. Let us *see* if it is possible to arrive at an alternative formulation. I draw on two proposals, Martínez Alier’s definition of political ecology, and the Women and the Politics of Place framework, together with Gibson-Graham’s conceptualization of a diverse economy.

Martínez Alier (2002) defines political ecology as the study of ecological distribution conflicts. By this he means conflicts over access to and control of natural resources, particularly as a source of livelihood, as well as the costs of environmental destruction. In providing this definition, Martínez Alier was making an extension from political economy as the study of economic distribution conflicts – class distribution of wealth, income, assets and so forth – to the field of ecology.² This two-pronged political ecology perspective is still missing an important dimension of conflict, namely, the cultural. ‘Ecological distribution conflicts’ exist in the context of economies, cultures and forms of knowledge, besides the obvious ecosystem context. It is necessary, in other words, to consider those conflicts that arise from the relative power, or powerlessness, accorded to various knowledges and cultural practices. To continue with the example above: by culturally privileging the capitalist (for example, plantation) model of nature over the local diverse agro-forest ecosystem model, not geared to a single ‘product’ and to accumulating capital, a cultural distribution conflict has been created. This conflict has ecological and economic consequences so that economic, ecological and cultural distribution conflicts are intimately intertwined.³ In other words, economic crises are ecological crises are cultural crises. When considered together, the domains of subjectivity and culture, economy and ecology provide the basis for theoretical insights about how to reorient societies away from the nightmarish arrangements of the present, and towards cultural, ecological and economic practices that could constitute tangible alternatives to capitalist significations and realizations.

One further word about the cultural dimension: cultural distribution conflicts arise from the difference in effective power associated with particular cultural meanings and practices. They do not emerge out of cultural difference per se, but out of the difference that this difference makes in the definition of social life, whose norms and meaning-making practices define the terms and values that regulate social life concerning economy, ecology, personhood, body, knowledge, property, and so forth. Power inhabits meaning, and meanings are a main source of social power; struggles over meaning are thus central to the structuring of the social and of the physical world itself. This concept shifts the study of cultural difference from the modernist concern with multiculturalism to the distributive effects of cultural dominance (coloniality) and struggles around it. If traditionally social movements have tended to emphasize the first dimension, in recent decades they have also addressed the latter two (as in environmental justice and identity-centered movements), often underscoring the interrelations among economy, ecology and culture.

Akin to the ‘women and politics of place’ conception (Harcourt and Escobar 2005), the above argument brings together into one framework discourses and struggles around culture, often the focus of ethnic, gender and other movements for identity; environment, the interest of ecology movements; and diverse economies, the concern of social and economic justice movements. This conceptual framework aims to analyse the interrelations created within subaltern struggles (for example, peasant, black and indigenous peoples’ struggles in some Latin American cases) around identity, environment and economies, in all of their diversities. In doing so we aim to demystify theory that ignores subaltern experiences and knowledge of the local economy, environment and culture *in order to relocate their politics of place as key to our understanding of globalization*. Many subaltern struggles can be seen today in terms of place-based yet transnationalized strategies of localization – or, more succinctly, as forms of place-based globalism (Osterweil 2005).

Towards the end of *A Postcapitalist Politics*, Gibson-Graham adumbrates the possibility of building community economies ‘as a practice of (post)-development’ (2006: 192), and their framework of a diverse economy can be seen as involving an ‘alternative set of “dynamic principles of development”’ (ibid.: 195). These principles should include, among others, meeting local needs more directly; using the surplus to strengthen communities; recognizing consumption as a viable route for development; (re)creating, enlarging and replenishing the commons; acknowledging the interdependence of people, nature, things and knowledge; and what they call ‘cultivating subjects of economic difference’ or subjects that desire other economies. Their dream is for a moment when

the development project no longer entails simply (painfully) submitting to the demanding logic of global capitalism, but becomes instead an ethical and political engagement – a sometimes difficult and conflictual process of experimenting with, fostering, exploring, connecting, expanding, and reworking the heterogeneous and scattered elements of a diverse (becoming community) economy. (Ibid.: 195)

They envision a collective dis-identification with capitalism to which we can add development and modernity, in their more dominant and conservative forms.

The framework of the political ecology of difference (the integrated framework of diverse economies, environments and cultures) is offered here as a contribution to a ‘global outline of a practical politics’ that works by reading world events for difference, rather than just for dominance, and by weaving connections among languages and practices of economic, ecological and cultural difference (Gibson-Graham 2006: 30). It should be emphasized that this framework is not offered here as a universal approach; on the contrary, *it is a theory of difference that is historically specific and contingent*; it is a response to the present moment that builds on intellectual and political developments in many places, particularly some parts of Latin America. It is also partly a response to Eurocentric teleological arguments about the alleged universality of modernity and globalization. Above all, it is an attempt to think with intellectual-activists who aim to go beyond the limits of Eurocentric models as they confront the ravages of neo-liberal globalization and seek to defend their place-based cultures and ecologies; it is, finally, about projects of de-coloniality in and for the present.

4 GLOBALIZATION AND MARGINALIZATION IN CHINA: IS THE LATIN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE RELEVANT?

Don Nonini (2008) has contested the claim, found in much of the western scholarship on China, that China is ‘becoming neo-liberal.’ In his view, the period of economic liberalization since the late 1970s has seen not a unified set of allegedly neo-liberal policies, but rather a hybrid ensemble of approaches that combine earlier socialist, nationalist, and developmentalist practices with the more recent logic of ‘market socialism’. While the growing dispossession of land and the unemployment of large masses of rural and urban people have indeed happened, this cannot be explained in simple terms of processes of neo-liberalization but of the emergence of a corporate state and party whose legitimacy is being challenged by

disenfranchised classes. In other words, whatever it means, ‘market socialism’ is not equal to western-style neo-liberalism. One important aspect to remark from this reinterpretation, however, is that nevertheless the overriding logic of the state is an overall goal of modernization. Both aspects, as we shall see shortly, are important for imagining alternatives outside neo-liberalism, but taking into account the modernizing bent of the state.

The question of marginalization in China is beginning to be posed with poignancy (for example, Xiaoquan Zhang et al. 2007a). It is now commonly accepted that China went from one of most equal societies in the world in the 1970s to one of the most unequal today (Sanders et al. 2007). Peripheral groups, including ethnic minorities, have been most affected (Wang Yu 2008) leading to what have been named ‘other Chinas’ (Litzinger 2000). Again, the overriding rationale seems to be ‘modernization,’ including bringing ethnic minorities into modernity. The development path of post-reform China has thus produced negative impacts at the socio-economic, cultural and environmental levels that are beginning to be recognized and tackled. Notions of people-centered, more inclusive, and holistic, approaches to development begin to be entertained, although ‘how such rhetoric is translated into reality remains to be seen’, and effective treatment of marginalization ‘remains doubtful’ (Xiaoquan Zhang et al. 2007b: 3). The same has been argued about ‘sustainable development’ (Muldavin 1997, 2007; Wang Yu 2008). Rapid decollectivization in the countryside, coupled with market reforms, privatization and the need to export agricultural commodities to boom regions have fostered the expropriation of peasant groups, depletion of communal assets, destruction of local food systems and ecological degradation. As the Maoist Commune-based development model, based on self-reliance and allowing for local reinvestment of surplus and the harnessing of long-term productivity to the communal projects is dismantled, the environmental problems reach a new scale. The environmental effects of the reforms, in other words, question the long-term sustainability of the model (Muldavin 1997, 2007), thus opening another space for rethinking development and modernity from this perspective.⁴ Like Nonini, Muldavin sees the current landscape of practices in the countryside as a mosaic of mixed market and socialist forms. Others have hypothesized the existence of an even more complex landscape of economic practices in China today (Yang 2000). In contrast to the view of a hegemonic single ‘neo-liberal market economy’, this view of the existence of a ‘diverse economy’ also opens up other spaces for rethinking the economy, development and modernity.

Given this problematic, so schematically sketched, let us summarize the arguments about ‘post-development’ and inquire whether they might have any relevance to Chinese situations. Post-development means: a space of

inquiry and social practice where the centrality of development as the only, or the main, organizing principle of social life is questioned. This includes questioning the pre-eminence of the concept of economic growth as the goal of the economy, the progressive disarticulation of development based on the premise of modernization, the exploitation of nature as a non-living entity separate from humans ('natural resources'), and the primacy of individual over collective action. Post-development also means the ability to effectively deconstruct the cultural matrix from which dominant visions of development have emerged. The corollary is the recognition of a multiplicity of visions, interests, goals and social relations around questions of livelihood and economy, among other aspects of social life. Concrete alternative policies may emerge from the visualization, activation and promotion of existing practices of ecological, economic and cultural difference, at least of those that could be construed by particular groups as contributing to the betterment of living conditions and to coexistence with a multiplicity of proposals and visions.

Let us *see* if any of these processes can be said to be happening in Latin America. One way of interpreting what is happening in many parts of South America, at least for many social movements, is as follows: overcoming the model of modern liberal capitalist society has become a must for survival, and a real possibility. Despite the contradictory and diverse forms it has taken in the present decade, the so-called 'turn to the Left' in Latin America suggests that this urge is felt even at the level of some governments (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Paraguay, Nicaragua and, to a lesser extent, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile). Why is this happening in Latin America more clearly than in any other world region at present is a question I cannot tackle here, other than saying that it is related to the fact that Latin America was also the region that most earnestly embraced neo-liberal reforms since the late 1970s, where the model was applied most thoroughly, and where the results most ambiguous, in the best of cases.⁵ The question is, are these regimes engaged in alternative modernizations (that is, modernization with greater equality, redistribution, and respect for difference and the environment), or are they engaged in a more profound project of post-development and societal transformations? The provisional answer to this question suggests that what is happening at the level of the progressive governments is the first option, that is, alternative modernizations, to the extent that the basic tenets of the models of economic growth and development have not been challenged. However, some movements are beginning to intuit, and propose, what could be called a post-capitalist and post-liberal (beyond private property and representative democracy) form of society. The question being broached by some social movements is: is it possible to go beyond capital (as the dominant

form of economy), liberalism (as the dominant cultural construction of society) and Euro-modernity (as the central cultural model)? This means that the scenario of a post-capitalist, post-liberal and post-modernity social formation is emerging in some contexts as a distinct possibility.

The following will likely be naive conclusions or provisional at best, about what could be relevant from these debates for situations in China.

1. From certain western perspectives, the world is facing today a profound ecological and social crisis. There is, on the one hand, a crisis of development models, particularly the neo-liberal model that has held sway since the late 1970s. Second, there is a longer historical crisis, that of the dominant model of modernity (Euro-modernity). Based on this observation, one can imagine questions such as the following when thinking about China (again, whether these questions are relevant is another matter; I hope they are relevant for what might be a critical development studies field in China, one that is of course aware of the geopolitical and epistemic dimension of development studies itself as a field of expertise):
 - (a) A *historical-theoretical question*: to what extent does China fit into these debates about a dominant Euro-modernity that is allegedly becoming universalized? If one were to accept the thesis of multiple modernities with multiple points of origin, what kinds of arguments could be made about/from China?⁶
 - (b) A question *from the perspective of the development discourse*: can China's current development models be described as modernizing in the Euro-American sense? Are they taking place 'under western eyes' primarily (that is, according to western-derived notions of development, person, nature, land, economy, and so on)? To what extent do they articulate, economically, culturally and ecologically, with global patterns and processes, particularly dominant ones (for example, neo-liberal globalization)? In what ways are Chinese development discourses different from historical western ones (for example, assumptions about teleology, stages, expert knowledge, link to governmental apparatuses, economy, and so on). Finally, do any of the arguments about post-development, as summarized in this section, have any purchase on Chinese situations?
 - (c) Questions relating to *non-modernity, alternative modernities, and alternatives to modernity*: are there other (older, from China's long-standing and, I assume, plural histories, including the more recent socialist periods) or emergent logics or cultural matrices also underlying the current transformations? Are there non-

modernist practices at play, even if in interaction with the modern forms? If so, would it be possible to articulate *another theory of globalization* (and development?) from this perspective?

- (d) Put in the language of an ecology of difference, and particularly for cases such as rural development, biodiversity-rich spaces, indigenous minorities, and so on: how can one study '*practices of economic, ecological, and cultural difference*' in Chinese rural contexts today, and could they credibly be proposed as a basis for alternative socio-natural designs?
2. A question of *geopolitics of knowledge and political economy*: I assume that, due to the sheer weight of culture and history, let alone size, in China, Europe is 'naturally provincialized', to use Chakrabarty's term (2000). To the extent that Chinese 'local histories' are at least partly different from those of the West, are these histories producing 'global designs' (Mignolo's formulation) that differ from the global designs of the dominant West (for example, imperial globality)?
 3. I have not mentioned much here about current proposals for facing the ecological crisis, particularly global climate change. I suspect, as I am sure many others have remarked, that *the ecological limits* to the planet as a whole will pose strict limits to any model of development based on the dominant western, modern industrial capitalist model. Some of the more radical strategies to redress global warming in particular – which appear utopian at present – involve the reorientation of the growth process in the so-called developing world towards a 'de-carbonization' of the South. This implies a significant rethinking of development and of the economic model (for example, Banuri and Opschoor 2007). What changes in the conceptualization of 'rural development' and 'countryside' could resonate, and possibly support, such significant change of course?
 4. From the analysis presented in the preceding pages, one can distinguish among interrelated, overlapping, and partially contradictory projects. I suggest that governments, experts, NGOs and social movements are faced with these three aims and maintain them in tension; moreover, one may lead to creating conditions for the others: the first is *alternative development*, focused on securing people's livelihoods (particularly the poor in the countryside, including food autonomy). The second, *alternative modernities* that shelter the economic, ecological and cultural difference that – even in the midst of a globalizing modernity – characterizes many regions and communities in the world today; these are largely based on processes of counter-work and could utilize development interventions strategically. The third is *alternatives to modernity* referring to that dimension of the relation

between globalization, development and modernity that imagines explicitly alternative constructions of the world from the perspective of difference. This latter dimension of alternatives to modernity would contribute to a weakening of the strong structures of Euro-modernity (for example, Dussel 1996, 2000; Vattimo 1991) but from a different position. Alternatives to modernity point at a moment when social life is no longer so thoroughly determined by the constructs of economy, individual, rationality, order, separation of nature and culture, mind and body and so forth that are characteristic of Euro-modernity. I wonder if this tripartite conception of theory and policy finds any resonance with debates in China.

5. In other words, are the concepts of decolonial turn, epistemic decolonization and the like applicable to China? If, as the MCD perspective hypothesizes, we all live within a single, albeit heterogeneous, modern/colonial world system, how could decoloniality be conceptualized from concrete Chinese historical and contemporary situations? How about China's own coloniality, such as its internal hierarchical classifications in terms of ethnicity, residence, education, and so on?

If what has happened in the reform period is a 'transition from plan to market' (Muldavin 2007), that is, from state socialism to growth-based market economies, or market socialist economies, and if these policies have triggered various forms of opposition and resistance, for example, by peasants and possibly some emerging social movements, could this usher in a space to 're-theorize the changing nature of post-socialist state/society relations around pressing current issues' (Muldavin 2007: 320)? The coupling of environmental destruction and social decline could well be one such issue, so that 'rural development' in particular could emerge as a propitious articulation of possibilities and proposals, whether for post-development or in other terms.

These brief questions point to the possibility of conversations among three set of actors: Chinese academics and intellectuals articulating development studies, and Chinese intellectual-activists in general; critical development studies; and Latin American critical thought, including MCD and beyond. I hope this chapter is a small contribution towards this goal; it has been written in this spirit.

NOTES

1. Grossberg's reading is much more complex than I can explain here; it includes an analysis of social, structural and ontological discourses of modernity; a theory of modernity

as virtual multiplicity, following Deleuze and Guattari; and a diagram of modernity in terms of the dialectic of space and time, structure and experience, change and presence, event and everyday life.

2. Over the past two decades, the debate between environmental economics and ecological economics around the question of the 'internalization of externalities' has led to a search for concepts to account adequately for the hidden ecological and social aspects of production. For neoclassical economists, the issue is resolved by internalizing previously unaccounted for ecological costs or 'externalities' into the economic system (such as the contamination of water tables by pesticides, clean-up costs, the costs of reducing carbon dioxide emissions or the payment for carbon sinks, or the benefits to future generations foregone by destroying biodiversity). This is simply done by assigning property rights and market prices to all environmental services and resources. The internalization of externalities has given rise to the field of environmental economics. It assumes that the valuation of natural resources is only subject to economic conditions, and that all natural aspects can be entirely reduced to (actual or fictitious) market prices. For the field of ecological economics, on the contrary, the value of nature cannot be assessed only in economic terms. There are ecological and political processes that contribute to define the value of natural resources that cannot be reflected in market prices. Indeed, in many cases there is incommensurability between economic and ecological processes to the extent that communities value the environment for reasons other than economic – whether they consider nature to be sacred, uncommodifiable, or whatever. This is why ecological economists have suggested the category of ecological distribution. The result is conflicts of ecological distribution, such as those found in struggles around the protection of forests, rivers, mangroves, wetlands or biodiversity. The fact that these conflicts often times appear when poor communities mobilize for the defense of the environment as a source of livelihood has led some ecologists to describe them as 'environmentalism of the poor' (Guha and Martínez Alier 1997; Martínez Alier 2002).
3. Not only do ecosystems have different ecological conditions and requirements for their maintenance, communities worldwide have perceptions and practices of nature which differ greatly among themselves and which are also essential to the health or decline of natural environments. Said differently, not only economic factors and ecological conditions, but cultural meanings, define the practices that determine how nature is appropriated and utilized. Until now, sustainability has referred chiefly to technological and economic variables. Ecological economists among others added the ecological dimension, yet the full inclusion of cultural conditions remains elusive (Leff 1998). More recently, however, some trends in political ecology as well as social movements' strategies have emphasized this latter aspect. They shift the question of sustainability from its economic, technological and managerial center to the ecological and cultural level. Struggles for cultural difference, ethnic identities, and local autonomy over territory and resources are contributing to redefine the agenda of environmental conflict beyond the economic and ecological fields. They take us fully into the terrain of the cultural as they elaborate a complex demand for seeing places in terms of economic, ecological and cultural difference. To put it bluntly, the destruction of rainforests, advancing desertification in many parts of the tropics, and so forth, are the dramatic physical effects of distribution conflicts linked to particular constructions of nature. The resignification of rainforests by modern capitalist interests, in this way, results in a profound physical reshaping of the landscape in the most literal sense.
4. As Muldavin put it already in 1997, 'China may be the first modern state to face an intractable legitimation crisis based on environmental decline' (p. 604).
5. See the special issue of *Third World Quarterly* on 'After the Third World,' edited by Mark Berger, 25(1), 2004. For Latin America, see the critical but insider's evaluation of the 'market reforms' in the continent over the past 25 years by CEPAL former director, the Colombian economist José Antonio Ocampo (2004), later the Adjunct Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations (UN) under Kofi Anan.
6. This first question might be too general to be of any use; moreover, it is possible that

some scholars working in or on China have already dealt with this question, although I suspect much of the literature in this area, of which I have very limited knowledge, stems from the assumption of a single modernity, albeit locally inflected (alternative modernities but not alternatives to modernity thesis).

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2. Peasants, territorial cooperatives and the agrarian question

Jan Douwe van der Ploeg

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the emergence of a new institutional arrangement in the European countryside, the territorial cooperatives. These new organizations differ from the familiar cooperatives involved in processing agricultural products or delivering services and inputs to their member farm-enterprises. Such cooperatives are essentially located within the food chain and aim to smooth its operation while enlarging the value added that is realized at the farm-enterprise level. Instead, the currently emerging territorial cooperatives are essentially area based and can therefore include farms from many different subsectors (for example, arable farming, horticulture and dairy farming) that are supplying different food chains. Territorial cooperatives aim, above all, to strengthen and develop the qualities of an area and the resources it contains (for example, environmental quality, landscape, biodiversity, social well-being, services and employment level). Through such measures the environmental cooperatives also strengthen and augment incomes at the farm-enterprise level, albeit in an indirect way.

Environmental cooperatives also differ from the production cooperatives that were once widespread in Eastern Europe (and in some parts of Western Europe), the former USSR and, until recently, the People's Republic of China. Production cooperatives are essentially based on communal ownership of the main means of production. Territorial cooperatives, however, are grounded on individually owned units of production (in practice family farms), which at higher levels of aggregation (that is, the territory) engage in dense and multifaceted patterns of cooperation.

From the theoretical point of view this chapter is based on the notion that territorial cooperatives might be considered as a peasant-like type of response to the many difficulties (that might be summarized as the 'agrarian question') that farmers worldwide are facing. The peasant-like nature of territorial cooperatives also implies that they might be relevant

in other geographical settings, such as China. As will be argued later, such an institutional arrangement could possibly help to address some of the problems facing the Chinese countryside. This is not to propose any simplistic ‘transfer’ of an exogenous model. What this chapter proposes to show, instead, is that a well grounded ‘comparative sociology of development’ (that takes into account both communalities and dissimilarities) might contribute to enlarging the set of potential responses that might be considered in different localities – wherever they are located.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first discusses the structure, significance, dynamics and impact of territorial cooperatives. Although there are several such organizations throughout Europe (and elsewhere), I draw especially on the case of the Noardlike Fryske Wâlden, the Northern Frisian Woodlands (NFW), which is one of the most prominent Dutch examples of a territorial cooperative. It currently embraces nearly 900 members, most of them farmers and rural dwellers with some land, as well as non-agrarian members. It covers an area of some 50 000 hectares, which includes large spaces dedicated to nature. Almost 80 per cent of the farmers in the area are affiliated to the NFW.

The second part of the chapter aims to unpack the specific experience of the NFW cooperative from the specificities of time and space. It analyses territorial cooperatives as a valid response to the agrarian question that is currently unfolding worldwide.

WHAT ARE TERRITORIAL COOPERATIVES?

The agrarian crisis of the 1880s was, to a degree, provoked by deteriorating relations between farming and *markets*. Butter fraud, usury, a lack of transparency and failing market power were but a few expressions. This triggered a first wave of agricultural cooperatives. These emerging cooperatives did not aim for major changes in the markets as such (nor could they ever have done so). Their target was basically to improve the articulation between farming and markets. Today, it is the interrelations between the *state* and the farming sector that have become strongly disarticulated. The state imposes regulatory schemes that are increasingly felt as inadequate, if not asphyxiating. Mutual distrust is a ‘structural’ feature (Breeman 2006). This disarticulation has triggered a new form of rural cooperation that has materialized in territorial cooperatives, which aim to radically improve relations between farmers and the state by introducing new forms of local self-regulation and new strategies for negotiated development (Ploeg et al. 2002). This approach, which is currently gaining momentum, is also in line with the generally accepted European Union (EU) principle of subsidiarity

and reflects the strong democratic traditions of north-western Europe. It reduces the transaction costs associated with current rural and agricultural policy programmes (Milone 2004) while augmenting their reach, impact and efficiency. Territorial cooperatives could therefore, in synthesis, prove to be a perfect complement to agricultural and rural policies.

Theoretically speaking, territorial cooperatives may be understood as the interlocking of three emancipatory impulses that aim to move beyond current impasses. The first is the search for, and construction of *regional cooperation*, which aims to integrate the many activities that seek to improve the environment, nature and landscape within local farming practices (Wiskerke et al. 2003: 3). The background to this is twofold. The regulatory schemes imposed by the state are highly segmented: for example, one set of rules pertains to nature values and their protection, while another set is concerned with the reduction of ammonia emissions, and so on.¹ In turn, this internally segmented (and often contradictory) set of prescriptions is disconnected (due to its particular design) from farming practice. As a consequence, the sets of rules materialize as a host of limitations that are imposed upon farmers. In addition, biodiversity, landscape and the quality of resources such as water and air cannot be produced at the level of the single farm; they require a regional scale, both from a material and social point of view. Improving the environment and ‘managing’ nature and the landscape implies processes of learning, exchange and, indeed, of cooperation. Thus the construction of sustainability requires regional cooperation which is also the only way to successfully redress the many frictions and limitations inherent in the sets of general rules defined by expert systems and the state.

A second impulse stems from the search for, and construction of new forms of *rural governance*. This move emerged in the early 1990s and has subsequently produced, in different arenas, a broad spectrum of expressions, in which the principles of responsibility, accountability, transparency and accessibility became important beacons for gaining legitimacy. In this respect an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report concluded that ‘the farmer-led co-operatives [out of which the NFW grew] are consistent with both Dutch institutional and democratic traditions’. It also noted that ‘from the government’s perspective, the emergence of these groups has proved a useful vehicle for mobilizing farmers’ commitment to environmental protection, and for finding ways to shift more responsibility over the implementation of environmental policy to local communities’ (OECD 1996; see also Fischler 1998; Franks and McGloin 2006). Central to the newly emerging forms of rural governance of the territorial cooperatives is the principle of *institutionally defined exchange*. Territorial cooperatives accept the general *objectives* regarding

landscape, nature and environment (and often seek to go beyond these objectives) on the condition that they receive room for manoeuvre to define for themselves the most adequate *means* to achieve these objectives.

Thirdly, territorial cooperatives represent a move away from expert systems and towards the innovative abilities of peasants. Territorial cooperatives are thus also *field laboratories* (Stuiver et al. 2003, 2004): They are places where the locally most suitable *means* for resolving local manifestations of global problems (such as the environmental crisis) are developed, tested, implemented, evaluated and further improved.

The new territorial cooperatives bring these three impulses together within one institution. This new institution crucially builds upon and strengthens the social capital available in the territory. Equally important, it builds a network of interrelations with other regional, national (and sometimes supranational) institutions. Through such networks additional room is created and new services can be delivered that would otherwise be difficult to achieve.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NFW

The NFW cooperative is located in the north-eastern part of the Province of Friesland in the north of the Netherlands. The area is characterized by an attractive, historically created hedgerow landscape with a beautiful variation of open and closed, high and low lying, wet and dry areas (see Figure 2.1). It was recently declared as a national landscape deserving special attention and support from national and regional government. The landscape and farming practices are the main carriers of a highly developed biodiversity in the area that embraces both flora and fauna.

The birth of what later became the NFW is a perfect illustration of *institutionally defined exchange*. In the early 1990s a national law was implemented to protect valuable nature from acid rain. Natural elements were declared acid-sensitive and were subsequently encircled by restrictions that meant agricultural activities could no longer be expanded. The new regulations implied that in a dense hedgerow landscape such as that in the NFW, all agricultural activity would have to be 'frozen'. A general standstill would be the result.

This legislation provoked considerable anger in the area. One of the main arguments raised was that farmers had created this landscape (from 1850 onwards) and had always been the ones to take care of it. It was seen as wrong and unjust to impose a noose upon this landscape, which would literally strangle farming in the area. Some were even prepared to eliminate hedgerows and other acid-sensitive elements in the area to avoid



Figure 2.1 An overview of the hedgerow landscape

such restrictions. Luckily another way out was found through an institutionally defined exchange. The municipality (and the province) promised *not* to declare the many hedges as acid-sensitive elements in exchange for a promise from farmers to maintain and protect the hedges, ponds, alder rows and sandy roads of the area. For this reason farmers formed a first association, the Eastermars Lânsdouwe or VEL. In this way the state's objectives were secured but through other, more appropriate, means. This first association was formed in the spring of 1992. The second (VANLA) followed in the autumn of the same year. Later, another four associations were created in the surrounding municipalities. Together, in the course of 2002, these six associations and cooperatives created the NFW cooperative as an umbrella organization.

The creation of the first two nuclei involved difficult bargaining (for an extensive description, *see* Ploeg 2003). The expectations of participating farmers and the 'surrounding' institutions had to be brought in line with one another. A solid, contractual base for reciprocity had to be constructed, without either of the parties falling victim to any opportunistic behaviour by the other. The shape of the cooperatives was influenced by a contract that was agreed with the Minister of Agriculture. This contract gave the cooperatives the legal room to develop and test several novelties: it created a large programme for maintaining alder rows and another for constructing a new peasant trajectory towards sustainability. To create

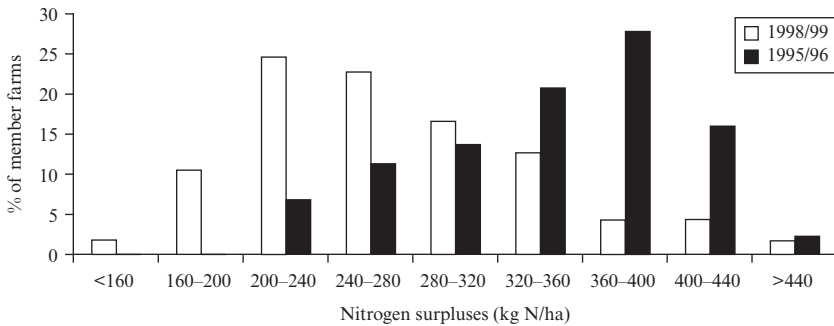


Figure 2.2 *Distribution of nitrogen surpluses among VEL/VANLA member farms*

room for these programmes, specific measures and exemptions from legal obligations (such as the injection of slurry into the subsoil) were granted.

Following this agreement, VEL and VANLA developed their own, locally adapted modules for landscape and nature management, enrolled the majority of farmers in these and thus started a large programme that greatly improved the qualities of the area. At the same time they designed an ‘environmentally friendly’ machine for manure distribution (a machine appropriate for small fields surrounded by hedges and alder rows) and succeeded in engaging nearly all farmers in the management of nutrient accountancy systems. With the widespread application of this accountancy system, environmental progress (included in the contract with the minister) could be monitored adequately.

One strategic aspect of producing effective environmental progress was a twofold modification of participating dairy farms: the use of chemical fertilizer was strongly reduced, while slurry was rebuilt into ‘good manure’. The effects of this typical peasant approach (reducing external inputs and improving internal resources) were impressive: within a few years the frequency curves representing nitrogen losses per hectare changed completely (see Figure 2.2). In 1995–96 the largest number of farms was experiencing losses of 360–400 kg N/ha; by 1998–99 the largest number was in the 200–240 kg N/ha range. In 2001–02 the N-losses were further reduced to an average level of 150 kg/ha. Several farms managed to go far below this level, an indication of further future potential.

The NFW also became involved in a wide range of activities for maintaining and improving landscape and nature. Approximately 80 per cent of the whole area is covered by some form of nature and landscape management. Nowhere else in the country is there such a high coverage. Regional cooperation was crucial in this respect and made it possible to

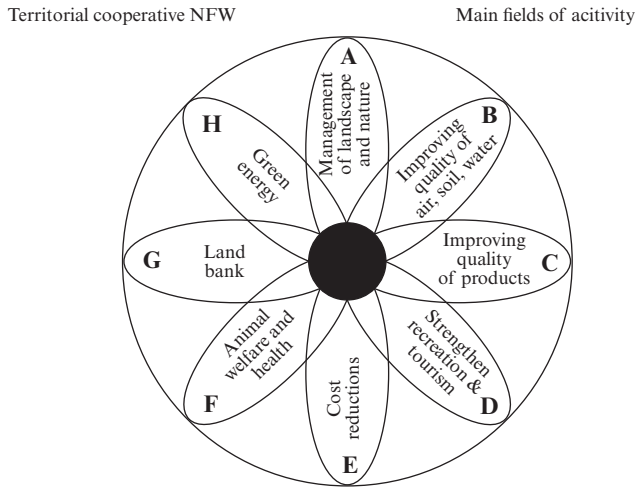


Figure 2.3 The outline of the new plan

achieve qualitative improvements in the landscape and biodiversity that went far beyond what could have been gained from single units of production (Eshuis 2006; Swagemakers 2008). With a cooperative approach, the management of landscape and biodiversity was lifted to the level of the territory as a whole. The cooperative management of nature and landscape created an additional flow of income into the regional economy of 4 million euros per year.

The nature, landscape and environmental tracks were brought together in what eventually became a large and promising new research programme carried out jointly by scientists and farmers. This programme not only shifted several of the boundaries between science and practice; it also shifted, albeit slowly, several boundaries *within* science itself. At the same time, this slowly growing research programme created new levers and mechanisms to further develop local self-regulation. I return to some of the outcomes of this research when discussing novelty production.

From 2003 onwards, the NFW greatly enlarged the spheres in which it operated, or planned to operate. Figure 2.3 gives a synthetic overview of these, with the central overlap highlighting potential synergy. The NFW also prepared the text of a ‘territorial contract’ in which a range of institutional partners declared that they would actively engage in bringing about the goals of the working plan of the NFW. This territorial contract is a major expression of the three impulses discussed before: regional cooperation, rural governance and the creation of a field laboratory.

Those signing the territorial contract included the provincial government, the Ministries of Agriculture and Spatial Planning, the District Water Board, the five local municipalities, the Environmental Federation, Nature Organizations and Wageningen University. The agreement also resulted in the creation of a territorial board in which the NFW and the other partners meet twice a year to discuss any problems associated with the implementation of the working plan. In the longer term, it was assumed that the regional economy would be strengthened, sustainability improved and self-regulation expanded.

A highly interesting feature of the process that led to the territorial contract is the 'mission statement' that the NFW cooperative formulated after several rounds of internal consultation. This contains ten commonly shared values that reflect the history of both the area and the cooperative (see Box 2.1). They also reflect the interests, prospects and the emancipatory ambitions of its members (as reflected, for example, in the claim for 'our own entitlement'). Taken together, they embody the strong social capital that has been forged in the 15 years of successfully expanding the NFW from its first vulnerable nuclei to a now solid and well-rooted territorial cooperative.

From an analytical point of view these commonly shared values might be interpreted as constituting a moral economy (Scott 1976). *Community* (that is, the historically rooted sense of community that is neatly interwoven with the interests and prospects of those who are part of it) plays a central role. Another important feature, echoed in the declaration, is the notion of constant *struggle* (within and against an often difficult environment) with the community as its main vehicle, and the focus on potential *superiority*, 'we perform better'.

NOVELTY PRODUCTION

As indicated earlier, one aspect of the territorial cooperatives is their role as field laboratories, as exemplified by the NFW. The cooperative has, in close cooperation with a group of scientists, explored a range of novelties and linked these with other novelties that together make up an important 'web', that is, a well-integrated constellation of interconnected changes that have far-reaching and multidimensional impacts on farming practice and transition. Novelties are, in a way, *deviations from the rule*, which might be deliberately created or equally can be the unexpected outcome of the messiness of life (Flora, 2005; Remmers 1998; Richards 1985; Wiskerke and Ploeg 2004). Novelties can be new practices, new artefacts or simply changed definitions of a particular situation or task. A key

BOX 2.1 COMMONLY SHARED VALUES SPECIFIED BY THE NFW IN ITS 'MISSION STATEMENT'

1. *Community*

As a community we are proud and strongly aware that over the past hundred years we have managed to shake off the yoke of poverty. In the province of Friesland we are known as headstrong people and we are proud of that. We resolve the conflicts that emerge within our community ourselves, and usually manage to find our own area-specific solution to problems that come from outside. Our sense of community and togetherness is strong, and we expect others to respect this.

2. *The unity of man and land*

Our area is characterized by an attractive, varied and living landscape: a unique unity of man and nature. The landscape has been made by our forefathers. At present, the guardianship of NFW's farmers is complemented by the active involvement of bird protectors and other volunteers, thus securing the further development of nature and landscape. We expect to be given an active role in the management of nature, landscape and environment. For this, a lively and land-based agriculture is indispensable.

3. *Farming gently*

We, the members of the NFW co-operative, are fully aware that the unique unity of man and nature brings about a special responsibility. Farming should be carried out in a responsible and sustainable way: farming gently. Given our historical and current experience and skills, we, more than anyone else, are the obvious entity to ensure that this continues.

4. *Our own rights and entitlement*

The Northern Frisian Woodlands is our area, shaped by us and our forefathers. It is our own right and entitlement. Therefore we are entitled to participate in all planning and decision making that concerns our area.

5. *We perform better*

The NFW Association is made up of six grassroots organizations that have up to 15 years of experience in the management of

programs for nature, landscape and environment. Furthermore, we have a strong cooperative tradition of communally-owned dairy factories, commons, village associations, study groups, voluntary land consolidation schemes and mutual help. We have demonstrated that our way of farming is environmentally sound, and that we sustain nature far better than is achieved through state-imposed regulation. Using our knowledge, our skills and our cooperative tradition, we perform better than would be possible with any generic approach.

6. *Reliability*

In agreements with other parties, the NFW co-operative is a reliable partner. We offer perseverance and reliability and we expect our partners to be trustworthy.

7. *Progressing slowly but steadily*

History has taught us that the battles we are fighting can last a long time. That is why we aim at steady progress, step by step. Sometimes, however, we make big leaps too. Step by step or with big leaps, the common interest of the area is always paramount.

8. *Not alone*

We are convinced that challenges should be faced together, not alone. We have recently built, and maintain, fruitful coalitions (at local, provincial and national level) with politicians, environmentalists, conservationists, scientists, water management boards and farmers' lobby groups. The NFW co-operative will continue along this path.

9. *Caring for the future*

In these times of globalization we stand up for the future and put the future first – the future of the area and its future inhabitants. Thus, future generations can also continue to foster the area, be proud to live and work in it, and enjoy it together with others.

10. *With satisfaction and joy*

We, the members and governors of the NFW co-operative, have worked over the years with joy and satisfaction. This has increased the solidity of the area. We wish to continue in this way and our organization will play an important role in helping us to manage our own affairs in our own area.

element is that they entail a promise, which often implies that things can perhaps be done better. Of course, they may also prove to be a failure, or can take time to become fully comprehended. Novelties ‘infringe’ existing codes of conduct or rules for understanding things. Materially novelties generally produce some kind of rupture. They are not incremental and thus differ from innovations. They may build on already available elements, connections and their specific ordering, but at the same time they imply a re-ordering of elements, connections and overall patterns (see Ploeg et al. 2004). Thus, novelties occur as *agents of change in disguise*. In addition, they emphasize the importance of the local which contains, but also produces, them. Novelties are, as it were, *hidden* in the local and may have to be identified and unpacked in order to allow them to travel to other localities. Furthermore, as novelties represent a deviation from the rule, this implies that the rules may have to be changed or at least ‘softened’ in order to allow ‘things that should not occur’, to occur. This is the theoretical side of the equation. The material side involves the idea that a rule represents some kind of institutionalized code of conduct, that is, it is an integral part of the wider socio-technical regime, as depicted in transition studies (Rip and Kemp 1998). Space has to be deliberately created for a novelty to develop, and the creation of such room might run counter to existing infrastructure, interests, and/or laws. Hence, a central role must be given to various forms of strategic niche management (Roep and Wiskerke 2004).

The NFW cooperative represents a locality where many novelties have been encountered and actively developed. ‘Good manure’ is probably one of the most telling but also most contested. The background to this particular novelty is located in the earlier modernization process, which deeply restructured farming practices and resources. ‘Well-bred manure’ was once a highly valued resource and the making and use of it were closely embedded in local cultural repertoires. However, in accordance with the modernization trajectory, well-bred manure was converted (unintentionally) into a waste product – a ‘nuisance to get rid of’ (Eshuis et al. 2001). But, as many farmers put it, ‘once you have a nuisance on your farm, it has the habit of repeatedly re-emerging’. The loss of organic matter in the subsoil, the increased need for high levels of fertilizer and deteriorating grassland conditions are but a few examples of this ‘reproduction of misery’. For some farmers this worrying state of affairs triggered a multifaceted search to re-create good, or at least improved, manure. Thus, the emphasis on good manure began as a critique of inefficiency and loss. It was especially aimed at a *revitalization of food webs*, that is, the intricate ‘web’ of micro-organisms, worms, herbivores, parasitoids, insects, moles and birds’ that provide ‘a network of consumer-resource interactions

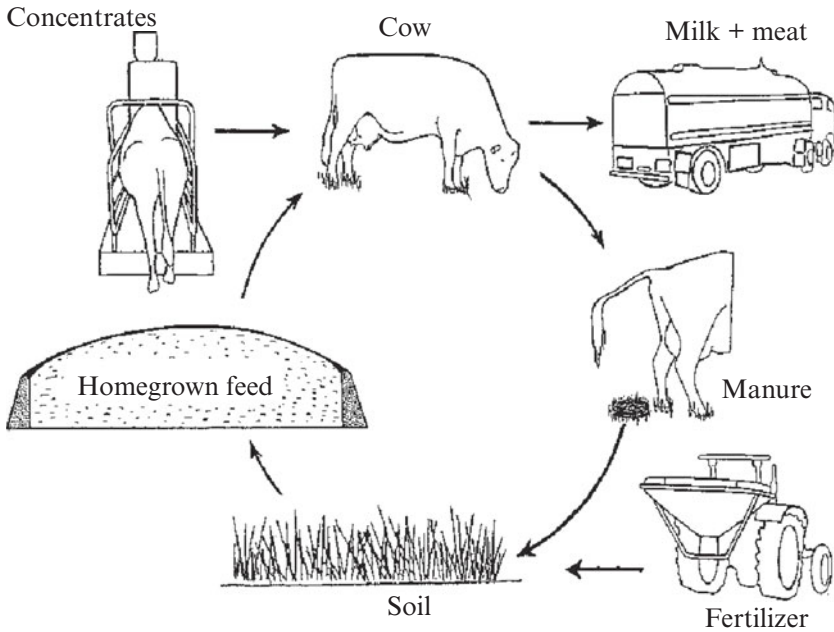


Figure 2.4 The cattle–manure–soil–fodder balance

among a group of organisms, populations or aggregate trophic units' (Smeding 2001: 84). Such food webs can improve and sustain productive capacity by, for example, enhancing the nitrogen delivery capacity of the subsoil, but may also sustain a range of 'higher order natural values', such as birds of prey. In synthesis, through 'good manure' agricultural production was regrounded in local ecology. The relation with *nature* has been restored in so far as agriculture is re-based on *ecological capital*.

Evidently, good manure is not an isolated artefact; it is the outcome of an active and goal-oriented re-patterning of the entire process of agricultural production. This is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

Good manure is slurry with a high carbon–nitrogen (C/N) ratio and a relatively low ratio of ammoniac nitrogen (and consequently an elevated proportion of organic nitrogen). These and many other features are now (after almost 15 years of research) well known, documented and scientifically explained (see, for example, Goede et al. 2003; Reijs 2007; Sonneveld 2004; Verhoeven et al. 2003). However, prior to this, such insights were lacking and farmers' opinions differed widely. There only was the expectation that manure could be improved. It was hoped that rebalancing the soil–plant–animal–manure cycle (see Figure 2.4) would have positive

outcomes on the performance of the farms, as well as on the quality of natural resources at regional level.

In the beginning good or improved manure represented a novelty. It was different in terms of composition, outlook, smell and effects. It also differed in its history, that is, in its making. However, exponents of the Dutch agricultural expert system considered good manure to be a *monstrosity*, something that, according to available insights, should and would not work (see for a general discussion Long and Long 1992). However, it is now abundantly clear that, when combined with good application techniques, good manure improves soil biology, which in turn (that is, through the augmented autonomous nitrogen delivery of the soil) allows for the production of more and better fodder with less chemical fertilizer (Ploeg et al. 2006). Feeding cattle with this improved fodder leads to less stress in the dairy herd, with fewer veterinary interventions, greater longevity, and to milk containing more protein and fat and finally – again – good manure (Reijs 2007). Thus the cycle is closed and a new, self-sustaining balance is created that from an environmental point of view is superior to the model imposed by the state: since nitrogen losses and ammonia emissions are far lower (Groot et al. 2007; Huijsmans et al. 2004; Sonneveld and Bouma 2004).

The construction of this, now widely accepted and scientifically supported, re-patterning of the social and natural microcosm of dairy farms, took many years to develop. It took also the concerted action of 60 dairy farmers belonging to the first nuclei of the NFW working with a multidisciplinary group of scientists which together operated outside the vested routines and interests of the expert system. The approach has spread, like ink dots, all over the country, taken up by farmers who *see* its positive impact on the economy of the farm unit. Monetary expenditure is reduced and additional benefits are realized through increased longevity and improved milk content.

An important aspect of novelty production in the NFW cooperative is that it is an unfolding programme, in which the initial novelties provoke additional ones. Thus novelties are strung together in a chain that often develops in unexpected directions and which helps consolidate the individual novelties as part of a coherent whole. Figure 2.5 shows how the initial novelty, good manure, was translated into a range of interconnected novelties. One might consider this web as an unfolding programme that is multiple layered: it involves and reshapes the practice of farming; it constitutes the core of the activities of the cooperatives and it translates into scientific research that enters areas that were previously almost unknown. Is it possible, for instance, to go beyond an autonomous nitrogen delivery capacity of say 200 kg/ha/year on sandy soils? Is it possible

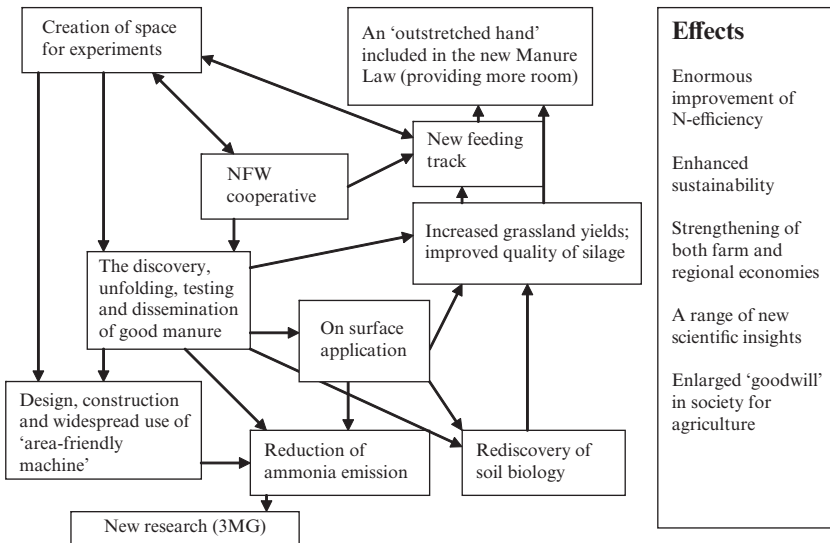


Figure 2.5 A web of interconnected novelties

to assess the environmental qualities of an area with new smart systems that go beyond the current segmentation and atomization? Under what conditions might self regulation become a vehicle of transition? These are some of the new questions that the growth of the web has triggered which might, in turn, result in new solutions and generate further new novelties.

As indicated in Figure 2.5, one benefit of good manure was that of creating an 'outstretched hand'. This is political jargon used in the Netherlands to describe a major amendment of a law (in this case the Manure Law), which allows *local* exceptions to a *global* set of rules imposed on farming. Here it is notable that the web of novelties extends beyond the (geographical) boundaries of the area of the NFW: it extends into agrarian policy-making, science, improved soil biology 'beneath' the area, enhanced value flows in the regional economy and greater social 'goodwill' for farming.

Taken together, the many novelties, their careful co-ordination and active development in widening webs have had major effects. First, there has been a reversal in the interrelations between economy and the environment. Within the NFW the classic zero-sum game has been converted into a realignment in which there is considerable synergy between the two. A second reversal concerns the change from mutual distrust to negotiated cooperation between farmers and state organizations. The third relates to the change from the single farm to the territory as unit of operation,

allowing issues of landscape, biodiversity and environmental quality to be discussed and dealt with *at the most appropriate level*. A fourth and final reversal I wish to touch on is the cultural reversal among participants. Where once despair reigned, it is now firmness (as expressed in commonly shared values), hope and sometimes anger that dominate.

THE ‘AGRARIAN QUESTION’ OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Whatever its location in time and space, farming – understood as the specific organization of the agricultural process of production – needs to articulate, in a well-balanced way, with nature (especially the ecosystems on which the agricultural process of production is grounded), the wider society in which it is embedded and the interests and prospects of those directly involved in the process of production (*see also* Figure 2.6). If one or more of these axes enters into a disequilibrium, an ‘agrarian question’

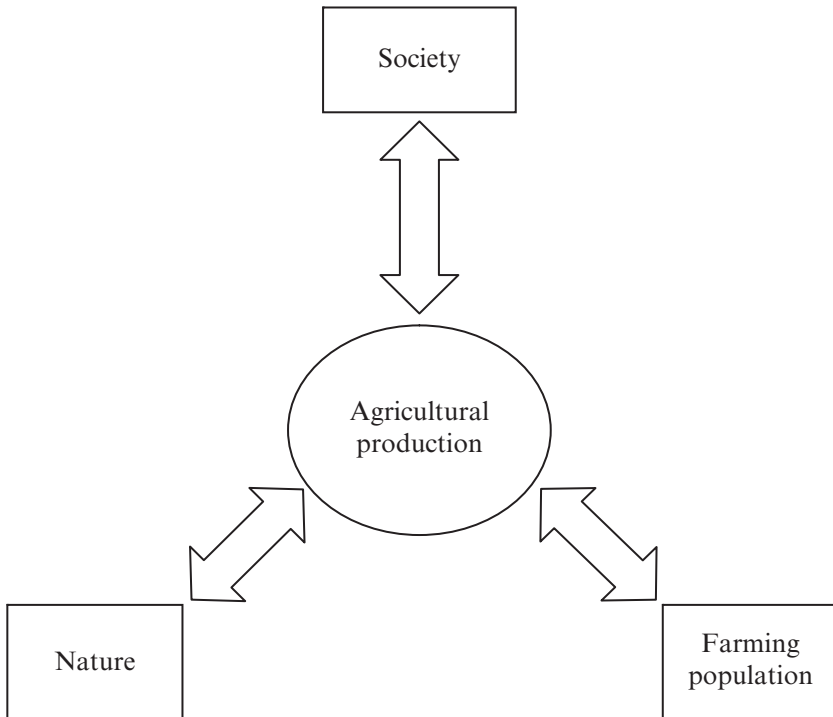


Figure 2.6 The contours of the agrarian question

will emerge; especially when such disequilibrium appears permanent rather than temporary and/or when its effects impact heavily on large and ever-extending domains of the social and natural worlds.

The specific patterning of the agrarian processes of production (and the associated processes of processing and distribution) have often provoked intolerable social conditions which, in turn, have triggered socio-political struggles over access to, and control over, the land (an excellent analytical overview can be found in Paige 1975; *see also* Huizer 1973; Wolf 1969). Such a patterning can also run counter to the broader developmental needs of society as a whole: seriously hindering the processes of capital accumulation and/or the formation of more productive employment (Bernstein 2006). The patterning of agricultural production can also give rise to other expressions. Contemporary examples include seriously contaminated food, local scarcities, the destruction of beautiful landscapes and the contribution that farming makes to global warming. Equally, some particular ways of farming can enrich nature while others tend to destroy the ecosystems (or 'nature') upon which they are based. This destruction might occur *in situ*; or occur far away as a result of worldwide commodity flows.

Historically a disarticulation on one axis has often been reflected on, and accompanied by, a disarticulation on another. Thus, José Carlos Mariátegui (1925), who was the first Latin American scholar who identified and analysed (in Marxist terms) the agrarian question of his time as '*el problema de la tierra*', simultaneously analysed it as '*el problema del indio*' (that is as a constellation that ran counter to the needs, interests and prospects of the peasant population). This implies that it is not sufficient to diametrically oppose an 'agrarian question of capital' to another one of 'labour' (as done by Bernstein, 2007), since the two are often just different sides of the same coin.

The agrarian question of the twenty-first century might be characterized as a state of *generalized disarticulation*: it is no longer of a local nature but is a *global* crisis. All over the world major and sometimes seemingly irreversible disruptions in the interrelations between farming, society, nature and the interest and prospects of farmers are emerging. From an analytical point of view, this multiple disarticulation is due to the rise of new socio-technical regimes and the simultaneous globalization of food markets. The 'mechanics' of these regimes (technical prescriptions, legal requirements, artefacts as engineered plants and animals, trading procedures, expertise, and so on) and globalized markets (through which prices are defined globally, irrespective of local or regional scarcities or gluts) have moved the processes of agricultural production away from the once self-evident parameters imposed by nature, society and the interests and prospects of farmers. The new and now

dominant regimes have reoriented the processes of production, directly and indirectly, towards new ‘system requirements’ that above all else, reflect the logic of the financial capital embodied in processing and trading companies and the need for extended state control.²

At the global level, regimes with very different characteristics are increasingly being brought in line with this new global reality. This is occurring in a number of ways: through the dismantling of national agricultural policies and associated institutions (and the simultaneous expansion of global coordination mechanisms such as WTO, EuroGap, and so on); through increased and centralized control over genetic resources by a limited number of transnational companies; and through a worldwide displacement of local knowledge systems by new, scientifically grounded, expert systems. Thus, globalization occurs *not* primarily through the internationalized flows of commodities, ideas and people,³ *but* through the subordination and reorganization of local and regional farming systems to just one grammar, that is, the one entailed in, and imposed by, the increasingly interlocked socio-technical regimes (Goodman and Watts 1997; McMichael 1994). The increasingly global markets are an important part of these regimes implying, in the words of Burawoy (2007: 4), that ‘the mode of exchange oppresses the mode of production’. As a consequence, for the first time in history, the agrarian question is becoming a universal, instead of a localized, problem.

TERRITORIAL COOPERATIVES AND THE ‘AGRARIAN QUESTION’

If we relate the experience of the newly emerged territorial cooperatives (illustrated with the NFW case) to the newly emerging ‘agrarian question’, it might be argued that they represent modest, but nonetheless important, steps in challenging and moving beyond the current agricultural crisis.

First, these cooperatives imply a regrounding of farming so that it is increasingly re-based on the available *ecological capital*⁴ (see also Figure 2.7), while simultaneously further developing this capital. By replacing bought feed and fodder by self-grown fodder, industrial fertilizer by ‘good manure’ and by reducing the levels of stress in the herd (see again Figure 2.4), farmers actively enlarge their autonomy at the farm enterprise level and reduce their dependency on financial and industrial capital. In ‘following such a strategy [these] farmers may be less vulnerable to the ups and downs of the market than big, capital-intensive farms’ (Djurfeldt and Gooch 2002).

Secondly, through their territorial cooperatives, farmers are constructing

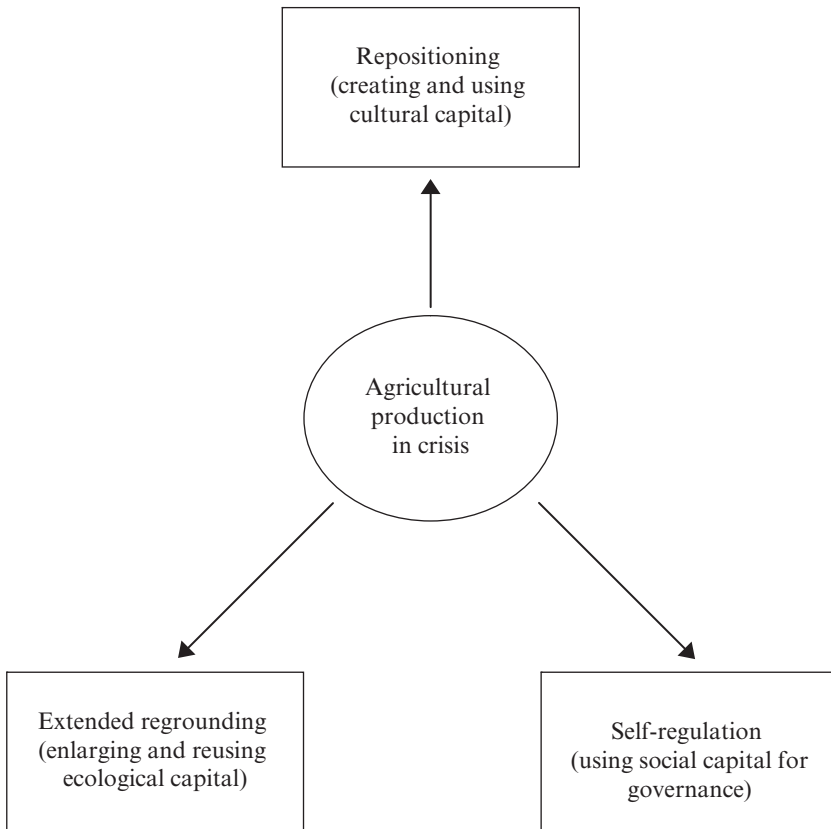


Figure 2.7 Ways out of the current agricultural crisis

new forms of self-regulation that can replace state imposed regulatory schemes. This allows them to align the specific patterning of farming (and its development through time) with their own interests, prospects and knowledge. In doing so, they reactivate the *social capital* entailed in the peasantry, which is used to govern local farming and the relations in which it is embedded, thereby challenging and sometimes replacing imposed regulatory schemes.

Thirdly, territorial cooperatives engage in a repositioning of farming vis-à-vis society at large. Repositioning is about the creation, use and further unfolding of *cultural capital*. An important element of it involves taking care of nature, the landscape and the environment. Repositioning also implies the creation of new interrelations between food production and consumption (Miele 2001). Through such new practices farming

reconstitutes itself and its value vis-à-vis society at large, so its value extends beyond commodity relations but becomes embedded in new normative frameworks and thus, as it were, ‘relocalized’.

Together, regrounding, repositioning and the struggle for self-regulation constitute important lines of defence that aim to sustain farming while redesigning its productive practices through complex and often innovative processes of novelty production. The many activities developed along these lines might be understood as so many *local responses* to a generalized (or *global*) agrarian crisis. Together they reduce dependency on financial and industrial capital and on the state. They imply the creation of more space for manoeuvre, within which ecological, cultural and social capital can be mobilized and used as important (non-commodity) resources for farming.

In synthesis, territorial cooperatives represent an organized attempt to operate *simultaneously* on the three interfaces previously discussed. They reposition farming vis-à-vis wider society. They reground farming on available (and newly developed) ecological capital. And, they reintroduce the actors directly involved in farming into the arena where the future of local and regional agriculture is defined. In doing so, territorial cooperatives are a response to the agrarian crisis, and simultaneously help to defend income and employment levels. Responding to the major distortions created in recent decades summarized in Figure 2.6 (as disarticulations on the axes) brings about many reductions in costs, associated with the use of external inputs, new benefits and often far reaching reductions in transaction costs (see, for example, Groot et al. 2006).

ARE INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS ABLE TO ‘TRAVEL’?

Territorial cooperatives undoubtedly represent a major institutional innovation within the Northwest European context. And, although similar initiatives are emerging in other places as well, there is no a priori reason to assume that they might be relevant and applicable elsewhere. According to transition theories at least three conditions need to be met for this to occur. First, the new institutional arrangements need to fit with relative factor prices (Hayami and Ruttan 1985) in both the original and in the subsequent spaces. Secondly, they need to be ‘unpacked’, that is, to be ‘stripped’ of the specificities of the locality in which they were born in order to move to other spaces. Thirdly, they need to match the collective memory and the moral economy of the places to which they ‘travel’. Only if these

three conditions are met will it be possible to integrate these arrangements within the prevailing patterns of path dependency (North 1990).

For each of these conditions there are very large differences between north-west Europe and south-east Asia. However, there are also some commonalities that might be strategic in this respect. The first is, that regardless of the many differences, a considerable part of the farming populations of both NW Europe and SE Asia consist of peasants (Ploeg 2008). Peasants typically try to enlarge their autonomy – not only at farm enterprise level but also at higher levels of aggregation (for example, in the territory). This is especially the case when they are facing a multidimensional agrarian crisis. In this context territorial cooperation emerges as a strategic vehicle for enlarging autonomy, in different, interrelated ways and at several, interlinked levels: as illustrated by the NFW case. In NW Europe territorial cooperatives draw on historical tradition and repertoires (or, more generally, the specificity of available social capital). Enlarging autonomy through cooperation was a major response to the first agrarian crisis of the 1880s, just as regrounding farming on ecological capital was crucial in resisting the impact of the second large agrarian crisis of the 1930s. In both episodes ongoing novelty production was a distinctive feature. From this line of reasoning it might be assumed that in SE Asia the very rich array of historic and more recent experiences which involved differently balanced collective and private responses (Kung and Lin 2007) offer a promising point of departure for locally adapted forms of territorial cooperation that reflects the richly textured available social capital.

A second commonality relates to the fact that scarcities can no longer be defined solely in neoclassical terms. Today, issues such as access, transaction costs, the uniqueness of products and the governance of markets are far more important than relative factor prices. The capability, for instance, to demonstrate in a transparent and convincing way, that food is sustainably produced is more important, for both access to markets and farm continuity, than the match between the organization of production and the relative prices of land, labour and capital. This applies as much in SE Asia as it does in NW Europe and is not only true of products that enter global circuits but also to the rapidly growing range of products and services referred to as ‘non-importables’, which are produced, delivered and consumed locally. For example, the considerable and rapidly growing middle class in China (currently estimated to include some 300 million people (Yep 2002)) is creating demand for agro-tourism facilities in specific parts of the country and organically farmed produce. Cultural capital, that is, the capacity to produce and to ‘consume’ distinctiveness and attractiveness is decisive in these new markets. This typically requires

new territorially centred institutional arrangements which tie together supply and demand.

The third commonality requires less discussion here. Both NW Europe and SE Asia are facing the challenge of reversing developmental trajectories that give rise to considerable contamination and a gradual, and sometimes irreversible, destruction of valuable natural resources. This is especially true for agriculture and implies the active involvement of farmers and peasants whose knowledgeable and goal oriented activities hold the key to realigning economic and ecological objectives. In areas, such as SE Asia, where ‘skill-oriented technologies’ (Bray 1986) dominate and ‘household responsibility’ (Chen and Davis 1998: 124) holds sway, there is huge potential for such an approach – a potential that again mirrors historical precedents and collective memory.

Finally, one major difference between the two regions needs to be highlighted. Since the mid-1980s European agriculture has been facing an overall ‘squeeze’: with stagnating or declining prices (temporary turbulence apart) and rising costs, which together reduce the overall agrarian income per country (or per region). By contrast, south-east Asian agriculture, and especially Chinese agriculture, is experiencing the opposite. The gradual creation of a market economy (from the 1980s onwards) had a positive impact on income levels in agriculture (Brauw et al. 2004; Huang and Rozelle 2007). Temporary labour migration also contributes considerably to rural incomes (Zhigang and Song 2007: 209) and the recent elimination of a wide range of taxes on farming has further enlarged total agrarian income. Whether this different ‘macro trend’ will facilitate or hinder the creation of new, territorially based institutional arrangements is an, as yet, unresolved question.

NOTES

1. These segments might easily conflict. Slurry injection in the spring, which is legally required in most parts of the Netherlands for instance, kills many young birds and destroys many nests. It can also be detrimental for soil biology and thus reduce the available food for birds and chicks. Operating the huge equipment needed for injection can be difficult in small fields with surrounding hedgerows and increases the pressure to remove hedgerows and enlarge fields.
2. Both requirements presuppose a considerable degree of standardization to allow for planning and control. It is precisely at this point that the interests of the state and of financial capital coincide and interact with those of modern science (Christis, 1985).
3. The oldest available farm accounts (from the sixteenth century) clearly show that even then European farming was integrated with the global circulation of many commodities (Slicher van Bath, 1958; for a summary in English language *see* van der Ploeg 2003, ch. 2). On the other hand, in *today’s* agriculture some 80 per cent of food is consumed within

the same area in which it has been produced. The simultaneous coexistence of the global and the local, in the past as well as in the present, is striking.

4. In his discussion on food webs, which are a decisive feature of ecological capital, Smeding argues that 'one important solution . . . for agriculture in the industrialised countries could be the development of farming systems that are economically based on utilisation of biodiversity and that also harbour conservation worthy species' (2001: 131; *see also* Altieri 1999). Solid food-webs, embedded in adequate ecological structures might also considerably strengthen the resilience of plant-animal production systems and reduce the levels of 'stress' which pose a major problem in today's agricultural production systems.

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3. Rural livelihoods and agrarian change: bringing class back in

Henry Bernstein

INTRODUCTION

This chapter proposes and illustrates an argument for bringing class back in to the analysis of rural poverty and its causes, with implications for development policy. For present purposes, development policy is understood broadly as intervention aiming (at least rhetorically) to achieve advances in agricultural production, more secure livelihoods and greater welfare in the countryside. The argument hinges on seven theses about agrarian change in the contemporary world that aim to identify some of the class dynamics that underlie the issues that development policies address in different ways, more or less directly, coherently and plausibly. The conditions of development policy are themselves partly shaped by the effects of past policies, including their unintended consequences which may outweigh the realisation of their intended objectives (and typically do?).¹

The seven theses are generated from within materialist political economy. Adapting the ‘mission statement’ of the *Journal of Agrarian Change*, I understand political economy as ‘investigation of the social relations and dynamics of production and reproduction, property and power’. The classic questions of political economy that address the social relations of production and reproduction are:

- Who owns what? (Social relations of different ‘property’ regimes)²
- Who does what? (Social divisions of labour)
- Who gets what? (Social divisions/distribution of income)
- What do they do with it, and how? (Social relations of consumption, reproduction, accumulation).

The sites and scales of application of these questions extend from households to ‘communities’ to regional as well as national and global economic formations. In circumstances of generalized commodity production

(capitalism), the social relations of production and reproduction signalled by these questions are *universally*, albeit *not exclusively*, relations of class.

Next I suggest seven ‘coordinates’ of the conditions of any agrarian production. To switch metaphors, they provide some elementary building blocks for conceptualizing and considering any set of agrarian processes and the social relations through which they take place:

- (i) Natural/environmental conditions of farming.
- (ii) Productive forces or ‘powers of labour’, comprising the instruments of labour and knowledge applied in farming (and the wider culture that generates them).
- (iii) How access to land (the object of labour) and the tools for working it (instruments of labour) are organized.
- (iv) How the labour processes of farming are organized.
- (v) Claims on the products of farming, and how they are distributed and used for purposes of social reproduction (and accumulation).
- (vi) The productivity of farming, in terms of both of land and labour.
- (vii) The size/density of population that farming can support.

Table 3.1 situates the four key questions of political economy in relation to the seven ‘coordinates’ of agrarian production suggested. This leaves some cells (under ‘key questions’) empty, although there are evident connections both in evolutionary accounts of agricultural technology, demography and social organization,³ and in the preoccupations of current policy discourses which I return to.

SOME ‘COORDINATES’ OF AGRARIAN CHANGE IN MODERN HISTORY

First I use Table 3.1 to specify some simple, highly stylized, ideas about agrarian change in the modern world. Like all such exercises, this does considerable violence to the specificities, complexities and contradictions of historical processes and experiences and responses to them. Its utility rests in the extent to which it provides a guide to how agrarian change in the modern world has been ‘modelled’ in various theories (in economics, political economy and sociology), and how those theories have been contested ideologically, politically and in terms of policy.

The exercise can begin with a standard model of agrarian economy/society comprised of peasant producers who work land owned or otherwise controlled by a class of (feudal) landed property and/or a pre-industrial state.⁴ Peasant production is small scale, using relatively simple

Table 3.1 The four key questions of political economy in relation to the seven 'coordinates' of agrarian production

Conceptual 'coordinates' of farming systems	Key questions
(i) Natural/environmental conditions of farming	
(ii) Productive forces or 'powers of labour', comprising the instruments of labour and knowledge applied in farming (and the wider culture that generates them)	
(iii) How access to land (the object of labour) and the tools for working it (instruments of labour) are organized	1. Who owns what?
(iv) How the labour processes of farming are organized	2. Who does what?
(v) Claims on the product of farming	3. Who gets what?
(vi) The productivity of farming, in terms of both of land and labour	4. What do they do with it? (Consumption/reproduction; investment/accumulation)
(vii) The size/density of population that farming can support	

technologies (or, at least, technologies centred on human energies and those of draft animals), and provides both the 'subsistence' (simple reproduction) of producers and surplus labour appropriated in the form of rents and taxes by ruling classes. The latter use it to for their consumption and to reproduce their social and cultural domination (including their armies) rather than for accumulation or expanded reproduction through investment in increasing the productive forces/'powers of labour'. This model is held to characterize agrarian civilizations from about 10 000 BCE onwards until the world-historical changes that followed Britain's pioneering transition to capitalist agriculture from say, the sixteenth century, and its subsequent industrial revolution.⁵

The transition from precapitalist ('feudal' and other) to capitalist agriculture (and landed property), and its links with, or contributions to, industrialization, could proceed along various 'paths', albeit with a common destination. The first key step in those paths, realized by very different means, was the abolition of predatory landed property and its historic exactions from the peasantry. Broadly speaking, the necessity of this first step was a point of convergence between very different ideological positions and programmes: bourgeois, populist and socialist/communist.

The abolition of predatory landed property was widely agreed across such different positions as a necessary if not sufficient condition of a second step: transforming agricultural production itself, by removing obstacles to productive investment in land and the means of working it, thereby increasing yields and the productivity of labour.⁶ And this, of course, was the terrain of intense, and often violent, divergence, conflict and social struggle.

The ‘incentives’ or compulsions to transform agricultural production could be rooted in different forms of social relations and dynamics: whether generated by processes of commodification of land and labour power (the development of capitalism) or by a socialist organization of agriculture attempted successively in the USSR, China and Vietnam following the overthrow of classes of landed property and the political structures which supported them. The development of commodity production might be ‘immanent’ in certain historical conditions and/or driven (and regulated) by political authority, as in modern colonialism and the would-be ‘developmental’ states of the South that followed independence from colonial rule.⁷ For all the diversity of historical experience and massive social upheaval underlying these few observations,⁸ various versions of modernization – ‘immanent’ or managed capitalist, state-promoted (‘developmental’), state socialist, and their hybrids – came to centre on, and share, a notion of *economies of scale* as fundamental to a productive hence ‘progressive’ agriculture, as implied by the following:

This ‘primary stage of China’s socialism’, which would last until the middle of the twenty-first century, was dominated by the transformation of China from ‘an agricultural country where farming is based on manual labour and where people engaged in agriculture constitute the majority of the population . . . into a modern industrial country where non-agricultural workers constitute the majority . . . The fundamental task of a socialist society is to expand the productive forces’. (Gittings 2005: 116, citing Zhao Ziyang’s report to the Thirteenth Party Congress, October 1987)

Economies of scale are the key to raising the productivity of labour, in which the mechanization of farming operations (application of inorganic sources of energy) is emblematic. The mechanical basis of the productivity of labour connects with the biochemical means of raising the productivity of land (yields) through irrigation, improved genetic material (plants, animals), and enhanced applications of improved fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides and feeds: in short, ‘high input–high output’ agriculture. This then is what occupies the strategic sixth cell under ‘key questions’ in Table 3.1, and its links with the blank cells (i), (ii) and (vii). To illustrate: with regard to (i) developing the productive forces entails overcoming the limits

presented to farming by different natural/environmental conditions; with regard to (ii) this in turn requires the development of modern science and its applications to farming; and with regard to (vii) this means that progressively fewer farmers and farm workers can feed progressively larger non-agricultural populations working in other branches of activity (as Zhao Ziyang, above).

The last proposition is highlighted by one of the most robust correlations of modern economic history: that between economic growth and a declining proportion of the working population employed in farming. In 2000, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (as cited by Losch 2004), about three-quarters of the world's 'economically active population' who worked in agriculture (just over 1.3 billion people) were concentrated in China, India and sub-Saharan Africa: some 500 million people in China (or 66 per cent of the total labour force)⁹, 260 million in India (60 per cent), and 200 million in Africa (also 60 per cent).¹⁰ By way of contrast, the proportion of the total labour force employed in agriculture in the USA was 2.1 per cent, in the European Union (then with 15 member countries) 4.3 per cent, in Japan 4.1 per cent, and in Brazil and Mexico 16.5 per cent and 21.5 per cent respectively. Such numbers also suggest a massive gap in labour productivity in farming between the regions and countries where capitalist and 'peasant' farming is concentrated. Thus of the 10 per cent of the world's total agricultural production that is traded internationally, 62 per cent of exports (by value) are accounted for by countries with 15 per cent of the world's population and just 4 per cent of the world's agricultural labour force: 17 per cent each by the USA and the European Union (EU), 15 per cent by Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and 13 per cent by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (Weis 2007: 21).

If raising the productivity of labour is commonly understood as key to developing the productive forces in agriculture, this leads to issues of policy (and more broadly strategy) that have long been contentious, and contested, and continue to be so:

1. One such issue, or set of issues, concerns different ways of attempting to develop the productive forces/'powers of labour' through appropriate technical change; farm size and scale of capitalization (involving alternative or combined types of scale economies) required by different technologies;¹¹ the costs and benefits of different types of technical change and their characteristic forms of social organization (property rights, management, labour regimes, market integration, 'entrepreneurship').
2. The goals of policy, the political, fiscal, and institutional means deployed to implement it, and experiences of implementation, point to

another (massive) set of issues, in which we can incorporate the social consequences, including unintended consequences (as above), of pursuing particular policies of technical and social change in farming.

3. This connects with a third set of issues concerning the relations of agriculture with other sectors and branches of the economy (allocations of public investment; incentives to and regulation of private investment; intersectoral production and consumption linkages, and so on); the policies pursued to develop those other sectors, and their effects; and how, and how effectively, policy frames coordinate the dynamics and processes of national economies with international market integration.
4. The final set of issues, I would suggest, is virtually definitive of the challenge (and indeed the pathos?) of development research and policy, namely, the commitment – at least discursively – to ‘win-win’ solutions to problems of production, livelihood and welfare.¹² That is, to achieve results that produce only winners and no losers – or only those who deserve to lose because they prevent the progress of the general good (like predatory landowners, as above).¹³ Such ‘win-win’ outcomes defy all historical experience to date and, indeed, may be seen as a characteristic delusion of modernity as project (see, for example, Mitchell 2002). With this sombre observation, it is time to move on to my theses.

SEVEN THESES

Thesis 1: Commodification/Generalized Commodity Production

By the time of independence from colonial rule in Asia and Africa, the economies of their former colonial territories were permeated (like those of Latin America) by generalized commodity production, that is, capitalist social relations of production and reproduction.

Commodification is the process whereby the elements of production and social reproduction, including labour power, are produced for market exchange and subject to its disciplines and compulsions. In capitalism, this process is premised on the historical emergence and formation of a fundamental social relation between capital and wage labour, that generates generalized commodity production. This is easily and often misunderstood: generalized commodity production does not mean that all elements of life are necessarily and comprehensively commodified.¹⁴ Rather it signifies that *reproduction can not take place outside the circuits and disciplines of commodity relations*, what Marx termed ‘the dull compulsion of economic forces’. In this sense, to suggest that a social formation

is capitalist by virtue of being founded on the contradiction between wage-labour and capital is not to assert that all – or even the majority of – enterprises in this social formation will conform to a ‘type’ in which capitalists and wage-labourers are present, and which constitutes the measure in relation to which all other forms deviate. What makes enterprises, and more generally social formations, capitalist or not, is *the relations which structurally and historically explain their existence*. What has to be shown in order to ‘prove’ the(ir) capitalist nature is that the social entities and differences which form the social division of labour in such formations are only explicable in terms of the wage-labour/capital relation. (Gibbon and Neocosmos 1985: 169, my emphasis)¹⁵

The dynamic of commodification can also be hypothesized (problematized and investigated) for the post-(state) socialist circumstances of China and Vietnam in their current periods of market-oriented reform, and also of the former USSR (Russia, CIS).¹⁶

Thesis 2: Commodification and Small-scale Farming

Generalized commodity production includes the internalization of capitalist social relations in the organization of small-scale farming.

I prefer ‘small-scale’ farming as a *descriptive* term, and petty commodity production as an *analytical* term, to notions of ‘peasants’ or ‘household’ or ‘family’ farmers in the historical circumstances of generalized commodity production specified above.¹⁷ Petty commodity producers combine the class ‘places’ or locations of both capital and wage labour, hence have to reproduce themselves as both. Of course, processes of the commodification of small-scale farming display massive variation, one aspect of which concerns the sequences and degrees to which various elements of production and reproduction are commodified. For example, one kind of sequence is the commodification of, first, crops (‘output’), then some means of consumption, then tools and other ‘instruments’ of labour (‘inputs’), then labour itself (as the commodity labour power), and finally land (the object of labour).¹⁸

Thesis 3: Commodification, Small-scale Farming, Social Differentiation

The combination of the class places of capital and labour in agricultural petty commodity production provides the basis for understanding the class differentiation of farmers, as follows:

- (a) Those able to reproduce themselves as capital on an expanded basis can accumulate productive assets (petty capitalists, corresponding to ‘rich peasants’).

- (b) Those able to reproduce themselves on a ‘simple’ basis (and generationally) constitute relatively stable petty producers (corresponding to ‘middle peasants’).
- (c) Those unable to reproduce themselves as capital increasingly struggle to reproduce themselves as labour (sometimes directly linked to their struggles to maintain themselves as capital in strongly adverse conditions), and tend to become an element of the reserve army of labour, in Marx’s term (1976: ch. 25) – they correspond to erstwhile ‘poor peasants’.

Two further observations are useful here. One concerns the robust ‘family’ (or ‘middle peasant’) farm. This is the ideal model or aspiration of agrarian populism. Typically, however, that aspiration is compromised by the analytical problem that the robust ‘family’ farm is naturalized as a kind of norm from which other social forms (capitalist farms on one hand, ‘landless peasants’ on the other) deviate. In the framework proposed here, the relatively stable ‘family’ farm has to be problematized both analytically and concretely, that is to say, historically. This includes investigating whether and how the formation and reproduction of such farms are *the result of processes of differentiation* as ‘entry’ and reproduction costs (and risks) rise in the course of commodification, whether there is competition for land and/or the labour to work it, and so on. One aspect of this is the extent to which the operations, and relative stability, of such farms are dependent on sources of income from outside own-account farming (see theses 4 and 5 following).

Another aspect links to a second observation, namely, that *a critical condition of existence of petty commodity production in farming is rural labour markets*, which supply at least part of its labour needs. Instances are found across all three types of farms differentiated by class relations/dynamics as sketched above but, especially, the hiring of labour by middling petty commodity producers and the sale of labour power in the countryside by poor farmers are often overlooked, both analytically and empirically.¹⁹

Chris Bramall (2004) provides a careful analysis of social differentiation among Chinese farmers from the 1930s through the various phases of reform and restructuring in the countryside since the late 1940s, and rejects the standard view that the ‘second land reform’ of 1981–83 accounts for the subsequent surge in grain production based in egalitarian individual household farming. I would guess that wage labour in Chinese farming today – both locally and through migration – is probably more widespread than often supposed. To test this requires more research, and ethnographically sensitive research, into ‘vernacular’ agricultural labour markets (on the analogy of vernacular land markets, see note 18).

Thesis 4: Agrarian Capital beyond the Countryside

Agrarian capital can have a range of sources beyond the countryside and its 'original', localized (indigenous) rural classes of landed property and peasantry; *the range of non-agrarian, non-indigenous sources of agrarian capital is likely to expand and diversify, and their significance to increase, over the history of capitalism.*

Different types of agrarian capital (in capitalist and petty commodity production) are increasingly likely to be combined or articulated with forms of activity and income in non-agricultural sectors, or spaces in social divisions of labour, with (variant) effects for the specific forms of organization, scale, economic performance, and simple or expanded reproduction of farming enterprises (connecting with the next thesis). There are some indications in China of capital accumulated from outside farming being invested in agriculture and horticulture (including orchards), especially in more profitable branches in the most dynamic economic zones, both to meet growing urban demand and for export.

Thesis 5: Rural Labour beyond the Farm

There are similar tendencies to the decomposition of (notionally) once 'pure' classes of agrarian labour that have to diversify their forms, and spaces, of employment (and self-employment) to meet their simple reproduction needs as labour ('survival'), and in the case of petty commodity producers as capital too.

This is a thesis of massive significance because it suggests that the practices, fortunes and prospects of small farmers/petty commodity producers are often – and, I would argue, increasingly – closely bound up with their activities outside their farms and the income those activities yield to their consumption funds (reproduction as labour) and investment funds (reproduction as capital).

In effect, such off-farm income typically makes a vital contribution to the viability (reproduction) or otherwise of 'small-scale' agricultural enterprise, and correspondingly to its tendencies to class differentiation, which it might accelerate or impede, according to circumstances. This is the dynamic underlying such observation that 'non-farm income sources are beyond doubt critical for describing the living standards of farm households in developing countries' (Ellis 1998: 10), and that 'Diversification is the norm' (Barrett et al. 2001: 315). These observations in turn link to the argument that non-farm activities and sources of income play an increasing role in the reproduction of households which retain some basis in land and/or farming, to a greater or lesser extent, and/or retain rural residence.

This type of argument has been formulated with various emphases to address different types of circumstances; for example, and very schematically the views that non-farm activity and income are pursued by those ‘*too poor to farm*’ or ‘*too busy to farm*’.

‘Too poor to farm’ suggests that farming can not meet the reproduction needs of rural people, and is associated with ‘de-agrarianization’ (Bryceson 1996) or ‘depeasantization’ (Bryceson 1999), in sub-Saharan Africa, manifested in the growing proportion of rural incomes ‘derived from non-farm sources’ (Bryceson 1999: 172). Bryceson explains this tendency by the ‘fundamental problem’ – exacerbated, if not solely caused, by structural adjustment and globalization – of ‘African peasant agriculture’s inability to compete in today’s global market’ (1999: 185). ‘De-agrarianization’ in sub-Saharan Africa can also be linked to evidence of a trend of diminishing farm size, or area cultivated, and with fewer ‘inputs’ (other than labour), especially by poorer farmers (Ellis 2006).²⁰

The apparently more ‘virtuous’ notion of ‘too busy to farm’ applies when other opportunities for employment and (other) self-employment outweigh the benefits of (full-time) farming. This has more affinity with the inherited view that non-agricultural employment automatically replaces, or displaces, employment in farming in the course of modern economic development, albeit in this instance without the direct and coercive dispossession of the ‘peasantry’ suggested by the ‘classic’ model of primitive accumulation (in effect, a dynamic of enclosure: Marx 1976: pt 8). Significantly, this more virtuous notion is advanced in relation to Southeast Asia by Rigg (2006; also Rigg and Nattapoolwat 2001), that is, a region of dynamic (if volatile) economic change/expansion of livelihood opportunities, in contrast to the economic stagnation/pressures on livelihood of sub-Saharan Africa. For some ‘too poor to farm’ and ‘too busy to farm’ might correspond to the distinction in livelihood ‘diversification’, and its determinants, between ‘diversification for survival’ and ‘diversification for accumulation’ (Hart 1994, as cited by Ellis 1998). This, of course, is a *class* distinction which has to be applied to understand patterns of social differentiation *within* as well as between regions and rural populations.²¹

Since the 1980s China presents probably the most dramatic instance in modern history – in terms of numbers and pace – of such ‘diversification’, manifested in both rural non-farm employment and labour migration (see Christiansen, Chapter 5 in this volume), although the rate of change registered by both appears to be slowing now (on the former *see* Eyferth et al. 2003, on the latter Cook 2008).

In effect, this thesis, together with thesis 4, points to how the seven ‘coordinates’ of farming listed earlier, have to be reconceptualized in order

to understand how the social relations that structure them can ‘straddle’ both on- and off-farm activity, and working for self and for others – and in a great variety of ways, which is the challenge to empirical investigation. What empirical results reveal in so many instances is that off-farm employment and income is increasingly necessarily to sustain ‘small-scale’ agriculture, including the enterprises of the poorest farmers. Where this is the case, the remarkable ‘persistence’ of small-scale farming cannot be taken as evidence that ‘small is beautiful’ (efficient, equitable, resilient, and so on), but rather recommends fresh thinking about the conditions of reproduction of rural ‘classes of labour’, which I come back to below.

Thesis 6: Agriculture beyond the Farm

The agricultural ‘sector’ today is increasingly, if unevenly, integrated, organized and regulated by the relations between agrarian classes (capitalist landed property, agrarian capital, wage labour) and types of farms (capitalist and petty commodity production), on one hand, and (often highly concentrated) capital upstream and downstream of farming, on the other hand.

So far the terms ‘agriculture’ and ‘farming’ may have appeared to be interchangeable, and indeed are all too commonly used thus. The point here is that ‘agriculture’ is not simply a set of relations between agrarian classes (landed property, agrarian capital, labour) nor an aggregation of farm enterprises of different types. Any once simple identity of ‘agriculture’ and ‘farming’ is no longer tenable, which links with the next thesis.²²

Thesis 7: Globalization

The integration and regulation of agriculture increasingly operate through global as well as national (and more local) social divisions of labour, circuits of capital, commodity chains, and sources and types of technical change (including in transport and industrial processing as well as farming).²³

This is true of the longer history of capitalism and its international character (see, *inter alia*, the excellent account by Schwartz 2000), but has undergone what some consider a qualitative change with globalization since the crucial decade of the 1970s (the ‘acceleration of history’ suggested by Weis’s *decades* of revolutionary change, quoted in note 5).

Important ‘globalizing’ tendencies that affect agriculture directly include new strategies of sourcing by transnational agribusiness; new forms of organization and regulation of global commodity chains for agricultural products; the high profile of agricultural trade and its regulation in the agenda of, first, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) from the mid-1980s and now of the World Trade Organization (WTO); and

the drive of transnational agribusiness (chemical and seed) companies to patent, monopolize, produce and sell genetic (plant and animal) material, and to lock in farmers (in both North and South) to its use.²⁴ Much has been written on these themes, which may prove to be a major concern with regard to the future, if not immediate, prospects of farming and farmers in China, and I do not explore it further here.²⁵ Nor do I consider here the indirect ways in which processes and projects of globalization affect the lives and livelihoods of small farmers and other rural people, as of ‘classes of labour’ more generally.

I conclude this section with two observations. One is that the histories of combined and uneven capitalist development constantly generate new forms of the social organization of economic life, without destroying earlier forms. The ‘persistence’ of those earlier forms (like so-called ‘traditional peasants’) may represent the exclusion or marginalization of whole groups of the labouring poor as the effect of certain types of capitalist development, or how those groups are incorporated in particular forms of capitalist accumulation.²⁶

The second observation is that as we retrace the histories of capitalist development to the moment of contemporary globalization, a number of inherited identities and distinctions start to break down, hence can obscure rather than illuminate current realities. Key examples of dissolving identities are those of the rural with the agricultural, and of agriculture (as ‘sector’) with farming (as ‘livelihood’). Key examples of dissolving distinctions are those between the rural and the urban (as mutually exclusive sites of livelihood and residence), and between employment (wage worker) and self-employment (petty producer). The massive scale of rural non-farm employment and of labour migration in China, noted above, provides a rich and dynamic arena for research of the dissolution of inherited sociological distinctions and social identities and the formation of new (‘hybrid’) ones.

CLASS RELATIONS AND DYNAMICS

Class analysis has been one of the most contested areas in the social sciences, between those committed to it as well as between them and those who deny its utility. It has also largely passed out of intellectual fashion. It is striking that in the important paper by Ellis (1998) that does much to specify various circumstances, dimensions, determinants and effects of ‘rural livelihood diversification’, class is not mentioned once (albeit occasionally implied).²⁷ To recommend ‘bringing class back in’, then, is to enter a terrain that is certainly difficult or that may be considered redundant,

or both. Here I simply present aspects of my own understanding of class relations and dynamics, and their salience, connecting with the ‘theses’ presented above.

The majority of ‘small farmers’ in a globalizing South are a component of what I term ‘classes of labour’,²⁸ and a component that is neither dispossessed of *all* means of reproducing itself nor in possession of *sufficient* means to reproduce itself. The former is not exceptional nor novel (it was remarked by Lenin in late nineteenth-century Russia). The latter marks the limits of their viability as petty commodity producers. ‘Classes of labour’, then, comprise ‘the growing numbers . . . who now depend – directly *and indirectly* – on the sale of their labour power for their own daily reproduction’ (Panitch and Leys 2000: ix; my emphasis). Classes of labour in the conditions of today’s ‘South’ have to pursue their reproduction through insecure and oppressive – and typically increasingly scarce – wage employment and/or a range of likewise precarious small-scale and insecure ‘informal sector’ (‘survival’) activity, including farming; in effect, various and complex *combinations* of employment and self-employment. In China as elsewhere, many of the labouring poor do this across different sites of the social division of labour: urban and rural, agricultural and non-agricultural, as well as wage employment and self-employment. As noted above, this defies inherited assumptions of fixed, let alone uniform, notions (and ‘identities’) of ‘worker’, ‘peasant’, ‘trader’, ‘urban’, ‘rural’, ‘employed’ and ‘self-employed’, and also contributes to what I call the fragmentation of classes of labour.

Classes of labour are fragmented, in the first place, because, as suggested earlier, in capitalism production and reproduction are structured *universally*, but *not exclusively*, by relations of class. To paraphrase Balibar (as quoted by Therborn 2007: 88): in a capitalist world, class relations ‘can and should be thought of as *one determining* structure, covering *all* social practices, without being the *only* one’ (emphasis in original).²⁹ In effect, social differences of a typically hierarchical, oppressive and exclusionary nature, of which gender is the most ubiquitous and which often also include race and ethnicity, religion and caste, fragment classes of labour. Thus the ‘structural’ sources of exploitation and inequality inherent in all capitalist production (petty and grand, informal and formal) combine with other forms of social inequality and oppression. Furthermore, it is common for particular capitals to seize on such (relational) differences/divisions – of gender, of generation, of place (town and countryside), and indeed of ethnicity and nationality – in how they recruit labour and organize it in production.³⁰

Second, relative success or failure in labour markets and salaried

employment is typically key to the viability (reproduction) of agricultural petty commodity production, which – in terms of production (and productivity), income, contributions to reproduction, and any possibility of profit – is not distributed equally across the social categories that farm or otherwise have an interest in farming and access to land. Thus there are cross-cutting effects for those in classes of labour who combine self-employment in farming and/or other branches of ('informal economy') activity with wage labour. This means that, as small-scale farmers (and other petty producers), they tend to inhabit a social world of 'relentless micro-capitalism' (Davis 2006: 181). 'Petty exploitation (endlessly franchised) is its essence' (ibid.) at the same time as its size, contours and dynamics are shaped by the larger economic circuits in which it is located and their mutations.

This leads to a third, long-standing and strongly contested, aspect of class analysis (which is indeed its whole rationale for those whose politics commits them to class struggle). So far I have referred to class relations and their dynamics without referring to class struggle waged by collective actors. It can reasonably be asked, then: is it useful to consider class dynamics *without* the formation of observable sociological classes and, by extension, recognizable forms of class identity, 'consciousness' and action? My answer is 'yes', because the analysis of class relations and dynamics helps explain processes of commodification and their consequences, even in the absence of observable sociological classes and class action.³¹ Once more, the general basis for this is explained by Gibbon and Neocosmos (1985: 190) in lucid and concise fashion:

capitalism reproduces class spaces or places on the one hand and actual phenomenal forms of a unitary and distinctive kind not corresponding to the spaces or places on the other (e.g., urban/rural dwellers, industrial workers/ agricultural labourers, urban craftsmen and women peasants, men/women, mental/manual labour, young/old, black/white, regional, national and ethnic differences, and so on). . . [As] classes are produced phenomenally as groups of owners (and hence as buyers and sellers) of specific conditions of production ('capital', 'land', 'labour') . . . *class relations are not simply evident at the phenomenal level* [my emphasis].

In short, to move from the analysis of class relations and dynamics to that of class identities and consciousness, and from there to the analysis of collective ideology and political practice, requires considering a series of further factors and determinations, including those that affect the fragmentation of classes of labour (just sketched), that are as much political and cultural as social and economic, and that require due attention to historical and conjunctural specificity.³² As indicated above, social subjects

necessarily experience the effects not only of class relations but also of a series of other (relational) differences/divisions, illustrated in the quotation from Gibbon and Neocosmos.

It is also well to remember here that the economic and social power of capital, rooted in commodity relations, has to be secured through its political and ideological rule (a necessary condition of accumulation). How the rule of capital is constituted and exercised, adapted and reproduced, is better interrogated without assuming any simple instrumentality or coherence in how it seeks to justify its moral order,³³ or assuming that it is equipped with any guarantees of effectiveness in how it perceives, anticipates, assesses, confronts and tries to contain its social contradictions and their effects.

If this is true of capital, then it is equally the case, or even more so, of classes of labour. Some of the issues in the political sociology of collective action by (fragmented) classes of labour are indicated by Mahmood Mamdani (1996: 219, 272): 'translating social facts into political ones' – especially when 'the many ways in which power fragment(s) the circumstances and experiences of the oppressed' are so pervasive an aspect of the 'social facts' – is always contingent and unpredictable. This subverts any simplistic notions of movement from the first to the second term of the Hegelian couplet class-in-itself (structural location, conditions of social existence, objective interests) and class-for-itself (consciousness of class interests, collective action to pursue them), in effect from the socio-economic to the political, above all when this movement is conceived as 'natural' and obstructed only by the machinations of capitalists and bourgeois (or petty bourgeois) politicians, by the practices of policemen and priests (or imams).³⁴ The issue is (re)stated thus by Barbara Harriss-White and Nandini Gooptu (2000: 89): that 'struggle over class' precedes and is a condition of 'struggle between classes'. In their magisterial 'mapping' of 'India's world of unorganized labour', they explore how 'struggles over class' by the working poor are inflected (and restricted) by gender, caste and other social differences/divisions noted above. They suggest that the overwhelming majority of Indian classes of labour 'is still engaged in the first struggle (over class) while capital . . . is engaged in the second' (class offensives against labour).

A final point here, which (further) departs from the class struggle 'purism' of much of the Marxist tradition, is that there may be a 'progressive' substance of social and political struggles which are multi-class in character or otherwise ambiguous in class terms. Classic examples would be some instances of anti-imperialist and other national liberation struggles, including, say, the long struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Contemporary agrarian examples would include the Brazilian MST

(Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) and *Via Campesina* in Latin America, and, I would add, the highly contradictory course of land redistribution in Zimbabwe (Bernstein 2004: 210–20).³⁵ All such struggles nonetheless have their own class dynamics, consequences and effects (of which debate in South Africa today concerning the period since the end of apartheid provides one instructive example).

CLASS, POVERTY, POLICY

A fundamental question confronting development policy is: what produces and reproduces the poverty which it aims (or claims) to overcome? There are two basic approaches to answering this question. One is residual: poverty is an effect of the ‘exclusion’ of certain types of people from the benefits of capitalist or ‘market’ development: small farmers, women, ‘minority’ groups, the ‘informally’ self-employed, those with insufficient human and social capital, and so on. Its logic can only locate the causes of poverty in obstacles to the proper functioning of markets, the inadequacies of some categories of market actors – whether deficits of human or social capital or entrepreneurial ability – or ‘exclusion’ from markets due to negative (‘irrational’?) non-market social and cultural ‘institutions’.³⁶

The other approach is relational: poverty is produced by social inequality, by the social relations and divisions of class, gender, ethnicity, nation, and so on, that make up the actually existing worlds of capitalism, large and small. This is the approach that this chapter has tried to outline conceptually, and to illustrate, with special reference to the dynamics of agrarian change.³⁷

Of course, it is the residual approach to poverty that prevails today in the official discourses and agendas of the big agencies that ‘do’ development. This approach rules out both any (radical) redistribution and a central role for the state in stimulating and managing accumulation. Both were central tenets of much structuralist development economics, and arguably still apply, albeit in highly complex ways in practice, to ‘the Chinese road’ – even if that road leads eventually to a particular version of capitalism. There are two principal thrusts of policy of viewing poverty as residual: to promote the conditions of market-led economic growth and to ‘empower’ those otherwise excluded to share in its labours and rewards.

To conclude this chapter, I sketch some aspects of the four sets of issues about policy proposed earlier in the light of bringing back in class relations and dynamics. All are relevant to China’s continuing rural transformations, albeit articulated and addressed in ways particular to China’s specific politics, institutions and practices of development policy.

1 Developing the Productive Forces/‘Powers of Labour’ in Agriculture

This remains a central preoccupation, albeit one with a host of intrinsic tensions. One such tension is virtually definitive of development theory, policy and practice, namely, the quest to develop production, productivity and growth in ways that also overcome poverty and enhance the security of livelihoods and welfare (see, further, 4 below). In relation to agricultural growth/rural poverty alleviation, that tension is at the core of long-standing debates around the merits of a ‘small farmer’ path of development noted earlier. Some of the key questions that permeate and structure those debates are:

- (a) What are the appropriate interventions necessary for small farmers to flourish? This incorporates and connects further questions about key factors that have been mentioned: technology; property rights and markets in land, and their effects for land distribution; forms of (improved) market access and integration; investment in rural infrastructure and other public goods (education, health), and so on.
- (b) Is small-scale farming able to feed (increasingly) large non-farming populations? That is, a matter of the productivity of labour and size of ‘marketed surplus’ of small-scale farming.
- (c) Can small farmers compete in increasingly integrated global markets, in relation to both imports (food staples, changing demand for types of food staples) and exports (tendencies to systematic overproduction in ‘buyer-driven’ global commodity chains)?
- (d) Is it anticipated or intended that farming populations should remain the same size? Indeed, is it a goal of rural development policy, whether explicit or implicit, to inhibit rural–urban migration?
- (e) Is it anticipated or intended that rural populations will/should combine farming with other sources of income? If so, should those be the target of interventions to boost non-farm rural employment (NFRE)?
- (f) Is it intended, or anticipated, that healthier, better educated rural people are more equipped to find better employment/livelihood opportunities outside farming (and the countryside), and more likely to pursue them?

2 Policy Intervention: Goals, Means, Consequences

The kinds of questions above already touch on goals and possible consequences of interventions to promote a small farmer path of development. And some of those questions, and answers to them, have been

articulated increasingly by those sceptical of small farmer development within the usual currents of development discourse (for example, Ashley and Maxwell 2001; Ellis and Biggs 2001; Rigg 2006), while others have long advocated ‘big(ger) is beautiful’ in farming (for example, Byres 1979; Dyer 1991; Sender and Johnston 2004).

Here I ‘unpack’ a little more some aspects of goals, then means and consequences of development policy. First, as indicated earlier, there is the matter of the coherence of policy frameworks and their typically multiple (and indeed ‘win-win’) objectives. Second, underlying this is an issue, in some ways more profound and certainly ubiquitous, nicely summarized by Alain de Janvry’s question ‘Why do governments do what they do?’ (1983). This is a fundamental question of the *politics* of policy and planning, that always subverts any naïve acceptance at face value of policy discourses and their official rationales, with their distinctive claim to combine seamlessly humane intent and technical expertise (the claim which Foucault’s penetrating analytical gaze fixed upon). The politics of policy can be analysed in terms of responses to powerful social interests (classes of capital) and threats (of social disorder); in terms of the interests, dynamics and tensions internal (and intrinsic?) to regimes and bureaucracies; and of the legitimating ideologies of ‘national’ (or socialist) development and the ‘rule of experts’; and various combinations thereof.³⁸

These aspects, and explanations, of the politics of policy also contribute to grappling with questions concerning the means of its implementation, how they are selected and designed, and the (often unanticipated) ambiguities, tensions and contradictions they confront in practice. This, of course, is an area of massive interest and debate within and across governments and major development agencies, among their critics, both intellectual and activist, and among ‘civil society’ formations – in all their bewildering shapes and sizes – which seek to engage with development interventions and their implementation through varied repertoires and practices of advocacy and organization, ‘resistance’ and pressure, leverage and influence. There is a growing body of studies of why official development policies are so hard to implement effectively in the countryside, whether pursued by imposition or ostensible ‘participation’, by coercion or negotiation and compromise – with these various modalities often generated beyond the gaze of policy planners and designers, and by social dynamics they fail to understand (if they even try).³⁹

These observations in turn bear on the consequences or outcomes of agricultural and rural development interventions. Here I note only that policies that advocate ‘market-led’ development – that is, extending and intensifying commodification, which raises the entry and reproduction costs of viable petty commodity production in farming – are bound to

exacerbate existing forms, and often to create new ones, of class (and other social) differentiation in the countryside. This fundamental tenet of materialist political economy is starting to be recognized, even if class is not mentioned, in mainstream discourses that aim to look beyond the premises of the inherited small farmer model: in proposals to create more robust possibilities of ‘diversification’ (beyond the pursuit of ‘survival’), for example, through NFRE, or, more radically, arguing that the resolution of rural poverty does not lie in farming, or in the countryside, at all (Rigg 2006). Recognition that small farmer and rural development policies will, at best, create only some ‘winners’⁴⁰ at least opens the door to thinking about solutions to rural poverty in the frame of larger economic processes that extend beyond agriculture and the countryside: the next set of issues.⁴¹

3 Intersectoral Linkages

A third set of issues concerns the relations of agriculture with other sectors and branches of the economy, in various ways. There are various versions of positive intersectoral linkages (backward and forward production and consumption linkages), albeit stronger on prescription than supported by much historical evidence, or at least evidence that lends support to a small farmer path of development. There are also versions of negative linkages which, according to theoretical and political position, can be deployed to explain both lack of agricultural growth and rural poverty, on one hand (for example, ‘urban bias’), and lack of industrialization, on the other hand (for example, failure to tax landed property and agrarian capital).

For present purposes, it is enough to acknowledge that finding ways to achieve advances in agricultural production, more secure livelihoods, and greater welfare in the countryside, can not be separated from the multiple ways in which the prospects of agriculture (as ‘sector’) and of farmers/rural classes of labour (who increasingly ‘straddle’ sectors in their ‘livelihood diversification’) are bound up with the dynamics of change in other parts of the economy. This much, certainly, seems always to have been clear to those who make development policy in China.

The importance of this recognition is only enhanced by the effects of globalization, through which the relations between any given sectors of a national economy (agriculture, industry, mining, services) are mediated by the places such sectors occupy in global divisions of labour, trade and investment. The implications of this only compound the challenges of development policy for national governments, and especially when they are pressured to assess the performance or potential of each sector or branch of their economies in terms of global ‘competitiveness’, rather than

in terms of their contributions to the structure of productive employment and their actual or prospective intersectoral linkages in the formation of the domestic market.

In these respects, China again presents key elements of development that might prove an exception, first its combination of extraordinary (if now somewhat slowing) economic growth based in industrialization for *both* export *and* its vast domestic market together with an agriculture as yet largely untouched by globalization (noted earlier). And second, external pressures on the state and its policy processes (whether from aid donors or indeed global capital markets) are relatively so weak in the case of China, which is becoming a major player in its own right in global financial markets and a major overseas investor in energy and mineral production.

4 Win-win solutions?

Do the recent (re)‘discovery’ of poverty by the mainstream, and the speed and intensity of its return to discursive prominence (symbolized in the United Nations’ Millenium Development Goals), perhaps reflect an implicit recognition that there are no win-win solutions within capitalism, together with a revival of the historic fear that the rule of capital is under threat from the vast and manifold inequalities its development generates,⁴² and not least in the conditions of current globalization with all its volatilities.

Such recognition, to the extent that it exists and is owned up to, might be the beginning of wisdom in development policy-making. Once the self-delusion or fantasy of win-win solutions is cast aside, and the class dynamics and consequences of capitalist development are acknowledged and investigated, then it may possible to devise and implement policies – in however ‘second best’ a fashion – with a greater likelihood of relative benefit to classes of labour, including those who combine or ‘straddle’ farming with other self-employment and wage employment. At the same time, it is difficult to *see* how this might be achieved without greater and more effective measures to ‘govern the market’ – one reason, among others, for the continuing intense interest in processes of socioeconomic change in China, including in its diverse countrysides.

NOTES

1. I am not a scholar of China and am more familiar with the literature on sub-Saharan Africa. Hence references to China in this chapter are only to illustrate how some of the

propositions of the theoretical perspective outlined might be applied to agrarian change there – and the challenges involved in such applications. Those challenges are both analytical, including issues of ‘transition’ in China (transition from what to what? And the ‘drivers’ of transition), and empirical, given the difficulties of accurate statistical data, and disaggregating them across China’s diverse regions, as well as adequate coverage by qualitative/ethnographic studies of changing countryside.

2. I style ‘property’ thus to indicate that it is a problematic term, the object of much current analysis and debate, and not least in relation to land in China.
3. *Inter alios*, and from different perspectives: Wolf (1966); Bray (1986); and the counter-Malthusian texts of Clark and Haswell (1964) and Boserup (1965).
4. This is, in effect, a predominantly ‘Eurasian’ model, incorporating most of the major agrarian civilizations – in terms of population and scale of social and political organization – of recorded history.
5. Corresponding to millennia and centuries as Weis (2007: 5) puts it: ‘The origins of the contemporary global food economy could be traced back through a series of revolutionary changes, which once took shape over the course of millennia, then over centuries, and which are now compressed into mere decades.’ The decades to which he refers are those of globalization since the 1970s.
6. And also contributing to an accumulation fund for industrialization, the principal thrust of T.J. Byres’s work on ‘agrarian transition’ (1991, 1996).
7. A nice example of recommending that ‘the market’ (commodity relations) does its ‘immanent’ work, once the political task of redistributive land reform is accomplished, is the prescription by a Chilean minister for agrarian reform of the 1960s: ‘a certain proportion of the new peasant beneficiaries [of land reform] will probably fail as entrepreneurs . . . it will be necessary to caution against too rigid an institutional link between the beneficiaries and the land so that a natural selection may take place later which will allow those who fail to be eliminated’ (Chonchol 1970: 160).
8. Including Eric Wolf’s ‘peasant wars of the twentieth century’ (Wolf 1969), which indicate the centrality of ‘agency’ to what may appear as a basically ‘structural’ perspective presented here. At the same time, it is useful to note that ‘agency’ manifests itself in different sizes and shapes, as it were. For example, James Scott (1985) argued that countless small acts of ‘everyday resistance’ have a larger incremental significance than the epic instances of ‘peasant war’ that are Wolf’s focus. Similar propositions are advanced in relation to the everyday ‘agency’ of small farmers (for example, Ye Jingzhong 2002) or informal economy ‘entrepreneurs’ (for example, de Soto 1989) in economic change vs the ‘big’ agency of state institutions, policies and practice – so often characterized respectively as oppressive, misconceived, and ineffectual or worse; also Scott 1998). My own view of ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, and issues of the forms and scales of agency, both individual and collective, is closer to that formulated in the essay on ‘Agency’ in Anderson (1980).
9. In fact, it seems generally agreed that the agricultural labour force in China was below 50 per cent of total labour force by 2000: according to Guang and Zheng (2005) it was 47 per cent, down from 71 per cent in 1978. Even so, the figure of 47 per cent is likely to be overestimated rather than underestimated, for various reasons.
10. Figures of this approximate order of magnitude are cited by those who consider ‘peasant elimination’ (in Kitching’s term) a crucial condition of modern economic development (for example, Hobsbawm 1994: ch. 10; Kitching 2001: ch. 10), while Martinez-Alier, for whom small-scale farming is the principal exemplar of ‘the environmentalism of the poor’ and the basis of an alternative path of development, proposes nearly two billion ‘traditional peasants and landless labourers’ in the South in 2000, in absolute terms more than in 1900 (2002: 155). Who and what ‘traditional peasants’ (or simply ‘peasants’) are today is hotly debated, of course (Bernstein 2000); how many there are is similarly problematic and elusive, given (a) the diversity and complexity of the social relations of farming across the world; (b) whether ‘peasants’ and ‘landless labourers’ should be lumped together; (c) the increasing divergence between ‘rural’ and

‘agricultural’ as demographic and sociological categories and aggregates; and (d) the inability to specify and capture such complexities and differences in global data series, like those of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

11. It might be objected here that the advocates of a small farmer path of development, among whom Michael Lipton is a prominent and consistent figure, reject economies of scale in their emphasis on the inverse relationship between farm size and productivity of land (yields) given the factor endowments of poor(er) countries, that is, abundance of labour relative to capital. However, their specific policy prescriptions entail increasing economies of scale in various ways: investment in (usually biochemical) technologies appropriate to small farmers which raises the scale of capitalization of farms without increasing farm size necessarily; organizing household farms in larger entities to benefit from economies of scale in acquiring inputs and marketing output (for example, cooperatives) and the provision of social services – both key elements in the thinking of the great Russian agrarian economist A.V. Chayanov; and substantial investment in public goods in the countryside, both economic (transport infrastructure, and irrigation of which Lipton is a keen advocate) and social (education, health). Such investment is also central to a recent macroeconomic (re)statement of the case for a small farmer path of development by Diao et al. (2007); the econometric analysis by Irz et al. (2001) of ‘agricultural productivity growth and poverty alleviation’ comes to a similar conclusion, albeit also identifying a (very large!) number of ‘qualifications and necessary conditions’, as, in effect, do Hazell et al. (2006) and the World Bank (2007).
12. See Bernstein (2007d), and note how current development discourse continues to add to its inventories of desirable policy objectives, thus human rights, equity, sustainability, and so on.
13. A good example of this pathos is provided by the conclusion of the IFAD *Rural Poverty Report 2001*, of which Michael Lipton (note 11 above) was the principal intellectual architect. There it notes what it terms the ‘paradox’ of ‘an ambitious target for (rural) poverty alleviation with fewer resources to achieve it’ (IFAD 2001: 232). The report claims that the conditions of a win-win solution exist, namely that the knowledge how to overcome rural poverty (through market-friendly reform) is available *and* recognized by governments and aid donors which, however, remain reluctant to act on it. Alas, no explanation of this ‘paradox’ is forthcoming.
14. Indeed, the drive to ongoing commodification, both extensively in areas of social activity that lie (at least partly) outside markets, and intensively in already commodified areas of social existence, are seen as characteristic of capitalism, and especially in the era of globalization. Extensification is exemplified by the privatization of services once regarded as public goods (for example, Harvey 2005; Leys 2001), and intensification by two of the most discussed aspects of globalization: the dynamics and mechanisms of ‘financialization’ of economic life, and new forms of consumption/consumerism (for example, Gibbon and Ponte 2005; Sklair 1991).
15. The lucid theoretical gloss by Gibbon and Neocosmos indicates that this definitive *structural* condition of capitalism has to be explored *historically* to explain the economic formations of the modern world in all their diversity, complexities, unevenness, contradictions and mutations. Moreover, this intellectual agenda, and its challenges, requires a method that incorporates the international dimensions of the historical trajectories of capitalist development in different parts of the world at different times (thesis 7). For the first three ‘theses’ here I owe a longstanding debt to the powerful essay by Gibbon and Neocosmos (1985), including its critique of my earlier attempts to theorize ‘peasantry’.
16. Whether market-oriented reform in China represents a full-blown transition to capitalism – as suggested by, among others, Harvey (2005) and Walker and Buck (2007) – or something else, is too large (and difficult) a question to address here. While conventional views of ‘transition’ as a process whereby ‘market’ incrementally displaces ‘state’ are as simplistic as they are widespread (see note 36 below, and Christiansen, Chapter 5 in this volume), there seems little doubt that farming and farmers in China are subject to processes of commodification, albeit in specific historical conditions and unevenly so.

17. Of course, none of these signifiers is innocent, even when used descriptively. 'Small-scale' begs the question 'small relative to what?', while simple unitary notions of 'household' and 'family' economic forms have been devastated by the past four decades of feminist analysis in social science. Hazell et al. (2006: 47) note that small farmers are often defined as those with less than 2 hectares of crop land, but that this is meaningless unless location and quality of land, type of farming, and so on, are specified. Certainly in most of rural China, with its relatively equal distribution of land (relative, say, to much of India and Latin America) average farm size is typically much smaller than 2 hectares (Fanfani and Brasili 2003). There is a recent fashion to embrace ('family') farmers in both South and North under common terms like 'people of the land' or indeed 'peasants'. This typically registers a political stance critical of capitalist agriculture (and agribusiness), including its drive to 'de-peasantization', and that advocates alternative agricultures as 're-peasantization' (for example, Desmarais 2002; McMichael 2006a). Theses 1–5 suggest some of the reasoning why I think nothing is gained, and much obscured, by characterizing contemporary 'small' farmers (petty commodity producers) as 'peasants'. The use of the term typically resonates a notion of deep continuity with past worlds – the 'persistence' or 'survival' of some essential pre-capitalist social category or form (emblematic of most of recorded history) into the era of current globalization or imperialism, as well as valorizing it (Bernstein 2000, in press).
18. For innovative attempts to theorize this kind of sequence in colonial Africa and India, see Rey (1976) and Bharadwaj (1985) respectively. For those who know their Karl Marx, and indeed their Karl Polanyi, the most striking feature of this sequence – because it diverges most radically from the model of the ('original') transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe – is that the commodification of land can come after that of labour (power). Underlying this apparent 'reversal' of the 'classic' sequence: dispossession ('elimination') of the peasantry → 'proletarianization', are the varied and complex histories of commodification in the South. At the same time, and borrowing from Lenin's advice to avoid too 'stereotypical' a view that capitalism always requires the free, landless worker, I note here that similarly the commodification of land in agricultural petty commodity production can proceed without markets in land based on (bourgeois) private property rights – on Africa, for example, see Chimhowu and Woodhouse (2007) and Bernstein (2007b). Most accounts suggest that markets in land for agricultural purposes are relatively little developed in the Chinese countryside (for example, Brandt et al. 2002), by contrast with transactions in once farmed land for the massive expansion of housing, industry and transport infrastructure. However, this would benefit from research that is sensitive to the formation and functioning of 'vernacular' (versus formal) markets in land, in the term employed by Chimhowu and Woodhouse.
19. In his outstanding account of rural social movements in Costa Rica in the 1980s, which includes a typology of agrarian petty commodity production in that country, Marc Edelman refers to the hiring of *peons* (labourers) (1999: 122, 123, 167; indeed poor farmers complained about their lack of cash to hire *peons*, 126), without saying anything about who those *peons* are, where they come from, and so on. Neglect of rural labour markets in sub-Saharan Africa, and underestimation of their extent, has long been pointed out by John Sender and his co-workers, for example, Sender et al. (2005) for a general statement; Sender et al. (2006) for findings from their extensive field research in Mozambique; see also Bridget O'Laughlin's important article on Mozambique (1996). And in India, many of those classified as 'self-employed', including poorer small farmers, are designated 'wage workers in thin disguise' by Harriss-White and Gooptu (2000: 96, also 91, 93).
20. In sub-Saharan Africa there are some (many?) with claims on land but without the means to farm it because they lack adequate instruments of production, even decent hoes (Mamdani 1987), and/or the ability to command the labour of others – which is strongly gendered, of course. It is a potent index of the pressures on livelihoods/

reproduction for so many rural Africans that they pursue means of livelihood outside of farming when opportunities for secure wage employment and informal sector (self-) employment have also declined. In effect, then, this amounts to a ‘scissors crisis’ of reproduction (Bernstein 2007c).

21. A similar distinction was noted for sub-Saharan Africa by Berry (1980). Of course, regional variation is critical to understanding types of farming, in both environmental and social terms, for example, distance from markets; Wiggins (2000) provides a useful matrix for these two dimensions in relation to trends in food production in sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is sometimes a tendency to conflate ‘resource poor farmers’ with ‘resource poor’ regions characterized by harsh environments and/or spatial isolation. This is ironic as class differentiation of farmers (as explained above) is likely to be more intense in more highly commodified (relatively ‘prosperous’) agricultural zones.
22. This sixth thesis recommends bringing the development of the USA into the narrative framework, if only to illustrate a proposition about modern capitalist agriculture central to the consideration of globalization. The ‘classic’ agrarian question, and its extensions and debates, was concerned above all with the historical emergence of capitalist *farming* from structures of landed property and peasant labour (as above), in the original transition of sixteenth-century England and thereafter. It can be suggested, however, that the nineteenth-century USA (which had no ‘peasant question’ to resolve) pioneered the organizational forms of modern capitalist *agriculture*, and not least Chicago and its hinterland with its interlinked industrial manufacture of farm equipment, emergence of corporate agribusiness, infrastructure for handling and transporting agricultural commodities in unprecedented quantities over long distances, and futures markets in farm commodities and other institutional innovations, all traced in William Cronon’s seminal *Nature’s Metropolis* (1991). In effect, in the formation of a home market across its continental distances, including the dynamic linkages of agriculture with industry, and in its rapid emergence as a leading grain exporter (not least to Europe), the USA developed many aspects of modern corporate agribusiness and how it incorporates and regulates farming. This is a world of capitalist organization and operation far beyond the struggles between landed property and peasantry over enclosure or rents that marked the passage to early European capitalism. And, of course, these constantly evolving modes of organization and operation of agribusiness, exemplifying the concentration and centralization of capital, were soon internationalized and indeed are central to current processes of globalization (Friedmann 1993 is an original and illuminating account of such processes in the second half of the twentieth century).
23. An important and interesting, if often neglected, aspect of the dynamics of globalization and how it affects ‘national agricultures’ – and one of great importance in the case of China – is the relationship between production for domestic markets and international trade in agricultural commodities (exports and imports); see, further, note 25.
24. Historical overviews and arguments are provided by, *inter alios*, Friedmann (2004, 2006); McMichael (2006b); Weis (2007).
25. Of particular, and highly topical, salience is the matter of self-sufficiency or otherwise in basic food production, and the effects for world markets should China become a major importer of grain for human and livestock (feed) consumption, something it has avoided to date, along with India (Weis 2007). This may well change, of course. The World Bank (2007: 62) projects that net cereal imports in the South will triple from 85 million tons in 2000 to 265 million tons by 2030, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, with the ‘potential for larger and more frequent shocks to global food prices’. On Chinese notions of food self-sufficiency, see Christiansen (2008), on the Chinese food economy, Aubert (in press), and for an assessment of various projections of domestic food production and import needs, Zhang (2003).
26. Of special significance here is Marx’s notion of the reserve army of labour (Bernstein 2007a). One component of the reserve army is those ‘with extremely irregular

- employment', providing capital with 'an inexhaustible reservoir of disposable labour-power' with maximum hours and minimum wages, especially in 'special branches of capitalist exploitation' like 'domestic industry' (Marx 1976: 796). This has a contemporary ring to it, as many studies show. 'Domestic industry' may appear 'archaic' in its relatively simple technologies and technical divisions of labour, and often brutal oppression of labour, yet as we know, it is incorporated in some of the 'cutting edge' organizational forms of contemporary large-scale capital (global commodity chains, varieties of outsourcing, and so on).
27. Portes and Hoffman (2003: 42) suggest that: 'The concept of class is commonly excluded . . . because of its Marxist origin and consequent evocations of conflict, privilege and exploitation . . . its omission obscures significant aspects of contemporary social dynamics and deprives us of a valuable analytic tool.' They provide a rare and extremely useful empirical account of changes in class structures – in this case in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s (the 'neoliberal era') – which they conceptualize and plot with considerable care, including the growth of (a differentiated) informal economy and trends of the informalization of labour. Closer to Ellis's territory, another agricultural economist of sub-Saharan Africa notes that 'Social differentiation among the peasantry is no longer a fashionable area of inquiry, so case studies published during the last decade tend to be weak on such differences. What is reported, though, confirms our worst fears: differences are substantial. When and where farm economies blossom, it seems that the great bulk of the marketed surplus comes from a small fraction of the farmers' (Wiggins 2000: 638).
 28. I prefer the term 'classes of labour' to the inherited vocabulary of proletarianization/proletariat (and semi-proletarianization/semi-proletariat), as it is less encumbered with problematic assumptions and associations in both political economy (for example, functionalist readings of Marx's concept of the reserve army of labour) and political theory and ideology (for example, constructions of an idealized [Hegelian] collective class subject).
 29. There remains, however, a persistent and potent theoretical issue: if commodification is a general ('world-historical') process that entails both class and other social relations, the latter *cannot* be theorized through the same procedure of abstraction as the class relation of wage labour and capital (exemplified in Marx's *Capital*) even though they are ubiquitous in shaping specific and concrete forms of class relations in 'actually existing capitalisms' (and transitions to capitalism).
 30. Barbara Harriss-White's remarkable series of studies on India (for example, 2003) treats 'identities' as markers of objective social relations of inequality (gender, caste, religion) in how labour regimes and enterprises function and accumulation occurs. More generally, such 'identities' and divisions are often indicators of the boundaries between the active and reserve armies of labour, and of the distribution of social categories of labour between formal and informal employment and between relatively better and worse prospects within each (Bernstein 2007a).
 31. I have developed this line of argument in relation to processes of agrarian change in modern African history which can not be understood adequately without an analysis of class relations and dynamics, even though evident classes of landed property and ('pure') agrarian wage labour are rare (Bernstein 2007b); *see also* the work of Kojo Amanor (for example, 2005).
 32. What Lenin famously termed 'the concrete analysis of a concrete situation'.
 33. Including 'the rule of experts': the unique power assigned to those who know better. This, of course, is a central element in the pathos of development discourse mentioned above. At the same time, the 'rule of experts' derives from the power of capital and how it is inscribed in its modes of governmentality; while it may be a pervasive characteristic of modernity, it is not its *constitutive* feature, as argued by Mitchell (2002).
 34. There is an exemplary dialectical discussion of issues of the political sociology of collective action by small farmers in the concluding chapter of Edelman (1999); O'Brien's review essay (2002) points to several of those issues in his useful survey of a growing

- body of empirical material concerning rural China, on which *see also* Le Mons Walker (2008).
35. On the MST, *Via Campesina* and other instances *see* the useful survey by Edelman (2003) of ‘Transnational peasant and farmer movements and networks’, also Borras et al. (2008).
 36. On China, the principal focus of the residual approach is the ‘incomplete’ transition to market economy, of which a central preoccupation in studies of the countryside is the continuing rent-seeking activities of party and government cadres; *see*, for example, the ‘Symposium on market transition’ in the *American Journal of Sociology*, **101**(4), 1996. Pieke (2004) provides a nuanced discussion and an interesting case study.
 37. The relational approach goes back to the origins of social science but, as so often in Development Studies, it apparently requires a ‘new’ concept, or at least name, to stake a discursive claim: in this instance, that of ‘adverse incorporation’ – as if the uneven history of capitalism on a world scale is not inscribed in the ‘adverse incorporation’ of many (most?) who experienced it and continue to experience it.
 38. A few choice examples include de Janvry’s (1983) comparative analysis of food price policy in the USA, India, Colombia and Egypt, centred on agrarian capitals and their interests in different historical conditions of accumulation; Michael Cowen and Robert Shenton’s seminal exploration of the origins, logic and trajectories of ‘doctrines of development’ (1996); Partha Chatterjee’s quasi-Gramscian account of Congress discourses of planning before and after independence in the context of India’s ‘passive revolution’ (1998); the similar period covered by Vivek Chibber’s potent account of why industrial accumulation in India remained ‘locked in place’ by contrast with South Korea (2003); and Tim Mitchell’s examination of ‘the rule of experts’ at different conjunctures of Egypt’s modern history, including the current moment of ‘market reform’ (2002: pt 3).
 39. Mosse’s *Cultivating Development* (2005) is an illuminating ethnography of a major ‘participatory’ rural development project from the inside; *see also* Peters’s edited collection (2000) among a burgeoning literature.
 40. A minority?; *see* Wiggins cited in note 27 above, also the World Bank (2007) on what it calls ‘commercial smallholders’.
 41. I am aware that I have omitted environmental deterioration as a possible consequence of technical change in farming, and its social (and demographic) correlates, but then this chapter is already overburdened. The environmental costs and destructiveness of ‘modern’ technologies, and the forms of their globalization, are central to the critique of contemporary agriculture/agribusiness as unsustainable and the case for alternative ways of farming/food provisioning. *See* the references in note 24 above, and note the reluctance of the critics of global capitalist agriculture cited to meet head on the issue of population. Martinez-Alier (2002) is unusual among political ecologists in confronting Malthus’s question while not embracing his answers (Bernstein in press).
 42. A fear that originated in early industrial capitalism as the source of ‘doctrines of development’, in Cowen and Shenton’s provocative thesis (1996).

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4. Value, gender and capital: frameworks of calculation in micro-financial practices

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Microfinance has now acquired centre stage in world spotlights, not only as a mechanism of poverty reduction, but also an instrument of peace, as has been underlined in ceremonies surrounding the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize to Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank. As development instruments, micro-financial schemes are expected to help people escape poverty by providing them collateral-free loans and other financial services. In most cases, beneficiaries are encouraged to use loans for the establishment of small enterprises. Women are preferred clients for micro-financial programmes, central as they are to the social and economic dynamics of households. The underlying assumption is that, with the provision of ‘seed’ capital, the poor –and women in particular – can be introduced into the market. Well nurtured, the enterprise will expand, capital will grow, and the poor will be able to pull themselves out of poverty. Capital is expected to multiply itself and produce profit.

However, despite the fact that micro-financial schemes have readily been taken up by many women, both urban and rural inhabitants – particularly those with little or no access to formal banking institutions – these have not been as successful in alleviating poverty as is often hoped. Many small enterprises established under these programmes do not survive more than a couple of years and most fail to expand. The ‘seed’ resources that are injected are often diverted, disappear into everyday consumption, or are turned into what Hernando de Soto (2000) labels ‘dead capital’, which he claims is unable to do ‘economic things’ for the impoverished.

My aim in this chapter is to explore the nature of these ‘economic things’ that capital is expected to trigger. Such a task requires, on the one hand, a critical unpacking of the notion of capital itself, thinking ‘outside the box’ to delve into the frames of calculation that are drawn upon in the attribution of value. On the other hand, we need to situate the different

kinds of assets and resources involved in the processes of valuation that are brought into play.

It is important to consider the complex webs of meanings and actions that are activated in the calculation of value, as well as the ways in which people interact with money and other resources. Those involved in development projects, for example, draw upon different, and at times contradictory, frameworks of calculation wherein money is *represented* as the standard measure of value but does not always function as such. The chapter critiques analytical approaches that, in adhering to the facade of money as a universal yardstick, brush off a number of social and economic relations (generally considered erratic, volatile or subjective) as externalities – thus obscuring the ways in which non-commodity values and institutions act to restructure monetary frameworks – and argues for the need to examine social, cultural and moral dimensions of financial calculations in order to identify space for change.

I have thus resorted to an actor-oriented approach, which allows us to take situated actors' practices and transactions as the main focus. It is with reference to these actions that resources – be they land, labour, knowledge or cash – acquire value. I contend that a specific resource – monetary or non-monetary – can only become capital when it is mobilized and leveraged within particular circuits of signification where its value is assessed and negotiated according to particular standards, rules and expectations. This has important implications for the issues of poverty and capitalization.

VALUE AND THE MYSTERY OF CAPITAL

I start with Hernando de Soto's depiction of capital, since his point of view seems to be shared by many development agents and has been acclaimed by some governments – including the Mexican one – as providing the key to poverty alleviation. In his book, *The Mystery of Capital*, he claims that a large percentage of the poor already possess the assets they need to make a success of capitalism. Based on a five-year study with a team of 100 researchers from six different nations (one of which was Mexico), he points out that, at the end of the millennium, the value of savings among the poor was 40 times all the foreign aid received throughout the world since 1945 (2000: 5).

And, according to his team's calculations, 'the total value of the real estate held but not legally owned by the poor of the Third World and former communist nations was at least 9.3 trillion dollars'; that is, 93 times as much as all development assistance from all advanced countries to the

Third World in the past three decades (2000: 35)! However, he says, they ‘hold these resources in defective forms . . . they are dead capital’. Because the poor’s economic and social assets are not fixed in a formal property system that can homogenize their qualities and values in such a way that they are broadly recognizable, they are extremely hard to move in the market and cannot be used as collateral to start enterprises. He concludes that in order to make their assets ‘do economic things’ for them, these must be represented in a title, a contract and other similar legal documents, which will allow them to be combined, divided, mobilized and used in commercial transactions. In this way the poor will be able to convert dead capital into an active one that is widely transferable and fungible.

Here he has a point. Those identified as poor hold or have access to a host of resources that are not activated within capitalist circuits of profit-making. Not only do many impoverished sectors of the world population own houses and urban plots, but they possess agricultural land and have access to mineral resources and forests. They also have skills, knowledge, networks, and rich cultural heritages that could become valuable assets in economic transactions. However, the fact that these are not gainfully articulated with commodity or financial markets has less to do with a lack of proper titles or legal documents to prove legitimate property than with the social relations involved in capitalization, particularly regarding the handling of value.

This includes the ways in which markers of class, race, gender and other forms of social differentiation are entangled in the notion of capital itself. Capital, as Steve Keen (2001: 145) so nicely phrases it, is simply ‘a reckoning of wealth and a guesstimate of profit’. He explains that capital does not exist as an easily definable entity,¹ and that ‘the concept of capital as a homogeneous substance is an illusion’. The term, he says, covers too great a multitude of things that have only one thing in common: price. But price is not a precise measurement of value, since it is established by the profit expected of a particular good. This involves an obvious circularity, because the rate of profit is the ratio of profit to price, but this is still how economists prefer to aggregate capital (Keen 2001: 141, 145). Doing so allows capital to be established in – however unsteady and inexact – monetary terms, which is what de Soto proposes.

Titles and legal documents help standardize the value attributed to a resource in such a way as to be recognized by the broad market. For this to be made possible, an accepted yardstick must be applied to measure the ‘market value’ of a good. Money provides the measure of equivalence to depict such value. It is the universal language that we all think we understand. However, as a language, its meanings are not homogeneous, and as a measure of value it is insufficient and often misplaced.

Depending on the situation and the context, similar monetary

denominations can be valued differently,² and dissimilar ones might be judged equivalent.³ And while money can depict the amount producers are willing to receive for a good – or forced to do so by diverse circumstances – it does not necessarily reflect its value. The concept of a particular good is interwoven with notions concerning its social, economic and cultural traits, risks and projections, with claims to its usufruct and entitlements, and ideas as to how the products it yields can be spent. Values are established by resorting to social, symbolic and cultural codes where class, race and gender identifications, emotions and practical concerns are relevant. Different kinds of capital are assessed by reference to a range of social values that are intertwined with, and to a degree determine, the monetary value that is accorded to a particular good. As I have reiterated elsewhere, a specific resource – be it monetary or non-monetary – can only become ‘capital’ when it is brought into circulation within particular circuits of signification where its value is assessed and negotiated according to particular standards, rules and expectations (Villarreal 2004b).

De Soto overlooks the fact that market currencies are based on particular information, predictions, speculation, promises, social links, trust, myths and fallacies. Financial transactions include games of interpretation, inferences and contests over the value to be attributed to a resource, over meanings and identities. Value is established through speculations that include the interpretation of the possible interpretation others will make concerning the value of a particular resource.

Here, political, ethical and cognitive dimensions come to the fore, and as Long (1984, 2001) argues, these do not depend on, nor can they be reduced to, market rationalities. Long has, for some time, been pointing out the mistake of giving analytical priority to the capitalist side of the equation in economic transactions, thus failing to appreciate the theoretical importance of non-commoditized relationships (1977, 1984, 2001). This has two important implications.

On the one hand, it warns against the reduction of people’s livelihoods to the pursuit of economic goals, particularly those related to their involvement in a capitalist economy (Arce 2003; Long and Villarreal 1998, 2001). The extended use of economic metaphors to address livelihood issues tends to obscure the complexity of issues entailed. Individuals, families, social groups, institutions and communities are involved in a range of activities – including, for example, entertainment and building relationships – which cannot be packaged into market concerns. As Wallman et al. (1982: 5) writes,

Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, getting food to put on the family table or to exchange on the market

place. It is equally a matter of ownership and circulation of information, the management of skills and relationships, and the affirmation of personal significance [involving issues of self-esteem] and group identity. The tasks of meeting obligations, of security, identity and status, and organising time are as crucial to livelihood as bread and shelter.

Such relationships may or may not affect, or be affected by, economic activity, and one cannot attribute them market value a priori.

On the other hand, it calls for the need to consider a wide array of values and institutions involved in market interaction, including social and cultural concerns and patterns of interdependencies between the needs, interests and values of particular groups of individuals. Political issues, welfare considerations and ethical matters are often brought into what appear to be purely economic or financial criteria. Transactions in commodity and other markets are sustained by values and non-commodity relations that vary according to the field of activity and the interests that are played out (Arce 1997; Arce and Marsden 1993; de Haan 1994; Hutchinson 1996; Long and Villarreal 1998, 2001). They must be viewed as the outcome of the series of interlocking encounters and relationships that take place between the various exchange actors who endeavour to defend and reproduce their own enterprises, livelihoods, and cultural repertoires (Long and Villarreal 2001). Therefore, in exploring the issue of capital in microenterprises, a crucial concern is how assets are weighed and measured and how their perceived virtues and attributes are made relevant in the context of economic transactions and their evaluation. One cannot assume that exchange value is determined by the utility value of buyers and consumers (Long 2001).

To be sure, human dimensions are taken into account in the now trendy notion of social capital, which is used to address social resources that yield benefits such as improved material conditions, increased income and social status. This is not difficult to conceptualize in today's world, where everyday parlance strongly incorporates economic markers to address 'growth' and 'investment' in human, intellectual and organizational resources, not only within businesses and corporations, but also in universities, governments, and social clubs. Notions of social, environmental and cultural capital have eagerly been taken up in the development scenario, where projects and enterprises depend on the good will of donors and other stakeholders who are keen to measure the 'cost-benefit' ratio of their investments.

To think of social, environmental, kin, friendship and other resources as capital is to recognize their potential to produce profit in terms that can in some way be made equivalent to financial gain. But the relevant issue is how such equivalences are defined, weighed and attributed value. As de Soto contends, our conceptualization of their economic qualities (or

the conceptualization we are able to impose on others) is crucial, because such resources need to be mobilized and leveraged. However, one has to take into account that this can only be done within fields where their value is acknowledged and can be negotiated in accordance with recognized standards, rules and expectations. Hence it is important to analyse the ongoing struggles and negotiations over value between different sets of actors involved.

NEW FINANCIAL PRACTICES IN MEXICO

In the past decades, the make-up of rural towns and villages in Western Mexico has suffered important transformations. The proliferation of horticultural companies geared to exporting their products has entailed, on the one hand, increased incorporation of women in wage labour, and on the other, the stifling of traditional subsistence agriculture. The reconfiguration of labour markets, the dynamics of migration (both in-migration from other regions and out-migration, mainly to the United States), and processes of diversification wherein both men and women engage – sometimes part time, as a complementary activity – in activities related to commerce, transport, tourism, and so forth, has had implications for the nature of financial practices. Also relevant are, of course, remittances and social compensation programmes oriented to ‘the poorest’, and in some regions, drug traffic – with its extravagant splurges on drink, food and music, which have spillover effects in local communities. Levels of poverty have not decreased, but rural areas can no longer be visualized as oriented solely to agriculture.

In the process, the demand for money has followed an upward spiral. Rural economies have become increasingly monetized. Despite the prevalence of a large number of households whose per capita income is less than 3 dollars per day, the flow of monetary resources in the form of cash or debt that circulates in these sectors is not inconsequential. It is quite common to find expensive electronic devices in some of these households, and there is a considerable amount of petty consumption – people buy a few eggs or tomatoes at a time, shampoo in small sachets and ham by the slice, even if that requires visiting the shop several times a day. Such consumption patterns provide employment – however precarious – for locals and juicy profits for intermediaries and usurers.

Micro-lending and microfinance organizations have blossomed, mostly in response to the increasing demand for financial services. But the supply of monetary resources has also opened up to private non-bank financial intermediaries, including those organized as *sofoles* (limited object financial societies) and *sofomes* (multiple object financial societies), and, in

some regions, credit cards have been introduced. The mushrooming of new financial agents and intermediaries entails a significant diversification of mechanisms of access. The kind of warranties required have changed, and with them the value attributed to different forms of assets and capital, including property, knowledge, social networks, stability in employment, credit history, and so on.

Micro-lending organizations must incorporate economic markers to address growth, efficiency and ‘cost–benefit’ analyses of investments in human, intellectual and organizational resources. Clients must qualify as a ‘good investment’, a promise of sure pay and future profit. A ‘trustworthy person’ is often called upon to sign as guarantor and take on the responsibility of paying if the new client defaults. Culturally defined criteria enter the equation in the establishment of parameters as to what classifies as trustworthy, as well as how growth and efficiency are to be delineated.

Economic transactions necessarily involve forms of prediction and valuation that are conformed within circuits of meaning in which social, ethical and cultural dimensions cannot be overlooked. Even obtaining gifts and loans from friends and neighbours entail going through socially prescribed processes of categorization and re-identification, and the same goes for government or non-government programmes, where an applicant for funds must be classified as ‘poor but willing to make an effort to progress’.

Thus, financial practices are forged through arrangements that involve relations, responsibilities, complicities and dependencies. Recourse to one practice or another and its effectiveness to resolve the requirements of a social group in the short, medium or long term depends on a series of interrelated factors, amongst which one can mention group configurations (that is, nuclear or extended family, domestic cycle, type of cohabitation, and so on), dependency linkages (including relations within the group and external to it), features of the sources of income, economic and financial arrangements, family history (including places of origin, ethnicity and special needs), and the incidence of different forms of violence. Gender plays a central role in this process, since calculations and predictions as to the structure of opportunities available to the potential subject of a particular transaction are included in the formula.

SAVING, INVESTMENT, AND CIRCUITS OF VALUATION

Mexican rural inhabitants face new challenges resorting to a range of financial procedures. Within the lowest income sectors of the population,

it is quite often women who save, invest, and anticipate expenditures, but inevitably emergencies crop up. It is difficult to meet needs. These are prioritized, postponed. A small luxury is indulged in now and then. Health tends to be neglected, and education, interrupted. The creativity with which people devise different mechanisms to cope is surprising. Links to politicians, local authorities and other 'big men' are useful and are paid for with favours and loyalty. Social networks can be an important asset, but they need to be oiled and managed, and this is not always easy. There is also apathy, greed, envy, competition, exploitation, discrimination and violence. The maintenance of social networks entails monetary and social costs, the latter including at times personal dignity. People's economic life can be visualized as an intertwining of fragments that include a diversity of small incomes, many of which are sustained through different types of support, favours, promises and debts. Challenges are addressed by resorting to a range of financial procedures, and this has important social implications, not least of which involve new forms of exclusion.

Low-income rural inhabitants have different ways of saving. It is common for women to keep secret hiding places behind a brick or inside an old kitchen pot where they keep coins and a bill or two, ready to be used for emergencies. They often make use of money-keepers – friends or relatives who can keep the money safe for them until they need it – who in turn might use it or lend it but can be trusted to return it in a timely way, even if it entails borrowing from someone else.

Participating in Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (*roscas*) is most common. Participants in a *rosca* contribute the same amount over an established period and take turns to receive the kitty. People – mostly women – participate in several *roscas* at the same time, and might hold more than one number (*roscas* can include as many as 100 numbers). A young mother of three children in the village of Nahuapa explains: 'I like participating in *roscas*. I am someone who spends whatever money I have, so it is better to have it secure in a *rosca*. That is how I have saved the most.'

Participants calculate the dates they will need their savings: the beginning of the school year, mother's day, Christmas, a trip to *see* the virgin. If they need the money urgently, they will try to get the first numbers. If not, they view it as a saving. A *rosca* organizer explains:

I organize *roscas*. You have no idea how much money I mobilize! And I don't have any money! Only yesterday I handed in the last number of ten thousand pesos. Members to the *rosca* were mostly my relatives, but I'm tired of it, having gone on over four years with that *rosca*. As soon as it ended we started again. It ended and we started. We had ten numbers between friends and family, because they can be trusted. I had to knock on doors to collect the money.

Other rosca participants, also from Western Mexico, comment:

What I earn from my work is for my roscas, ten pesos per day, with seventy numbers, we get seven hundred. Last Sunday a rosca ended, we received a thousand because there were one hundred numbers, but since I now took four numbers, I have to give forty pesos every day. But we like it, we feel very good with this rosca. When I get paid I will pay my rosca in advance, or on Saturdays, when he [the husband] gives me money, I will advance my Monday payment.

Another, more skeptical, warns: 'I always choose the first numbers, because I consider myself very secure. Now, if I participate in a rosca, I have to have the first numbers because I do not want to risk my money.'

Roscas are generally classified as an informal practice, due to the fact that they do not involve established institutions or written rules. However there is a great deal of formality involved. Participants commit themselves to contributing prescribed amounts on time. Actually, most rosca organizers explain that it is not difficult to collect participants' contributions. Participants generally come to their homes to pay their due quota. The fact that some roscas continue for a long time is proof of the formality of such mechanisms. However, in everyday operation more informal practices can be involved. If one of the close relatives or friends of the organizer cannot pay the amount to which he or she has committed, the organizer might lend her the money for a few days. If the person has not paid for three weeks, the number can be taken by the organizer, who continues paying and when she receives the kitty, will pay the debtor the amount she had paid. Some organizers earmark a number for unforeseen circumstances. They will start paying but might allow someone else to continue doing so when necessary. Exchange of numbers is also common, as are loans among participants, who know whose turn it is to receive the pool.

Credit and savings associations are also much resorted to. The problem is that the monetary amounts that people are able to save are small and are used to cover short and medium term needs. Larger savings tend to be carried out in the form of acquisition of patrimonial goods such as a piece of land or a house. Cattle – the symbol of accumulation – and raising hogs and chickens are also recurrent forms of saving. People visualize them as a way of investment. A plot or a house are also good investments in that they can, if necessary, be rented out or used as collateral in credit operations. Investment in vehicles, small shops, musical instruments and so on, is frequently obtained through money earned in the US.

However, if what they seek is to multiply existing resources, the accumulation of patrimonial goods is not very efficient. This is because patrimonial goods are hardly fungible. That is, they cannot be transferred rapidly into cash, which can entail loss of opportunity. In this way land

is not necessarily the best investment, unless it is situated in a zone with touristic potential or can be rented out easily for a reasonable price, for example, to horticultural companies.

We are here speaking of two different circuits of valuation. On the one hand, if agricultural land or housing provides security for families in terms of food or shelter, its acknowledged value depends less on the market than on its usefulness. But if the intention is to invest in the market, the value of access capital – in terms of timely information, contacts and the possibility of speculation – can be larger than the value of the patrimonial good, which can in fact be considered dead capital.

In one circuit, kin and friendship networks are indispensable. In the other, they can be a dead weight. Social relations, based on socio-historically defined differentiation, form an intrinsic part of the different types of savings and investment. The possibility of growth through savings is limited if we resort to frameworks of calculation commonly utilized by development experts.

COWS, CHICKENS, PIGGY-BANKS AND GENDER

This is clearly shown in the case of a group of women from Ayuquila, in Western Mexico, where different processes came into play in the attribution of value to their resources. The women that formed part of a beekeeping group in this small town of Western Mexico were not the poorest in the community, although their family income was then on – or slightly below – what would be considered the poverty line. The government programme offered the group seed money to establish an enterprise, following federal stipulations that rural women should be provided the opportunity to become entrepreneurs. They had been invited to join by the local authority, and accepted, although most would have preferred to stay at home and look after their children and husbands, or carry out small income-earning jobs they engaged in, such as sewing, peddling Avon and Tupperware, or cooking meals to sell in the evening.

They attended their monthly meetings smelling of soap and shampoo, wearing clean, ironed dresses, and at times jeans, but their situation was by no means ideal. Their husbands, a number of whom possessed land, worked in the fields all day and their income was never quite enough to cover all their basic needs, including sending their children to school, clothing them, covering transportation costs, and so on. None had bank accounts and only two had reached secondary schooling, although all but one could read and write.

Regional officers were particularly interested in the consolidation of

this group. Their reports needed to show gender related activities. Many such groups had been formed in the country, a number of which included women in less advantageous conditions, but most of these groups dissolved, since the members needed to work for a daily wage. And obtaining profit, or at least payment for their work, was, in the best of cases, only possible after a couple of years when the enterprise took off. The beekeepers were thus posed as the ‘model’ to follow, and were often mentioned in official speeches and meetings in order to show that women were included in government development schemes. Diverse interests came to be vested in this undertaking, and multiple expectations were raised. Socorro, one of the eldest members of the beekeeping group, laughingly narrated her group’s decision to choose honey production:

the woman officer asked us whether we wanted chickens, or pigs or goats, or a sewing group. We said bees because we thought we could just leave them and they would work on their own. All we had to do was harvest the honey! Sewing? No, the material is too expensive, and then we would have to go out and sell garments. Chickens, we would have to work hard every day, and if the price of the feed went up, we would go down. Goats would have been nice, then maybe we could have divided them up between ourselves, instead of having to work as a group, but no, goats are very destructive, they jump fences and get into the men’s fields, and we don’t want problems with them. So we chose bees, but now we regret it, because we constantly get stung!

The group had been prompted to select an economic activity and join the credit scheme. They had weighed their options carefully, considering the implications of their decision for themselves in their relations with their families and the community. They wanted a money earning enterprise, but did not want to jeopardize the time they needed to spend on family commitments, nor did they want to trigger conflicts with other people in the village.

For the government officers involved, as is the case with many development workers around the world, it did not matter too much whether the women chose bees, chickens or goats. In encouraging them to engage in economic activities, their aims were to ‘help the women help themselves out of poverty’, providing the seeds for what should become a sound economic enterprise. Pigs, chickens, cows or goats were generally classified in a standardized way as ‘initial capital’, as resources that, with a bit of enthusiasm and hard work, would reproduce themselves. Their value resided in their potential for rendering incremental monetary benefits.

However, this was an inaccuracy that could have serious economic and social consequences. While the prices of inputs entailed, the amount of work involved and the possible price they would acquire in the market were definitely crucial, value was not only measured in monetary terms.

The make-up of capital associated with chickens was different from that of cows, bees or goats.

I expect we will all agree that it is better for rural women to own cows than to simply have chickens, but I was truly disappointed when, during an evaluation-for-planning meeting with government officers in the region, one of the local leaders proudly stated that a large percentage of the (largely male) groups in his municipality had dutifully paid the loans they had acquired to buy cattle – some of them ahead of time, even if it had meant that they sold their wives' chickens to raise the money! His statement was applauded by all of those present – except for myself.

Paying loans on time was assessed as an achievement, considering that many of the producers involved had fallen behind in their reimbursements to previous government loans. It was generally accepted that this had to do with a lack of financial culture among the rural population. They had become used to receiving charitable funds and they needed to enhance their entrepreneurial skills and operate in the real world – meaning learning to work for the market and paying at 'market value'.

While I agreed that producers must pay their loans, I could not accept the fact that this should be done with women's chickens. Having worked in that region for an extended period of time, I knew that chickens were an important element in sustaining the livelihoods of rural families. Eggs and poultry were one of the most important sources of protein and were also crucial in sustaining social relations. It was generally embarrassing for a Mexican family to have no food to offer visiting relatives, and a fried egg was often the solution. Moreover, poultry were resources in the women's domain. They generally decided when to slaughter or sell a chicken, and which one to get rid of – whether it was a particular hen that no longer laid eggs or one that was not good for looking after her chicks – and also decided on the destiny of the money obtained. And eggs were 'borrowed' and sold between neighbours, thus strengthening social links and feelings of solidarity.

In turn, cows tended to be thrust into the men's domain. Although women might have them registered in their name, and might even look after them, taking them out to graze and bringing them home in the evening, milking them, and curing their illnesses, they would most often consult their husbands, sons or male relatives before selling a calf. And if no other urgent need was at stake, men would be allowed a degree of freedom as to how to spend the money. At times this could mean investing in a vehicle, paying for a son or daughter's schooling, fixing the house, or going off to drink with friends. They could also be slaughtered for a special occasion – this would demonstrate the status of the family. Too often, however, calves were sold before they had the desirable weight in order to pay hospital fees, medicine, or a debt.

On the other hand, pigs were the common stereotype for saving. As in many places around the world, small money-boxes were modelled on pigs. Piggy banks symbolized the ways in which families saved pesos until they became a significant amount of 'hard currency'. Rural families frequently raised pigs on scraps of leftover food, weeds and, if possible, maize, and, when full grown, would either slaughter the hog to keep the lard – thus saving money in the near future, since they would not have to buy it – ate and shared part of the meat with friends and neighbours, and sold meat and crackling. Or they would sell the hogs to pay debts, acquire a piece of furniture or cover other important expenses.

While chickens were generally classified as short-term capital, pigs tended to be placed in the category of mid-term. They provided a small savings account, a security set aside for relevant expenditure. However, unless a family possessed a pig or chicken farm, they were not considered capitalized. It was generally expected that the proceeds from small numbers of chickens and hogs would 'go down the drain of daily consumption'. They might provide better standards of living, but would rarely constitute 'sound capital'.

This was not the case with cattle, which, in rural Mexico, almost constitute a synonym for wealth. 'If we don't have a cow or two to our name', said a farmer, 'I feel dispossessed, as if we have nothing.' Cattle were a longer-term security as well as an investment that could render more profits. While male calves could be sold to cover expenses, a family would aim at using the profits gained to buy more cattle, particularly female calves, which were set aside for reproduction. This was capital that would multiply and expand.

But the mechanisms of operation some of these cattle raising enterprises engaged in did not differ markedly from that of piggy banks – since funds were slowly and painfully saved to increase the kitty – except that this 'kitty' was larger and it provided more status. And it tended to be tighter. While the tendency with hogs was to 'break the piggy bank' within a medium term to use the funds in one way or another, cattle – in these more traditional enterprises – was a money-box that was only opened for big occasions or urgent needs. Quite frequently, families would forgo daily consumption needs in order to maintain their cows. More than a few women complained that all they obtained from their herds of cattle was the milk they manage to salvage if the cows grazed near the village and perhaps some cheese they themselves fabricated on the milk that was not sold. But their children went without shoes and they hardly ever tasted the meat, since their husband's one aim was to increase the herd. This was understandable, since a large herd could provide the basis for power and authority in the local scenario, which

was quite attractive for someone who resented having always been under 'someone else's foot'.

Although capital invested in cattle could be fungible – owners did sometimes sell cows to buy vehicles or invest in building their homes, and the status cattle owners acquired was useful to access credit in local shops as well as larger institutions such as banks – this was not quite the fungibility required in today's entrepreneurial scenarios, where the flexibility to move quickly between one product and the other, to translate one kind of capital to another, is the key to success. In this sense, their cattle was to a large degree 'dead capital' to use de Soto's (2000) way of describing many of the resources possessed by the 'poor'.

This does not mean that development programmes should be oriented to chickens rather than cows, but that they constitute different forms of capital, they move within different circuits and render differential benefits. The 'economic things' they are expected to produce include social, cultural and symbolic benefits.

A range of social values were intertwined with, and to a degree determined, the monetary value that was accorded to a particular good. Hence, 50 pesos earned from a chicken, which were esteemed high, were not the same as 50 pesos that were extracted from the sale of a cow. One was considered a large chunk of 'petty money', to be used for food and basic consumption, and the other, a small fringe of big money, perhaps a leftover after covering important payments which could be destined – why not? – to give the money holder a small break, a bit of pampering to compensate for hard work and sacrifices.

There were, to be sure, several categories to be taken into account in the case of cows and chickens. Milk from cows was frequently stashed for daily expenses. Squandering milk money on drink could be judged severely, while the sale of a calf could be set aside for partying. This was most clearly the case with the profits from special breeds of chickens, such as fighting cocks. Fighting cocks were a gamble, a lottery ticket which, when won, was worth a celebration. And these were classified within the men's domain. Although women were frequently expected to feed and look after them, they would rarely include the proceeds these might generate as part of the family income.

It was not at all infrequent to hear peasant women complaining about having to tend fighting cocks or look after cattle, yet they continued doing it. Such submissiveness, however, was not always straight-forward subordination. Keeping a husband happy and looking after his interests could, in certain contexts, render social profits in terms of consolidation of kin networks and solidarity grids. It could entail a form of social collateral, safeguarding the man's honour and dignity, which in turn produced status

for the family, which was useful in procuring loans, keeping clients, and receiving gifts, for example. Having a husband was itself important for the upkeep of social networks and status. It was generally signified as security for the family, the woman could increase her solidarity networks and there was a degree to which it made the woman less vulnerable to malicious gossip. Thus social links – including marital and kin relationships – were an important asset.

But although assets (be they social, cultural or financial) might generate added worth, they could also reduce it. For example, money coming from a person linked to a family associated with witchcraft tainted the reputation of the bearer; having social connections to drug traffickers aroused fear in some groups, and women's submissiveness to their husbands was not considered a positive trait within development enterprises. This, of course, had to do with differential denominations in processes of valuation.

Socorro, a member of the beekeeping group cited above, stated that, as a group, they would have liked to raise goats. Goats do not require a great deal of attention, they feed on practically anything – grass from the hillside, leaves and bushes. They could be easily divided among the members of the group, each of whom could use child labour to look after them. Also, goats reproduce quickly, and goat meat is highly valued in the region, so they could obtain good profits. But goats are problematic because they generate conflicts with farmers. They jump fences quite easily, and gobble up valuable crops.

In local currencies, the social price of raising goats was too high for the women to take a risk. Their links with much needed solidarity networks would be at stake, as would their political space in terms of relations with local authorities. They would likely have problems with their own husbands, who had their crops in the adjacent fields, and who would not want to have their women involved in conflicts.

But in October 1986 the group was extracting honey. The yields were very good. Petra – who was then vice-president but later became president of the group – commented that it was like a dream to *see* so much honey. The fact that they had obtained a decent harvest in an enterprise that even men considered risky (and hence had 'macho' associations) contributed to the creation of a special social space for the members of the group.

However, honey from bees is largely considered an act of providence. It depends on whether and how wild flowers blossom, whether it rains and whether or not too many predators – such as ants and toads – reproduce. And if it is an act of providence, they must be thankful and show it with generosity to neighbours and friends. Hence, the women gave away jars of honey and pieces of honeycomb to government officers, local authorities, kin and fellow citizens – at least in the initial stages. When in later seasons

the produce was not so good, more than a few blamed it on the women's greed and lack of generosity.

DEBT, DELAYED PAYMENT AND MORALITY

I was in need, but I never dared to ask for delayed payment (*fado*), never! If I had nothing to eat, I held on, but I never had the courage to ask, not even for a piece of bread, it embarrassed me so! Even if I did need it, I did miracles with food so that my sons did not lack the basics, a tortilla or a plate of beans. I don't like to ask because if something happens, if I die, even after I am dead they will badmouth me! It is not good to be the object of talk. (Licha, a Mixtec in-migrant)

Most people in Western Mexico mention the shame and humiliation entailed in asking for delayed payment at local shops. However, it is one of the most commonly used resources to make ends meet. Other frequently used practices are loans from relatives, local lenders and institutions; participating in *roscas*; pawning jewellery or electronic equipment, donations and support from civil, religious or government institutions. At some point in their trajectory, most families have had to resort to forms of usury, paying excessively for their money. Here accessibility to money is more important than its cost.

Bank accounts are seldom resorted to, although people do go for furniture shop and department store credit schemes and in some cases they have taken on credit cards with very low credit levels. In addition to participation in credit associations, which we will discuss below, people make use of different forms of savings, money-keepers, and investment. At times, women take credit from savings and credit associations to pay debts in local shops or to street vendors. They explain that when resources enter their households, these are already destined to pay local shops, moneylenders, the credit association or their relatives. They pay a bit here and there, and claim that frequently they have nothing left to eat, but at least they still have the possibilities to acquire credit since they have shown willingness to pay. It is particularly interesting to explore the forms of debt engaged in the relations between shopkeepers and their customers. Debt is one of the most common ways of coping with dearth and scarcity in everyday life, and some households base up to 50 per cent of their daily consumption on different forms of debt. Whether monetary or non-monetary, debt often constitutes a transient solution for today's needs with the expectation that tomorrow will be better. It is a way out of a bad patch or temporary ill fortune.

A 'bad patch' is a frequently used expression in rural Mexico. Underlying

the notion is a conception of misfortune, of bad luck which has temporarily come about in the form of sickness, the death of a family member, a bad crop, lack of employment or other calamities. However, there is an element of hope entailed in the notion. The adverse situation is somehow expected to change. But faith in ‘what providence may bring’ is not only a religious principle, it is also a style of life and an organising practice involving processes of redistribution of resources where time is a resource in itself.

Delayed payment, under some circumstances, has negative moral connotations. Resorting to delayed payment can be related to the general insecurity in which people live: it is often quite difficult to plan even as far as the next meal, not knowing whether a bit of money will be available one way or another or perhaps a neighbour or relative will share food. It can also be a gender strategy: women acquire groceries, but also clothes and shoes in installments to force their husbands to cover household expenses. They claim that their husbands are often wary of providing money, but with the argument that it is already owed, they are obliged to pay.

But people try, within their range of possibilities, to keep such arrangements private, since, in addition to augmented monetary costs (commodities acquired in this way tend to be more expensive and final bills blurry), these kinds of transactions entail social costs. Favours must be paid and non-monetary interests (these are seldom monetary) tend not to be made explicit. However, it is common to draw upon delayed payment and loans from friends and neighbours, especially when amounts are small. Not infrequently, two or three sources must be approached before receiving a positive response, and sometimes the required amount will be put together from different sources. They also draw on barter, including the exchange of services and favours, which plays an important role in their precarious economies.

It is hence no surprise that social relations, based on socio-historically defined differentiations, form an intrinsic part of their financial practices. Indeed, ‘pulling through’ does not only entail a roof, food on the table or monetary income. It also entails the circulation of information, the management of abilities and relations in addition to social membership. Meeting commitments, guaranteeing protection, acquiring status and organizing time is as important as food or physical security. It is thus that dishonour is seriously taken into account in the valuation of mechanisms that can be opted for in economic transactions. ‘Better hunger’ says one of the interviewees, ‘than humiliation’.

Although within cultural standards engaging in monetary debt is hardly ever recognized as an ideal or morally correct procedure, it is a recurrent practice. As such, it is constantly reinvented and re-signified to legitimate

its use. In the process, a bad patch may temporarily be overcome, but commitments and obligations frequently remain, often leading to the reproduction of vulnerabilities and forms of exclusion. This does not mean to say that debt always leads to powerlessness and exclusion. This would be a misconstrual of its nature and workings. Whether debt relations have increased or simply relocated with the accelerated changes taking place in Mexico, it is clear that their importance has become more evident and the social frameworks upon which they are based appear to change.

SIGNIFYING AND WEIGHING THE RELATIONSHIP

The notion of debt itself varies. Debt is frequently referred to as a moral hazard, as default, exposure, fraud and imprudent or illegal behaviour. But in Mexican rural villages people use various terms to refer to debt. Although the precise meanings and the implications of each label vary in different regions and within diverse circumstances, it is interesting to distinguish the terms.

Préstamo, for example, is a loan. It can refer to a formal loan from a bank or a moneylender as well as to informal loans from relatives and friends. Its use often suggests willingness to pay within a short time span without it implying too much effort. A *préstamo* is a favour. People are mostly thankful for *préstamos* which helped them out in a moment of difficulty.

Deuda, on the other hand, is an established debt wherein the person owes in cash or in kind (such as a favour to be repaid). There is more commitment insinuated in the term. A *deuda* should not be forgotten. The term *compromiso* is also used in this way: a debt which entails a degree of strain. But to have a *droga* (bad debt) is heavy. You feel the weight of the debt and are struggling to *see* it through.

Crédito is more frequently used for formal credit pertaining to banks or other institutions. Often a notion of rights is presupposed. You have the right to obtain funds and you recognize your obligation to pay interest on it. *Crédito* can also refer to the potentiality of acquiring debt. Having *crédito* in a store or a bank means that you can obtain a loan if you need so. Your name is on their trust lists. An *ayuda* can also refer to credit from a bank, but it is mostly used with reference to government money or aid. It was given with the specific purpose of helping out and it may or may not be paid back.

Finally, *fiado* is delayed payment, used with reference to groceries or other articles which are not immediately paid for, particularly in local shops or to street vendors, but also in regional stores selling fertilizers and

other agricultural inputs, for example, where the client is well known and can be trusted. The debt must be settled on a short-term basis.

Hence, debt is spoken of as a favour, a right or a strain, it can be a strategy and a coping mechanism. Within one and the same social and monetary relation, debt can be conceived as a resource, as virtual wealth, or as a commitment and mechanism for the reproduction of vulnerability and powerlessness.

But the ways in which social assets are articulated in economic processes within market economies is seldom clearly elucidated. Such resources need to be mobilized and leveraged. However, this can only be done within fields where their value is acknowledged and can be negotiated in accordance with certain conventions and expectations. And here, of course, patterns of exclusion and discrimination are reproduced and reinforced.

In accessing and managing their finances, women deal with calculations concerning their possible sources of income – taking into account considerations with regards their capacities, their rights to obtain aid or receive pay for their services – and the ways in which their monetary resources will be spent. Perception of risk, fear, ideas concerning advantages and disadvantages enter into the picture, as well as identity attributed them and their self-identity. These are not necessarily rational processes of calculation, but frameworks within which processes are facilitated or restricted, margins for interpretations.

MONEY, CAPITAL, VALUE

In this scenario, the key for women is not to accumulate resources, but to capitalize and gain a degree of economic control, profiting from the value attributed to a particular resource. Processes of capitalization involve the ways in which assets (and identities) are weighed, measured and mobilized, and how their perceived virtues and attributes are included or not in economic calculations.

There coexist and interrelate different frameworks of calculation in the definition of value equivalences, where money does not function as the standard measure of value. What it does do is 'delimit the circle of actions between which equivalences can be formulated' (Callon 1998: 21). By providing the facade of a universal yardstick, monetary calculations can brush off a number of social and economic relations (generally considered erratic, volatile or subjective) as externalities. But markets are constituted in social interaction. The power to negotiate, for example, becomes a critical, and quite unmeasurable, factor in determining the value of goods and assets. The ways in which social and symbolic resources are deployed

and made significant is thus essential. Activating capital, in this scenario, involves the manipulation of symbols, the imposition of interpretations and anticipation of the future. Hence, a crucial issue – that we have underlined above – is how assets and identities are weighed and measured and how their perceived virtues and attributes are made relevant.

And in today's world, the range of what can be identified as an asset yielding monetary benefits seems to have increased or, at least, diverse resources are quite explicitly priced and allocated in ways that were previously unthought of. This compels social scientists to reassess the notions of ownership and entitlements, and, in particular, the ways in which these provide the basis upon which poverty is defined.

NOTES

1. Sraffa (1960), quoted by Keen (2001).
2. See Zelizer (1997) for a discussion of pin money, paychecks, gifts, and so on.
3. Villarreal (2004a).

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PART II

Encountering the State: Peasant Livelihood Issues

5. Building livelihoods: how Chinese peasants deal with state regulation of opportunity and risk

Flemming Christiansen

1 HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY AND RATIONALITY

In China *policy* in the first place signifies a major control mechanism for the allocation of resources in the political economy, and in the second a trail-blazer for new forms of large-scale, often global, incorporation and commercial control; only in the third place comes policy as a regulator acting for the well-being of ordinary people and as a protector of the weak; this reflects how the role of the state is still gradually changing from planning to regulation and redistribution.¹ China's *rural transformation* is, in essence, a massive social transformation away from the 'rural' as we know it, towards an urban reality. Although it is willed by policy, its main dynamics and forms emerge from infinite interests and practices converging in transient institutions of behaviour, occasionally nudged and guided by state intervention and gradually leading to reformulations of policy.

This chapter explores the intersection of peasant livelihoods and state intervention in China in recent decades, during which society and people have undergone huge changes. It does this by examining how people in China make a living and how the state directs development through policy initiatives, seeking to address issues of what structures agency and purpose of action both for the individual and for policy-makers. In doing so, it will rethink some common conceptions of livelihoods and livelihood strategies, and will use *risk* as a core notion, that is, risk as an outcome of policy and risk as a resource in livelihoods strategy. The starting point for the discussion is the introduction of what can in a meaningful way be described as a 'rural livelihood strategy' at the end of the 1970s. The cut-off point is somewhat arbitrary, for during the collective period, under the people's commune system, peasants voted with their feet when they met adversity

like crop failure and other severe crises, and that, of course, is also a form of livelihood strategy.²

However, the introduction between 1979 and 1983 of the household responsibility system marked the *publicly sanctioned resurrection of the family unit as the site for economic decision-making*. The policy handed the agricultural land use right back to individual households together with state production targets to be met; the farmers were at liberty to make production decisions, could keep or trade surpluses (almost) as they pleased, and were supposed to demonstrate ‘enthusiasm in production’, a term used by Hu Qiaomu (1978) in his famous exhortation from July 1978 to follow ‘economic laws’ in what was yet to become known as the reforms of Deng Xiaoping. The household responsibility system had a huge appeal to liberal economists, who in it saw the rise of the ‘rational economic actor.’ Victor Nee, for example, wrote in 1986: ‘the constellation of policies associated with the implementation of the household responsibility system are compatible with core assumptions [about] the importance of individualistic incentives for peasants and the efficiency of the peasant household as a production unit’ (Nee 1986: 196). These core assumptions pertained to a school of political economy, seminally influenced by Theodore Schultz and Samuel Popkin, which, in the words of Victor Nee (*ibid.*) held that peasants are rational actors, who, given proper opportunities and incentives, will save and invest in new factors of production and drive up productivity and agricultural growth rates.

The presumptions behind this blithe theoretical embrace of a state policy are staggering. Because peasants earn more the more they produce (that is, because they are incentivised), they will save and invest to produce more, leading to higher aggregate growth rates, which is good for society as a whole. Nee’s opinion ignores the specific institutions of the political economy and of social organisation as major determinants of how resources are distributed. However, it has stuck as a simple and easy textbook explanation: The household responsibility system solved the ‘free-rider’ problem of collective farming and generated huge growth rates in agricultural production (Lin 1987).³ The post-reform effect of the household responsibility system on production volume is a conjecture at best; the enforcement of collective labour obligations certainly *was* an issue, but it was a symptom of a much deeper, structural crisis of the people’s commune system and of the Chinese economy as a whole; it was only marginally responsible for low productivity. Going back to the introduction of the household responsibility system is important, however, because it furnishes us with the rural household as a unit for livelihood strategies that we can explore in an attempt at understanding the relationship between actors and policy. So, if the household responsibility system was not aimed

primarily at creating a stable-state, smallholder agriculture with incentives to increase production, then what was the purpose of introducing it?

Let us put the question in another way, at the very aggregate level, what was the main economic crisis facing China in 1977–78? Of course, I cannot go into a full analysis of this here, so I will point at two related issues that are of direct importance in this argument and that represent the wider complex of concerns the political leadership at the time had to deal with:

1. *Productivity issues:* China's agriculture was at the time characterized by influential Chinese policy researchers as one of 'self-sufficiency' only, with very small surpluses sold to the state; in 1979, 20.8 per cent of the grain was sold to the state, but after deducting 'reverse trading grain' (*fanxiaoliang*) a meagre 14.7 per cent was available to the urban population (Liu Zhongyi and Liu Yaochuan 1981).⁴ However, much more fundamentally, the significant growth in agricultural production between the 1950s and the mid-1970s (which had kept food production at pace with a doubling in the national population on roughly the same amount of farm land) was already showing signs of stagnation: terracing, irrigation, soil improvement, infrastructure development, new species and so on had met a technological limit and the state was not able to deliver technological inputs on the scale required to stabilize and increase agricultural production. Only around 20 per cent of the collective units in the countryside were considered to produce optimally, while 20 per cent at the bottom end were dysfunctional and a serious liability for the state. This assessment was articulated by Du Runsheng – a senior official in charge of the early rural reforms – on several occasions during the operationalization of the reform policies (for example, Du Runsheng 1985).
2. *Population and labour issues:* China's demographics were, even before the 1982 Census, considered a huge issue. The inability of urban industry to absorb new cohorts of urban residents coming of age into their labour force was one of the main crises that led to the 1978 Reforms (see Christiansen 1993). The disproportionately large size of the rural population and the structure of the labour force were regarded as seriously out of balance but, more importantly, the projections of annual population growth,⁵ combined with the inability of the existing economic structures to create employment outside agriculture and the worsening shortages of consumer goods, were at the start of the reforms identified as main development issues to be addressed (see Hua Yinchang 1981).

In practical terms, it was proposed to, by year 2000, absorb 150 million rural people into existing small towns, establish two or three

new small towns in each county to absorb another 200 million rural people, and to expand the existing cities to 150 million people. In that way, 40 per cent (or 500 million) of the projected population in 2000 – 1.2 billion – would be urban (rather than the about 13 per cent in 1979) (Chen Yuguang and Zhang Zehou 1981).

Let us contemplate this scenario: The, from the perspective of the late 1970s, apparently unstoppable dynamic of population growth (with the workforce expanding accordingly with a 15-year delay) necessitated a huge, sustained transfer of people away from agriculture and agriculture would need substantially improved technological efficiency to meet the demands for agricultural output.

There is no doubt that these issues constituted a strong belief among political decision-makers at the start of the reforms. Yet the policy chosen was to return land use to individual families, arguing that private cropping would provide incentives to produce more without significant additional technological input (Hua Yinchang 1981), based on the notion that the balance of rural labour, the demographic trends and the impossibility of technological intensification under the conditions of growing abundance of rural labour militated against rapid urbanisation (*ibid.*: 73). Abandoning operation on scale for the sake of individualized operation and tying individuals more closely to ‘their own’ land in stable family farms, was at the time thought of as the best way to avoid an exodus from agriculture, although the longer-term target was to speed up the rural–urban population transfer.

The introduction of the household responsibility system provided choice for households, but the choice was limited in two ways: collective land ownership was maintained; only *land use* was transferred, and the *hukou* system (household registration system) continued to exist, a system which limited peasants’ place of legal residence and their occupation.

All the official policy statements at the inception of the household responsibility system declared that it would achieve a stable state resource base for peasants’ agricultural production. The household responsibility system was presented as a win-win situation for all, replacing low incomes and stagnation with better opportunities for gains (Du Runsheng 1985) In reality, it also replaced low risk and equality with inequality and, in particular, *risk*.

In the household responsibility system, the returns from a particular plot of land and the availability of particular labour at specific times determined the level of income. The risk of crop failure, illness and other adversity, accordingly, became focused on the individual peasant household, as opposed to the situation under the collective management, where

Table 5.1 Schematic relationships between various strategies influencing risk and gain

		Individual (household) risk	
		Low	High
Gain	Low	Diversification; small scale (land, labour)	Specialization/intensification; small scale (land, labour)
	High	Diversification; large scale (labour)	Specialization/intensification; large scale (land, labour)

these risks were totally absorbed through the work-point system. The risk of failure was exacerbated by the volatility and unpredictability of policy incentives and market fluctuations. A reasonable *prima facie* assumption about rational behaviour, therefore, is that *hedging against risk* became an important consideration in line with income maximization. If we consider some possible strategies for reducing risk and enhancing income, the household responsibility system left most peasants with limited choices. Table 5.1 shows the schematic relationship between various strategies (scale of operation, diversification and specialization or intensification) influencing risk and gain. If we assume that land and labour were distributed equally according to labourers and members of the collective, in the majority of cases the land would be a function of the number of labourers and of household members, and so reflect a reasonably realistic potential for production. One would also expect a certain asymmetry, as some families had less labourers and more dependants and vice versa. However, the effect of Chayanovian family cycles hit in strongly, as families passed through them asynchronously.⁶ One can expect a full cycle to take between 30 and 40 years, that is, the time it takes for parents to raise their first son from birth to the age of labour participation, and for that son and his wife to raise their first son to the age of labour participation.⁷ Cyclical family changes tend to be underestimated in their effect on communities. Although a community may be stable in its composition at an aggregate level, the reality is that families individually change rapidly as they move through their phases.

In a small sample from rural Jiangsu only six out of 26 households remained unchanged, six changed in terms of size, while 14 changed their internal composition and size during this ten-year period. The average number of persons in a household fell from 4.8 in 1977 to 4.5 in 1987, and the number of small families increased. The unusually high proportion of people of working age (87 out of 117, or 74 per cent aged between 15 and 55 in 1987) had only grown slightly over the ten years, but their

distribution among the families was changed radically; the place where my research was carried out kept to the family planning policy in the younger generation (Christiansen 1990). In places with greater fertility, the dependency rate is greater, and the changes to household size and labour force distribution among households even more frequent. The redistribution of land use, in other words, over time created a growing unequal availability of resources in terms of land and labour. When the formal contracts were rolled out across China in early 1983, there was uncertainty about the duration of the land use distribution, and it was in the first instance understood that they would only last for one year in order to secure equitable distribution. The households immediately sensed that uncertainty of land use contracts was a major risk. Farm land maintenance, therefore, was subject to business calculation; if land could be redistributed due to demographic changes in any local family, who would then risk longer-term production cycles and soil improvement or investment in relevant technology? By 1984, the message was clear: the contracts were for five years, and soon after, it was clear that local redistribution would only take place after 15 years. Woodland contracts were for 50 years and/or inheritable. Policy was adapted in order to secure the stability of land as a productive resource, and rapidly growing inequality between families in terms of land and labour resources was accepted as a given. If we now look at the choices as they posed themselves for households, land was sufficient for small-scale farming, but the family had little chance of developing large-scale farming as no additional farmland was normally available. In as far as the farmland was subject to a state procurement quota, specialization of production (the issue of specialized households – *zhuananyehu* – is discussed separately below) was not allowed, and most farmers were reluctant to specialize at the cost of production of grain for their own consumption; if they did, they would invest labour and funds in production with uncertain net returns at the opportunity cost of food grain. Intensification of production on the farmland was possible, and may be a strategy where the family had sufficient labour and/or had funds to enhance technological inputs. In the 1980s, the contracts favoured this strategy, as the price margins for above-quota grain sale to the state were increased significantly, and contract fulfilment was linked to deliveries of chemical fertilizer, diesel oil, plastic sheets, pesticides, and credits at discount prices.

The gains of intensive farming must be calculated, of course, on the basis of the additional costs, the actual availability of inputs at the right time and any opportunity cost of labour. The very large harvests in 1984 and in subsequent years seem to reflect a positive reaction to stimuli, but the notorious problems of cash shortages in the grain procurement stations (leading to the issuance of IOUs or promissory notes in lieu of cash

payment), and the actual non-delivery of subsidized factor inputs in many areas rapidly dampened enthusiasm. Intensification of agricultural production was in most cases either an investment of backbreaking labour or significant amounts of cash with a decreasing marginal gain, and subject to uncertainty of procurement prices and market prices. If we look at Table 5.1 again, we notice that basically the safest, but lowest earning bet was to produce for the quota and for own consumption, and within that diversify as much as possible in order not to lose all crops to the same pest. Some households were at the outset of the reforms able to contract additional land for special types of production. Normally this would be land for cash incomes outside the plan quotas, which was used in a way that made little sense when divided up, quite often grown with perennial crops. Tea fields, mulberry gardens, orchards, and so on belonged to this category. Specialized households (*zhuanyehu*) would be in charge, reaping the profit after a fixed rent was paid to the collective; as part of the contract, there may be an obligation to employ commune members at specified rates. Typically, risk-taking and entrepreneurial people would take on this type of activity, in particular in view of the financial exposure and uncertain market conditions. These entrepreneurs would normally have strong political capital and links to the trading agencies for the special product in order to minimize risk-taking. All of those I have come across had such contracts not as a sole source of income, but as part of a diversified strategy. The overall result of this discussion is that the majority of households had the choice of either dealing with production by adopting a relatively resource extensive production for the state quota and own consumption or, where possible, rely on any opportunities for diversified use of labour.

Taking stock of these dynamics of change it is obvious that the issue of *rationality* is central to any explanation. The household responsibility system has been claimed as an ideal of liberal economic rationality, where the producers responding to markets and thereby generating aggregate wealth, using resources in the most efficient way, including their own labour; yet this caricature does not hold, for in reality the exchange of goods and services remained under centralized state control until the early 1990s and, even more importantly, what appeared rational for the individual and/or the household rarely served the purpose of increasing aggregate wealth, growth or productivity in an unambiguous way. The use of *rationality* here does not make claims about the rationality of aggregate outcomes and only makes the claim that actors, be they policy-makers, individuals or households, tend to pursue what they consider best for their own interests, based on their resources, knowledge, beliefs and socially constructed habits; this pursuit may, on occasion, take place in an Adam Smith marketplace, but in its totality covers a much broader range

of value judgements. Rational behaviour, it follows, has no universal measure except the agents' belief that they pursue a balance of welfare, sustainability and improvement within a socially determined framework (cf. North 2005). The introduction of risk under the household responsibility system added a significant pressure on China's peasants to change their judgements of how to achieve welfare and life improvement.

2 LIVELIHOODS AND RISK

The agricultural policy has thus since the early 1980s created dynamics that encouraged peasants to find employment outside agriculture. The livelihood strategies that we need to explore, therefore, have to be conceived of differently from what we often *see* in the analysis of other developing countries, where the livelihoods of some (mainly those in rural areas, often in villages or settlements that reflect a subordinate political economy position) tend to be explored, while those of others (for example, those who have left, or those who constitute different social strata or ethnic groupings) are left outside the scope of query. In much of the development studies literature, livelihood accounts often reflect the *rural* and *marginal* in a steady state, in decline or under threat from a competing, external economic system or ecological aggravation. I, with Frank Ellis (1998), argue for a much more integrated and dynamic view of livelihood strategies as straddling economic systems. The emphasis on situational and contextual understanding of diversification is important, for policies and markets present opportunities for diversification that are not only context specific, but also different from household to household. Diversification is, by its nature, a sign of transience, of things happening in the wider political economy that entices farmers to reorganize their production and earning profiles. Analysing the process of diversification and acknowledging that the households are embodying systemic change, is a realization that we may learn from the Chinese experience. Focusing on the perceived stasis of the rural rump is a common fallacy of research, obfuscating an understanding of how it is dynamically linked to urbanizing populations like local proletariats and middle classes, migrants on the fringe of large cities and even in diaspora.

In the Chinese case, once we start analysing the opportunities available, the risks and the policy ramifications, we can account for why such a large part of the rural population diversified its use of labour and its income sources, and we can identify a time span when this occurred as part of a policy-induced systemic change. This makes it so much easier to identify the processes in China than in many other developing countries, where the

processes may be much more diverse and the transitional dynamics better camouflaged.

We may say that an operational definition like that given by Ellis (1998: 4), 'construct[ing] a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living', neatly captures the issue of livelihoods analysis. It almost presumes a clean business calculation and an ability to interpret a changing political economy environment with the purpose of taking rational action.

Based on the Chinese experience, I suggest that livelihood strategies play a significant role in defining individual belonging and also involve aspirations for social and economic transformation. Livelihood strategies are, in a way, how people imagine and act upon their opportunities; they are social, signalling community status and power relationships; and they are cultural, interpreting, reinventing and realigning the rules and conventions of social behaviour. The economic calculus and the weighing up of risks were palpably only the seeds of livelihood strategy and reflections of the conditions available through the market and policy. The full scope of livelihood strategy can only be understood within its social and cultural dimensions. I shall explain this, using a range of examples.

Diversification in China took three main forms: (a) agricultural diversification; (b) large-scale local non-agricultural economic development; and (c) large-scale rural–urban migration.

Agricultural diversification on a small scale included attempts to increase income and spread risks through responding to new market demands. On a larger scale, it tended to be associated with major state development schemes, including major poverty alleviation (*fupin*) schemes that, for example, provided market access for new products or in other ways improved conditions for production of rare and specialized crops; and more importantly the large comprehensive agricultural development (*zonghe nongye kaifa*) schemes of the 1990s, which involved substantial financial inputs in upgrading poorly used land resources, and which typically helped farmers specialize in new high-income crops. These activities often helped households to diversify incomes substantially.

However, the real systemic change took place in the areas of rural industry and migration. The inability of the state to invest in industries that could provide agricultural factor goods had in 1970 led to the decision to develop small rural industries to cater for rural needs for cement, machinery and tools, chemical fertilizer, and other similar products (cf. Wong 1989). By the end of the 1970s, this rural industry sector had developed somewhat, and had also taken up production activities in other fields. Between 1978 and 1983, this sector gained much more freedom, and

a rapid development began (cf. Byrd and Lin 1990; Jun Li 2002; Sjöberg and Zhang 1998). Simultaneously, quite a number of small-scale service and industrial production activities that had been classified as ‘sidelines’ were privatised and registered as rural enterprises.⁸ From 1983, private enterprises on any scale were de facto allowed (Christiansen 1989). This enterprise sector emerged in a situation where the urban state-owned enterprises were mainly geared towards heavy industrial outputs, not only providing raw materials, but also a huge unexploited market demand for consumer goods and services. State-owned enterprises, of course, following initial reforms in 1981 were able to enter into this marketplace. However, they operated under the constraints of higher investment requirements and higher total labour costs. Rural enterprises had easier access to land and had no overheads associated with employment, unlike state-owned enterprises responsible for housing, canteens, kindergartens, clinics and other welfare arrangements (ibid.). Rural enterprises, due to their flexibility, were often also able to attract foreign orders and Hong Kong and Taiwan investment. The sector developed rapidly, attracting huge numbers of workers. Even where efficiency and product quality were low, they had a distinct market advantage. Because rural residents were defined by their ‘agricultural household registration’ (*nongye hukou*), they were not able to compete directly with workers in state-owned enterprises, so one could say that the rural industries and services that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in China gave shape to a Lewis-type ‘unlimited supply of labour’ for industry in the locality.⁹ A large part of this activity was highly informal and opportunistic. Small individual entrepreneurs struggled with the lack of investment funds that would allow their companies to grow and become formalized, while larger collective enterprises were part of what has been termed a ‘local state corporatism’ by which the township governments would run the collective enterprises as one large concern for the sake of local development (Oi 1992, 1995, 1998) Where these enterprises emerged, they provided attractive labour opportunities for peasants, to the effect that scarcity led to peasants from other parts arriving to take up work, and often also to enter into agricultural production on fields abandoned for the sake of industrial work.

In this process, status and power became strong elements for household strategies. House building and marriage alliances became important investment targets in order to secure social status. House building became associated with marriage in the sense that the newly-weds’ house and appliances, delivered by both the groom’s and the bride’s families (in the form of bridewealth), were a sign of social status and prowess.¹⁰ Entrepreneurship and work in rural enterprises were sources of cash income that could facilitate a strengthened community belonging through

the emphasis on social competition. In this competition, the ambition to leave the peasant status became a strong driving force (cf. Anagnost 2004; Davin 1999; Murphy 2002; Solinger 1999).

Rural–urban migration, still based on the ‘agricultural household’ status, which dictated that migrants must apply for temporary residence permits in cities or risk being ‘illegal’ became a major strategy for seeking earnings from other sources. Where migration went to the urban fringe, work was often agricultural, but tended to be much better paid than at home. In most cases, however, migration was highly structured and brought workers into core urban sectors to take care of hard work. In particular, the recruitment to the construction sector was huge. Domestic services, factory work, service jobs in catering and in transport abound. Once in urban areas, the strategies migrants needed to follow were often at odds with the household strategies that brought them to the cities in the first place; operating in the context of an urban market economy involved its own ‘rationality’ and migrants soon developed fine-masked institutions to deal with this type of market place (Lei Guang 2005). The temporary status and *hukou* registration, of course, linked migrants with their ‘home’ area in the village. Their opportunity to migrate and enjoy higher earnings was often construed as proto-contractual in some way, so there was an obligation towards the family. Remittances often had to supplement incomes at home. However, such exchanges were in some cases phrased in terms of obligations to the family; migrant men would be expected to sustain their parents, often by remitting funds to build the house for him and his spouse. Daughters would remit money until any brother she had was married.

It is risk that keeps people together in livelihood strategies. The rural industry in its early phases was shaky and unpredictable as a source of income and rarely provided social security; the collective membership and the land contract were regarded as a security, and are still legally and in policy construed to be so. The obligation of parents to support children and children their elderly parents is part of the moral code, and is also enforced by the state. This obligation also includes migrants, intensifying the backwards links to the villages. Children are sent back for education, remittances help support the family and, in case of illness or other problems, the village is a haven for outside members returning. Village leaders and township governments have on occasion questioned the rights of returnees, but overall most migrants think of the village as ‘home’ and as insurance in case they are not able to pursue their livelihood any more. Urban insurances and equitable labour rights for migrants do exist on paper, but are not in general carried out through local government agencies.¹¹

Under the fairly neat grid of abstractions I have presented here, we have a rather more complex political economy. During the last 20 years, millions have left rural areas, and land contracts have changed hands. Urban development has subsumed huge stretches of rural land, in the process transforming millions into urban residents. Markets have become much more predictable and stable, so farmers specializing in particular types of production are no longer in the high-risk bracket. Rural enterprises have been through many attempts at streamlining; it has been particularly important that the most viable of them have been incorporated vertically in national or global companies as branches or suppliers. The rest form an undergrowth of less efficient companies run by petty entrepreneurs still able to gain some profit from a developing market in packaging, transport, house building, furnishing, retail, and so on. The ‘streamlining,’ of course, is a double-edged sword, as the semi-regulated and viable, often vibrant, examples of local-state corporatism are subjugated to standards, controls, regulation and demands that effectively cut them loose from their communities and turned them into faceless representatives of remote business interests. This trend to weed out the semi-regulated and unregulated economy narrows the capital base for popular livelihoods, forces affected villagers away from their clientelist reliance on village and township cadres (see Oi 1989) into the cold embrace of institutions whose aim and end is gain and not the individual and collective well-being of the villagers they employ. The cost of ‘formality’ thus is the loss of informal networks and codes that reduce risk, while the gain consists of faint promises that state legislation, regulation and as yet immature jurisprudence will safeguard basic labour interests and that the weakest in the communities can rely on last-resort social safety nets. The small enterprises and workshops left tend to rely on informality and self-exploitation to eke out a marginal existence; where ‘informality’ becomes fragmented and marginal it naturally turns its weapons against the weak who normally wield them in self-defence; class solidarity, village membership, kinship and other social networks become the convenient moral avenues for disposing of the casualties of ‘formality’, while the self-exploiting, poorest and most marginalized peasant and ‘petty entrepreneur’ households provide care, shelter and odd jobs for those surplus to the demand of streamlined companies or rejected by them due to occupational diseases and injuries.¹² The advance of ‘formality,’ in brief, tends to lead to the pauperization of the ‘informal’ institutions, depleting their ability to counteract social injustices and to act as social safety nets.

Migrant workers in urban areas are also a transient group, and as they become increasingly able to settle permanently with a firm status, their rural bond becomes less intense, as land contracts, so to speak, cease to

underwrite their social risks. That being said, the underlying demographic pressure in rural areas continues to play a role, although the peak has passed. The livelihood strategies that drive the movement away from agriculture will continue to be interesting to research. We gradually *see* new larger farm contractors emerge in some areas, and agro-businesses are making some inroads here and there to replace old contract farming. The entrance of the corporate world to govern economic relationships and the failure to cover new economic phenomena with adequate policies and legislation has created new risks and pressure points. Our attention must now also be directed at in particular workers, be they migrant or not, and rural workers and contractors, whose contractual relationships with employers often leave them with high risk and uncertainty.

Many who ought to be under labour contracts are in reality under lease and operate contracts that shield their patron from any business risk and leave the subcontractor with all the risk. Others are under trainee contracts that do not guarantee employment after completion. Labour, health insurance, health provisioning and social security legislation in China is only now beginning to catch up with the new realities. These dynamics must be part of our long-term account of livelihoods in China.

3 REAL LIFE CHOICES

In the majority of Chinese villages there is a tradition for female exogamy, meaning that the sons are expected to remain in the village of their parents, while the daughters are expected to marry outside the village. The complex origins of this shall not be addressed here, but it is deeply engrained in the rural social structures and reinforced by the administrative practices of the Chinese state since the 1950s. The expectation during the people's commune system was that they would join production at 16; by the early 1970s, policy would not allow marriage before 20, so they would 'contribute' at least four years to social production. Among the practices that emerged after the reforms started in 1978, making the *household* the core unit of decision-making, was that young unmarried women would be expected to 'contribute' to the marriage of their male siblings; in other words, their labour incomes were expected to go towards the costs of the marriage of their brothers. The diverse conditions in different villages and among people with various levels of affluence conditioned the specific practices that emerged. The *rational actors* focused their attention not just on land, crops, markets and off-farm opportunities, but on marriage and house building. At the core of the household strategies we find marriage

as an opportunity to enhance the household with assets in the form of daughters-in-law (Christiansen 2007; Yan Yunxiang 2005).¹³

‘One’s own daughters’, as rural mothers in all parts of China have told me, ‘are raised for others to benefit from’, while gaining the right daughter-in-law was essential. Mothers across China would be listing excellent work skills, social standing and social capital (gained through the association with the in-law family), good health, stamina, physical strength, reliability, sound judgement, ability to bear sons, and obedience to the mother-in-law. The cost of gaining a strong daughter-in-law was the gift to their son of an array of assets in the form of separate living space, household equipment, means of transport and luxury items, plus a substantial *bridewealth*, money paid to the bride’s parents, but returned by them to the bride as her property, almost as a *dowry*. In addition to this, each family had strong expectations about a lavish wedding sufficient to establish the *face* of the family, adequate for its social standing, not mean and not presumptuous vis-à-vis kin, but definitely jockeying for social standing in the community. Translated into monetary terms, sons’ marriages were expensive, yet universally regarded as important parts of the households’ livelihood strategies.

Daughters’ contribution could be to do hard work in the field freeing their fathers and brothers up to work in off-farm enterprises to earn cash; in some cases the daughters became off-farm workers, and in some cases they were encouraged to migrate to cities or new industrial towns on the east coast. They handed their earnings and/or remittances over to their father.

In the 1980s, matchmakers played an important role, and married people in the villages in many interviews stated that there was no room for ‘love’ matches, but that ultimately the young people were left to decide for themselves; the perfect match, of course, was among social peers, reflected in the banal formulation *mendang hudui* (lit.: ‘matching doors’). By the late 1990s, the young had taken the initiative, phrasing their dating criteria in equally utilitarian political economy terms.

The point to be made about this very powerful and all-pervasive institution is that it interprets economic decisions as part of the big life cycles and focuses resources on the achievement of gain that is not expressed in monetary values. One may, with Bourdieu, understand these processes as ‘transformations of capital’, in the sense that investing labour effort to build social capital is of intrinsic value both by securing sustainable livelihoods and by raising the potential for economic gain. ‘Purchasing’ (through bridewealth and other expenses) a wife/daughter-in-law who possesses social and cultural capital (standing and skills) can be construed to be a ‘rational’ decision, also in economic terms. However, it is mitigated

by institutions of expectation (Bourdieu would call this *habitus*) that the actors on the one hand are constrained by and on the other actively manipulate, to the extent that there is no simple calculus.

Peasants' devices for dealing with state policy, therefore, involve socially constructed, resilient and malleable institutions of value transformations that insulate individual behaviour from policy; the outcomes are highly situational, as the perceptions differ from village to village, and the pressures experienced by households vary widely. Many social perceptions, including for example on marriage, are widely held, but tend to reflect *ideal-type* constellations; the reality, of course, often fails to produce the circumstances needed, and people interpret the 'rules' in ways that best suit their situation.

For rural households, the linkage to land involves the right to the site of a house; in principle, the assets of the parents are equally inherited between siblings, but in reality, this is curtailed by the reliance on *fenjia* and other practices, whereby the adult members of a family set up a written contract of dividing the family property. This contract normally excludes the daughter(s) of a family from any claim, or only a limited claim, to the assets. This practice, flying in the face of policies on gender equality and in many recorded cases seriously affecting women's social status and welfare (Zhang 2003), is deeply engrained in rural society, associated with the patrilocal marriage pattern already mentioned, for the collective land ownership excludes males from outside the village gaining any land rights. This means that incoming men are seen as a threat, except where they, traditionally, are adopted in as children by son-less families. The expectation of village *exogamy* means that the land use under the household responsibility system in many places does not include daughters in periodical reallocation. Only if they marry a man in their own village are they ultimately entitled to land, and by the logic of male land distribution, their husband will have been considered in land-use reallocation. Where things go wrong (for example, if the husband dies), the woman's choices will exclude marriage to a man from outside the village, lest she be forced to give up her own land. Other cases of female landlessness arise where divorced women return to their parental village. Policy changes that aim to stabilize productivity (for example, extension of land use contracts to 30 years in the late 1990s) have the effect of exacerbating these problems (Hare, et al. 2007). In some places, this logic behind the land-use allocation assumed historical dimensions, restoring claims that only lineage descendants had land rights, and those who had arrived from other villages should return to the villages of their 'own' lineage origin, presenting large groups with huge challenges: loss of land, livelihood, and house, and ultimately uprooting and migration to villages where one is unwanted (Liu and Murphy 2006).

For migrants to urban areas, land ownership often remains an essential symbolic root and an imaginary insurance against hard times. The continuous discrimination against rural migrants to cities means that migrants maintain strong backwards links in the villages; the idea of earning enough to go back and live a prosperous life in the village is often a lingering illusion among migrants. Remittances invested in houses or empty houses to return to are often testimony to household strategies pulling in different directions at the same time (Sargeson, 2002): On the one hand, the consolidation of agriculture, and keeping intact the social institutions of family cycles, while on the other hand serving the symbolic functions of mutual support and social 'insurance.' Needless to say that in those cases where migrants return to their villages in bad health (due to, for example, occupational accidents or illnesses), their rural relatives, previously relying in part on remittance incomes to maintain stability, may easily fail in their attempts to offer any real help to returnees, due to limited labour resources and low agricultural incomes.

The agency of peasant households in dealing with state policy thus needs to be conceived in terms of the social institutions, practices and value systems in peasant communities. The economic success of the reforms to a large extent relies on the ability of these institutions and practices to change over time, to help reallocate resources and to give meaning to household decisions. During this process there is no doubt that new social injustices emerge.

NOTES

1. The effects of the policies introduced since 2003, and reinforced in October 2008 are gradually under way, and bear in them the promise that social justice and the well-being of people is gaining importance in policy.
2. Perhaps the most well-known examples of this are recorded in a collection of papers published in support of the rural reforms in China. See Wang Gengjin et al. (1985). Fengyang was allegedly where the rural reforms started spontaneously in the late 1970s.
3. Lin makes the point that early adaptors of the household responsibility system were those places where abandoning *monitoring* of production led to swift *efficiency gains*, as areas lagging behind were those where this gain must be traded off against the *cost* of dismantling other efficiency-enhancing collective institutions (for example, collective ownership of farm machinery). The 'free rider' argument is a catch-all for a belief in efficiency of individualised production, where the producers' individual 'marginal return' is a product of their 'marginal effort'.
4. This two-volume work (Ma Hong and Sun Shanqing 1981) collects policy documents aimed at appraising the Chinese economy to form the background for decisions of the economic reform process. 'Reverse trading grain' was distributed to communities, where other production quotas made grain production impossible, and also to disaster-stricken areas.

5. In the absence of a population census in the 1970s, and due to the poor administrative reporting of the of core population data, Chinese officials at the outset of the reforms had no way of estimating the steep decline in population growth rates from 2.7 (1970) to 1.3 (1977), with 3.6 per cent (1963) as the last reliably recorded data (see Banister 1987: 354). Accordingly, they could neither gauge the size of age cohorts, nor predict the effects of population policy, and were likely to overestimate the demographic crisis. It was not until the 1983 census that the needed data became available.
6. Chayanovian cycles are used here to describe functions of household change under conditions of forced egalitarianism being replaced with non-egalitarian systems, where household composition allows different responses to opportunity. No point is made about Chayanov's supposed determinism, or the 'class' versus 'natural cycle' debate often associated with Chayanov's model.
7. The use of gender reflects the conditions of patrilineal succession in rural China. I use the 30–40 years cycle not as a formal definition, but as a practical measure with which to indicate a time span within which a family unit is likely to have passed through its various stages.
8. Comparing definitions of statistical categories in Zhongguo Tongji Ju (1984) and Zhongguo Tongji Ju (1985), it is possible to explain the sudden rise in rural *industries* with the inclusion of all non-agricultural rural small-scale production in the category.
9. Rural Economy Group of the State Council Research Division and the Rural Development Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (1990), Flemming Christiansen (1995: 410–25).
10. See further detailed examination below.
11. However, this may be changing as the Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao leadership's ambitious plans not only change legislation (major legislative milestones on labour and social security have been achieved since 2003) but also actual practice and local authorities' commitments.
12. The author has observed this phenomenon in some communities in China's richest provinces, and has no doubt that as the frontier of the formal economy progresses into the townships and villages of the interior, the fragile local bonds and safety nets will succumb to powerful economic interests.
13. Yunxiang Yan provides an excellent account of the transition of the marriage institution in response to new opportunities during the economic reforms.

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6. Land to the tiller: the complexities of land ownership and use in a north China village

Zhao Xudong

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the debates and issues concerning land ownership and use in China. It covers key arguments regarding land reform and land privatization and illustrates the complexities involved with a case study of land use in a north China village.

As a basis for survival, land has always been the special focus of social institutional arrangements. However, land occupied as the private property of the individual is, in China, only a recently emerging phenomenon. Land was originally collectively owned by the lineage, clan or tribe, and more recently by the collective and state. Rousseau's comment that 'the noble savage' had no concept of a piece of land being defined as private property in his name might still be the case for many rural cultivators in China. Rousseau implies that its formation and development is the basis of one aspect of the human civilizing process.¹

Since time immemorial, whether in the north or south, at least one piece of land has been reserved for communal use in rural China. It was the basis of the common consciousness of a village community. There were several names for such land, including 'lineage land' (*zu tian*), or 'righteous land' (*yi tian*). In his famous 1947 book, *The Golden Wing*, Lin Yueh-hwa describes, for Huang Village in Fujian Province, the important role played by public/common land in collective action:

The first ancestor is said to be the nominal owner of a piece of land, usually called the ancestral plot, which is cultivated in rotation by different families among the different lineages of the clan. Each year, whichever family is temporarily the tenant in charge of the ancestral land gets the right to the produce of the plot. But it also has the duty of making sacrifices and preparing a feast for the whole clan for that particular year. The ancestral plot is of course never permitted to be sold, and the whole clan has a collective responsibility towards it. (1947: 60)

The quote indicates the importance of maintaining ancestral land as a public good. A common consciousness was not transmitted from 'above' but existed in its own right. Each member of a village lineage possessed the right to cultivate public land and anyone who rented land would return any accruing benefits to the whole community. This is the basic logic of social justice in Fei Xiaotong's notion of 'earthbound' China (*xiang tu zhong guo*), which I have described in previous research under the term 'reciprocity' (Zhao Xudong 1999).

From studies of land use among ethnic minorities, even today, in what one might refer to as a 'rural commune pattern', communal and private ownership forms coexist. Of course, as anthropological studies have shown, land has always occupied an important position in the ideological world of peasants. The late Professor Fei Xiaotong (1992) described peasants as earthbound in that they lived in close relationship to the land where they were born and died (Fei Xiaotong 1992: 1–7). In earthbound society all social institutional designs are used to reinforce the ideological relationship of people to the land. An example from the past is the lineage system (based on an ancient feudal pattern of social organization), which, in practice, was a way of emphasizing a communally owned pattern of residence and cultivation based on kinship and territorial relationships.² Its collective representation was based on a common ancestor and was sustained by village elites through the ideology of Confucianism. In the Qing dynasty, Zhang Ying (1638–1708, see Beattie 1979) included in his book *Heng Chan Suo Yan* many teachings for his own descendants on how to keep ancestral land in the lineage and avoid its transfer to an alien lineage. Maintaining collective land ownership and associated relationships entailed the survival and continuation of the lineage group rather than the survival of the individual household or person.³

The scope of 'public land' was enlarged during the Maoist period under a system of 'collective ownership'. However, in 1979, the Deng Xiaoping land reforms introduced the 'household contract responsibility system' for production, and benefits were returned to the collective in the form of contract fees. In yet more recent reforms, starting in 1993, rural taxes and fees were gradually abolished by the state (State Department Document 2003).⁴ Such practices have been the key to providing the preconditions for changes in forms of land use and for resolving the larger issue regarding the system of landholding in China. Before presenting details on land use in a north China village, I focus on the larger issues surrounding current arguments and debates on land reform in China.

THE LAND SYSTEM IN CHINA: BACKGROUND TO THE LARGER ISSUES

The majority of the population in China is still engaged in agriculture, and thus rural economic development is connected to the many problems relating to land. Deng's land reforms, based on the contract system of household responsibility for production, were, for example, more about land management than about land use and ownership. Not until 1985 did reforming land use become an important aspect of land reform. One consequence of the Deng reforms was a sharp downward trend in the use of fertilizers as households sought to make savings on inputs. Moreover, because there was a lack of clarity as to who precisely had the ownership or use rights to particular plots, it was difficult to achieve a balance in land relationships. This has led to frequent disputes and invasions of land in rural villages. Likewise, because there is no market for land, farmers face serious conflicts when they encounter contradictions between the amount of land contracted and their ability to manage it under the rapidly changing situation of labour and society. In addition, the small size of plots has blocked a rational arrangement of production elements (Ho 2005; Huang Heqing 1989). One might summarize the land problem, therefore, as lacking any definition of, or integration of, the system of ownership.

Two aspects to this problem are ripe for research: first, is the lack of clear definition in respect to property relations. Although the constitution includes the statute that 'land in rural and suburban areas is owned by the collective except for that part owned by the state as prescribed by law', this kind of ownership is far from complete, since the collective does not possess the right of disposal, which should clearly be an essential part of the code. Who the subject of ownership is, is also unclear and its forms of organization are in disarray. Second, is the absence of institutional security regarding ownership. There is no clear definition of land ownership, boundary markers, procedures for transactions, no way of realizing the asset or the security that the collective and the peasants need. In other words, there is no effective legal protection for collective land ownership. Except for expropriation by the state, the configuration of collective ownership cannot be changed through the market. State policy permits the transfer of peasant use rights in two ways: a peasant household can subcontract land to others; and the collective can make new regulations in the village. Neither allow for the commercial marketing of land. Thus, ownership is a focus within the wider debate on the problems of the present system.

Two arguments predominate. First is the belief that land should be

state owned. Qu Futian et al. (1986) argue that although the constitution prescribes collective land ownership, most of the rights, such as the right of disposal and income from the land, remain in the hands of the state. When the socialist system of agriculture was established, the state became *de jure* owner of rural land. Later, the reforms that contracted out responsibility for production to the household unit, in part resolved the rights of ownership (in terms of use and assets) between peasants and the state. In many places, the relationship between the collective and peasants has gradually changed into a more direct one between the state and peasants. Han Jun (1989) argues that state ownership of land allows the state to limit its use and also and to effectively promote macro control and regulation, as well as stimulate marketing mechanisms. Yang Xun (1989) also stresses that state ownership is necessary for the reasonable and effective use of land. On the other hand, those opposed to state ownership believe that it deprives peasants. And as Wang Guichen et al. (1988) point out, there is also the risk that seizing land from peasants involves political risks that can have a dramatic impact on the economy, politics and social life, with woeful results. Chen Jiyuan et al. (1989) argue that institutions would also be needed to manage, regulate, and oversee such a great amount of rural land, which in turn would result in high transaction costs.

The second point of view focuses on land privatization. Chen Yongsheng et al. (1988) believe that the difficulties associated with land centralization come from the fact that the land does not belong to those who manage it, and therefore the chance to transform it in terms of the principle of efficacy is lost. Another problem of centralization is realizing a market system for trading, renting, and shareholding land and the difficulties of regulating and managing land effectively on a large scale. Starting from a concern about the security of property rights and the liberated status of peasant, Zhang Qi (1989) proposes that the trend should be to change the land system from collective to private ownership. By doing so the trinity of ownership, management and use rights would be consolidated, and if peasants were free to manage the land themselves then an increase in productivity would be achieved. But the voices against land privatization are also strong. Chen Xiwen (1988) argues that, from an economic point of view, land privatization would lead to an increase in the price of agricultural produce once ground rent was included in the income of peasants, which consumers could not afford. Zhang Yunqian (1989) believes the idea of land privatization to be too far removed from the basic situation of China and the practical thinking of peasants. He also claims that land privatization would simply reinforce the role that land plays in terms of welfare and security and its role in terms of economic production would

be gradually weakened. As a result, it would be difficult to develop mechanisms for commercialization and centralization.

A third suggestion is to maintain the existing system, that is, ownership by the collective but contracted out to households. But those who oppose this argue strongly that if the system were to be continued then the reason for a land contract period and the shortsighted behaviour of peasants regarding land use would be difficult to avoid. Yet others insist that a complex system of land ownership should be instituted which seeks to overcome previous shortcomings. They propose a system of 'three element ownership': state, collective, and private. The argument against this multi-system of land ownership is that although ideal in theory, in practice, such a system is too difficult to implement. Furthermore, as a whole, multi-ownership would be mutually weakening and the increased transaction costs would not fit the principle of efficacy (Ma Li 1988). As well as divergent opinions over the reform of rural ownership, they also exist over reforms in land marketing. The main task for future land reform then would be to supplement and consolidate the existing system.

Any reforms in ownership, use or marketing have to be operational in practice. In terms of consolidating and clarifying collective land ownership, for example, the view has been expressed that collective land should belong to a collective body at grass roots level and that village organization should be self-governing. Rights of occupation, use, income, and its legal treatment might then be implemented and realized through forms of contract, transfer, renting, mortgage or shareholding. Land ownership could be transferred between the collective and the state and between collectives themselves.

The same applies for clarifying and consolidating land use. Contracts on use rights should be stable so farmers can make plans over the long term and reinforce good land management. Peasants should have secure rights over ownership, use, income, and partial rights to reserved land for the period of the contract. The farmer contracting the land could then manage it independently or be able to transfer its management through price or other forms (share-cropping or mortgaging the land to a financial institution). Land use rights could be realized through forms of contracting and contract transfer to introduce a competitive element into land use management and accomplish a system that implements the right to transfer use rights for a return.

Finally, all laws regarding land owned collectively must be clearly defined and consolidated, including market and competition mechanisms, from the legal use of economic levers such as ground rent and land price, through forms of contracting, tenancy, public bidding and shareholding, in order to promote land transfer in a rational manner.

LAND RELATIONSHIPS IN PRACTICE

There are thus many discussions of a general nature concerning land, but detailed studies of rural land occupation and ownership relationships are rare. I have been concerned with the land issue for many years and would also argue that a simple division of ‘public’ or ‘private’ ownership is too radical. An institution cannot be established and integrated in a day. It is a longer-term adaptive and re-adaptive process of individuals and society.

As we know, the system of ‘well-land’, that is, land drawing upon a particular well, proposed by Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BC), a famous Confucian of the Han dynasty, was a way to eliminate social contradictions caused by the anomalies of land distribution. Under this system a landlord who occupied too much land was forced to transfer some to peasants who needed land for their survival. This ‘ideal’ system, never realized in practice, may be seen as the beginning of land-reform thinking in China. The basic ideas of social justice contained in the vigorous land reforms of the 1950s, were akin to those intended in Dong Zhongshu’s ‘well-land’ system,⁵ in other words, a radical swing from private to public ownership. Swings are difficult to stop when radical positions are adopted, such as those of the present-day reformers who would seek ‘Great Harmony under Heaven’, and who would push the pendulum from one extreme to the other. From the privatization of land before the Mao period, to its collectivization under Mao and then under the Deng reforms contracted to individual households, history went full circle.

This realization and the current debates over land pushed me into looking at what was happening on the ground rather than simply accepting the trend of land ownership going ‘public’ or ‘private’. In other words, land tenure in agrarian societies is really about looking at the relationship between land and people rather than the relationship between ‘public’ and ‘private’. This kind of relationship is not universal, and my own fieldwork provides an example.

THE CASE OF LI VILLAGE

Li is the academic name given to the village I studied in Hebei province. A detailed ethnography of the village, based on five months fieldwork in 1999, was published in 2003. Li village lies in the eastern part of Hebei province, in Zhao County, 200 kilometres south of Beijing. It enjoys good conditions for growing pears because of the silt accumulated in the old channel of the Hutuo River. Before 1949, it was said that pear trees grew

naturally there, and pesticides were seldom used. But the trees were not as widely grown as today. The main crops then were corn and wheat.

During the collective period, the village production team cultivated a communal garden with pear trees as a source of income that was distributed among all the villagers. They received in this way twice as much for their labour as other villages. The village implemented the family responsibility contract system in 1983. It was the first time villagers had received land for their own personal use. Each village made its own rules for land distribution, and Li village authorities reserved a small garden for their own use, some of the benefits of which were used as a fund for public construction. The primary school, the road and some of the essential cadre allowances were paid out of this fund. Until 2003 the rest of the collective land was distributed, and each family received a share. The collective village capital was sold off year by year to individuals and when I visited in 2005 a resident told me that the production team had none of it left to sell.

The land is contracted to farmers for a period of 30 years, and they therefore *see* it as belonging to them, the only difference being that they do not have titles to the land. They do not *see* this as essentially a problem. They do not work with the concept of ‘private property’ and care only about whether they have the use and benefits from the land. In theory, the state places many restrictions on the use of contracted land but, in practice, peasants manage the land as they please. They build cold storage rooms and houses on their contracted land, and even sublease it to others to farm. Several farmers reached a private agreement to sublet land to a villager who opened a factory to make cardboard boxes for the pear industry.

I interviewed Jiangfang, the middle-aged owner of this factory. He had built the factory on 30 mu of land in the north of the village. The land belonged to many individual farmers and he had had to negotiate and haggle with all of them before signing individual contracts to be able to use the whole 30 mu of land. A sample of the contract drawn up with each farmer is that between Jiangfang and Yifang, of Li village No.7 team. In discussions, Jiangfang and Yifang reached an agreement as follows: The rental period was agreed as ‘a long period of time’. The land rented was defined as 3.0575 mu, at a rent of 9019 yuan per year, due every Layue⁶ of the lunar year. The four boundaries were agreed as: north to the farming road, east to Qi Mengzhen, south to Li Zhongqiao’s land, and to other factories in the west. Land in the shadow of the factory wall was 2 metres to the south, 4 metres to the east and was to remain at the disposal of Yifang, who had not the right to transfer it. If the factory were to close, Yifang would receive compensation for five years’ loss. The contract was

to take effect after signatures or thumbprints, and was dated 3 March 2004. The factory owner rented 30 mu after signing such a contract with 19 villagers.

Although the exchange of land for house building is illegal, the covert exchange of house land between city and village people is very active (cf. Sheng Rong 2005), and despite not being recognized by the legal department in Jiangfang's case, it nevertheless had right of promissory between the farmers and the factory. What is more important is that this kind of contract relationship is left open on both sides, which means that both parties shoulder some risks. The basic principle is that both sides benefit from the lease. Ownership is seldom taken into consideration or even thought of. Some scholars assume that peasants lose out in such deals because of unclear property rights. But in reality this appears not to be the case. The asking rental price would not be higher if the peasant had ownership rather than use rights to the land, and nor would the factory owner pay more if the farmer *had* ownership rights. It is a bargaining process on both sides. It is no more possible for the farmer to throw away his land to the factory owner than it is for the factory owner to raise the rent above his expected profits.⁷

My investigation shows that the real reason for renting out land is that the returns are higher than from cultivating it, and that the income is more visible and stable. The farmer can guarantee in this way his family's basic needs without the need to labour on the land. It is difficult to resist this kind of temptation. In addition, not having ownership does not mean that he cannot renegotiate the contract made with the factory boss in line with the cost of living. In this sense, the land is much more like a bank and it is a common occurrence for both sides to amend the contract.

Much of the land used by rural factories will never return to farm use, but such land is not permanently lost. Because neither side has private ownership of the land, but only an agreement on a specific period for using it, perhaps 30, 50, or 70 years, and the farmer may possibly get compensation from the factory if some misfortune occurs. So the farmer is unlikely to go bankrupt. To some extent, the lack of clarity surrounding land ownership could be to the peasants' advantage and performs a positive social function to sustain their lives. Under the system of collective land ownership the farmer has room for his own rational choices.

Of course, the fact that land is not owned by any specific individual or family also facilitates the implementation of certain national programmes. During investigations in Li village in 2004, a province-level road was being built that passed by the east of the village. The village authorities had responsibility for the demolition work required. The villagers living along the road did not refuse to move since they acknowledged the convenience

it would bring, but they wanted compensation for the land lost. The price per square metre is always the focus of such events and reaching an agreement on such matters is not easy. An agreement on the destruction of the houses was finally achieved by the village authorities offering alternative land within the village to build a new house and by the county offering compensation of 200 to 250 yuan per square metre of land lost. The compensation was not high, but was based on tacit bargaining powers. Thus national construction programmes are made possible through unclear land ownership. Otherwise, faced with private rights the costs to the government would have been much higher and perhaps impossible. Thus one might say that not fixing property rights is a rational choice for government.

LAND AS HOME, A SENSE OF BELONGING

Land is tightly bound to peasants' ways of life and their feelings and attachments. It is therefore not easy for government to alienate them from it simply through policy change. Urbanization always seems to sever the relationship between peasants and their land, compelling them to become citizens. Those responsible take no account of the fact that land provides a sense of identity and belonging for farmers. Land that was once lived on and handed down by the ancestors is fundamental for the family, and is also a reason why migrants return.⁸ Of course, land also provides life's necessities for peasants, but if land can no longer do this, they leave, though they may later return to work the land when conditions permit. Urbanization in Taiwan supports this point of view. Bernard Gallin (1966: 16) records that the irrigation system in Taiwan was first introduced by Japanese colonists. In his collected handwritten manuscript 'Pu Yen Chuang Yen Ke Chih', Gallin writes that in the Pu Yen area, irrigated land in the early 1900s accounted for about 600 chia. By 1922, this had increased to 2100 chia (Gallin 1966: 302, no. 4). Labour input increased accordingly and many workers who had had to leave to make a living in the nearby city of Lukang were able to return to cultivate wet rice (Gallin 1966: 16–17). Gallin provides us with a vivid picture of the amount of labour that could be absorbed by introducing a profitable system of irrigation. Earlier, all village land was given over to dry rice with a very low outcome per unit of land, which was insufficient to supply the family's basic needs. But with higher yields and an increased need for labour, those working in Lukang were able to return and make a living. Lukang lies near an open port and provided many work opportunities. Such a situation is similar for peasants who work on the Chinese mainland. Beijing, Shanghai

and Guangzhou also accommodate many peasant workers. However, their importance decreases when farmers can make a comparative living on their land. Adult farmers remember from their youth the skills needed to work the land, but the precondition for returning often depends on having a family member still living in the village. If they do not keep land in their own family's hands, it is impossible to go back (ibid.: 48).

My research in Li village leads me to argue that many people want to live in the city but do not want to give up their roots in the rural homeland. They will keep a pear garden or house there and will go back often. There are also those who live in the village but make a living from renting their land to others. I asked the driver who took me downtown whether he was still caring for his pear trees. He replied no, he had given all that up some time ago. He was getting around 8000 yuan per year from renting his land to the carton factory. Last year, he bought a car for fun, but with the rising cost of oil he was using it as a taxi to meet costs. When we talked about his age, I learned that he was only 26 years old. It is unbelievable that such a young man can earn his living by renting out his land. And such a kind of 'reap where one has not sown' is based on land distributed by the collective. Because of this he is still able to continue living in the village and maintain his village life.

Many in Li village work in the city and some own apartments there while still keeping their old village homes. The house I lived in was owned by the landlord's eldest son, who had bought an apartment in Shijiazhuang city. Three members of his family had also moved there but they keep the family compound house, though it is not fully occupied. They return for gatherings at festivals and sometimes use the house at weekends. In the spring of 2005, they returned to attend the ceremony of the Fengjia Laomu Temple Fair. I also recognized the retired president of a middle school from a nearby village, named Fanzhuang, who lives in Li village with his wife in a big compound of more than ten houses. They have six children but they live there alone since the children are busy with their work and seldom meet each other, even though they all have houses in the compound. However, on the second day of the first month of the lunar year, they all gather there as a family. In the children's mind the family home is the place where their parents live. In traditional society, a sense of family was maintained by those who had left their land returning to it. As the saying goes 'defoliation goes back to the root'. Village people consider owning a piece of land a serious thing. In Lu village of Yunnan Province where Fei Xiaotong (1990: 194) did his field research, people considered it unthinkable for those who became officials in town not to 'buy' land in their home village. Many in lowly official positions saved money to buy farmland and become a 'dirty farmer'. Fei argues that in this way the

family retained their village ties and that the money earned through official work also went back to the land. With family still in the village, rights are not lost. But again, the emphasis villagers give to the value of land is not that of private property but of maintaining a public sense of family and village.

The boundary lines of Li village, as in all villages, are known by the villagers as well as they know the boundaries of their own plots. The boundaries play a role in the village temple fair, an important annual ceremony, during which the Xingshen, the moveable image of the village god, is taken in procession round the four village boundaries (Zhao Xudong 2003: 170). Such ceremonies are becoming unpopular or may even be abandoned because of the changing interests of the younger generation. Take the temple fair in Fan village, which I attend every year, as an example. The pageant of taking the image of the carved dragon around the village boundaries has been abandoned since the new village temple was built (also called the Dragon Culture Museum). Many thought walking the dragon image around to be laden with trivial detail and it was dropped. But more and more old people complained that the temple fair was no longer as lively as it used to be and blamed this on the absence of the processional pageant of walking the dragon. Those in charge of the temple fair told me that they planned to restore this pageant the following year. I believe this feeling of dissatisfaction is not only associated with memories of how lively temple fairs were in the past but also with the feeling of belonging they gave, the feeling that the pageant signified consolidation and conveyed renewal of their own four village boundaries. There is no doubt they consolidate the village as home, the place where they were born and will die.

CONCLUSION

As emerges from the above account, land policy in China has been formed under specific historical conditions and its configuration has changed as society itself has changed. Although detailed ethnographies are scarce, we can draw the conclusion that land usage will show territorial differences in line with geography and land pressure. The economic and social differences emerging between areas are leading to an imbalance, and rural land reforms will likewise be out of phase. This calls for a rural land policy that addresses these issues and a system that takes these differences into account and adopts therefore different methods in different areas.

My own research suggests that the main issue is not whether farmers own the property rights, but how best to guarantee the benefits for the

farmer from the use and leasing out of land. There is a need for village leaders with influence to voice the villagers' point of view and to mediate with the state on their behalf. Such leaders could be considered as brokering agents, who can ensure that land leasing policy works smoothly and fairly. We can return to the point made by Fei Xiaotong's 1939 work, *Peasant Life in China*, where he argued that the real problem in rural China was famine. Of course, farmers no longer worry about starvation. But the bottom line for them when making livelihood decisions and allocating resources is to be warm in the cold winters and to have enough to eat. If they fall below this line, then whether they have property rights or not, hardly matters. Moreover, I would argue that it is precisely the unclear nature of land property rights under the present collective system that allows farmers to reach the 'warm and full' line and fulfil basic needs in a flexible way (cf. Ho 2005: 3). Absolute property rights will cause farmers to lose their land absolutely should they in future be unable to make a living from the land.

It is possible that the configuration of the present land policy in China reflects social justice. We can argue how unfair it would be if those who owned it became completely separate from those working it. That is to say, those who owned the land had the exclusive right to decide the benefits derived from it rather than those who used or cultivated it. Such an impartial policy actually existed in society; it was not unreal, as in Utopia. As is well known, in 1942, Sun Yat-San proposed a land reform on the principle of 'land to the tiller'. The core of his proposal was that each farmer should own a piece of land and retain the benefits through working it. For instance, in Taiwan decreasing rent and interest fees in 1949, selling public farming land in 1951 and putting 'land to the tiller' into effect in 1953, eliminated social conflict in that period and went some way to achieving Sun Yat-San's dream (Chiang Monlin in Hui-Sun Tang 1954). The most pivotal step of the revolution, with regard to land policy, was the use of a public debt bond, whereby government could buy out land from existing landholders (ibid.). Compensation to the landowner had the effect of transferring investment in land to industry and this was the foundation of early industrialization in Taiwan (ibid.). Of course, because of the special background, scholars in China seldom introduce the experiences of the land reform in Taiwan, but it was actually a strikingly successful one. During that revolution, the government distributed the land reasonably without causing any social conflict. Generally speaking, the land reform after the liberation of China in 1949 by the communists was also successful. It almost equated with the vision of 'land to the tiller'. However, because of an overemphasis on collectivization, the fruits of the reform were lost. After the Third Branches of the Eleventh Conference of

the Central Communist Party, the land contract system was an attempt to return to the land utilization system before collectivization, and although this has not been spelled out, it was based on the idea of 'land to the tiller'. Comparative research of the land reforms of Taiwan and the mainland is far beyond my discussion here. I simply wish to emphasize that all the social reforms instituted there were geared to achieving social justice, and that effectiveness took second place or was accidental. As John Rawls stresses in his work, *A Theory of Justice* (1971), no matter how polished and effective regulations and laws are, if they do not address justice, then they need to be reformed or abolished. In any case, the logic of land is not occupation but making a living. As Taiwan reformists anticipated, people live from food and their food comes from the land. However, where the total amount of land is limited and the population is increasing, then obviously making a living from the land is a struggle. As Chiang Molin (in Hui-Sun Tang 1954) suggests, the maladjustment of social institutions combined with unreasonable distribution of wealth can cause a crisis of adjustment, that is, conflicts of opinion, clashes and confusion. It is impossible for a privately owned property system to avoid an increase in conflict brought by the uneven distribution and occupation of farming land. On the other hand, neither can a long established system easily be replaced by a new incoming foreign one. This has been proved by much research on the land system in various places in China.⁹ If reformists do not take this into consideration but simply impose their will, then the outcome could be disastrous (Han-seng Chen, 1949; Ying-Kuei Huang, 1992: 49).

Of course, what we learn from research is that the present land system is not yet satisfactory. The cases of contracting out land by peasants reveal a new exploitative trend. But, nevertheless, ownership is still by the collectivity. No one can occupy the land and own it as private property. The present system may be sustained by changing the imbalances through redistribution of the land in a reasonable and just way. But this cannot be accomplished within a short period. It involves a process by which peasants themselves are free to make their own decisions and choices. From this angle, it is better to let changes take their course, rather than initiate land reform from above and force society to accept it.

NOTES

1. On the inequality among men, Rousseau (1745) said. 'The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground bethought himself of saying *'This is mine'*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not any one have saved mankind by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch and crying to his fellows, 'Beware

- of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belongs to us all, and the earth itself to nobody' (cited in J.J. Rousseau 1754).
2. See Qu Tongzu (2005), who briefly reviews the original concepts of 'associate' and 'private' ownership in Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861). Qu also mentions Seebohm's common clan ownership and Vinogradoff's discoveries on early property ownership systems, such as consanguinity land ownership in the village, community and large family.
 3. One kind of property relationship in China which westerners find difficult to understand is land occupation. The most significant is so-called 'two owner' (*yi tian*), 'ancestor' (*zu tian*), and 'public land' (*gong tian*), that is, a piece of land where the underground or root ownership and the surface ownership are mutually separated. This separation emerged in the Song dynasty when, for example, words such as 'bone ownership to sell' and 'root ownership to sell' appeared in some land contracts. There were at the same time many terms used for root ownership such as 'land bone', 'land underground', 'land root'. (see also Fan Shuzhi (1988).
 4. 'State Department suggestions to promote experimental units for reforming rural taxes and fees'. It states: 'Each rural area should consider practical steps to reduce the range of special agricultural taxes, play down tax rights and create conditions for their final abolition.'
 5. See also Chiang Monlin's Foreword in Hui-Sun Tang (1954).
 6. The last day of the last month of the lunar year.
 7. A recent talk with a land developer in a tourist landscape of Huairou County of Beijing, confirms my point of view. The developer hoped to construct a hotel and individual houses on a large area of a mountain. Mountain land is distributed between local households and the developer would have to bargain with each household over the cost of expropriating the land. Strategic bargaining takes place. For example, one farmer had demanded a high price for his land, but the developer had already bought a piece of land near his target land that was not the piece the farmer tried for. He was therefore able to strike a balance whereby neither side suffered losses.
 8. According to surveys in south China, the metaphor '*gen*' (root) is becoming an image of current lineage rebuilding. Through the imagination of *gen* a blood association among people is being shaped (cf. Qian Hang and Xie Weiyang 1995, in Zhang Peiguo 2002: 245–46). The same situation has occurred in north China, especially emphasizing roots and links (*mai*) (Zhao Xudong, 2003: 39–40).
 9. See Huang Ying-Kuei's research among the Bunong people in the Dongpu community, and also in Lu village studied by Fei Xiaotong. It is even more obvious in Chen Han-seng's research of Baiyi society. Before 1726, Baiyi society was feudalistic and land ownership was collective. Between 1726 and 1909, the Qing dynasty forced the indigenous people to change this traditional system into one of private ownership based on family units. This led to many insurgences against the Qing dynasty.

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PART III

Urbanization of the Countryside and Migration Dilemmas

7. Urbanization, decentralization and the reorganization of rural life

Bryan Roberts

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is often confounded with the growth of cities and the accompanying changes in economics, politics and culture. Its impact is much broader, however, since it represents an overall transformation in spatial relations that changes rural life through migration and through integrating rural areas ever more closely into regional, national and global economies as a result of trade and improved infrastructure. Despite the often massive transfers of population to the cities, rural populations do not necessarily decrease in absolute numbers during this process. In Latin America, where the urban population was three-quarters of the total population in 2000, countries such as Colombia, Mexico and Peru had a larger agricultural labor force in that year than they had ever had previously.

As an integral part of economic growth, urbanization brings rising per capita incomes, economic diversification, but, in comparison with the relatively flat income distribution of subsistence-based agricultural societies, it also brings income inequality between regions of a country, between rural and urban and within rural and urban places. These income inequalities help shape what Norman Long and myself (2005) termed the 'new ruralities' where agriculture is not necessarily the dominant way of making a living, where new and more complex relationships have developed between rural populations, external economic actors, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and where locals and external agents contest over what they *see* as the proper use of rural resources.

Contemporary urbanization is occurring in a global economic and political context marked in many countries by the intertwining of economic liberalization, national moves towards administrative decentralization and the resurgence of local identities. Countries are urbanizing within the context of an intense and free movement of goods, capital and information as well as, to a lesser extent, of labor that is often less constrained than in the past by borders and by central government control.

Modern communications facilitate the development of integrated cross-national production and consumption systems on a world scale. They also spread information on alternate ways of living and organizing, including advocacy networks for human rights and reducing poverty. Modern cities and their business, political and professional elites filter the effects of transnational networks on rural areas in diverse ways and alter livelihoods through trade, outsourcing and the work of development agencies. Whereas in the past, only a few cities had a truly international presence, in the present even provincial cities are likely to be linked internationally. This undermining of national urban hierarchies can reach the extent of producing what Lo and Yeung (1996) call ‘borderless’ cities, such as the urban complex of Singapore that includes parts of Malaysia and Indonesia or El Paso/Ciudad Juarez that straddles the US–Mexico border. Global economic liberalization supports, directly and indirectly, administrative decentralization as central government control and planning of local economies loosens, both consciously and inadvertently, in the face of the direct contacts between localities and external agencies.

Despite global pressures to convergence, contemporary urbanization is not uniform between countries and regions of the developing world, and understanding its implications for rural development requires differentiation on various dimensions. Countries and regions of the world differ in their levels of urbanization, with high levels (75 percent) in Latin American and lower levels (37 percent) in the developing countries of Africa and Asia (Roberts 2006; *see* Table 7.1). They differ in their urban systems, with some countries exhibiting high primacy – the disproportionate concentration of population in one city – and others a more balanced pattern of urban growth. Such differences are likely to be consequential for the intensity and nature of rural–urban relations. Urbanization is also

Table 7.1 Rates of urbanization and population growth, 1970–2000, Latin American and Asian countries

Region and country	% urban in 1970	Rate of Urbanization			% urban in 2000	Rate of population growth		
		1970–80	1980–90	1990–2000		1970–80	1980–90	1990–2000
China	17.4	1.2	3.4	2.7	35.8	1.8	1.5	1.0
India	19.8	1.5	1.0	0.7	27.4	2.2	2.1	1.8
Mexico	59.0	1.2	0.9	0.3	74.3	2.9	2.1	1.7
Brazil	56.5	1.7	1.1	0.8	80.5	2.7	1.9	1.4

Source: United Nations Common Data Base: Total Urban Population (Code 13720); Total Population (Code 13660).

a multi-linear process in which countries at a similar stage of urbanization can exhibit contrasting cultural and economic characteristics, requiring us to look carefully at the factors that produce these contrasts. For example, differences between the patterns of urbanization in the United States and Europe, with the former more service driven and the latter more industry driven, had significant consequences for class structure, politics and economic structure. Urbanization in Latin America, the early urbanizer of the developing world, brought some of the trappings of modernity, but showed divergent tendencies between countries and was marked by the enduring legacies of a highly uneven development in terms of informal economies, corruption and political instability.

The issue is to identify the particular ways in which cities and towns relate to rural areas and their consequences for rural livelihoods. As Mike Douglass (1999: 1) argues in the case of Thailand, 'where cities arise and how they can link with rural development in a positive manner may well be the most important question for national planning in the coming years'. The degree of economic and social diversity in rural-urban relations that contemporary urbanization patterns introduce are, I argue, greater than in previous periods when urbanization was more 'self-contained' within the boundaries of a country. The major cities were then prime agents in national economic development, absorbing the rural 'surplus' population, intensifying direct trade and service links with rural areas and serving as the main points of contact with external economies. In the first section of the chapter, I outline the variety of patterns of urbanization in the developing world and the diversity of types of rural-urban reorganization that results from urbanization. The contemporary diversity in rural-urban relations multiplies the number of actors involved in these relations. I will consider two aspects of this micro-context of urbanization. One is migration and the other is the administrative and economic decentralization accompanying urbanization in much of the contemporary developing world. This decentralization is part of the global economic and political context reflecting both internal and external pressures to reduce the state's bureaucratic role in economy and administration and to encourage greater involvement by other actors, whether from the private sector, NGOs or local communities.

PATTERNS OF URBANIZATION

I begin with certain key variations in the historical patterns of urbanization in the contemporary developing world, which continue to affect contemporary rural-urban relations particularly through differences in

urban systems between countries and in the intensity of rural–urban migration and its importance relative to other forms of migration. These reflect the different global economic contexts within which countries began to urbanize and the differences in their mode of incorporation into the global economy through colonialism or neo-colonial economic relations (Roberts 2006).

The first type, involving the various countries of Latin America, includes those areas that historically were made over most completely to serve the import/export needs of the advanced industrial world and through the most radical restructuring of rural social relationships (see Walton's 1977 contrast of Latin America with East Africa). They exhibit the highest levels of urbanization (75 percent) of developing regions in 2000 (Table 7.1). They industrialized relatively early in the twentieth century through import-substituting industrialization, have, with some exceptions, urban populations concentrated in one or two large cities, the lowest regional rates of urbanization between 1970 and 2000 with rural–urban migration losing importance relative to urban-to-urban migration and international migration.

The second mode of urbanization involves countries like China and India that historically had well-developed internal markets, but whose economies were not fundamentally restructured in the colonial period by incorporation into the world system. In both these countries, internally generated economic changes were slow, and colonialism or, in the case of China, neo-colonialism brought no radically new sets of social and economic relationships (Raza et al. 1981; Skinner 1977). The levels of urbanization in 2000 are low in both China (36 percent) and India (28 percent) relative to most other less developed countries (Table 7.1). In the case of India, urbanization rates have remained low owing to higher rates of natural increase among the rural compared with the urban population, the scarcity of permanent job opportunities in the cities, and industrial de-concentration, particularly of household industry (Mohan 1997; Visaria 1997). China, in contrast, has one of the highest current rates of urbanization among developing countries.

Urbanization experiences associated with the third type of global incorporation correspond to the countries of North Africa, such as Egypt, and are similar in that they involve early incorporation in the absence of fundamental economic restructuring. Turkey and the countries resulting from the break-up of the Ottoman Empire also fit this type to a certain extent. The contrast with China and India is a heavy dependence on external trade, which, in the case of North Africa, combined moderately high levels of urbanization with an old urban culture (Abu-Lughod 1980: 30–51). In 2000, the northern African countries had the highest levels of urbanization in Africa (48 percent), with the exception of South Africa, but, particularly

in Egypt, have very low rates of urbanization and thus low rates of permanent rural–urban migration.

The fourth urbanization type involves relatively late incorporation in the world economy through colonialism and uneven economic restructuring, often producing ‘islands’ of export agriculture or mining amidst subsistence cultivation. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia fit this type, though to varying degrees. Thus, mining activity in the Copper Belt of Zambia and in South Africa produced a substantial level of urbanization by 2000, 40 percent and 55.5 percent respectively. Low initial levels of urbanization generally produce high rates of urbanization subsequently. This type includes the countries with the highest contemporary rates of urbanization and thus of rural–urban migration: Nigeria and Indonesia. For more detailed accounts, *see* Gugler and Flanagan (1978) and Hart (1987) for Africa; Armstrong and McGee (1985: 88–110) and Nemeth and Smith (1985) for Asia.

As the most recent form of incorporation into the world system, the fifth mode of urbanization is associated with global production systems, export-oriented industrialization and high rates of urbanization. The ‘new’ Asian countries, of which the Republic of Korea is an example, became significant locations of foreign investment in the 1950s and 1960s. By 2000, Korea classified some 81 percent of its population as urban and its rate of urbanization dropped substantially after 1990. Korea’s rapid transformation is closely linked to three phenomena: considerable economic and military aid; proximity to Japan, which facilitates its search for markets and outlets for investment; and the adoption of an export-oriented industrialization (Deyo 1986; Nemeth and Smith 1985: 197–204). The rapid urbanization of the countries of South-East Asia from 1970 to 2000, such as Malaysia (61.8 percent urban in 2000) and Indonesia (42 percent urban in 2000), also reflects their role as platforms for export-oriented industrialization. China’s recent upsurge in urbanization also indicates its changing role in the world economy as a supplier of manufactured products (*see* Table 7.1).

These differences in the rates of population transfer from rural to urban areas must also take account of how rural areas reorganize and relate to cities in the course of urbanization. I simplify these processes into six types:

1. Rural urbanization in which the growth of a country’s industrial product is contributed as much by village-based industries as by those in cities. This is urbanization and industrialization from below.
2. Export-oriented cities based on export production or tourism that are often loosely connected to national urban hierarchies.

3. Urban mega regions, which have strong global links, that include as functional parts of the region a core city, intermediate service and industrial cities, towns and villages.
4. ‘Frontier Cities’ that make possible the exploitation of new resources as in the Amazon region of Brazil.
5. Centers of refuge for a displaced rural population.
6. Central Places that consolidate their position through offering services and products to a relatively dynamic established agricultural/mining/craft industry region, and which have the political clout to bring in external investments,

The point of making this classification is that it emphasizes the different ways that through migration and economic exchanges (or their lack) rural areas can be incorporated spatially into national and international economies. These differences will be found within countries as well as in contrasts between countries, creating diverse challenges for rural development policy.

The first type of rural–urban reorganization is based on an extensive rural industrialization that converts villages and towns into poly-nucleated urban areas in which the geographical spaces are neither urban nor rural. In South-East Asia, these spaces are termed *desakota* (both village and town) and are found, according to McGee (1991) within 200 kilometers of large cities or between adjacent metropolises. The term ‘fuzzy urbanization’ has also been applied to these spaces to highlight the complex and fluid processes that partially transform rural spaces into urban ones (Heikkila et al. 2003). This pattern of urbanization is shaped by local actors – entrepreneurs, local officials, workers – representing urbanization from below whose evolution is influenced by, but not controlled by the major urban centers (Xie et al. 2005).

Contemporary China is perhaps the most dramatic contemporary example of this type of urbanization, based on the growth of Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) (Zhang 1999). By 1994, there were an estimated 130 000 export-oriented TVEs, which accounted for a third of China’s total exports. By 1996, some US\$ 30 billion had been invested in 40 000 TVEs. These TVEs are mainly located in the Eastern coastal provinces of China, with the richest 10 percent of Chinese villages concentrating the larger-scale manufacturing (Rozelle 2001).

The political economy underlying the success of rural industrialization in China is an interesting one. The gradual freeing of markets in China left out labor markets. By the *hukou* system of registration, peoples’ residence and rights to social security were fixed to their place of birth. Although rural migrants could move to cities and obtain temporary work permits,

their families could not enjoy any educational, health or housing rights that pertained to urban citizens. The strictness of the *hukou* system has been relaxed over time, but migration remains easier between villages and between villages and towns, than it is between villages and cities. From 1978, a series of reforms transformed rural production systems, replacing collective farming by household responsibility systems that distributed lands owned by the commune to individual families for a period of years.

The rural areas of China are densely populated and land, when distributed individually, is unlikely to provide an adequate source of livelihood. Whereas in the first years of rural industrialization, a work-points system equalized the individual rewards for agricultural and industrial work, this was replaced by a wage system that soon produced substantial differences in the pay given to agricultural and industrial workers. The gradual loosening of the communal property system to allow both individual and cooperative enterprises encouraged the development of rural industries that were formally or informally owned and controlled by local entrepreneurs, often in alliance with outside capital. Since much of the drive to export industrialization in developing countries has been based on the cheapness of labor relative to that of other countries, China had an opportune synergy between an abundant source of cheap rural labor 'trapped' in the rural areas and the opportunities for Chinese industrial exports identified by Taiwanese, Hong Kong and other investors. Taiwanese investors, at times, went back to their lineage villages to make the investments. After the local, mainly female, sources of factory labor were exhausted, rural-to-rural migration from poorer interior areas of China continued to supply the factory demands. Rural industrialization is present in Latin America, also, but the difference is that living costs in Latin American cities are relatively much less than in Chinese cities. Ciudad Juarez expanded its *maquiladora* labor force on the basis of a workforce that lived in irregular settlements with very poor infrastructure, where the costs of survival were little different from the rural areas. In contrast, Chinese cities have very little informal settlement and the costs of being a citizen are substantially higher than those of living in a peasant village.

The second type of re-organization is that based on the outward-looking industrial and service metropolises, which are likely to have few functional links with their rural hinterlands. The migrants that come to seek work in them, as in the case of the Northern Mexican *maquiladora* cities, are drawn from all over the country, not from their own region. Economically, their main exchanges are international or with other major cities of their own country. The inputs and the outputs of their production system are international, not regional, and do not create economic linkages with the towns and villages of their hinterlands. In this type, planning

for agriculture is disassociated from urban growth. As Douglass (1999) points out in the case of the market economies of East and South-East Asia, the concentration on an urban-industrial national economic growth exacerbated patterns of spatial polarization of development around large coastal urban centers. This was reinforced by rural development policies to increase grain production and link rural producers with international agribusiness.

The third type of re-organization shows intense functional linkages between a metropolitan center, intermediate cities and villages within its region. The metropolitan center is the organizing center of the region, concentrating producer services and linking the region to the international economy. The intermediate cities take on specialized manufacturing and service functions within the region, while the villages provide market garden products and labor for out-sourced production or for nearby factories. This model represents metro regions such as those of Mexico City, São Paulo and the Hong Kong/Pearl River Delta complex (Gar-on Yeh and Xu 1996; Garza, 1999). The complexity of the economic relationships involved in this type of urbanization and its close ties to the international economy means that it is unlikely to be an engine of balanced rural development. Both the second and third types of urban system depend on countries being closely linked with the international economy and being attractive to foreign investment. Consequently, they are more prevalent in Asia and certain countries of Latin America than in Africa.

The fourth type of reorganization – the frontier city – is one where urban places make possible the settlement and commercial exploitation of a previously undeveloped region. Whereas in central place type growth, the central place grows conterminously with the smaller towns and villages of its hinterland, in frontier city type growth, the city is a bridgehead for settlement. The Amazonia area of Brazil is a well-documented example of this type of urbanization (Browder and Godfrey 1997; Schmink and Wood 1992). Similar patterns are present in the tropical areas of Bolivia and Peru.

The fifth type of reorganization is that where there are no longer any dynamic economic relationships between cities or between cities and their hinterlands. This describes the situation in which rural areas have collapsed economically and socially. One cause of this collapse is the lack of livelihood opportunities in agriculture as a result of civil war, drought, soil erosion and competition from cheap imported foodstuffs, particularly of basic foodstuffs such as cereals. The result is an economically or politically forced migration from rural areas into towns or cities that serve as places of refuge. In these cases, the links between migrants and their rural places of origin are tenuous, and restoring them requires

substantial rural reconstruction work on the part of states and international agencies.

I reserve the Central place type of reorganization to last because I *see* it as having, in modified form, the most promising potential for creating livable cities, which are also integrated with their rural hinterlands. Beginning with Christaller's Central Place Theory, there has been a continuing emphasis by urban planners on the benefits that emerge from a well-articulated network of urban places that provide services for their hinterlands with individual urban places specializing in particular functions.¹ Vernon Henderson (2002), for example, calculates that high primacy results in an inefficient national allocation of economic resources through the premiums paid for investing and doing business in the largest cities. These concerns have led to a renewed policy emphasis on the need for a more spatially even pattern of urbanization, through intermediate cities that can serve as growth catalysts for their hinterlands without the costs in congestion and pollution associated with the largest cities (Unesco 1999).

In this model of urban growth, an intermediate city develops a synergistic relationship with its region, providing the specialized goods and services, including administration and information, which enable local agriculturalists, miners or craftspeople to produce and commercialize their products more efficiently. There is no rural-urban divide and cities are not isolated poles of development, but have significant economic and social linkages with their geographic region. In this vein, Friedmann (1996) advocates the idea of modular urbanization in which rural and periurban districts are organized around service centers that are accessible by bicycle or foot from all parts of the district, and have good road communications with other districts and with the larger cities. Friedmann (1979) and Friedmann and Douglass's (1978) policy concept of agropolitan development has a similar focus in terms of its emphasis on the advantages of small-scale, economically and morally interdependent communities.

In the developing world, a central place model is most likely to be found in countries, like China, whose economies were not fundamentally restructured by colonialism or neo-colonialism. Skinner's (1977) concept of the macro-region as applied to South-East China was explicitly based on a central place model of urbanization. In this model, villages are hierarchically organized through marketing and administrative links with higher-order centers: village, township, county seat, and so on. The hierarchy shapes both economic and social exchanges giving sets of villages and townships particular cultural and economic identities. Urbanization and migration under this model would be relatively continuous processes, with people moving to higher order centers, but retaining strong links

with places of origin and the possibility of return. Questions have been raised about the applicability of Skinner's model to the Chinese case, both historically and in the contemporary period (Cartier 2002); but it remains useful in identifying the possibility of self-sustaining development at the local and provincial level.

These types of rural–urban reorganization are likely to coincide with particular historical experiences of urbanization, such as China's macro-regions that reflect low-levels of foreign economic intervention historically or Latin America's export-oriented cities and mega-regions reflecting historically high levels of foreign economic intervention. However, diversity within countries and involvement in the global economy and polity mean that all of these types of urbanization are likely to be found in most large and economically significant developing countries.

MIGRATION AND INEQUALITIES

Urbanization necessarily implies the net transfer of population on either a permanent or a temporary basis from rural to urban areas. This net transfer can conceal a wide range of population movements both in size and direction. Thus, a relatively low rate of urbanization can be made up of large flows of population from rural to urban areas, from urban areas to other urban areas, or back again to the rural area. Even at high levels of urbanization, such as those of Latin America, there continue to be substantial migration movements between towns and cities, internationally, to colonization areas and even back to villages of origin. Migration interconnects places socially and economically, and these interconnections are an increasingly significant part of the new ruralities. Whereas the urban system approach outlined in the previous section tells us something about the formal economic and administrative structuring of urban–rural relations in contemporary urbanization, migration tells us about the informal structuring of those relations and the role of human agency in creating new and unpredictable relationships between places. Because of this unpredictability, understanding the role of migration in creating the new ruralities is an ongoing question for research, which will need to pay attention to context and culture. There are some general considerations to bear in mind that I outline in the following paragraphs.

In some of the literature, the transfer of the rural population to the cities has been viewed as positive for the economies of both rural and urban areas. The exodus of the rural population was seen as reducing pressure on land and permitting land consolidation and more efficient forms of farming. Rural migrants' labor would, in turn, be used more productively

in the cities to provide the labor needed to power the growth of urban industry and services. While this process more or less reflects the experience of the developed world, it has had a less easy fit with that of the developing world. We noted that the absolute numbers of the rural population do not decline with urbanization. The obstacle to raising productivity in agriculture is not simply small and inefficiently farmed plots of land, but the lack of agrarian reform, inefficient latifundia, and poor rural infrastructure. An additional factor, as Michael Lipton (1977) emphasized, was the urban bias in development planning in which urban inhabitants were subsidized at the expense of rural inhabitants.

The capacity of cities to absorb rural migrants productively may now be reaching its limit. In the 1990s in Latin America, for example, despite substantially lower rates of urban growth in the large cities, levels of poverty and of informal employment remained the same, and in some cities have increased. One response has been international migration. Rural places in Mexico – those with fewer than 2500 people – are some 25 percent of the total population, and they still provide half of current migrants to the United States. Villages that had once been involved in networks of rural–urban migration are now mainly involved in networks of migration to the US.

The impact of migration on rural areas and its contribution to the new ruralities depend on the characteristics of those migrating. These characteristics vary depending on the work opportunities available in the place of destination, whether, for instance, it is service work as domestic servants or as street sellers for women, or construction or agricultural work for males. The economic status of migrants also varies. In the mainly peasant societies of Latin America, migration has been selective of the wealthier members of rural communities. As migration has generalized, so selectivity has diminished, but it still concentrates among the lower-middle strata of the rural population. The poorest have not the material resources to undertake migration, and are often embedded in subsistence production, whether on their own plots or in looking after those of others who have migrated.

However, in societies, where there is a substantial rural proletariat, the lack of work opportunities locally can be a potent force in migration. In a recent review of the literature on the impact of migration on inequality, Black et al. (2005: 15) argue that ‘the key questions about how the institution of migration affects inequality relate to access – who gets to migrate where – and the different opportunities that different types of migration stream offer’. Their review of the case studies from Latin America, Africa and Asia show that the rural poor tend to be restricted to less remunerative and more hazardous types of migration, while rural migrants with

more material and cultural resources get the better remunerated and less demanding jobs.

The impact on inequalities in rural areas is thus likely to be a complex one. In rural areas that are homogeneously poor, with little income differentiation, migration and the remittances that result may contribute to income inequality, but are unlikely to create local economic opportunities since they will be spent on the subsistence needs of those left behind. Where there is income differentiation locally and it is members of the more prosperous families that migrate, then migration and remittances may increase local inequalities, but also may sponsor local family enterprise in farming, trade or crafts. An important issue is the commitment of the migrant to the village and family that he or she has left behind. Spouses, children or aged parents that stay behind are likely to engender commitments, particularly where the migrant has economic prospects in the village. However, the longer the migrant stays in the city or abroad and the more commitments he or she generates in the destination, through marriage, having children, buying a house, and so on, then remittances are likely to decline, as Mexican studies indicate (Lozano 2006).

Important questions are the degree of interdependence between social and economic relations among migrants and how these are affected by distance and spatial organization. A host of studies have shown that migration from villages to large cities, whether these are national or in another country, is facilitated by networks of village-based kinship and friendship relationships, which aid migrants in obtaining lodging and work in their place of destination. Such is the importance of these networks that they explain why apparently identical villages in terms of their economy send migrants to different places, abroad or at home, or do not send migrants at all. Networks also explain the changing selectivity of migrants over time. As migration from a particular place increases, so the networks facilitating migration become generally available to the local population, enabling the migration of those whose characteristics made it unlikely that they would be pioneers – women, the poorer sections of the population, children and the elderly.

Networks are not gender neutral and can channel male and female migrants from the same village into very different jobs. Young, single women are likely to be the first female migrants and will be channeled into domestic work or low-paid factory work of the *maquiladora* type (in bond industry). Early male migrants are young, but often married, and are channeled into manual work, often construction. In China, the barriers to urban residence of rural migrants reinforce the gender division of migration (Fan 2003). Social pressures in the village result, according to Fan's informants, in young women returning to marry and to maintain the household in the village, while the husband continues to migrate. Village

networks are vital to male survival in the city in China in the absence of rights to urban welfare, which makes it important for them to keep contacts with the village that, for many, remains the long-term source of their welfare. In cases, where economic pressures lead both husband and wife to migrate, children are usually left behind in the village to be cared for by elderly parents (Fan 2003). Even in the Chinese case, despite or perhaps because of a system of migration control that separates the rural from the urban, the two apparent poles remain strongly intertwined by urbanization.

Village-based networks have an evident initial usefulness in coping with life in a large city whose organization is necessarily more impersonal and chaotic than is that of the village. The continuing strength of such networks even when migrants are settled in the city requires further explanation. One is the importance of ongoing economic relations between city migrants and their home villages. Ownership or co-ownership of land in the village and interests in local craft or trade enterprises represent such relations. In the Mantaro Valley of the Central Highlands of Peru, migrants to Lima returned for fiestas to keep an eye on property or business interests and exchanged rural and urban products (Long and Roberts 1984). Smith (1984) showed how some migrants organized a strawberry business in Lima on the basis on seasonal migration of kin from their village in the highlands. Cases of these kinds of relationships have been shown to exist transnationally, between villages and even cities in Mexico and their migrants in the US (Zuñiga and Hernández León 2005).

Such relationships are strengthened where there is some economic basis of exchange. In comparing migrant networks between Guatemala City and Lima, Roberts (1974) argued that village-based networks were stronger in Lima than in Guatemala because the Lima migrants were more likely to have economic interests in their villages of origin than were those in Guatemala. The Guatemalan migrants came from poor areas of the countryside where they had often been tenants or laborers and did not retain rights to land. Narrowly defined economic interests are not, however, the only basis for continuing exchange between city-based migrants and their villages of origin. Responsibility for family members left behind remains a strong tie, even though distance and increasing commitments in the city will attenuate that tie over time. Also, migrants will often emphasize their village origins not because of active ties with the village, but as a way of securing a basis for organization and identity in the city. This has been reported for Alevi migrants in Ankara, Turkey, where the village of origin is socially disorganized and where the migrants recreate an idealized version of the village, planning summer homes and visits (Coşkun 2003, Fliche 2005).

DECENTRALIZATION AND NEW MODES OF GOVERNANCE

A new characteristic of urbanization in many countries of the developing world is that it is accompanied by administrative and economic decentralization.² This is in contrast with the urbanization experience of much of the developing world for most of the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, urbanization and the primacy of urban systems impelled economic and political centralization. Indeed centralization and economic and population concentration were seen as necessary components of economic growth and modernization since it was only the largest cities that possessed the necessary urban infrastructure, communications, markets and human capital to stimulate economic development (see Sovani 1964). The contemporary shift to decentralization results from several inter-linked developments. The first is the increasing emphasis by governments and international organizations alike on the benefits of freeing trade and the movement of capital, of privatization and of the de-regulation of labor markets. This emphasis includes a strong ideological commitment to ‘downsizing’ the state and reducing what is seen as an over-involvement in managing economy and society. In the economic sphere, this can create more openings for private enterprise to develop local initiatives and become active agents in local development. In the social sphere, this emphasis manifested itself in the emergence of the new social policies of the late 1980s and 1990s in which the state’s centralized and bureaucratic involvement in providing social services was replaced by an increasing reliance on the private sector, NGOs and community involvement (Franco 1996; Roberts, 2006). From these perspectives, decentralization provides a more cost-effective way of administering services.

The emphasis on cost-effectiveness was accompanied, particularly on the part of international organizations, such as the World Bank, by a stress on the values of efficiency and empowerment brought by decentralization. Decentralized administration of resources is seen to be efficient because it relies on local judgments about the best way to allocate resources in the particular context. Empowering communities to take greater part in administration was viewed as also ensuring efficiency by increasing local oversight of the use of public funds and by taking advantage of unpaid community labor. The ending of the Cold War and of the ‘threat’ of revolutionary movements permitted a greater emphasis on the democratic values of decentralization.

In economic terms, decentralization means ending state monopolies of resources and allowing the market and individual entrepreneurs to decide how best to allocate and exploit them. Land and labor markets are

deregulated and individual incentives replace state development projects. In administrative terms, decentralization means giving greater powers, including fiscal ones, to lower order administrative units. In Latin America, this means municipalities, units that include an urban center and a rural hinterland, as well as provinces. Within municipalities, schools and health clinics are frequently subject to local control through parent and neighborhood oversight associations. There is, in contrast, relatively little emphasis on overall planning, due, in large part, to the implicit bias of neo-liberal policies against central planning. For example, in the large Latin American metropolises, government remains heavily reliant on municipalities, which can mean over 30 competing jurisdictions as in the case of Santiago, Chile, with little overall metropolitan governance.

One of the results of these processes is a proliferation of actors engaged in administration and in promoting local development. The private sector is one of these as restrictions on ownership of land, other natural resources and utilities have been loosened and, at times, abolished. The growing importance of non-traditional exports of agricultural products, such as fruit and vegetables, mobilizes large-scale growers to push for standards of production that will satisfy foreign requirements. It was this 'grass-roots' pressure from Michoacan avocado growers, which brought both the involvement of US Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials in Mexico and that of the Mexican state (Stanford 2002). To avoid contamination, these standards are applied to small-scale growers who do not export. An equally complex set of local and external actors have appeared in Mexican mango production through commodity chain relations between local mango producers, distributors, packers, USDA inspectors and US distributors and investors (Alvarez 2001). In the case of the mango, USDA requirements now affect local production and distribution strategies not only throughout the Pacific West of Mexico, but also in Central and South America. Although the commodity chains are hierarchically organized, the local is connected to the global in different ways, permitting a variety of negotiating strategies at the local level.

These developments have not so much replaced the state, as changed its manner of operation. In social and economic policies, Latin American states target individual families in need of special aid. Targeting often involves more direct state involvement with individuals than in the past as governments transfer cash directly to families and evaluate the effects of transfers through surveys of beneficiaries. Many of the new policies are conditional on families themselves adopting behavior that will contribute to positive outcomes, such as health check-ups or ensuring children's school attendance, as in the Brazilian Bolsa Familia program and Mexico's Oportunidades. Certainly in Latin America, it can be argued that there is

now more state involvement in the lives of individual citizens than in the past, albeit with subcontracting to NGOs and the private sector. The lack of administrative expertise at the local level has fostered greater reliance on NGOs to either provide services or to support and train local leaders in administration. Decentralization has also directly or indirectly encouraged the involvement of international organizations, such as the World Bank in local-level projects. Central government often remains involved as an actor at the local level in rural development, working with international organizations, NGOs or local government. But it is involvement without overall planning for rural development. The rural development policies of the past, whether those of agrarian reform, large-scale infrastructural projects or those associated with the Green Revolution, are replaced by ad hoc policies responding to the pressures of local and international agricultural interest groups.

The implications of this change for the rural sector need examination. In the case of Mexico, the old centralized agricultural bureaucracies and their often clientelistic control of the rural sector are less in evidence. The importance of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC) for the control of agriculture has substantially weakened not only because of the privatization of the *ejido* (social property used by a group of small-scale farmers), but also because of the political changes that broke the monopoly of power of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), of which the CNC was a component part. Gone are the national plans for agricultural development, such as the Sistema Alimentaria Mexicana (SAM) or the government's purchasing system, CONAPO. Neo-liberal economic policies and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have meant the end of the system of state subsidies and price guarantees for agricultural products.

INTERFACES AND THE NEW RURALITIES

The combined impact of urbanization, migration and decentralization pose clear challenges for rural development policy. Contemporary urbanization is a potent mobilizing force at the local level through migration and the intensification of external trade and communication. In many countries, the impact of urbanization on rural areas has been made more direct and individual by the decline of the structures that formerly dominated the lives of local populations and mediated their external relationships in clientelistic ways, whether through large-scale landownership, political parties or state bureaucracy. Contemporary urbanization also changes the relation of local populations to the state as improved communication and

greater international visibility make it more difficult for states to ignore the needs of previously isolated populations. All this is happening within a global context in which market forces predominate and in which development policy respects those forces by emphasizing direct individual help over communal planning and subsidies.

One outcome is the multiplication of actors that affect local development. Another is the likely lack of monopoly of any one actor over resources or external contacts and information. Central and local governments may have competing programs of assistance at the local level. National and international NGOs may both be present. The health and production standards of international agencies and of foreign governments, as in the case of the US Department of Agriculture, may be further factors that shape directly or indirectly local farming practices. Migration brings cash and information into villages, and may intensify existing bases of differentiation. These situations vary considerably both within countries and between countries but, to a greater or lesser extent, they inhibit the development of a coherent rural development strategy. It is not just that local circumstances must be taken into account, but that policy implementation will inevitably be affected by competition between local actors and by their differing perspectives on the aims and benefits of particular policies.

In this situation, the role of research in rural development becomes central. Templates for 'best practices' in local development projects are likely to be less useful than is the careful mapping of local ecologies, including the structure of rural-urban relations, migrant flows and the range of actors and interests present at the local level. Such a mapping can become the basis for constructing the alliances, designing the incentives and providing the information that will mobilize local populations around viable development projects.

NOTES

1. In their review of the literature, Frisbie and Kasadra (1988: 647) state that 'there is substantial agreement that a hierarchical system of cities is strongly, positively and reciprocally related to economic development'.
2. My use of the term 'decentralization' does not imply that central control over fiscal resources is necessarily lessened. Administrative functions can be decentralized without the local units gaining any real control over fiscal resources.

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8. Rural urbanization in Phoenix Village: revisiting a village in Guangdong Province

Zhou Daming with Huang Xueliang

INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s, the American sociologist, Harrison Kulp, arrived on the coast of southern China and conducted anthropological and sociological fieldwork there, resulting in the 1925 publication *Country Life in South China*. The book records in detail the economy, population, family, religious and educational conditions, as well as community organizations in Fenghuan (Phoenix Village). It is also one of the earliest academic works to focus on China's Han people. Indeed, in Rong Guangqiong's (1996) estimation Kulp's research represents a milestone in the history of social anthropology in that it shifts the emphasis from the study of tribal societies to that of the peasantry, thus laying the groundwork for a series of detailed ethnographies of Han society and culture.

Kulp's case study methods and approach were adopted by many Chinese and western researchers, and his book inspired me in 1994 to make the first of many visits to Phoenix Village to study the transformations that had taken place since Kulp's original work. Kulp believed that urbanization was a necessary road to development and that urban residence would follow technological development and the introduction of new perspectives. It is this theme, based on an analysis of work carried out in the village between 2003 and 2006 that I take up in this chapter.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON PHOENIX VILLAGE

The 1920s were a time of transition. The Qing dynasty had collapsed, war lords were fighting each other and the Republic of China was founded. In terms of education, it was a time of transition from private schools

and imperial examination preparation to the development of a modern system of universal education. Kulp witnessed the powers of the state and how local government began to penetrate the village, causing the scope of village autonomy to shrink.

Villages in the 1920s were based principally on clans of a single family name, as was Phoenix. The village was involved in growing crops of high market value and as a sideline engaged in various non-agricultural activities. There was a growing tendency for people to migrate abroad or to other places in China. This situation was interrupted, however, following the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the introduction of collective control over production. This collective system lasted up until the late 1970s/early 1980s when it was replaced by the Household Responsibility System. At the same time, the building of a large dam made people less vulnerable to the vagaries of natural and man-made disasters.

Today Phoenix is an administrative village (*xingzhengcun*) that consists of four natural villages (*zirancun*) – Xikou, Dunjiao, Lingbian and Caiyuanwei – with seven village production teams (*sheng chan dui*), 297 households (*nonghu*) and a population of 1153. Ninety per cent of the families have the family name Dai; the second most common name is Lin, followed by Huang and Chen. A fluctuating number of in-migrants (between 30 and 60) live in the village and work in the watchstrap factory and some 50 inhabitants in the village have changed their citizenship or *hukou* registration from rural to urban.

The village is located in the northwest of Guihu Township, Cha'an County, Chaozhou City, with the government headquarters in Huluxu. A new market northwest of the Guihu lies close to the village and the Fenggui Highway cuts across its eastern neighbourhood. Phoenix River runs along its western edge and to the north one can see Phoenix Mountain. To the east is the village of Xifong and across the river to the west is Tantou. Jinfung lies to the south, and to the north is Mingtan. In total, Phoenix covers an area of 1.7 sq. km.

In 2005, 289 mu of arable land, 187 mu of paddy fields, and 102 mu of irrigated land were cultivated in Phoenix. The main staples were rice, potatoes and soybeans; the main cash crops being plants for oil and *mushu* (cassava). Fruit production was also important, especially olives and pomegranates. Village collective income came mainly from the communal fruit gardens and fishponds. Financial data for January–March 2005 indicate collective income was 155 626 yuan, of which 52 204 yuan came from the county government and 102 872 yuan from land contracted out to villagers by the collective. Land for subsistence purposes in Phoenix is allocated once every three years and, in 1995, land of average quality per

person was 0.3 mu. By 2005, this had been reduced to 0.2 mu and land of better quality to 0.18mu. New additions to the family or new settlers were not eligible for land within a three-year period and received instead a subsidy of 50 yuan per year.

IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT REFORMS

Following state agricultural tax reforms, in 2003 rural taxes and fees were virtually abolished in Chao'an County. From 1 July 2003 five taxes were cancelled and substituted by a single tax (that listed 52 items), which reduced the agricultural tax and fee burden per year per mu of farmland from 15.56 to 4.7 yuan. At the same time, a supervision card system was introduced to protect the legal right of farmers. Two hundred and forty thousand cards were printed and distributed to households. Statistics show that by 2004 the agricultural tax rate had fallen to 3 per cent of what it had been.

Obligatory educational fees also changed to a one-fee system in 2003, in line with Guangdong government policy. Chao'an County implemented this system in both rural primary and middle schools, and abolished altogether fees and levies for books and class activities for some of the poorest families. In Guihu Township, some 5928 primary and middle school students benefited from the policy. Most of the students in Phoenix Village benefited from this change.

In 2005, Chao'an County implemented the new rural cooperative health system. Each farmer had to pay 10 yuan to join the system but, so that all villagers could join, the village committee and party branch decided to pay the fees out of collective income. A basic life security subsidy was also introduced in 2004, making it possible for the village committee to apply to central government for subsidies for its poor and disabled farmers. Twenty individuals in 12 households benefited from this scheme. Lin Zhenqiang, a lame and disabled farmer, told me that he received a subsidy of 50 yuan per month, the highest in the village.

RECENT INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The construction of the Chaozhou City water supply project is a significant Guangdong provincial project. It is located 4 kilometres from Chaozhou, and integrates water supply, electricity generation, air transport and improvements to the water environment. The foundation for the project was laid on 28 February 2002 at a cost of 1.449 billion yuan, and

was finished in June 2006. The project was also important for the lower reach triangle of the Hangjia River. It is responsible for water resource allocation and was intended to resolve local people's domestic, industrial, and agricultural water needs. It produces 49 000 000 cubic metres of water. The benefit area includes the cities of Chaozhou, Shantou and Jieyang.

Water levels rose after construction and flooded riverbank land at the edge of Phoenix, normally used for growing fruit trees and bamboo. The regulations stipulated that the construction company would compensate for the loss of this land at the rate of 3500 yuan per mu. Based on agreements with the village committee and affected households, the company was required to pay Guihu Township 8 per cent of the compensation money and the rest to be shared equally between Phoenix administrative village and all its households. At the end of 2005, the construction company duly transferred 2.5 million yuan to Guihu Township but the township held back 1 million with the excuse that they were using it for road construction and infrastructural improvements. The local farmers protested strongly and organized a demonstration against the township to claim the total amount. This was still under negotiation during my last field trip to the village.

RURAL URBANIZATION OF PHOENIX

My aim here is to explain the process of urbanization in terms of the change from rural to urban lifestyles. Several aspects of this process are relevant to the current situation of Phoenix, which is rapidly urbanizing.

The first concerns the increase in the number of people engaged in non-agricultural production activities associated with the rise of second and third sector industrial enterprises, a process that is accompanied by changes in the marketing system from that of small-scale traditional local markets to much larger external markets and centres of trade. Concomitant with these trends, are changes from rural to urban lifestyles in respect of housing, clothing, food, transport and entertainment. In addition, public media has become more effective in reaching out to both distant rural and newly urbanizing populations. Hence the idea of modernizing society has taken root and begun to replace the more conservative and 'backward' thinking attributed to peasant society. This has placed emphasis on raising educational levels and the promotion of so-called more 'progressive' ideas and lifestyles characteristic of urban life.

For the purpose of the survey I conducted in the village, I divided Phoenix into four areas: District A, around Xikou Rd, south of Tang Fang alley where all the families have the same family name Dai; District

B, around Xikou Rd north to Tang Fang alley, where the family names are Dai, Lin and Huang; District C, west of Feng Gui Rd, which has new buildings and the family names of Dai and Lin; and District D, west of Feng Gui Rd with new buildings and a few traditional houses bordering the hillside, and whose family names are Dai, Lin, Huang and Cheng. Districts A and B are composed mainly of old buildings of archaic structure, which were the nucleus of Phoenix before the 1990s. Districts C and D are built along the road and, except for a few traditional houses along the hillside, most buildings are new. My interview sample of 136 households was spread across these four districts.

MIGRATION MOVEMENTS

Many people now migrate for work in light and heavy industries within the region and, as a consequence, the number of villagers engaged in agriculture has reduced. Nevertheless, the total labour force has remained relatively stable over the past ten years, reducing only slightly since the implementation of the family planning policy and due to the fact that some migrants now work permanently outside in Chaozhou and Shantou. Yet city and township *hukou* status, so beneficial in the past, is no longer so useful given the state's commitment to solving what is called the 'Three Agrarian Issues'. It is now in the farmers' interest to retain their rural status since it allows them a share of collective land and 50 yuan per year in collective income. The government will also pay compensation for any land it takes over. Thus, since the 1990s, the number of those with township status or families with mixed town-rural registration has remained the same. In other words, villagers are no longer applying for non-agricultural status.

The numbers migrating and the diversity of places they move to have increased. In 1995, 27 per cent had migrated. Today this figure has risen to 35 per cent and 57 per cent of all families have migrant members. Younger males and single females migrate leaving the elderly and married women behind. People say 'all those who can go, do so' and that before the 1990s half of the Dai in Shantou city came from Phoenix. This is somewhat exaggerated but reflects the basic point that most Phoenix migrants went to Shantou. After the 1990s, with the building of Chaozhou City, many moved there for work, and with slower development in East Guangdong province, people moved to Shenzhen, Dongwan and Foshan in the Zhujiang triangle of Guangzhou, and to Huizhou. There is very little migration beyond Guangzhou; just one young man went to Hainan with his relatives to work in the building industry.

Thus long-term out-migration has had an important impact on Phoenix Village. The survey showed that 13 per cent of out-migrants were unable to return every year, although 50 per cent do come back for the Spring Festival holiday, especially if ceremonies to honour the local gods on the 12 January (lunar calendar) are to take place. Sixty-two per cent of the village population works either permanently or for long periods outside; 14 per cent return every six months and 3 per cent come back for the harvesting season. These people mainly work in the tidal water areas, such as Shantou, and because of the ease of transport they can return home for important events such as an elder's birthday or for the 'Pure Brightness' festival – the memorial day for the dead – or, as mentioned above, for the Spring Festival. Many of those working in nearby Chaozhou city are able to return briefly each month, and those who leave their spouse and children in the village usually return more or less each week, while single youngsters visit every few weeks. The cities provide them with better opportunities for wage work but once adapted to this milieu they tend to view village life as boring. On the other hand, those villagers living permanently in Phoenix will sometimes travel to Chaozhou and Shantou to *see* relatives who are unable to return home frequently. This was the situation of Mrs Rong who told me that her husband had opened a restaurant in Chaozhou and that the son had gone to live with him in order to achieve a better education. Only Mrs Rong and her father-in-law now live in Phoenix, but at weekends, all of the family get together either in Phoenix or Chaozhou. This is common practice.

These various migratory practices combine to stabilise population growth in Phoenix. The younger generation migrate for education or work, while the middle-aged continue to work or have businesses outside, leaving only the elderly, spouses and children in the village. This process is also supported by the lack of 'modern' developments in Phoenix and similar rural areas. Yet, although the cities have absorbed much of the rural population, most migrants remain connected to their places of origin, thus exploiting the short distances involved to enjoy both village and city life. This is one of the benefits of this type of rural urbanization. As the anthropologist Gregory Guldin (1992) argues, urbanization does not simply mean more and more people living in the cities and townships but also refers to the process of interaction between cities and rural areas and the increase in mutual interconnections between them. This mutual influence means the merging and integration of rural and urban cultures, a process that reduces the gap between rural and urban. As a result, the management of rural production, income and lifestyle ideas change and become closer to city ways.

Phoenix and its hamlets occupy about 3 per cent of the total arable land

of Guihu Township, of which only a small proportion is used for food and cash crops. The larger share is under fruit production – pomegranates, bananas and pears. Other fruits, mainly olives, occupy 51 mu, half of the 3 per cent area. Some 40 tons of olives are produced, though this represents only a small proportion of Guihu Township's total production. Phoenix is close to the Guihu market where most farmers transport their vegetables. Vegetables represent a high proportion of township production, especially leaf vegetables, which cannot be stored long term. Compared with other villages, Phoenix farmers can sell their vegetables directly at the market and thus have no need for intermediaries. This gives them a comparatively better cash return than is commonly the case, providing of course they hold on to their farmland. Fruit and vegetable cultivation absorbs most of the available labour in the village.

On the other hand, the increase in non-agricultural work has led over the past few years to a gradual decrease in labour available for agriculture. More than half the families living in Phoenix now have only one person available – a spouse or elderly family member, and only those with two or more workers can maintain the fruit gardens or fishponds contracted from the village collective.

PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION: PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

As I suggested above, close connection with the outside has led to economic diversification in Phoenix. In recent years, the percentage of labour directly engaged in agriculture has fallen from 31 per cent to 26 per cent and there is little room for expansion of the land area. What agriculture remains therefore requires intensive production and vigorous markets. However since the 1990s the market for olives – once the most important crop – has slumped. This combined with other economic pressures has motivated people to seek work in other sectors, leaving local residents with the growing impression that those who remain in agriculture are mostly the physically less able.

At the same time, according to government statistics, the percentage of villagers working in industry rose from 0.6 per cent of the labour force in 1995 to 6.3 per cent in 2005, though my own survey data for the same period indicates a much bigger rise of 0.4 per cent to 16.5 per cent. This large increase was due to the setting up of watchstrap factories during the second half of the 1990s, which absorbed many of the adults remaining in the village. The latter were either employed to work in the factories directly or they undertook contracted outwork at home.

In 1992, a young couple who had migrated for work, returned to set up watchstrap production, renting for the purpose a western-style building. Later, once they had enough capital, they moved to the Dai shrine area where they constructed a building east of Caiyuanwei Street that served as both factory and residence. Since then, this street has become the central area for making watchstraps, with seven factories located there by the beginning of 2006. All seven owners have similar labour histories. They first worked in a watchstrap factory to learn the technology, and after some time became familiar with certain buyers who liked their particular product. Then later, once they had accumulated enough capital and built a network of trustworthy clients with business connections, they went independent, eventually renting work spaces (big and cheap enough) in a building close to Dai or Qi Fang shrine. Following this they eventually constructed their own factories.

Except for two newly opened family operated workshops along the Xikou road, the factories are fairly large in floor size (that is, between 200 and 400 square metres). Workers are hired from both within the village and from outside, numbering between 20 to 50 for each factory. The products are traded through Hong Kong exporters who also often provide the raw materials and specify the designs. Only one factory, however, was registered formally with the government industrial and business bureau. The rest, it seems, were strictly speaking illegal.

Other townships in the immediate region have developed their own specific industries, such as salted dried fruits from Anfu and ceramics from Guxiang, but the Phoenix watchstrap factories have the combined advantage of having good technical support, an established product, developed sales networks and a cheap labour force. These factories do not need workers with a high level of technological knowledge and they serve to absorb surplus labour from different places, thus making Phoenix a staging place for both in- and out-migration. How exactly to further stimulate such enterprise development and spread the benefits more widely has become a central issue among village and township planners as well as the general public. The outcomes of course will fundamentally shape future processes of industrialization and urbanization.

In addition to working in the watchstrap factories, a few villagers are employed in the five metal factories in Caiyuanwei or in the spectacle glass factories of Qitai, east of Guihu Township. But the majority of young to middle-aged wives with migration experience and children or elderly parents to look after, supplement their family income by working for one of the watchstrap factories. The factory requires regular working hours and pays them on a piecework basis. Piecework is convenient since it makes it easy for employees to ask for leave and to combine earning with

caring for the household. Sometimes they are able to take work home, especially during peak periods in the agricultural cycle. Hence, wives are willing to work at the factory, even though wages are low, because their husbands bring in additional salary. Also, except for those who travel in from elsewhere in the region, women factory workers can carry on tending the family fields. Such combinations of rural and urban income flows are missed in government statistics which categorize persons as either working in industry or agriculture.

Official figures for the construction industry indicate that the number of natal villagers working in this sector has over the years decreased slightly, but according to my own observations, many more outsiders now work in this sector, especially in heavy manual work – something that local people are generally unwilling to do. In addition, the owners and technicians of small construction companies not only carry out local contracts but now do business further afield. In contrast, the numbers working in storage and shipping and air transport have declined with the expansion of the road network. In this sense, Chaozhou has become history. Its ships and boats are generally old and find it difficult to compete with other modes of transport. In fact, several ship owners have sold up and moved into other activities, leaving only six functioning vessels.

On the other hand, few local people are employed in road transport as such. Of a hundred people interviewed, only two worked for the minibus companies that shuttle villagers to and from Guihu Township. The main transport centre for the whole of Guihu is located close to the village boundary and villagers can easily find a suitable means of transport there.

My data also show that the number working in the retail business and drinks industry has risen slightly, although government statistics (once more) indicate an opposite trend (from 6.1 per cent to 3.8 per cent).¹ Alongside Fengui Road there are more than 30 residences with a shop or small business. Most sell a range of retail goods, though some specialize in wholesale olives. All retain some farmland in the village. Almost all the shops are unregistered as shops, appearing only in the agricultural statistics. Moreover, due to the way Phoenix is connected to the township area, villagers may consume on a daily basis not only in the village but also in the township, and the same goes for township inhabitants who may make purchases in the shops along Fengui Road, Phoenix. However, Guihu Township is developing only slowly, with little evidence of a heavy influx of outsiders. In fact more people are moving away from both the village and township than those moving in.

LIFESTYLES AND THE CHANGING FACE OF THE VILLAGE

Housing and Furniture

Phoenix villagers are increasingly influenced by city and township lifestyles and there now remain few distinctions between them. Most live in new style buildings of steel and concrete with two floors. On the ground floor is the shop and behind is the kitchen and dining room, with other living quarters on the first floor. In recent years, almost all the buildings along the Fengui road are of this kind. None of the people I spoke to said that they would like to build a traditional-style house. Even the elderly prefer the new buildings, which are more comfortable and convenient (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2). Any remaining traditional houses are gradually being modernized – the first priority being to install modern kitchens, toilets and bathrooms. It has been calculated that as many as 96 per cent of all Phoenix housing is now modern, and old-style toilets largely a thing of the past. For example, Mr Dai explained that he lived alone but was often visited by his son and a colleague to eat *longyan* (a type of fruit) with him.

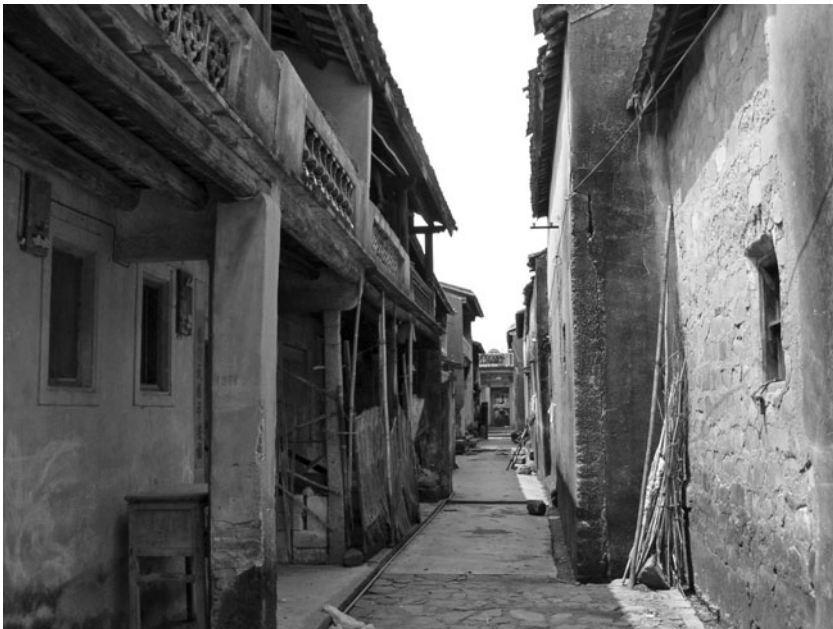


Figure 8.1 An old street in Phoenix Village, typical of Districts A and B



Figure 8.2 New houses along the hillside of Tang Valley, typical of Districts C and D

He was always embarrassed at not having a decent toilet, so eventually he installed a modern one. In another case, brothers living separately from the main family house reduced costs by building one new toilet which the two families could share.

In answer to questions about furniture (where it was acquired and did they get help, and so forth), five individuals said they had relatives or friends who were carpenters who had offered to make it for them when they moved in. All five emphasized that they would reciprocate in other ways. But the majority of households bought their furniture in the shopping mall as this was more convenient and practical and they could choose from a range of styles. Many chose city styles. Only 15 per cent hired people to make furniture. These were the better-off families, who wanted furniture that suited their house designs and living habits, and who were able to pay the extra price.

Streets and Neighbourhoods

The main part of Xikou Road and Caiyuanwei Street of Phoenix is paved and has street lighting. There are about ten refuse collection points in the village, and villagers conscientiously place their rubbish at the nearest collection point. The village committee hires people to collect it every day. This has greatly changed villagers' living habits, and improved village

hygiene and appearance. In a similar manner, land, house and transport planning in the village have led to significant changes by creating functionally distinct area divisions. The first is a residential area, scattered around Xikou Road and the foot of the hill, composed mainly of old-style village houses. This was the central area of the village before 1992, but is now a lower-income area where a majority of families have moved out permanently to seek employment outside Phoenix or have shifted to the business area along the Fenggui Road to live in the new-style two-storey buildings I described earlier. Most of them now sell daily necessities, such as foods, construction materials, motorcycles, briquettes for fires and so forth, targeting the local and neighbouring village and township people. Some households that have leased village collective land cultivate a variety of fruits and olives which they sell wholesale at their shop front.

A second functional area is the factory and service district. This is located in the northwest of the village near the east edge of Caiyuanwei Road. Four large-scale watchstrap factories and a ‘five metals’ factory are located there. Also to be found are the Guihu theatre, an internet office, a restaurant and telephone office, the post office and the rural cooperative credit bank, an industrial and business bureau, alongside the tax office of Guihu Township. The district also acts as a service district for Guihu Township.

Clothing and Cosmetics

My survey showed that most villagers bought their clothes at the market. I found no one who made his or her own clothes. Nearly 80 per cent bought clothing made in Chao’an county and the Chaoshan area, of a similar style to that found in Chaozhou city. There are few clothes shops in the main street of Guihu Township, which mainly sell old people’s and children’s clothing and underwear. The transport connection between the village and Chaozhou is convenient and so many villagers prefer to buy their clothes there, though newcomers prefer to buy clothes where they live and follow local styles. Dai Shujie, a student at Shantou professional training college, explained to me that he generally purchased his clothes there, even if he had to pay several hundred yuan, because items sold in the township were just not fashionable. Jeans, which go with most sorts of clothing nowadays, are the most popular with young people in the village. Young men like sports clothes and shoes, whereas returning migrants often like to dress formally and wear leather shoes. For the ceremony of God on the 12 January of the lunar calendar, girls carry flags with local symbols and wear their most beautiful clothes. Their dresses are as good as those of city girls. One, who appeared to be from a more prosperous family, wore

fashionable Korean-style clothes, and about half the girls participating in the celebrations expressed a specific interest in wearing similar Korean shoes. They obviously follow city trends. Middle-aged men will dress formally for the ceremony in the same manner as they do for other public occasions. Most wear a shirt but without a tie or bow tie. And the elderly care more for comfort than fashion.

Cosmetics and make-up have entered the lives of younger women in the village. A very small number of families (about 1 per cent it seems) spends over 100 yuan a year on cosmetics. A further 36 per cent indicated that they spent below 100 yuan, while many in the 30–40-year age group said they spent nothing, admitting that although cosmetics could help make them more beautiful, economic pressures excluded buying them. In their own words, ‘we can hardly afford to eat so how can we spend money on such things?’ Nevertheless, it is becoming a necessary expense for local young women and they include it in their ‘daily living’ expenses.

Food Styles, Eating Habits and Cooking Stoves

Food is still traditional in content and preparation, although improved living standards in recent years have meant that more meat, fish and poultry have entered the diet. When questioned about the source of food for meals, 43 per cent said they grew their own food. They bred pigs and cultivated their own vegetables. As one person put it, ‘we can plant whatever we want to eat and can eat whatever we plant and when we cannot eat all the vegetables or when prices increase then we take them to sell in the Guihu market’. Except for vegetables, villagers usually have to buy meat and fish at the market; and the locally reared pigs and poultry are mostly sold directly to middlemen and consumed only on celebratory occasions such as Spring Festival or at special family celebrations. People claimed that if they had more money then they would buy more meat, but anyway they eat what they produce and do not starve. Fifty-six per cent stated that they buy local meat and vegetables at the market only when they run short of home-grown varieties. No one admitted to eating in restaurants because most families were said to have women at home to cook for them, and anyway the cost of eating out was prohibitive. One local measure of the importance of home cooking is the fact that there exists no fast-food restaurant in Phoenix.

Having a full stomach is emphasized as important, which suggests that the pressures of daily sustenance remain uppermost in peoples’ everyday lives. More people, it seems, now emphasize hygiene and health than did previously, with 67 per cent and 64 per cent respectively stressing these issues. In addition, 51 per cent stressed the importance of fresh food

produce. The market is close to the village, thus making it easy for people to make daily purchases. In addition, traders tour the villages and neighbourhoods selling non-perishable vegetables which most markets do not sell. Having a fridge therefore is not regarded as so useful and it also burns up electricity; hence only a few families have one. Eating late, however, illustrates how certain city habits have penetrated the village scene. Adult males especially, retire late and often go out to the township to eat. Late-night eating consists mostly of porridge and different varieties of noodles. Some shops will even remain open until two in the morning. During holidays students also tend to eat after 11 p.m. Thus nightlife is becoming more common and varied.

Eighty-nine per cent of families use gas stoves for cooking but have not completely abandoned the traditional wood stove. Indeed, most newly built houses will include a traditional stove, though the richer families may use it only to cook for the Spring Festival. The majority of households combine the use of both stoves, the traditional one for heating water and the gas stove for cooking. At the beginning of 2006, it was evident that the use of modern stoves had declined due to a marked increase in the price of gas. In fact some households returned to using their wood stoves only, while others decided to combine the use of gas and coke fuel.

The owner of the coke shop, Mr Lin, explained that in the past there had been four shops making coke briquettes in the township, two making them by hand and the other two by machine. However, with the advent of the gas stove it proved difficult to earn a living from making coke, resulting in the closure of two of the businesses. The material for Mr Lin's coke comes from Fujian Province – 15 to 20 tons per month (1 ton of coal dust can supply 1500 briquettes) – and is sufficient to supply the township area and nearby villages. Mr Lin's clients are mostly poor farmers who use the coke stove for heating water. So although most villagers in Phoenix possess gas stoves, they supplement their use with a wood or coke stove.

Means of Transport and Mobility

With the development of the local community and surrounding regional urban network, individuals travel more, except of course the elderly. More than 90 per cent of families claimed to possess some means of travel, with the bicycle being the most universal form of transport. Most families own between one to three bicycles, used mostly by women and middle-school students. More striking is the fact that 44 per cent have motorcycles, used mainly by young and middle-aged men, and one or two farmers have cars, while the owners of small businesses usually possess three-wheeler mini-trucks.

In addition, buses travel 28 times a day to and fro between Guihu and Chaozhou, and, beginning in 2006, a new fleet of *yutong* middle-sized buses replaced the older buses. As a consequence, ticket prices have increased to 4 or 5 yuan one way, and 6 yuan during the Spring Festival, for what is a one-hour trip. Another means of transport is the private minibus that travels to Chaodu city. The journey takes 45 minutes and is priced at 5–7 yuan to any stop along the way. Buses also run directly to Shantou, Shenzhen and other cities. A large supermarket has been built near to the government headquarters in Chaozhou and a free bus service takes people from the township to the supermarket. They can now enjoy the convenience that previously only registered city-dwellers could avail themselves of.

As mentioned above, transport by boat has declined with the development of the road network and the building of the Chaozhou Bridge. This has brought Phoenix even closer to the city area and thus expands the area of activities and the ease of travel of Phoenix residents.

Entertainment and Communication

According to 82 per cent of men, women, elders and youngsters, watching television is the most popular form of entertainment. However, they also mentioned visiting friends or relatives in neighbouring villages or Chaozhou City. Some who have family members working in Chaozhou or Shantou indicated that they often visit them in their free time. These latter were mostly people with a higher educational background or technical skills. If, however, we break down the sample into same-age cohorts we reveal some interesting differences in entertainment preferences.

The Dai family shrine is most visited by elderly villagers who turn up, often on a daily basis, to partake of free tea and television and to play majong and chat amongst themselves. Village passers-by also sometimes call in for tea and to catch up on local matters, thus making this the information centre for the village. It is at the shrine that one rapidly learns about happenings in the village and further afield. And when a game of majong is under way it becomes the focus of shrine activities. Those who are not actually playing will stand around or sit there for hours commenting on performance and joking with each other and reporting on village gossip and ongoing quarrels. Others who are not so interested in majong will meet friends and chat.

Adult men of working age who had lived the longest in the village told me that they had little time for entertainment. They work in the fields doing whatever needs attending to and are rarely seen at home during the day. Their working hours are flexible and if they are not so busy they will stop to enjoy a cigarette with people on their way to work or they might

visit other farm plots to assess how things are progressing, before walking to deal with their own field crops. In short, chatting is their main entertainment; and in the evenings the family usually gathers together around the television. However, men tend not to watch for long as they prefer to visit a neighbour or friend and chat; and women combine watching and working or receiving visitors.

Undoubtedly the television is the most widespread public media technology in the village. All the families interviewed were connected to cable, except one who lived in a rented property where for some reason it was not available. The occupants often visited a nearby son's to watch particular programmes.

The teenagers present a different pattern since, rather than gravitating towards the family television, they tended to cling together in groups to study or play. They often referred to each other genealogically as 'so and so's' brother, and so on. Here we find an overlapping network of relationships based on class, neighbourhood and kinship affiliations that make for close ties, similar interests and forms of entertainment. They usually listen to the same kind of music, go to the Internet café, party with their age friends, or visit each other's houses to drink tea and chat. One striking example of this concerns the Rong family, who allowed their son and his friends to use a somewhat dilapidated traditional compound building as their main venue for their activities. The building was located adjacent to the new family house they had built. Here the group of youngsters gathered together on a daily basis to listen to and sing along with popular songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Between them they had CD and video facilities which they stressed were very much more interesting than the obsession that many adults had for television and karaoke sessions. Their regular meetings often gathered together as many as 30 young people crowded into the 10 square metre room. Pirate copies of all the latest songs were acquired through a network of brokers in Phoenix.

One evening when visiting the Rong family, I found them listening intensely to the song 'Seventy-two Changes' sung by the well-known Taiwan singer Cai Yilin. About ten youngsters were singing and tapping along with the rhythm. The room was alive with singing and dancing. They suggested that they might later move on to the Internet café to amuse themselves playing online games or contacting other friends but not necessarily for study purposes.

The café is located opposite the road sign announcing Phoenix Village and has 40 computers; and west of Guihu Township there is another Internet café with another 30 computers, mainly used by people from Longxi village. A truly amazing force for information and for instigating cultural change!

Earlier the telephone and now the cell phone play a major role in facilitating communication within the dispersed networks of family members, friends and work colleagues. In fact, 83 per cent of village households possess landline phones and 67 per cent mobiles which they use on a daily basis. Furthermore, the telephone has increased the frequency, volume and speed of information that flows between families and their migrant members, and therefore also the exchanges between urban and rural locations. The mobile phone technology has spread rapidly among the young and the working population, it being particularly useful for migrant workers, both men and women.

Public Media Issues

The increasing availability and use of public media is also associated with the process of rural urbanization. It has gradually penetrated into rural society, becoming one of the driving forces of social transformation.

Television news and documentary programmes are favourites and the source of much information and current affairs. The most popular programme is called *Public China*, put out by Chaozhou television station. This live programme claims to ‘observe society with sensitive eyes, reflect honestly on ordinary life, care and feel for civil society, and to construe the news with a spirit of service’. In short, it aims to serve the public with reports about daily life and the complaints that people make. It presents actual news, including information, for example, about electricity cuts, water shortages, accidents, fires and robberies – all of which are liable to hot debate. Hence, the programme reflects what most people care about, as well strange events, people’s stories, and a range of public opinion.

Many adults watch this programme every night and are influenced by its commentaries which often stimulate further discussion among viewers after the programme is over. They even joked about me being the author of the programme, believing that I had come from Chaozhou to learn about their lives! Another type of programme widely appreciated by local residents focuses on festival events that may involve artistic sketches, drama and opera. These are broadcast by the regional Chaozhou and Shantou channels and appeal mostly to the older age group. In contrast, some younger people have acquired a fascination for television advertisements whose presentation they find beautiful while also enjoying learning new kinds of celebrity vocabulary and product information.

Turning now to consider briefly the use made of radio and newspapers, it becomes clear that, for the majority of the population, they are much less part of everyday life. Radio is far less popular than television and only about half the households have one, mostly purchased several years ago.

A popular saying goes: ‘After the family get a TV, the radio becomes the “chicken bone”’. Thus most people *see* it as outdated and find the television with its pictures much more informative. Generally families use their radio as background while they are cooking, sewing or doing something else.

Newspapers and magazines likewise have little influence on villagers. In the whole Guihu Township area, there is no newspaper on sale. One shop sells the most popular magazine but such publications are not prominent in the market. Villagers think watching television is much more convenient for learning about news and current affairs, and it costs less than buying a newspaper. The village committee, however, does receive three newspapers and one magazine through annual subscription. This is in accordance with government policy but costs them around 3000 yuan. Thus, except for the village cadres, newspapers are not part of daily life, although Dai Mingrong, a retired government official, does continue to order a newspaper for himself via the post office.

We can conclude then that information, new ideas and other kinds of influence come mostly through the television and the Internet. This year, for example, the government raised the quality regulations for preserved olives, and farmers learned of this through the public media.

Modernization of Ideas and Attitudes

To understand further the transformation of ideas, I questioned people about their motivations in respect to achievements, education and social mores. In answer to a question about defining ‘social responsibility’, over half explained this in terms of ‘meeting family needs’, while a further 20 per cent opted for the more general concept of ‘caring for society’. The latter mostly resided in the more prosperous commercial area, had better education and stronger feelings about the wider issues of social responsibility. In answer to the question ‘what kind of elements should be considered when judging morality?’, 46 per cent mentioned one’s own personal conscience with regard to right and wrong, while 22 per cent stressed the role of laws, regulations and traditional morality. This suggests that traditional criteria may be losing ground to more individualized notions of morality, although most people still thought laws and regulations still play a role in controlling behaviour.

To the question ‘what are the most important components for personal development?’ 43 per cent emphasized individual capacity. Second came personal networks and educational level. These answers suggest that attitudes may be shifting away from China’s traditional emphasis on collective values and family commitments. The next question about people’s

'desires/aspirations over the next five years' resulted in the identification of several different goals, though not necessarily incompatible. Thirty-six per cent chose 'earning much more money' and the same number 'keeping family members safe', while a further 11 per cent opted for 'having a successful career'. Those who chose a safe family were mostly elderly and middle-aged, while younger people were much more achievement motivated and willing to migrate in order to pursue a career. Indeed, many of the respondents expressed the view those who stay behind and do not work hard to achieve a successful career must be considered less able or even 'disabled'. In general, then, most villagers strongly believed that one should go out and learn something new, and thus contribute to updating village ideas and consciousness.

Throughout these discussions the question of increasing the level of education in Phoenix assumed centre stage. Eighty-eight per cent of those interviewed gave it high priority, and 51 per cent stressed that the next generation should produce college students at the master's level. Thus educational expectations are rising. Only 16 per cent thought it did not matter but that they would respect their children's choice. Only a small minority said that they thought children should go to work before finishing middle or high school.

Even if development in the village has slowed down somewhat in recent years, it still maintains a high level of investment in education. According to data from January to March 2005, 55 per cent of village welfare funds, which amounted to 43259 yuan, were ploughed into Fengjie School, which was merged with other schools in the neighbouring villages, to become the most influential primary school in Guihu Township. Ten years ago the village had set up educational funding for excellent students, which was financed by donations from local factory owners and through migrant remittances and others closely associated with the village. At its highest, the fund was worth more than 100000 yuan. The fund was administered by one of the watchstrap factory owners who donated over half the funds. However, eventually the factory became bankrupt and the funds disappeared.

Today Fengjie School is a building of three floors. It is the biggest and most attractive building architecturally in the whole village. When the Party and the Village Committee were short of funds to build an office, they borrowed the third floor of the school. To ensure student security the committee invested in a wall around the school building. Ongoing discussions then proceeded between the President and Director of the Village Committee on how they might raise funds to build dormitories for teachers, so that they could attract young outstanding teachers. In the end they finished up giving priority to building the dormitory rather than

the office building. Clearly the Chinese slogan ‘Education First’ prevailed here.

Naming and Forms of Address

Traditionally in Phoenix, people addressed each other formally according to their generational relationships, but there is now much confusion as to what to call others. As I indicated earlier, the younger generation prefer to call age friends by their personal or given name, regardless of their generational relationship to them, and do not like to use ‘uncle’ for an older man if he is a colleague. They ignore generation orders in their interactions, using them only in jest or when discussing such matters. The elderly will scold children if they hear them calling each other incorrectly. Older people stick to using generational names but are tolerant of youngsters. For example, my two local interviewers (A’rong and A’ju) were classmates but genealogically from different generations (*Shao*, older and *Duo*, younger). They have a good relationship and so call each other by their personal names. Yet A’ju was reluctant to work with A’rong during interviews in the village because of the confusion that being of different generations caused them. Each had to address villagers differently in accordance with their precise generational relationship to them. But if they both adopted the same name usage vis-à-vis a specific villager, then they were scolded for it. So obviously, modernization is changing the way people address each other. Names used in personalized relations are now more important, and will likely overtake the use of generational names in Phoenix (cf. Fei Xiaotong 1997; Gedsi 1997).

CONCLUSION

Let me now draw together the central findings of this study. While identifying many aspects of the life of Phoenix Village that have been undermined by its gradual incorporation into a wider hinterland of industrial enterprises and migratory flows, it still retains a distinctiveness that represents the historical knitting together and reassembling of numerous ongoing processes at the levels of the family, economy, politics and social-cultural practice. Nevertheless, there seems little doubt that nowadays villagers and township people show little difference in their commitment to modernizing influences, balanced of course against their struggles to preserve the specificity of their village and township identities.

As the village and township have grown closer, so the village is regarded as a suburb of the township and at the same time set apart from other

villages and towns in the region. For instance, villagers visit the township market to buy and sell produce and, vice versa, townspeople will shop in Phoenix for specific items. But, at the same time, they have marketing and economic options that include the wider regional configuration of towns, cities, industrial zones and areas of agricultural production. This makes for the kinds of complexity characteristic of regional patterns of urbanization described by Bryan Roberts in Chapter 7.

Such structural processes are accompanied and frequently shaped by the interpretations and priorities that people themselves attribute to them. Thus, in Phoenix, we found several divergent responses to the development of the village economy. Thirteen per cent of villagers thought that agriculture should be given priority, as against the majority of 83 per cent who opted for continuing to develop manufacturing and other industries, while the remaining 4 per cent indicated a lack of interest. But underlying this general approval of industrial development was a variety of other issues and positions, for example, some strongly approved of the opening of watchstrap factories while others emphasized the need to secure investments to generate other types of employment, while the rest took a sceptical view about future possibilities.

A second major issue concerns the situation of agricultural production in Phoenix. For many years plot size has severely restricted production output. In 1995 the size of plot allocated per person primarily for subsistence purposes was small enough (0.3 mu) but by 2005 this had reduced to 0.2 mu for medium quality land and to 0.18 mu for good quality. This has meant that it is difficult for families to produce a surplus above their household requirements that they might market locally, although, as I described earlier, some vegetables are from time to time traded in Guihu Township. In addition to these household plots, the collective of Phoenix Village contracts out to villagers an average of 5 mu per household of land suitable for fruit production. The collective economy of Phoenix Village depends mainly on its fruit gardens. Most villagers plant olives together with *longyan*, pomegranates and persimmons, for which the area is famous and market the produce in the regions.

In 2005, the central government altered its quality control regulations, demanding a reduction in additives to dried fruit. This immediately reduced the supply in Chaozhou and Anfu, the two principal markets for dried fruits. However, the fresh fruit production in Phoenix remained abundant, although the purchase price for green olives fell from 1.5 yuan per jin (half kilo) to 0.45 yuan. Thus many fruit farmers' takings dropped severely and they made complaints to this effect. This made the village cadres worried that the bidding for fruit garden contracts in the follow year would not reach a good price, thus affecting the collective income of

the village. This underlined how closely agricultural production in Phoenix Village was connected to the domestic market. Thus, when farmers understand modern technology and the workings of commodity markets they are no longer simply producers and creators of an agricultural economy but they draw upon and introduce into the local scene many components of the wider urbanized market economy and lifestyle. Hence changes in the agricultural structure of Phoenix have worked to promote its own urbanization.

The Notion of ‘Village in the Township’ (*Zhen Zhong Cun*)

My observations on the mixed economy and lifestyles of Phoenix Village lead me in this concluding part of the chapter to reflect on the phenomenon we might call ‘village in the township’. As Phoenix Village is located in close proximity to Guihu Township, they have grown ever closer residentially over the past ten years or so, and villagers have adopted many of the lifestyles of the town. However, in terms of its administration, organization, land system and rural civil status or *hukou*, Phoenix remains a village and in this sense we may speak of it as an urban ‘village within a township’.

In previous research on urbanization in the Zhujiang River triangle area, I identified several types of urbanization – village to market town trends, township to city trends, county and small-size city urbanization, and middle and large city internationalization. When a rural location becomes more prosperous, it initiates a movement towards township and city trends whereby villages become more like township and city environments, and the latter expand their populations such that eventually they may in turn become more nationally and internationally orientated. However, this picture does not take into account how, during the process of township and city expansion, neighbouring villages may become entangled with each other.

The changes in Phoenix in fact represent a common type of township development in China that sets limits to what is possible in respect to economic and policy environments. When townships expand, neighbouring village development and infrastructure cannot easily be included under standard urban planning procedures, and it is difficult to change the village’s *hukou* identity. Thus, villages become part of the larger residential location but remain separate in terms of management and administration divisions and responsibilities. Hence urban and rural spaces coexist but retain independent units of governance with their own village and community committees. Yet, if the ‘village in the township’ grows substantially in terms of its level of economic and/or infrastructural development then it

is likely to suffer the fate of becoming completely absorbed into the larger urban area or city, and may then be targeted for reconstruction and thus disappear as a village entity. This is a recent phenomenon in China and is all-pervasive, especially in privately developed counties and districts such as those of Yuyao, Yiwu, Shaoxing, Xiaoshang and Wenling in Zhejiang Province. So far there is little systematic research on these situations and no clear definition of exactly what we mean by 'village in the township'. In my view it refers to those kinds of rural communities that are still under collective ownership but that increasingly fall under township domination and are often referred to as 'the underlings' of the township. A second characteristic is that administrative villages are formally located within township and government hierarchies and party structure. In this sense they have both the functions and characteristics of town and village.

The development of small towns and cities where urbanization is growing fast presents a challenge to government and in particular planning authorities. At present the dualistic rural-urban structure, along with insufficient government direction, leads to the widespread anomaly of the 'village in the township' phenomenon. It raises the question of how we should deal with the relationship between village, towns and cities so as not to repeat the path of villages being swallowed up by urban expansion.

This also raises important issues for township authorities in the context of rapid demographic, economic and spatial expansion. Although at one level 'villages in townships' are administrative units, it is difficult for them to form a relatively coherent, independent economic and social unit. Their future development lies in being integrated into the township system as soon as possible and becoming part of the township regional network. Such a profound transformation is full of transitions and uncertainty: obviously the longer the 'village in township' situation exists, the higher the cost of urbanization for government and people.

Based on current evidence, I would argue that government should push the transformation of rural to urban, of farmer to town dweller, of rural to city management and rural to urban community. This transformation constitutes a comprehensive social transformation process. It entails not only material and infrastructural change but changes in the economic sphere, in community organization and management, in lifestyles, and the improvement of peoples' general welfare, education and health.

NOTE

1. This discrepancy arises because the categories used by government for national industries do not coincide with mine. Those who worked most of their time in business or the

drinks industry I placed in the business field. They accounted for around 7.1 per cent – a small rise from 1995.

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9. Growing up and growing old in rural Mexico and China: care-giving for the young and the elderly at the family–state interface

Gail Mummert

INTRODUCTION

Rural societies around the world have created a diversity of arrangements to provide intensive care to children and the aged. Generally these arrangements emerge at the family level and involve intergenerational flows of resources and care-giving based upon ideological and moral tenets of filial duty and kin solidarity. However, state institutions also participate – directly or indirectly – in assuring that the fundamental needs of these two potentially vulnerable age groups are covered, typically invoking a discourse of social justice and intergenerational solidarity to justify their intervention.

Yet, as rural societies were transformed worldwide in the latter half of the twentieth century by trends such as massive migration toward urban centers and industrialized countries, dwindling economic opportunities in the countryside, demographic transitions to lower fertility and longer life expectancy, and the decline of multigenerational households, traditional care-giving arrangements for the rural young and old came under siege. Today more and more families around the globe are experiencing prolonged periods of physical separation of grandparents, parents and children as the sandwich generation of breadwinners struggles to adequately provide for both their offspring and their progenitors. This phenomenon of the work of production and reproduction being performed across kilometers and even international borders merits close attention from social scientists committed to influencing policymaking and deconstructing past policies whose repercussions reach far into the future.

This chapter analyses fluid, multidimensional and multi-sited care-giving arrangements in an attempt to understand their social and cultural

underpinnings. Developing the case of one Mexican migrant community with roots in the countryside and jobs in urban areas of Mexico and the United States,¹ it explores the diverse economic, political and familial circumstances – at the local and the global levels – that can give rise to such a reorganization of productive and reproductive tasks. It then considers the implications of an apparent recasting of the long-standing social contract in which the able-bodied provide for the needs of the young, the old and the infirm.

Both theoretically and methodologically, I embrace a social constructivist and actor-oriented stance. Thus, taking as our point of departure the dynamic interplay and mutual determinations between social actors, structural constraints and processes of socioeconomic, demographic, political and cultural change, I focus on individuals' discursive practices as members of peasant family units who struggle for livelihood by combining various income sources in an ongoing attempt to improve their lot and that of their progeny. I follow ordinary persons comprising peasant households over their life course as they make decisions affecting themselves and the group, take high-stake risks, and squabble over what might be construed at any point in time as a family project but in the long run proves to be a constantly contested domain. I use Long's concept of social interface to situate individual men and women, young and old within families, communities, and two nation-states to begin to understand care-giving patterns in which self-interest and emotional ties are inextricably entwined. Long (1989: 2) defines a social interface as 'a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative value and social interest, are most likely to be found'. He goes on to stress that 'the concept implies some kind of face-to-face encounter between individuals or units representing different interests and backed by different resources'. The encounters I will highlight occur between family members themselves (especially grandparents, parents and children), and between family members and government agents, usually by way of the formers' status as workers or students during their life course.

Our theoretical view of care-giving will be filtered through a transnational and gendered lens because I am convinced that it is not possible to fully comprehend the workings of relatedness nor the family–state interface without these two angles. By transnationalism, I refer to the fact that the everyday lives of individuals and families are increasingly bound up with globalizing trends; in their decision-making about livelihoods, expenditures, care-giving and much more, they take into account commitments, material and immaterial resources, and opportunities that transcend international political borders.² While this is particularly true of families who

are on the move back and forth across such physical borders and send remittances 'back home', even non-migrants are caught up in cultural models of modernization, technological revolutions, economic restructuring, and so on. Migrants and non-migrants alike are in the vortex of transnational processes and may indeed adopt transnational practices.

As a key organizing principle of social interaction, gender is undeniably our second lens. Following West and Zimmerman's (1991) seminal formulation of 'doing gender', I posit a situational, relational and quotidian notion of gender. Gender is not a personal attribute nor a politically correct term to replace male or female sex; rather it is a socially constructed, daily, recurring enactment of difference, hierarchy and power relations. In looking at care-giving, I therefore pay close attention to the differential positioning of women and men in female–female, male–female or male–male hierarchies. I am keen to point out the differing impacts of policy decisions on men and women and to explore their ways of negotiating, of promoting hidden agendas or of frankly resisting globalization and modernization as they participate in care-giving practices and discourse.

Accordingly, this study is based upon intensive anthropological and demographic fieldwork with a longitudinal following of specific cases of care-giving in a small group of transnational families. This longitudinal method allows for a mapping out of how family units constantly renegotiate their ties and duties in the face of changing demographics and wider processes of social change. Crisis situations (death, serious illness, deportation) or family transitions (change of residence and/or job, new marital status, the birth of children) can be usefully studied to detect strengths, weaknesses, and tensions in the social networks families depend upon to survive. The research design included interviewing all parties involved in the care-giving decisions (both women and men) and posing questions regarding ideals of fatherhood, motherhood and filial piety to kin with heterogeneous life trajectories and belonging to different generations. Special attention was given to the interplay of gender ideologies and the actual work of care-giving, since in Mexico this is naturalized as a female task automatically falling to mothers, wives, daughters, sisters or daughters-in-law.

Our notion of family and kin ties draws fundamentally upon anthropological and demographic literature and to a lesser degree, the fields of family history and psychology. Anthropologists offer insights into kinship and family as gendered, hierarchical groups of persons of different ages who share home and hearth, distributing resources unequally along those same gendered and generational fault lines. Demographers have long studied the characteristics and behavior of the young and the aged living in households in different societies and proposed a model of intergenerational wealth flows that is quite relevant to our topic.

Care-giving for the young and the elderly is undoubtedly a highly politicized topic since tending to the needs of both previous and future generations looms large in state visions of social order and, consequently, in social welfare policies. Nevertheless, an effort is made in this study to be neither judgmental of practices nor beholden to policymaking decisions. Consequently, childcare and eldercare are not defined a priori as problems in need of solutions. Rather, in section 1, emphasis is placed on telling the stories, dilemmas and justifications of fathers and mothers who make the heart-wrenching decision to travel far from their family in order to fulfill their obligations as household heads, thus forming transnational families. I present some evocative fragments of narratives of the caregivers of the young (often grandmothers, aunts and female siblings) and of the old (frequently unmarried daughters or sisters). The viewpoints and life experiences of the children left behind or sent back 'in their best interest' as well as those of the elderly fending for a dignified old age are also taken into account. Said experiences are framed in changing and disputed notions of gender and intergenerational relations.

Section 2 explores the interface of state and family actors around the issue of government's responsibility in providing for the young and the old. It addresses the question of what provisions the Mexican state offers to these age groups in need of support as well as its ideological discourse on family care-giving. Since government agencies generally intervene in education for the young and in health insurance and pension plans for senior citizens, I consider these areas as well as some recent social programs targeting the aged (65 years and over population) – a product of recent legislation guaranteeing basic rights for senior citizens. I argue that interventions are designed to complement and/or guarantee the workings of family solidarity, and that most 'war on poverty' programs are basically palliative. Due to the close historical ties between Mexico and the United States as well as the creation and maintenance of transnational practices by migrants and their families, we must consider more than one nation-state in our analysis.

In section 3, I turn to a comparative discussion of how families in rural Mexico and rural China and government agencies are redefining care-giving for the young and the elderly. Rural transformations in these two countries during the latter half of the twentieth century share certain commonalities (for example, massive rural–urban migration flows, a rapidly growing elderly population whose social status is in flux, a declining birth-rate) as well as stark differences (for example, the degree and direction of state intervention in care-giving solutions). In proposing a comparative research agenda, I review gaps between filial practice and expectations and frameworks for studying them; the implications of a breakdown of systems for regulating intergenerational and gendered power relations; and the

interplay of gender relations and family ideology with state directives and programs concerned with care-giving for the young and the elderly.

1 THE DOUBLE-BIND: CARE-GIVING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE YOUNG AND THE ELDERLY THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL AND GENDERED LENS

It is widely expected that families – as the basic units of human physical and social reproduction – care for their own. Within the family, however, certain members are considered particularly vulnerable and in need of intensive care: the very young who are not yet fully independent, the infirm who are (temporarily or permanently) unable to function on their own; and the elderly who gradually lose their independence. Generally the family's independent adults in good health are expected to provide such care. Biological cycles and individuals' health status thus pinpoint candidates for receiving and providing care. Yet, family members do not simply respond to the dictates of genetic programming; rather, as meaning-makers, they justify their acts in terms of a shared understanding of their position in a web of social relationships. Human beings provide care to one another out of a mixture of feelings of love, duty, and reciprocity as well as a result of social pressure to do so.

I therefore begin by positing an anthropological model of family care-giving as part of intergenerational flows of resources, paying close attention to who gives what to whom and what they say about why they do it. (Inversely, it is crucial to consider who denies something to whom and why.) In other words, I am interested in the ideological and moral underpinnings of filial duty and kin solidarity and the potential dissonance between norms and actual behavior. I then apply this framework to study care-giving to the young and to the elderly in the case of a rural Mexican community comprised of a large contingent of United States-bound migrants (predominantly adult males) and stay-behind wives, children and elders.³

Kinwork and the Importance of Being Related

As the twentieth century drew to a close, anthropological thinking about the family shifted from the narrow confines of kinship structures (viewed as descriptive genealogies with a given content to each position that all but dictated a person's behavior toward others) to a more comprehensive notion of relatedness that places specific kinship relationships within a wider social network. Classic anthropology divided kinship study into

three domains: behavior, rules and categories of terminology. As Godelier et al. (1998: 4) underline, this treatment meant determining respectively, ‘what people actually do’ to contrast it with what people ‘ought to do’ (supposing they knew, accepted and followed the group’s moral rulebook) and record how they address each other in kinship language. In the past, anthropologists regarded the domain of rules as one of consensus and clarity as opposed to the fuzzy indeterminacy of individual behavior. Nowadays, however, anthropologists tend to *see* the domain of rules as one of variations, contested meanings, hegemony, and resistance.

In a superb reflection upon anthropology’s novel shift toward ‘exploring local cultures of relatedness in comparative context’, Carsten (2000: 1) describes the mission of the authors in her anthology in these terms: ‘rather than taking the content of “kinship” for granted, they build from first principles a picture of the implications and the lived experience of relatedness in local contexts’. She also underscores the vital contribution to the debate over the changing contours of the natural/social divide made by scholarship on gender and the body, concluding that ‘there is a combination of sentiment, substance, and nurturance as grounds for relatedness’. These three elements ‘underlie all forms of relatedness, whether genealogically based or not’ (ibid.: 22). I return to this triad in our analyses of ethnographic materials on childcare and eldercare.

As an analytical and methodological grounding for our endeavor, I have adopted a useful framework called *kinscripts* proposed by anthropologists Stack and Burton (1994: 33):

I introduce *kinscripts*, a framework representing the interplay of family ideology, norms, and behaviors over the life course. *Kinscripts* encompass three culturally defined family domains: *kin-work*, which is the labor and the tasks that families need to accomplish to survive from generation to generation; *kin-time*, which is the temporal and sequential ordering of family transitions; *kin-scripting*, which is the process of assigning *kin-work* to family members.

In accordance with this framework (neatly tying together developments in the fields of sociology, family therapy, and kinship studies), I give particular attention to both the actions and the discourse of family members as they earn their livelihood and relate to one another. Carsten (2000: 1–2) succinctly refers to ‘idioms of relatedness’ as she aims to ‘describe relatedness in indigenous terms’.

Local Morality Tales

I preface the ethnographic part of section 1 of this chapter with two tales of prodigal husbands and brothers that are repeatedly told in the study

village because they are particularly eloquent indicators of Carsten's 'local cultures of relatedness'. At first blush both stories deal with old-age care but, in fact, if I take into account accompanying gossip, they propose a template for intergenerational relations over the life course.⁴

Tale of the prodigal husband

In the 1960s a husband, recently married and childless, left the village and headed for the United States. For roughly a quarter of a century no one in the village knew of his whereabouts since he failed to stay in touch with his wife and family of origin. When fellow male villagers finally located him in a bar in the US and assured him that his wife was still faithfully waiting for him, he was amazed at her loyalty. Even though he had formed a new family in the US and had a son and a daughter there, he finally returned to his wife in the village and she accepted him with open arms. When he died, the wife crossed the border illegally to complete the paperwork in order to receive his pension. This woman's forgiveness of years of abandonment and adultery by her spouse epitomized wifely duty and sacrifice; in the eyes of the village men, she had 'gained a place in heaven for herself' through her virtue.⁵

Tale of the prodigal brother

Recently, an unmarried migrant man, 'lost' for some 40 years in the Baja California peninsula of Northern Mexico, returned to the village. During his long absence, he failed to keep in touch with his family of origin, did not send remittances, and did not even return for his parents' funerals. Old and unable to work, he came back looking for family support and ended up living with his destitute, unmarried sisters who obtain their food doing odd housework tasks for other women. 'It is his own fault', says one elderly pensioner of the United States Social Security Administration. 'He never looked out for his relatives when he was able-bodied and now that he is useless [unable to work], he returns. That is why he has to look for food in the trash cans. One of these days, he is going to poison himself [from eating spoiled food].' This man's failure to maintain his kin ties is particularly disturbing to villagers since the mere existence of a beggar is a barometer of the breakdown of reciprocity and duty among relatives.

In these two tales, villagers are discussing family scripts, a notion borrowed from the family therapy literature and defined by Stack and Burton (1994: 34) as 'mental representations that guide the role performances of family members within and across contexts'. These authors' related concept of kinscripts however 'focus[es] on the tensions that are produced and negotiated between individuals in families in response to scripts'. The positive and negative outcomes as well as the embellishments that each male or female storyteller adds to the aforementioned tales speak volumes

to these tensions. In their old age and aware of their need for assistance due to declining health, the prodigal husband (armed with a pension) and the empty-handed brother attempt to reactivate their kin ties in the village and obtain vastly different results.

Pooling Resources in the Extended Family

Despite the stereotypical image of multigenerational peasant households in the Mexican countryside, the trend toward nuclearization is clear throughout the nation: nearly seven out of every ten families are nuclear. Furthermore, differences between rural and urban areas in this nuclear prevalence have become very small.⁶ Yet, even though more and more rural families adhere to the nuclear pattern in terms of residence, exchanges between non-coresident kin of different generations are frequent. However, more attention has been paid to material resources that change hands across generations and households than to kinwork such as that involved in care-giving. In this study of caring for the very young and the old, I consider both material and non-material resources that flow in two-way streams between generations. On occasion, the streams bypass a generation and move on to the following generation. Rather than producing a careful accounting of credits and debits by family members, as classic anthropological exchange theory posits, I suggest a more nuanced picture of subtle prodding and scolding which can escalate to emotional blackmail by relatives occupying positions of authority when wayward family members shirk, procrastinate over or totally avoid their kinwork responsibilities to the group.

Methodologically, I place greater significance on the extended kin group itself than on household structure per se in order to discover who provides (or owes) what to whom with regard to care-giving. In the material realm (the substance of the triad), the actual flow of resources includes obvious needs: food – beginning with breast milk – housing, clothing, medicines, and so on. Also, as we shall *see* below when we deal with migrants' transnational practices, it extends to identities by means of the sharing of personal documents to facilitate border crossings and access to health services. In the immaterial realm (the sentiment-nurturance of the triad), love and caring are exchanged. It is precisely to this mixture of material and immaterial resources, of interest and emotion, characterizing family ties over time that I now turn. Following a logical biological sequence, I look first at childcare and secondly at eldercare, even though most families simultaneously face these twin issues of 'kin-keeping – the undertakings necessary to keep family connected and family traditions transmitted' (Stack and Burton 1994: 37–8).

Long-distance Child-rearing by 'Many Mothers'

In stark contrast to the model of intensive motherhood⁷ prevailing in the West, an increasing number of youngsters around the world are entrusted to alternative caregivers while one or both of their biological parents work in another country. I refer to these arrangements in which child-rearing activities belonging to the realm of family reproduction are scattered across national borders as transnational parenting.⁸ Generally children are left behind in the country of origin when their parents depart, although in other cases foreign-born offspring are sent back to the home country of their parents to live with relatives there. Supposedly 'agreed upon' by at least two adult parties and cast in a discourse of being 'in the child's best interests', transnational parenting is in fact the outcome of a complicated set of negotiations and precarious understandings between parents, designated caregivers and the children themselves. In such a tense setting, mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives are drawn into a maelstrom of emotions, duties and reciprocities that are interwoven with gender and generational hierarchies and ideologies.

The increasing global frequency and visibility of transnational parenting is not coincidental; economic hardship and political strife in certain Third World regions coupled with worldwide industrial and agricultural restructuring have spawned particular employment demands and labor recruiting practices that force working parents to leave children behind or send them 'back home'. In this section I hope to shed light on the paradox of a burgeoning of mothers and fathers who 'opt' to endure physical and temporal separation from their offspring as a means to ensure the youngsters' safety and better provide for their upbringing. Ironically, they must split up to hold the family together.

It is important to distinguish between transnational fatherhood and motherhood in terms of their historical emergence and – from a gendered viewpoint – of the differential value judgments assigned to them by men and women. I therefore reserve the umbrella term transnational parenting to refer to the situation in which *both* biological parents are separated from some or all of their offspring. In the case of migratory flows from Mexico toward the United States and Canada, the practice of transnational fatherhood historically preceded transnational motherhood and parenthood. While the three practices are linked, they are evaluated differently along gendered lines. Gender and generational hierarchies and ideologies cross-cut the decision-making processes (at the individual and extended family levels), processes which are molded by trends in global political economy.

By developing two case studies of long-distance child-rearing from the village in Michoacán, I illustrate the multiple dilemmas and conflicting

loyalties that family members experience when they become involved in a transnational parenting arrangement. In a methodological departure from most extant research, I take into account the viewpoints of parents, alternative caregivers and the children themselves, enabling us to focus on the intricacies of these understandings and bring out the underlying solidarities as well as tensions. Furthermore, by following these case studies over time, the contingent and extremely volatile nature of transnational parenting arrangements will become manifest.

In the study village, transnational fatherhood has been a common practice among male sojourner migrants for several generations. For the most part, the migrant father's practice of leaving his children in the mother's care was naturalized by villagers and viewed as unproblematic by researchers. Yet, when transnational motherhood and parenting practices emerged more recently, giving rise to a variety of long-distance child-rearing arrangements by 'many mothers' rather than just one, or shared mothering (Glenn 1994: 6), villagers criticized the migrant mother or parents and family migration specialists paid attention to the new phenomenon. Such differential value judgments of transnational fathers, mothers and parents come to light only if we adopt a transnational and gendered lens.

As I show in this section, long-distance childcare arrangements are often the result of *faits accomplis* in which certain family members (predominantly females) are kinscripted and take on a sacrificial role for the 'common good'. Rarely are the children's preferences or feelings factored into the arrangement chosen for them. I present two contrasting cases of a teenage boy and girl who have lived in transnational families for nearly all their lives.

Case 1

Aldo is a shy 13-year-old who lives with his grandmother and grandfather in the study village where he attends junior high school. The son of a single mother, since infancy his maternal grandparents have been his *de facto* caregivers and the only parents that he acknowledges. The boy never knew his father. His birth mother left him in the care of her own mother while she worked, first as a strawberry packing plant employee in a nearby city and later, after migrating to the US, at a fast food restaurant on the outskirts of Chicago. In his short lifetime, Aldo has lived in rural Michoacán, the greater Los Angeles area and suburban Chicago for periods ranging from six months to several years. He has been schooled in all three sites, acquiring fluency in Spanish and basic English skills. He calls his grandmother 'Mama Elena' and refuses to live with his biological mother and half-siblings,⁹ despite the grandmother's attempt to reunite them while on a visit to Chicago.

Even though the teenager has made his preference to remain with his grandparents in Mexico clear to the extended family, his future remains uncertain. As his aging grandmother and ailing grandfather (both in their seventies) have pointed out to him, they may not live until he turns 18, the legal age in Mexico. This scenario has reopened the issue of possible adoption by a brother of the biological mother residing in California who is a naturalized US citizen. The topic continues to spark heated discussion among extended family members. On the one hand, another uncle living in California was adamant in his opposition: 'The boy is not a little pig to be given away.' The first uncle's wife (apparently the only non-blood relative involved in the decision-making process) has stated her conditions for the adoption to take place: neither the grandparents nor the biological mother would have any say in Aldo's future. This potential loss of elderly authority seems unfair to other uncles and aunts who point out the one fact that all can agree upon: the grandmother has indeed raised the boy from infancy. In short, she has mothered him and stayed by his side when he was living in Chicago and California. Elena has gradually divided up her plot of land where her house stands to most of her sons and will bequeath a small part of her home to Aldo 'so that he and his mother at least have a place to stay' since 'he has nothing and no one'. For the time being, Aldo continues to live with his grandparents and probably will until their deaths, at which time he poignantly states: 'Then we'll *see* who wants me.'

Case 2

I met Julia, the fourth of five sisters, when she was a sixth grader in a private Catholic school in the county seat several miles down the highway from the study village. This fact set her apart from the vast majority of village children who attend public grade school in the village. Julia and her siblings had been living with her parents in Chicago until the mother turned alcoholic, abusive and negligent toward her offspring and lost custody of all five girls to the biological father in a court case in the United States. The migrant father, a maintenance employee in an apartment complex in the Greater Chicago area, turned to his own parents in the village for aid in caring for his 'motherless' children; it was decided he would send his five daughters (then ranging from 8 months to 12 years old) back to live with their paternal grandparents. The father continued to provide for their financial needs and to speak to them by telephone; the girls visited him in Chicago during summer vacations. The principal caretaker in Michoacán was the paternal grandfather since the grandmother was frailer and less educated than he, a former migrant to the North himself who enjoyed a retirement pension from the United States Social Security system. A younger unmarried great aunt in her sixties served as tutor to the girls

in scholastic matters. The eldest granddaughter, upon completing high school, eventually moved back to Chicago to continue her studies, taking with her the youngest sister to live with their father so that she could learn English. Julia and the two other sisters remained behind. After a time, the third sibling also went to the US only to return to Mexico after a few months where she feels she has more freedom to come and go than with her father in Chicago.

When the grandfather died in 2006, a family crisis ensued. Two of the uncles made it clear that the grandmother was unable to step into the void left by the grandfather with regard to Julia's and her sisters' upbringing. They proceeded to whisk the widow off to their homes for extended visits in an attempt to force their brother to make new arrangements. However, Julia's father continued his practice of transnational fatherhood. Julia and her older remaining sister continue to live in the grandparents' home, attend school and for the most part, look after themselves: they cook, wash their own clothes and limit their social outings. Occasionally another young aunt sleeps in the same house with them as chaperone. The great aunt who served as tutor to the girls, hard pressed for money for herself and an invalid sister, and in order to complement aid received from her siblings, was forced to work outside the village in a strawberry packing plant. Consequently, she is less available to assist her great-nieces.

These two case studies¹⁰ dramatically illustrate how child-keeping¹¹ works and how it can suddenly fall apart, necessitating the forging of shared parental responsibilities and rights among kin (see Table 9.1). Both Aldo and Julia, in their comings and goings between Mexico and the United States, have lived in more than one household and enjoyed the support of a web of kin. They have been 'mothered' by a number of relatives (predominantly female nurturers and male providers) since neither has a direct relationship with his/her biological mother. They have been separated from siblings and half-siblings by the international border. Over time and particularly in family crisis situations (illness, death), the extended family group has debated possible care arrangements – especially ones that would lessen the care-giving load for aging grandmothers – but the issue remains a battlefield between kin who ostensibly seek to act 'in the child's best interest'. While neither Aldo nor Julia has suffered neglect thanks to their kin-generated safety nets, their narratives reveal a certain sadness and sense of limbo in their lives and their futures remain tenuous.

Adult Children Caring for Aging Parents

Today, the 65-plus age group is the fastest growing component of the Mexican population. In 2000 it accounted for nearly 5 percent and

Table 9.1 Case studies of children from the study village in long-distance child-rearing arrangements

Child's pseudonym	Main substitute caregiver	Marital situation of biological parents
Ana and her four younger siblings	Eldest sister (Ana)	Married, illegal US residents.
José and María	Paternal grandmother	Divorced; allegations by father of mother's neglect sparked his decision to send the children to Mexico to be cared for by his own mother.
Dalia	Unmarried maternal aunt	Separated due to father's ongoing problems with alcoholism. Mother working illegally.
Gabriel and Leonardo	Paternal grandmother	Married, both parents working in US. Grandmother cared for grandchildren along with her own daughter of roughly same age.
Mario and Celia	Maternal grandmother	Abandoned by her migrant husband, the mother went to the US. She later sent her children to Mexico in order to be able to work.
Aldo	Maternal grandmother	Single mother has remade her life in the US and formed a couple with a man with whom she has procreated two other children. Oldest child refuses to live with her and to recognize her as his mother.
Damian	Maternal aunt and uncle	Single mother accepted legal adoption of her son by her sister and brother-in-law when child was 8. He lives with them and visits his mother on weekends and vacations.
Julia and her four sisters	Paternal grandparents	Divorced; allegations of child neglect and abuse by mother led to a court case in which custody of all five daughters was awarded to the father. Older girls live with their father in Chicago, while the younger ones visit there during summer vacations.

Source: 26 interviews with members of eight transnational families in the Ecuandureo Valley, Michoacán, Mexico, 1999, 2005, 2006.

according to population projections, one out of every four Mexicans will be a senior as soon as 2050 (Ham 2003: 35). Although the vast majority of countries around the globe have experienced a population aging process, Mexico's has occurred so rapidly that planners and public policy decision-makers have been unable (and perhaps unwilling) to keep pace. As a result

of lack of foresight, as specialist Ham predicted, the pension and health-care systems are in dire financial straits and grossly unprepared to meet the demands of the swelling ranks of elderly who are living longer and suffering from long-term degenerative diseases. Coupled with a heightened public awareness of this population time bomb, tending to the needs of senior citizens is becoming a political hot potato. Government institutes dealing with this age group have been revamped and renamed; legislation to guarantee income to the over-60 population has been discussed in state and federal congresses; programs have been launched to ameliorate living conditions among the poorest elderly.¹² Studies of the aged are in progress and have begun to underline their diversity by rural/urban residence, ethnic groups, and social class. Women tend to outlive men by at least four years and are often in a more vulnerable social position due to less schooling and work experience as well as lower rates of remarriage among widows than among widowers.

The upshot of political and social effervescence around the issue of the so-called ‘third and fourth ages’ has been a reappraisal of the intergenerational social contract whereby resources flow toward the elderly. Old age is presumably a time of retirement from economic activity to a life of leisure in which the able-bodied working generation provides for the needs of those who went before. In fact, most rural Mexicans continue to work as long as possible; in 2000 in the countryside about one-fifth of men over 60 were active as agricultural laborers, followed by artisans and small-scale merchants. (Ham 2003: 200)

In addition to working and in the absence of a pension system covering more than a small percentage of workers with sufficient income levels, the over 60 population depends upon intergenerational transfers and other types of aid to make ends meet. As Kanaiaupuni (1999: 3) succinctly states: ‘elderly Mexicans look to their children for old-age security’. Most view assistance at the end of the lifespan as a reciprocal obligation of their offspring for care they received in childhood; indeed, many state this expectation as a reason for having raised children. Yet the elderly recognize that the obligation will be fulfilled only by loving children, male or female. ‘One reaps what one sows’ was a common aphorism cited by rural folk interviewed by Robles (2006: 269) to refer to the uncertainty of support from some or all of their children and to the fact that older generations set an example in terms of care-giving. In the study village, old-timers agreed that this was a labor of love that ‘good-hearted’ children should offer to their progenitors; that it was ‘on their conscience’ if they failed to do so. All persons involved supposedly understood the circle of life: care recipients become care donors for their aging parents because in the future they

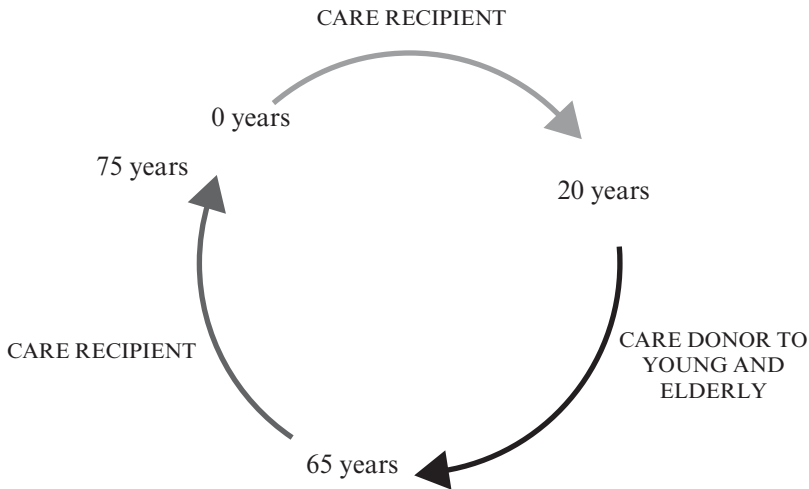


Figure 9.1 Intergenerational reciprocity in the circle of life

will once again become recipients of care from their own offspring. (See Figure 9.1.)

The greatest fears of elderly Mexicans are to be left unattended by relatives upon reaching an age of increased dependence for everyday life or to become a burden to kin. Financial support may come from migrant sons or daughters; though the former tend to earn more, in kin discourse they are often 'excused' from contributions since they are heads of their own households. Single daughters, on the other hand, may be encouraged by their parents to postpone marriage and continue to remit monies to the family coffer, since they are not expected to set aside savings for their future home. In the overall scheme of kinwork, their future husbands are expected to support them.

In a recent anthropological study of old-age care in rural and urban Mexico, Robles (2006) found that in both settings cultural norms assign this kinwork to the elderly's offspring. She then proceeded to explore the image elderly men and women had of the ideal caregiver, discovering that the spouse is the first choice. However, in the all too likely event that the spouse is deceased or unable to provide care (also due to old age), a child of the same sex as the parent in need of care is the second choice. Yet, in most instances, in consonance with a characterizing of females as more patient, skilled, compassionate, available and reliable caregivers whose domain is the home, the elderly preferred a daughter over a son.

In the study village in 2007, 202 persons were over the age of 65; 56 percent of them women. Based on key informant data and nine interviews

with retirees or their widows (see Table 9.2), I estimate that only one-tenth of the elderly population has obtained a retirement pension. For this rural population, there are two possible routes toward a pension: (1) through the Mexican Social Security system (known as IMSS) having been a salaried worker with a formally recognized labor contract in Mexico or an *ejidatario* (communal landholder) who signed up for this coverage in the 1980s when, for a fee, it became available to this segment; or (2) through the United States Social Security Administration having been a salaried worker in the United States with legal residence or US citizenship. The cases detected were about evenly divided between these two sources and the actual amount of money received monthly varied from roughly 170 to 500 United States dollars, depending upon the job held.

The small group of 'retirees'¹³ with a pension definitely consider themselves better off than the rest of the village elderly who must depend upon their children's help. Yet, none of them is able to live on the pension alone; rather they combine income sources. This is particularly true for those who are over 65 and still household heads with several dependents. 'Todavía tengo familia' (I still have family [to provide for]), said 72-year-old Eduardo (Case 1 in Table 9.2) who supports six persons: three single daughters (one of whom works in the strawberry packing plant and helps to cover college expenses in the state capital for the youngest sister), his father-in-law (about to turn 100), his wife and himself. His income consists of a 500-dollar US pension (obtained at age 65 as a legal resident after 26 years of farm work in California and service sector jobs in Chicago) and profits from sowing sorghum in his *ejido* fields. Sporadically he receives money from sons (for example, in the event of unexpected medical expenses due to an illness in the family).

Our analysis of kinscripts in care-giving for the young and the elderly in a migrant village in rural Mexico has highlighted the need to adopt a transnational and gendered lens in studying shifting notions of relatedness. I have argued that villagers organize their lives in relation to not one but two nation-states: Mexico and the United States. I have presented evidence to support the notion of a naturalizing of care-giving as preferably feminine kinwork and of increasing monetary contributions from working daughters. Family units typically provide the bulk of support for the young and the elderly in a circle of life model of intergenerational transfers. Social pressure can be exerted to prod kin into compliance, but as families are fractured and distanced by migratory flows and phenomena, kin ties face new challenges and are sometimes stretched to the breaking point. I now address the interface between family and two nation-states with regard to care-giving.

Table 9.2 Characteristics of pensioners in study village

Case	Sex		Year born	Spouse living		Number of living children		Number of persons supported	Type of pension		Pension amount in 2007
	M	F		Yes	No	Men	Women		USA - SSA	Mexico-IMSS	
1 'Eduardo'	✓		1935	✓		5	5	6	✓		500 USD
2		✓	1929		✓	6	1	1	✓		*
3 'José'	✓		1940	✓		4	3	1	✓		400 USD
4 'María'		✓	1928	✓		6	4	3		✓	1,900 PESOS (171.05 USD)
5 'Gloria'		✓	1937		✓	0	0	1		✓	2000 PESOS (180.06 USD)
6		✓	1936		✓	4	2	2		✓	2000 PESOS (180.06 USD)
7		✓	1934 or 1935	✓		5	2	2		✓	*
8		✓	1938		✓	4	2	1	✓		*
9		✓	1937	✓		3	4	2	✓		*

Note: * Amount unavailable.

Source: Interviews with pensioners (or their relatives), 2004-07.

2 THE INTE-FACE OF FAMILY AND STATE ACTORS AROUND THE ISSUE OF CARE-GIVING IN RURAL MEXICO

The two areas in which the family–state interface becomes clearly manifest with regard to issues of care-giving in transnational families pertain to education and health services, particularly pensions in the case of the elderly. The right of Mexican (and United States) citizens to education and to health care are constitutional guarantees in their respective countries, yet the obstacles for rural folk to exercise those rights can be formidable. What kind of encounters take place over these issues between family members who are strategically positioned in a kinship web, vying for a more advantageous position or accepting a sacrificial one? How do men and women relate to the different government institutions involved in getting an education, health-care services or a retirement pension? What resources does each actor bring to bear on these interactions? These are some of the questions I deal with in this second part of the chapter.

Stepping in for Absent Parents of School-age Children

Teachers are well aware of the learning and linguistic challenges which children in transnational families face in the classroom. Some youngsters travel back and forth between the Mexican and United States school systems over their educational career; others – especially migrant farm-workers – do so during the same school year. They may fall behind in their studies due to these disruptions and even be seen by teachers as disruptive elements in the classroom.

Since the state of Michoacán was a pioneer in developing ties with educators in California as early as 1976, it has also led the way in a federal program dealing with binational students¹⁴ that recently launched specialized tutoring programs. One such program assigns a bilingual tutor for US-based Mexican students who visit their home village in Mexico during the winter months (November–February) (cf. García et al. 2007). However, no specific governmental programs have been designed to tutor or follow up on school-age children of migrant parents living with alternative caregivers in Mexico. Furthermore, these children are unlikely to receive an *Oportunidades* scholarship since their needs are assumed to be met by remittances sent by a migrant parent. Recently, however, a charitable foundation linked to the largest private financial institution in Mexico launched a program tailored to this potentially vulnerable group of youngsters. The scholarship program, called ‘For those left behind’, targets children ‘left behind’ in Mexico by a migrant parent to ensure that

they stay in junior high school, invoking the slogan: 'Because we believe that education is the road to a better future'.¹⁵

For the most part, families themselves must search within the kin network to informally assign tutors to school-age children whose parents are absent. Ideal tutors are younger, more mobile members (often aunts or sisters) who are able to take children to school, deal with teachers, help with homework and perhaps handle an occasional doctor visit. Grandparents may be ill-prepared for such tasks; some lack basic literacy and others have difficulty getting around.

In the study village, some of the school-age children in alternative child-rearing arrangements attend the only private, Catholic primary school in the county seat. This is the case of Manuel, a 10-year-old orphan who receives a United States pension through his deceased father, a migrant who obtained US citizenship. Initially, the pension was given to his mother, who unfortunately also died when he was only 7. He now lives with his paternal grandmother, herself a widow with an IMSS pension. He receives assistance from a married aunt (also his godmother) living in the same family compound with her own children.

Pensions: Working the System

As pointed out in section 1 of this chapter, Mexican families must basically care for their own elderly since existing pension systems are grossly inadequate and cover only a very small percentage of the Mexican population overall, and even less in the countryside. Aging specialist Roberto Ham (2002: 37) reports that only between 10 and 14 percent (depending on the specific age group) of rural Mexican men over the age of 60 have a pension, while only 3 to 8 percent of rural women have one – usually as widows. To fill in the gap left by limited institutional coverage, most of the rural elderly continue to work as long as possible, hold on to their often meager resources (land, home, livestock, and/or an occasional small business venture) and turn to their children for support. They are reluctant to bequeath any of their belongings during their lifetime and plan to favor daughters over sons in terms of inheritance because the former are the ones who tend to look after them in old age. In addition, unmarried daughters are more unlikely than sons to have a home of their own.

As demographer Kanaiaupuni (1999: 2) argues, traditionally Mexico has exhibited 'a high degree of parent-child co-residence over the life course'. She attributes this multigenerational living pattern to both structural constraints (such as the extremely limited access to pensions discussed above) and social norms emphasizing family solidarity. In a study of 52 migrant-origin villages in Mexico, she found that the migration of

adult children – especially married ones – increased the chances of aging parents living alone by almost twofold.

State-generated Solutions: Student Scholarships and Food Basket Handouts

Populist and politically motivated, most Mexican government programs (be they at the local, state or federal level) directed toward the young and the elderly are part of poverty reduction measures; they are often palliatives. The latest of such programs are Solidaridad (meaning ‘Solidarity’ during the Salinas presidency 1988–94), followed by PROGRESA (‘Progress’, acronym for the Educational, Health and Nutritional Program) that was launched in 1997 during the Zedillo (1994–2000) presidency. Despite historical discontinuities in government programs from one presidency to the next, the program – renamed *Oportunidades* (‘Opportunities’) – not only continued during the subsequent Fox administration (2000–2006), but expanded, reaching 5 million families nationwide by 2006.¹⁶ These publicly funded schemes (backed by international aid packages) attempt to break the circle of poverty in which generations of rural Mexicans have lived by enhancing future human capital: they offer scholarships for children to remain in school, health-care instruction and coverage as well as nutritional support to selected families who meet the eligibility criteria. *Oportunidades* started out with coverage of the rural poor in 2001, then grew to include families in semi-urban and finally the metropolitan areas by 2004.

In contrast to traditional paternalistic and patron–client relationships between the Mexican state and its populace, this ongoing program has perhaps laid the foundations to forge a different type of relationship with rural Mexicans. Organized as an interinstitutional program involving three federal ministries (Education, Health, and Social Development) and IMSS in coordination with state and local governments, *Oportunidades* channels bimonthly monetary transfers directly to mothers who must accept their ‘shared responsibility’ in improving their families’ future. The mother’s responsibilities include: seeing that her children attend school, going to health talks, taking the entire family to the nearest health clinic for periodic checkups, and occasionally participating in community health campaigns.

This model of public assistance to the poor recognizes the pivotal role played by mothers in care-giving to all family members and in carefully handling family finances to make ends meet. *Oportunidades*’ design also includes a gender bias favoring female students at the junior and senior high school levels with larger scholarships than boys, in recognition of the

fact that in poor households girls are often forced to drop out of school due to family pressure to aid in household chores or engage in salaried work. In the study village, *Oportunidades* is currently benefiting only 22 families (of a total of approximately 600), since this community is considered by government officials to be one of the most prosperous within the municipality.

With regard to the over 65 age group, Mexican government assistance is very recent (linked to the aforementioned greater visibility of this segment of the population), piecemeal and limited to periodic handouts. For example, a state-level program with this target population began in 2003 and is currently distributing a set number of food baskets in the study village – the number increased from 50 to 157 in the past few years. The baskets include non-perishable basic foodstuffs (beans, cereal, rice, cooking oil) and are channeled through municipal authorities on a greatest need basis determined by the following three criteria set by the state government: non-migrants, without IMSS medical coverage, aged 65 or over. Recently the oldest villagers (aged over 70) have signed up for a federal Ministry of Social Development Program called ‘Seventy Plus’ making them eligible for monetary transfers of 500 pesos or roughly 45 US dollars per month. They have yet to receive any money. Many rural folk are wary of government programs, since their long-standing relationship with Mexican state apparatuses is one of mistrust and false hopes – a topic to which I now turn.

Men and Women’s Differing Relations to Government

In rural Mexico men and women relate to and experience ‘government’ (*el gobierno*) in starkly distinct fashions.¹⁷ This has to do with gendered identities that prescribe different family responsibilities for mothers and fathers, shape work histories in Mexico and in the United States and mold understandings of citizenship and rights. Men strive to be good providers for their families – a role that motivates many to head North.¹⁸ As breadwinners in the US, these rural migrant men become taxpayers for the first time – to a foreign government. They learn from fellow migrants that they must file income tax returns and that, if they report their numerous dependents in Mexico, they will receive a tax refund the following year. They also *see* Social Security payments being deducted from their paycheck and are told that this money will become a nest egg to be made available to them when they reach the age of 62 or 65, provided they have worked enough years for eligibility. The amount of their pension depends upon the salary earned at retirement, so that Mexican migrant men are also cognizant of the advantage of landing a well-paid job.

In the study village, men who were legal migrants expressed a positive view of the United States government and compared it favorably to the Mexican government which they perceive as having forgotten them. ‘There [in the US] the government looks out for people’ (*Allá el gobierno sí se preocupa por uno*). Illegal migrants tend to view the US government more negatively, emphasizing the emotional stress of living in constant fear of being detained and deported by authorities. Paradoxically, migrant men opposed US government interference in what they deemed to be private family affairs: disciplining their wives and children. In contrast, village women tend to lack experiences of dealing directly with government, either in the United States or in Mexico. Few have traveled to the US and even fewer have worked there. Women over the age of 60 may have made visits to the North as guests of married sons or daughters or sojourns if their husbands made arrangements for them and their children to join them in the North.

It is not surprising, then, that with regard to pensions, the nine men and women over the age of 60 who were interviewed in the study village of Michoacán expressed very different expectations. Migrant men, many of whom were agricultural laborers or more recently service workers in the North, seem to be well versed in the requirements for obtaining a pension from the US system. Dealings with the United States Social Security system for legal US-bound migrants in the study village are significant. In fact, working enough years in order to obtain a monthly pension check in dollars has become a goal of many long-term migrants. They also recognize the importance of staying abreast of recent changes in immigration law and Social Security regulations to be able to search for loopholes and take advantage of them. Some turn to legal advisers to unravel their individual cases and find ways to enjoy benefits from both nation-states. José, born in 1940 in the study village, is a case in point. (See case 3 in Table 9.2.)

Like many illegal Mexican immigrants to the United States, José first traveled as a contracted *bracero*¹⁹ in 1959 as a young, unmarried man. He then continued to cross the border without legal documents over the course of the next 20 years, doing farmwork in California in the 1960s and service sector jobs in Chicago in the 1970s where his sons were then living. During the first decade he worked under an assumed name with a Social Security card belonging to someone else. Even so, he had accumulated the required ten years of work for eligibility for a SSA pension. But, upon reaching the age of 62, he faced another legal obstacle to obtaining the pension: he needed to first acquire legal status. For this, he turned to one of his sons who had become a United States citizen and already done the paperwork for his mother’s and his wife’s legal residence. By way of intergenerational flows of aid from son to father, José obtained his legal

residence and was then able to apply for his pension in 2002. He currently receives a pension of 400 dollars a month which is sufficient to cover his own living expenses, since he is estranged from his wife. Recently diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, he was able to undergo an operation in the IMSS hospital in a nearby city since his nurse daughter working there had registered him as her dependent for medical coverage in that health-care system.

Unlike the migrant men whose cases have been presented, women are largely ignorant of procedures for obtaining retirement pensions; when migrant wives are eligible to receive a pension as a widow, their sons need to accompany them through the red tape and paperwork in the United States. The majority of women depend fundamentally upon the filial duty of their many children²⁰ for old-age support. Sons – and increasingly unmarried daughters still living at home – may contribute small monthly amounts.

Another possible but uncommon source of pensions for widows in the village is if the husband was an internal migrant who worked in Mexico with coverage by the IMSS. Here again the wife does not establish a direct relationship with Mexican government agencies but depends upon coaching by relatives to obtain the pension. This situation is illustrated by the case of Gloria, widow of a long-time employee of a bottling company in Mexico City. (See case 5 in Table 9.2.) Natives of Michoacán, the couple met and married in the capital where the husband held a steady, well-paying maintenance job for some 20 years. While single, Gloria had worked in a corset factory and, once married, in a family business involving food preparation. She was not registered for IMSS protection in either of these jobs. Upon the husband's retirement, the childless couple returned to his natal village in Michoacán. When he became seriously ill, his medical insurance covered the high cost of treatment. Upon his death, the wife knew nothing about pensions. Thanks to the coaching of a sister-in-law who availed herself of connections with educated cousins, they were able to handle the paperwork for Gloria to receive her husband's pension.

The possibility of a woman directly obtaining a pension is limited to having worked herself for a salary for many years outside the village: other than school teacher, basically only one job description was available to married and unmarried women: strawberry packing plant worker in a nearby city. Among the several hundred village women who had been salaried, non-unionized laborers in these plants at some point during their lives, most worked intermittently (before marrying) and many were not aware of any pension rights. The anomalous case of María, a wife and mother who began working there at the age of 50, will serve to illustrate women's experiences of government through the workplace.

Seventy-nine-year-old María married at age 17 around the close of the Second World War and gave birth to ten children, eight of whom survived infancy. She took the job at the packing plant ‘out of [economic] necessity’ because she realized that her husband needed her help to feed the family: She began working with her husband’s permission; even though she considered him to be a good worker ‘they could not make ends meet’. A mother past her childbearing years, she worked for an hourly wage checking the size and quality of the strawberries as they moved along the conveyor belt. María reports that she was surprised when, at the age of 70, her female supervisor at the second packing plant where she had been employed offered to obtain a Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS) retirement pension for her. When interviewed, she stressed the fact that she had been a responsible and steady worker for 20 years with a ‘clean’ record. She pointed out that another woman older than she and with more seniority did not receive a pension. In her narrative and in her insistence on showing the interviewer photographs of her retirement party where she is pictured next to the aforementioned supervisor, it is clear that María views her pension more as a ‘gift’ from a kind-hearted personnel director in recognition of María’s good behavior rather than as a worker’s right for years of labor. Furthermore, she did not mention any government agency as the source of her pension; rather she associates the pension with the last packing plant where she worked for the longest number of years, as if the plant itself had given her the pension.

María, one of the only two strawberry packing plant workers from the village to obtain a pension to date, received 1900 Mexican pesos per month in 2007 (equivalent of 173 US dollars) and may request zero interest loans against her pension. Both she and her peasant farmer husband (as her beneficiary) have access to medical care at the IMSS clinic located 5 kilometers away in the county seat. Since the pension is insufficient to cover the elderly couple’s living expenses (including private medical treatment for a daughter in her thirties suffering from Down syndrome who lives with them), one of their migrant sons sends 200 dollars a month to make ends meet while another son occasionally sends remittances or gifts.

Care Donors and Care Recipients between Two Nation-states

I have argued that the issue of care-giving for the young and the elderly in transnational families (such as the ones interviewed in the study village) requires careful attention to intrafamilial interactions as well as to the relationships that workers and their families establish with both Mexican and United States government agencies and employers. A variety of family members take care of (*liriar*)²¹ children and seniors, in the sense

of providing for their material and immaterial needs, mostly without assistance from governmental agencies. With the notable exception of the retirement or death pension, such assistance is by and large regarded as secondary to family sources of aid and care-giving. In addition, it is not expected and not to be counted upon.

In an interesting twist on intergenerational resource flows, some US-based legal migrants have applied for legal residence for their elderly parents as their dependents so that they can bring them North for medical treatment or even residence on a rotating basis with their various offspring. In fact, case studies from the village under scrutiny illustrate that aid flows simultaneously in both directions: from grandparents to children and grandchildren, and vice versa.

Elena, Aldo's grandmother/mama mentioned in section 1, and her peasant husband Juan participate in such two-directional flows. The parents of 11 children (nine living, all but one of them migrants to the US), they are now in their seventies and ailing. In addition to Aldo, Elena has cared for several other grandchildren belonging to two of her daughters. This care-giving has taken place in Mexico and during extended visits to Chicago. Both parents have legal residence papers to the United States, thanks to their eldest son – a long-time United States resident and naturalized citizen. They frequently move back and forth between the two countries for visits and medical treatment. Neither of the two elderly grandparents has access to a pension so they are completely dependent upon the compassion of their migrant sons and daughters. Remittances flow from adult children to the grandparents, but can be interrupted. For example, recently several sons expressed disagreement with Elena's care-giving for two grandchildren (Aldo and another son of her youngest daughter) because they considered this to be negligence on the part of their sister who contributes meager and sporadic support to the grandparents. Elena has ceased to receive remittances from these disgruntled sons and she considers this cutting off of all aid to her as a veiled protest; the eldest son continued to care for the father in the United States where he was receiving treatment for a serious illness. This current impasse and dire economic situation of Elena has revived the option of Aldo being adopted by his Los Angeles-based maternal uncle and plans to return the other younger half-brother to his mother in Chicago.

In this and in the other case studies sketched out in this chapter, we observe family members debating among each other over their notions of self-interest, common good, reciprocity and emotional ties. Thus, we can appreciate the flux that shapes the everyday workings of relatedness. In section 3 I explore the relationship between past and present practice and discourse of relatedness within families and the future expectations of their

members in light of politically fueled economic restructuring and household transformations. I do so by comparing dramatic changes occurring in rural Mexican and rural Chinese family life, by exploring the family–state interface from a gendered and transnational stance. The ultimate purpose of the comparison is to lay the groundwork for a comparative research agenda on care-giving.

3 CHANGING MEXICAN AND CHINESE RURAL FAMILY LIFE: TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AGENDA ON CARE-GIVING

During the final two decades of the twentieth century, rural Mexico and rural China experienced certain similar demographic and historical trends as well as policy interventions.²² In both nations, rapid state-spurred demographic transitions to lower fertility²³ and longer life expectancy produced a significant reduction in births per woman and an unprecedented increase in the proportion of the elderly population. Experts in both governments pinpointed a so-called ‘demographic dividend’, in which a low child dependency ratio and large labor force supply could potentially create a short-lived window of opportunity for development (cf. Zeng 2007).

The family planning and fertility control measures met most resistance in rural areas in both countries. As Yan (2003: 190) convincingly argues for the People’s Republic of China, ‘of all the state-sponsored programs of social engineering since 1949, birth planning (*jihua shengyu*) is perhaps the most dramatic and far-reaching, fundamentally altering the family structure and redefining the private lives of the Chinese people—urban and rural alike’. His longitudinal, ethnographic study of one village in northeastern China allowed him to document how couples ‘experienced a painful process of resistance, coping, and adjustment during the 1980s and 1990s’ (ibid.: 190). Likewise, rural Mexicans proved to be less apt to avail themselves of contraceptives that became readily available through government clinics and hospitals or to respond to publicity campaigns to convince them that ‘small families have better lives’ or ‘having few children allows parents to give them more’ than their urban counterparts.

The increased life expectancy in Mexico (74 years) and China (72 years) has created formidable challenges for both nations to tend to the needs of a rapidly increasing senior population: the 2000 census figures for persons aged 65 or over age are roughly in the same range: 5 percent and 7 percent, respectively. Housing, health care, pensions, and aging with dignity are just some of the many politically sensitive issues to be handled by newly created government offices for senior citizens.

Particularly relevant for this study is the rural–urban rift characterizing Mexico and China: jobs, educational opportunities and health services are much more plentiful in the cities. Rural areas are underserved in all types of services, even more true for indigenous peoples who tend to live in isolated and underdeveloped regions. Massive rural–urban migration was sparked by deteriorating conditions in the countryside and the lure of city life and higher incomes. In the Chinese case, the central government relaxed controls on the movement of labor (achieved by the *hukou* or residency permit system that restricts citizenship rights to the individual's birthplace), opening up virtual floodgates of rural migrants who headed toward fast-industrializing and booming coastal cities, particularly in the south. By 2000, China's rural population had dropped to 64 percent. No such internal migration controls existed in Mexico and it quickly urbanized from the 1960s onward, with only 25 percent of its 100 million inhabitants remaining in rural areas according to 2000 census data.

On the political stage, in the 1980s specific administrations in both Mexico and China entered the race to propel their countries to First World status, launching a rhetoric of rising expectations for the masses. This catch-up game, known as 'China's peaceful rise' was led by the Deng Xiaoping regime which launched its Four Modernizations and justified its 'open door policy'. These measures led to a dramatic globalization of China's economy and far-reaching economic reforms (such as the decentralization and privatization of enterprises that had been state-owned or collectively-owned under the Maoist regime), convincing many Chinese that their nation 'would become a world-class economic power in the twenty-first century' (Hsu 2007: 119). Riding out the same wave and touting similar modernization slogans, the Carlos Salinas government's (1988–94) technocrats boasted of Mexico's imminent entrance into the First World with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement that took effect in 1994.

In contrast to these great expectations fueled by political leaders, however, the daily lives of vast segments of the Chinese and Mexican peoples were marked by widespread layoffs and unemployment, increasingly precarious working conditions, dwindling buying power and greater social inequality.²⁴ Undoubtedly, the social and political costs of these races have been high. For example, Fong (2004) offers a telling account of how three generations of urban families in Dalian – a coastal city in northeastern China – have dealt with the great expectations of modernization. Woronov (2007) argues that the increasing influence of United States' models of higher education that has accompanied Deng Xiaoping's reform era has placed extreme pressure on Chinese adolescents to perform academically and has redefined parent-child relationships, particularly

long-standing notions of familial love and sacrifice. Aspirations of joining the ranks of First World countries were crushed and social unrest mounted as the deleterious effects of cutbacks in governmental social security safety nets were felt by low- and middle-income families in both urban and rural areas. While economic growth and increased foreign investment did seem to have a spill-over effect in somewhat improved living conditions in rural areas of both countries (Chen 2004: 7), neoliberal policy decisions have had differing repercussions for men and women, young and old – ones that are only beginning to be analysed by social scientists. I now turn to consider household transformations in relation to care-giving during this period of swift changes.

First, an understanding of the notion of relatedness to assure care-giving to the young and old has become paramount in a globalized era of neoliberal policies tending to reduce and privatize basic welfare services. In fact, notions of relatedness are key in schemes of public order, as Glosser (2003) argues in her groundbreaking study of family reform debates in China beginning with the New Culture Movement from 1915 to 1923 and extending into the Nationalist, Communist and People's Republic of China periods. She convincingly argues that the 'discussion . . . was ultimately as much about the nation as it was about the family' (ibid.: 1). The analogy drawn by political strategists and leaders between the family and the nation-state is a persistent one; the link between nation-building and family-based care-giving rhetoric in different historical periods merits closer comparative attention. By placing the 'ties that bind' in a larger framework of relatedness, I have attempted to underline the fluidity and flexibility of kin relationships within the contested terrain of interpersonal relationships and have presented ample evidence that notions of relatedness – the duties and obligations that relatives feel toward each other and their ways of acting upon those feelings – are changing, both in Mexico and in China. In addition, I have taken into account non-family actors – those policy-makers, legislators and law enforcement officers whose decisions impinge upon families.

Many analysts characterize recent household changes as a breakdown of the intergenerational and welfare state social contracts, one of whose consequences is a deepening social, economic and demographic vulnerability of the young and the old. Anthropologist Yan (2003: 163) clearly places said breakdown 'mainly in response to the introduction of values associated with market economy'. From the viewpoint of kin, reciprocity in intergenerational flows (generally shifting from parent-child to child-parent as the parents age) has been an unmistakable 'circle of life' for centuries. Likewise, from the state's vantage point, caring for past and future generations has long been a keystone of social welfare policies in

most nations. Yet, shifting definitions of filial piety grounded in Confucian philosophical teachings have spurred increased state intervention in certain family matters: for example, faced with increases in elder suicide rates, the Chinese government is requiring written care contracts between siblings and parents (cf. Ikels 2004) and the 1979 Criminal Law makes 'failure to support elderly parents an offense punishable by up to five years of criminal detention' (Fong 2004: 129).

Yet, economic growth and development priorities seem to have overshadowed concerns with the population's well-being (especially that of rural inhabitants) and with social justice. In Mexico as well as in China, marketization and neoliberal politics and policies have dismantled social safety nets. For example, as scholars of China have clarified, the 'iron rice bowl' – an image that symbolized security and social guarantees for vast sectors of the Chinese people – has been shattered. A few indicators are sufficient examples. Zhao (2006: 461, 474) has documented the collapse of the Cooperative Medical System in rural areas in the past 25 years: 'in rural areas, proportions covered by the Cooperative Medical System or other health insurance schemes are generally small, and more than 80 percent have no health care coverage at all'. Even though Whiteford (2003: 53) acknowledges that more unified, nationwide poverty alleviation programs have been designed since the early 1990s – such as the five-guarantees program aimed at destitute persons who have no children, no family and no resources – he underscores the inadequacy of the existing rural social insurance system (Whiteford 2003: 72). Frazier (2005: 108) analysed pension reforms that have 'transferred the costs and responsibilities for financing and distributing retiree benefits from the 'work unit', or state enterprise, to the abstraction of 'society'. This author goes as far as to say that reforms have 'diluted the implicit social contract in which the state guarantees a basic level of old-age income to its citizens' (ibid.: 124). At the other extreme of the age spectrum, we can cite the plight of 'left-behind children' in the Chinese countryside – rural youngsters entrusted usually to the care of mothers or grandparents in villages when one or both of their parents migrate to urban centers, lured by the prospect of a cash income. In a study conducted in ten villages in Mid-West China, Ye Jingzhong et al. (2005:1) highlight the 'continuous social concern shown for this potentially vulnerable category of children' and point out certain policy interventions that have been implemented at the local and provincial levels to protect them from abuse and to assure that they do well in school.

In Mexico, experts on social inequality have developed novel ways to measure the widening gap between rich and poor, thus demonstrating that the rift has tended to grow in the past few decades. In her longitudinal

evaluation of the federal *Oportunidades* program (which I examined in section 2), González de la Rocha (2006: 68) applied a vulnerability framework that ferrets out several factors in households that influence their ability to cope with economic hardship: size and composition, sex of household head, domestic cycle, gender relations and social differentiation. She holds that women and children are particularly hard hit by adversity, with reciprocal networks in crisis as poor families attempt to protect their income and buying power by mobilizing their meager resources. Social isolation and extreme poverty are closely linked according to González de la Rocha (2006: 79) and a lack of emotional support over a long time period can be just as devastating as material wants.

The Chinese and Mexican cases illustrate changing notions of intergenerational reciprocity and government responsibilities. But how do gender relations and family ideology interplay with state-formulated directives and programs? How are systems for regulating power relations affected by them? These questions hinge upon our understanding of the family–state interface, which I have argued, is characterized by the overlapping of the so-called public and private spheres. As Kerber notes in her foreword to Glosser's (2003: xiv) study of the Chinese family reform movement, 'If the public sphere presses so heavily on the private, then historians of the public order cannot avoid the history of the family and of ideas about it.' Nation-states and their governmental agencies indeed have a vested interest in promoting family ideologies that recognize this social unit as primarily responsible for childcare and eldercare. At most, one finds the idea of shared responsibility in the design of the Mexican government's current *Oportunidades* poverty-reduction program or in China's pension reforms that 'spread the financial and administrative burdens from state enterprises across a broad swath of employers, workers, national agencies, and local governments' (Frazier 2005: 108).

The crux of this debate concerns the link between public and private social orders and specifically – in countries such as Mexico and China – between modernization and market reforms and a questioning of patriarchal power relations within the family and of authoritarian government structures. Yan (2003: 9) poses this question for private life in the latter half of the twentieth century in the northeastern Chinese village he has studied longitudinally: 'whether, when collectivization broke up the previous system of social hierarchy based on kinship, it also created the antithesis of collectivity – namely, individuality. Similarly, when the state reconstructed the public in rural communities, how were the boundaries of the private also redefined?'

The determination of 'whose turn it is' to provide care for the young and the old (as well as the infirm) has allowed us to observe the overlapping

workings of gender relations, family ideology and state interventions in rural Mexico and rural China.

In large peasant families, several siblings may share the 'burden' of child-rearing and elder care. One such shared solution is rotating residential arrangements for the young and the old – meal rotation known as *chi lun fan* (cf. Jun Jing 2004). Traditionally in China, the eldest son was kinscripted (to use Stack and Burton's term) to care for the parents in their old age. But in fact, given the patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal norms in Chinese families, this meant that the daughter-in-law was responsible for this type of kinwork. As Zhan and Montgomery (2003: 210) point out, 'in China, daughters-in-law traditionally have been the major care providers for elder parents-in-law because of the patrilocal family structure . . . sons have always been expected to be the ultimate financial providers because married daughters have traditionally been given over to husbands' families according to patrilocal tradition'. Yet, these two researchers go on to argue that 'the recently observed increase in daughters' involvement in physical and financial care for parents might well reflect significant changes in the cultural value of *xiao*'.

In addition to sociological and anthropological studies, recent press reports have also been following changing Chinese family values and governmental recognition of the need to rethink the one-child per family policy, an unpopular policy which has produced many long-term unintended consequences in the past 30 years. Liu (2008: 13) reports widespread consensus on 'the breakdown of filial piety' as well as the tendency for only-children to be 'increasingly self-centered and more and more inclined to abandon old obligations'. This last finding is echoed by Fong (2004) in her study of singletons in Dalian at the turn of the twenty-first century. In a cultural framework that placed capital importance on having a son to perpetuate the family name and provide for elderly parents, Liu notes that even this principle is crumbling: 'Most strikingly, many Chinese parents are now even reconsidering their long-held prejudice for sons, on the new assumption that daughters are more likely to grow into loyal caregivers'. Yan (2003: 209) likewise points to a change in this direction for Xiajia village in Heilongjiang province: 'Villagers also began to question the notion of *yang er fanglao* (raising sons for old age) and tried to increase old-age security by establishing personal savings and cultivating close relationships with married daughters.'

In Mexico, Robles (2006: 280) also argues that a feminization of filial duty is occurring, a trend that promises to produce increasing tensions for adult women juggling paid employment outside the home and care-giving for the young and elderly. This double-bind becomes particularly worrisome in the case of China. What will the future hold for the generation of

singletons produced by China's one-child per family policy implemented in 1979? Taiwan-born anthropologist Fong (2004: 179), who studied the coming of age of adolescent only-children in the northern port city of Dalian, concludes: 'Though it accelerated modernization, China's state-mandated fertility transition also produced diploma inflation, unrealistic expectations for children's success, fear that *parents will not have enough support in old age*,²⁵ and widespread complaints about a rising generation of "spoiled" singletons.' The stark generational gap and the tensions inherent in only children struggling to obtain a well-paying job in order to support many dependents are clearly illustrated in this recent study. Fong (2004: 127) explains the persistence of the cultural model: 'As the primary source of social security for the elderly, Chinese cultural models of filial duty and parental investment entailed a candid recognition that parents must be repaid in time and money as well as love.'

Novel solutions to childcare and eldercare in Mexico and in China underline how transnational flows and practices are contributing to re-define care-giving. A recent press report by Liu (2008: 14) signals two novel solutions to care for the urban elderly who have become so called empty-nesters (living apart from married sons or daughters). At opposite extremes of the technological spectrum, she describes (1) surrogate children, that is, 'kids for hire' through the adoption of adult children; and (2) a costly and exclusive, high-technology nursing home in Shanghai where offspring living far away (some in western countries) can monitor their mother or father on the Internet thanks to webcams (called Mega Eyes) placed in the facilities. (ibid.: 16) On the other hand, the China National Committee on Aging, established in 1982, plans to implement 'a nationwide system of home care for the elderly – in part because it's still considered shameful to send mom or dad to a nursing home' (ibid.: 14). Also community centers in Beijing have begun to offer meal delivery to the elderly empty-nesters, with government subsidies.

In Mexico, collective old folks' homes are beginning to spring up in migrant villages, an idea that is still considered anathema to many Mexican families who pride themselves as morally superior to other people (notably in the United States) who abandon their elderly to nursing homes and never visit them. In the two cases of migrant villages in San Luis Potosí and Michoacán that I have been able to document, the homes for the elderly were financed and are being run by migrant hometown associations, with minimal governmental support. It is noteworthy that the perceived need for such facilities – seeing older people wandering in the streets with no family to look after them – took precedence over productive investment projects.

CONCLUSION

This study has considered familial care-giving for the young and the elderly in rural Mexico and China in recent decades of swift and radical social change. One of the key transformations I have analysed is the dismantling of social welfare systems, provoking heightened insecurity and vulnerability in the everyday lives of most countryside dwellers. I have stressed the importance of linking care-giving for these two generations precisely because the topic places us squarely at the family–state interface, that is in a social field rife with tension and negotiation among family members themselves and between these relatives and many social actors situated in different levels of government who are responsible for enforcing filial piety and intergenerational reciprocity. In other words, our analysis of child-rearing and care-giving for the elderly provides an opportunity to explore the intricacies of relatedness from the vantage point of the human beings directly involved as well as that of those invested with authority to judge, punish or reward the former. Notwithstanding undeniable historical and cultural differences and degrees of coercion in the reaches of the state’s grasp, the Mexican and Chinese cases constitute useful mirrors upon which we can reflect.

With regard to the theoretical framework and methodological tools best suited to understanding relatedness – and particularly filial discourse, practice and expectations, I have adopted a social constructivist and actor-oriented stance. I have demonstrated the fruitfulness of longitudinal studies of a wide range of kin of different generations as they interact and discuss the whos, hows and whys of childcare and eldercare. Like Yan (2003: 11), I have delved into intimacies and real life dramas of kin in transnational families through repeated interviews with them and observations of their face-to-face encounters. As researchers we cannot assume we know their motivations or justifications for discourse or actions nor can we take for granted the stakes involved in disputes over kinwork, especially ‘whose turn it is’ to care for the young and the elderly. In order to thoroughly explore the gaps between filial practice and expectations, it is essential to conduct follow-up interviews and careful observation of open-ended negotiations in the ‘circle of life’.

Hierarchical generational and gendered relations coupled with family ideologies have figured largely in our analysis, since they inform care-giving for kin. What is expected of women and men, of mothers and fathers, of sons and daughters is in flux, as filial duties and care-giving are being redefined in rural China and rural Mexico in light of shifting notions of relatedness as played out by family members and state-invested actors.

NOTES

1. The study village is a *mestizo* (non-indigenous) agricultural community of roughly 2500 inhabitants (living in approximately 600 households) nestled in the Valley of Ecuandureo, Michoacán in Mexico's central-western volcanic mountain range. (Population figures fluctuate constantly due to US-bound migration.) It is well-served by a two-lane highway to the agro-industrial and commercial cities of Zamora (to the south) and La Piedad (to the northeast). Arable land (much of it irrigated by wells) may be held in one or more of three different land tenure systems: collective (*ejido*), communal (mostly hillsides) and private property. Households have unequal access to land. Major crops include corn, sorghum, tomatoes, and wheat. In order to respect informants' anonymity, the village will not be identified and all names are pseudonyms.
2. Here I draw upon initial conceptualizations of transmigrants and transnational social fields by Glick-Schiller et al. (1992) as well as later scholarship reported in Smith and Guarnizo (1998) positing transnationalism as 'a multi-faceted and multi-local process' and emphasizing 'the enduring asymmetries of domination, inequality, racism, sexism, class conflict, and uneven development in which transnational practices are embedded and which they sometimes even perpetuate' (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 6).
3. This chapter draws upon fieldwork conducted as part of a longitudinal study dealing with demographic and cultural transformations in rural Mexican families living in migratory settings. Research began in 1991 and has involved multi-sited fieldwork with Mexican migrant and non-migrant families in the Ecuandureo Valley of northwestern Michoacán, California's Central Valley and suburban Chicago by a team of researchers headed by the author. Data were collected by means of household surveys, archival searches and hundreds of in-depth and open-ended interviews with men and women of different generations (cf. Mummert 1999). The author recognizes the vital contribution made by the following research assistants in the interviews, transcriptions of taped interviews and fieldnotes, and data processing: Alejandra Camarena Ortiz, Alberto Flores Hernández and Eduardo Santiago Nabor.
4. These two stories of the real-life unraveling and mending of family ties could be further analysed as local forms of morality tales. Mathews (1992: 127) explains that 'morality tales are concerned with evaluating and shaping courses of action. The texts of such tales contain a great deal of information about cultural expectations for behavior as well as about the bases of individual motivation for such behavior'.
5. Robles (2006: 259) reports a similar case of an 80-plus woman who forgave her wayward, lost husband out of her sense of conjugal duty when he returned in old age in search of support and acceptance.
6. With data from a nationwide survey conducted in 2005, Echarri (2009: 153) reports differences as narrow as four percentage points between the smallest villages (67.4 percent nuclear) and metropolitan centers (63.6 percent nuclear).
7. Intensive motherhood refers to an ideology positing that the biological mother cares naturally and exclusively for her child. She is judged to be the most adequate caregiver because such tasks supposedly spring from the maternal instinct (cf. Glenn 1994; Solé and Parella 2005: 5).
8. Previous authors have referred to this phenomenon with terms such as 'the divided house' (López Castro 1986) or 'split households' (Kanaiaupuni 2000: 1–2; Bustamante and Alemán 2007), while others (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997) have considered exclusively transnational motherhood. Feminist researchers have stressed the importance of women-centered networks in kinwork and caring work across the transnational social field (cf. Alicea 1997 for the case of Puerto Rican women moving between the home island and the continental United States).
9. Aldo's mother lived with a married Mexican man in Chicago for several years and gave birth to three other children as a result of said union. One of the obstacles to Aldo's living with his birth mother in Chicago was the extended family's fear of mistreatment

- or physical abuse by the 'stepfather'. Currently the grandmother is caring for Aldo and the youngest of the half-siblings in the village.
10. The cases of Aldo and Julia were selected from a total of 20 youngsters belonging to eight transnational families that I interviewed and followed over the course of several years (1999–2007), See Table 9.1. These families were identified during fieldwork conducted as part of the larger study dealing with transformations in rural family structure and organization in migratory settings described in note 3.
 11. I borrow this term from Stack's (1974: ch. 5) insightful study of how poor Black urban families who are social welfare recipients in the Midwestern United States weave resilient kin ties to cope with the harshness of daily life.
 12. I consider one such federal program called *Oportunidades* (Opportunities) in section 2 of this chapter.
 13. The notion of total retirement from economic activity is completely alien to the rural Mexicans I interviewed.
 14. The Binational Migrant Education Program (PROBEM in Spanish) began in 1990. Its objectives include support for migrant students, their parents and teachers in an effort to guarantee the children's learning processes as they cross back and forth between Mexico and the United States.
 15. The BBVA Bancomer Foundation conducts this programme (*Programa de becas de integración Para los que se quedan*) in ten of México's states with the highest rates of out migration. Monthly stipends to cover school supplies and other costs are awarded to outstanding students who are children of migrant parents.
 16. This description is based upon the brief history of *Progres-Oportunidades* contained in the Introduction to the program's comprehensive evaluation volume edited by anthropologist and poverty specialist González de la Rocha (2006).
 17. I thank Norman Long for suggesting this key point of discussion.
 18. Cf. Rosas (2008, especially ch. 3) for a discussion of how masculinity is partially shaped by the provider role in a small village in the coffee-growing region of Veracruz that has recently become a source of male migrants to the United States. She argues that, faced with the demise of traditional crops, migrating allows men to fulfill that role more effectively and to symbolically compete with other men more successfully.
 19. The Bracero program was a bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States ostensibly designed to provide 'arms' to replace the male workforce that had been diverted to the Second World War Allied efforts. Operating from 1942 to 1964, it afforded Mexicans with legal work permits for three to six-month periods.
 20. Six to ten offspring are common among families formed by the current generation of senior citizens over age 60.
 21. It is interesting to note villagers' usage of the term *liriar* when speaking about caring for either children or the aged. Probably a corruption of the verb *lidear*, it is etymologically related to *lid* which means combat, fight, struggle. In the words of one male villager in his thirties, 'one has to put up with the old folks; they need to be cared for just like children'.
 22. A caveat to be noted is that our access to publications about rural China was limited to a small portion of those available in English, written mostly by foreigners viewing the country through archives, survey data or anthropological fieldwork. I am cognizant of the extremely restricted review of sociological literature that I was able to undertake.
 23. The government of the People's Republic of China implemented a coercive one-child per family birth control policy in 1979 and vigorously enforced it by means of *xiao jiating* ('the small family') propaganda and deterrent measures (fines) as well as forced abortions and sterilizations. Fong (2004: 2) refers to it as 'the world's first State-mandated fertility transition'. In 1976, the Mexican government also launched a full-scale campaign to promote a smaller family ideal and implemented changes in its public health system that made effective birth control methods readily available throughout the country – an about-face in population policy and direct confrontation with the dominant Catholic Church which opposed the use of contraceptives.

24. Diamant et al. (2000, ch. 6) deftly document both the intended and unintended consequences for rural families of the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary policies implemented in the 1950s and 1960s, while Frazier (2005) gives an overview of pension reform in the People's Republic of China in the 1990s.
25. My emphasis.

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10. Rural–urban migration and the plight of ‘left-behind children’ in mid-west China

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INTRODUCTION

During the past two decades rural out-migration has kept pace with the increasing demand for labour in the rapidly expanding urban areas of China, and many such migrants are obliged or choose to leave their children in the village. This has resulted in the emergence of a new social group referred to as ‘left-behind children’ (*liushouertong*). Available statistical data vary, but all estimates put the number of such children in the multi-millions. Yet, despite the social concern shown for this potentially vulnerable category of children, there remain few in-depth studies of the phenomenon. It was for this reason, in 2004, that the College of Humanities and Development (COHD) of China Agricultural University and Plan China cooperated in looking at the impact of rural labour migration on left-behind children in mid-west China, one of China’s poorer and less well developed regions.

Ten villages in the Provinces of Shanxi, Ningxia, Hebei and Beijing were selected for the research, which focused primarily on the family backgrounds, daily lives, and educational and emotional worlds of these children. The data collected document the current status of both the children left-behind and those who remain with their parents, and the study provides a picture of the situation of left-behind children before and after their parents migrate (for further details, *see* Ye Jingzhong et al. 2005).¹

THE PREDICAMENT OF ‘LEFT-BEHIND’ CHILDREN

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the pace of modernization in China has led to huge urban expansion. It is estimated that around 150 million rural

inhabitants move for work to the cities each year for seasonal or more permanent work. This massive movement of rural people is largely composed of poor farmers (men and women) eager to increase their incomes, learn about the outside world, and earn enough money to put their children through a decent education so they can make a better life for themselves than that of their parents.

In many western countries legal immigrants are able to obtain housing in the new localities where they live and to claim certain social rights and benefits. They are protected by law, receive welfare assistance, and have opportunities for employment and education, and in principle enjoy the same basic rights as native citizens. However, things work very differently in China. Due to financial constraints and the dual (rural or urban) household registration system (*hukou*), farmers face many difficulties when they migrate to the cities. They have no recognized legal status there, almost no access to public services, and are unable to afford decent housing, transportation and educational costs. For these reasons, many migrants leave their children behind, entrusting their care to family members or other persons in the village. Thus, a new, vulnerable group of children, referred to here as 'left-behind children', has emerged in the rural areas of China.

According to a survey carried out by the China National Institute for Educational Research, 56.4 per cent of left-behind children live at home with one parent, 32.2 per cent are raised by grandparents, and 4.1 per cent live with other relatives, 0.9 per cent with unrelated persons and some care for themselves, becoming virtual orphans. (China National Institute for Educational Research 2004). The last six or so years have seen considerable media coverage of their plight, exposing individual cases of abuse, suicide, and accidents among these children. This has led to general discussions about the problems they face in terms of lack of family love and care, psychological stress, problems at school, and in terms of self-control. Often they lack effective communication with parents, with grandparents who do not understand their needs and from only superficial care by other guardians (*China Youth Daily*, 20 January 2005).

Following the 'Comments on Further Strengthening and Reforming the Ethical Development of Juveniles' by the CP Central Committee and State Council of 26 February 2004, some cities implemented policies and measures to this end, and the education departments of some provinces have been proactive in addressing the problems of left-behind children, including initiating parent-teacher contracts outlining the needs of children and the transfer of guardianship, providing teacher mentors for children, instigating army-and-police joint defence measures to increase their security, and compiling a system of files and contact cards for children who have disappeared or are presumed kidnapped and sold, of whom the

majority are left-behind children. Longwei Village in Jintang County of Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, arranged to distribute New Year gifts to its left-behind children and simultaneously launched a ‘Hand-in Hand, Sending Warmth’ campaign. The campaign helped every left-behind child in the village to find a peer partner with whom they could study and play (*Northeast-News Net*, 1 February 2005). Likewise, in 2004, the Cultural and Ideological Progress Steering Committee of Huai’an City, Jiangsu Province issued a document outlining ‘ideas for initiating ten activities on caring for rural and urban left-behind children’ (National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council 2008).

EXPLORING SOME CRITICAL DIMENSIONS: THE ONGOING DEBATES

The rural/urban *hukou* system has long been the single most important obstacle to the advancement of rural livelihoods and aspirations. Although countless rural migrants have contributed to the development of the cities, they do not enjoy the same rights and treatment as urban citizens. The cost of bringing families to the cities is prohibitive; migrants barely earn enough to meet their own daily needs, and children who have studied in rural schools cannot compete effectively with urban-educated children for places in city high schools (Wu Ni 2004). Leaving children behind, also enables migrants to respond to the heavy pressures back in the rural area of meeting education and health levies and other taxes (Wang Yanbo and Wu Xinlin 2003), though this burden was mitigated to a considerable extent by the state’s 2002–2004 decision to phase out rural taxes and levies.

Another debate concerns the impact that migration of parents has on the moral, emotional, social and educational development of left-behind children. Li Qingfeng (2002) examines the effects of the lack of communication with absent parents. He argues that this weakens the influence of the primary family unit on children’s development resulting in insufficient socialization during the critical years of childhood. The absence of parents also results in a lack of experiences that might broaden horizons. But whether parental migration really does impact negatively on children’s development and education is a contentious issue. One view suggests that it has no major effect; another that it has significant negative effects. In 2001, the Education College of Beijing Normal University carried out a study of the ‘Status Quo of the Education of Rural Left-behind Children’ which showed little difference between them and the rest. Wu Ni’s team (2004) looked at motivation, and again the conclusion suggests no great difference between left-behind and non-left-behind children, though there was a striking

difference in how they viewed their performance. Left-behind children took a positive view, estimating it to be much higher. Only a small number of them considered their performance to be poor. In contrast, a sample survey undertaken by Zhou Qiaochun and Wu Huangqing, correspondents of Xinhua News Agency, and the Education Department of Renshou County, Sichuan Province, found 48 per cent of left-behind children with poor educational achievements (as measured by the number of failed subjects each semester), and another 40 per cent with below average performance (Zhou Qiaochun and Wu Huangqing 17 November 2004). The reason for this seemed to be a lack of supervision and encouragement. Most exhibited inadequate motivation to study and lacked a sense of achievement. Only a few, with good self-control, were able to work hard and achieve well (Wang Yanbo and Wu Xinlin 2003). A further tendency was for a large number of left-behind primary school students to go from being 'good students' to 'average' and then 'bad' following parental migration for work. Ninety per cent of left-behind middle school pupils are residential students and a study by Tan Shaohuai and Wang Xiaohuai (2004) shows around 10 per cent of them to be slipping from good to bad students. Insufficient supervision by temporary guardians appears to affect performance. Li Xiuying (2004) shows that many left-behind students have unclear educational objectives and bad study habits. Their homework is not finished on time and there is the occasional occurrence of truancy or dropping out, and for these reasons the performance of left-behind students lags behind.

Zhang Helong's 2004 research on the study habits, social interaction, active participation, persistence and independence of left-behind children found that they displayed poor social skills, poor self-reliance, poor persistence and a lack of enthusiasm for participating in collective activities. They lacked opportunities to communicate with parents and thus when encountering problems half reported solving them alone, without guidance. They were also more likely to develop psychological problems. Other studies have concluded that the lack of moral guidance from parents during the crucial period of growing-up affects children's social nature; they are easily influenced by anti-social modes of behaviour and acquire bad habits that, if left alone, can lead to delinquency (Li Xiuying 2004). Li Lijing's study (2004) concluded that almost half of left-behind children displayed character deformity. They were distant, introverted, lonely, and had poor self-esteem. A survey on left-behind children in rural Fujian Province (Lin Hong 2003) showed many disobeyed their grandparents, contradicted or kept silent with their elders, or behaved badly and unpredictably. At school many did not respect the rules and regulations, lied, stole, got into fights, teased classmates or fell into 'puppy love'. In addition, some became addicted to electronic games, did not return home overnight or became

involved in extortion and drug taking. Guardians could do nothing about it and were inclined to shift responsibility for educating the children to the school, where the ability to manage and educate them was also limited. Li Xiuying (2004) argues that due to a lack of parental control and education, most left-behind students also develop poor health habits.

Wu Ni (2004), however, argues that the impact of migrating parents on left-behind children is more complex. There are also positive factors at play. One such factor is that the economic status of migrant families is usually relatively good. They are able to meet school fees for their children and satisfaction in life is higher. Many of these children worry about the family’s income and about the health and safety of their absent parents, while at the same time longing to live with them (China National Institute for Educational Research 2004). Thus they show an understanding of family circumstances and the hard work of their parents, which leaves a deep impression on them. When confronted with difficulties or troubles with their studies or in life more generally, left-behind children are more willing to turn to teachers for help than other children. Furthermore, as they grow older, the peer group becomes perhaps more important for them than other children and this can have a many sided influence on them.

This previous research has undoubtedly helped to characterize the nature of the problems faced by left-behind children; nevertheless it falls short in a number of ways. First, it focuses almost exclusively on those left-behind children where both parents have migrated for work, thus failing to consider the more common situation where only one parent works away from home. This casts some doubts on the generalizations made and underlines the fact that the problems of left-behind children arise out of the interaction of many factors, of which the absence of a parent or parents is only one such component. Hence we need to assess carefully the interplay of many factors. Most previous research has depended upon large-scale surveys and formal questionnaires rather than detailed qualitative methods entailing both interviews and observations, which can assist in uncovering critical components. A second limitation of previous studies is that they target a few provinces in central, southeast and southwest China where one finds large outflows of rural labour, thus neglecting cases in central-west China, which have their own specific social and cultural characteristics as well as migration trends.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Bearing in mind the complexities involved, the present study explores the following aspects:

1. The daily life of both 'left-behind' and 'non-left-behind' children with respect to the provision by guardians and parents of food, clothes, pocket money, health care, safety and social activities. The research also sought to identify any changes that might have taken place in the children's lives before and after their parent or parents' migration.
2. The education provided by guardians/parents of left- and non-left-behind children and their relative achievements. Here the study aimed to gather information on the results of school examinations, pupils' motivation for and attitudes towards schoolwork, supervision by guardians, and communication between guardians and teachers. It also focused on the changes before and after parental migration.
3. The psychology and inner-world/feelings of left-behind children, focusing on their knowledge of the world, feelings about their absent parents, and their behaviour. Again the study examined in this respect any changes that could be identified before and after their parents' migration.
4. Other environmental factors and characteristics of left-behind children, such as the status, attitudes and practices of their families, schools and communities.

The selection of areas for research involved provincial (including autonomous regions), county and village levels in mid-west China. The provinces of Beijing, Ningxia, Hebei and Shaanxi were chosen, and ten counties, including six project areas of Plan International and one village from each county as the main focus for research. The main selection criterion for selecting villages was those with many migrants.

The targets for research in each village were left-behind and non-left-behind children between the ages of 6 and 15, and 10 to 20 guardians of the left-behind children. Others interviewed included two left-behind children below 5 years and two older than 16, and their four guardians; from one to three tutors and teachers in the schools to examine school performance; the manager of the village store, the village doctor or person selling at the pharmacy to look at what children buy and what happens when they consult a doctor; and some village leaders and farmers, in order to explore the image of left-behind children in the eyes of other village participants. The total samples were designed to cover between 100 and 200 left-behind and non-left-behind children and their respective guardians and parents; 10 to 30 school teachers, ten managers of village stores and available village doctors.

No difficulties were experienced in selecting the adult samples, since all were generally clearly identifiable. However, it was a different case when selecting children: those below 5 years were excluded as being unlikely to

respond to questions asked and there were not many young people available between 16 and 18 years of age because most of them were at residential high schools outside their village, which made it difficult to meet them. For these reasons, the main sample of children interviewed was limited to those between 6 and 15. In addition to the interviews, a number of more detailed case studies were undertaken to explore specific issues, as well as a wealth ranking exercise aimed at depicting the relative levels of household income. The daily routines of different children were also mapped out. This provided a clear picture of the daily lives and social environments of both left-behind and non-left-behind children. Finally, a role-play exercise was initiated during which the children were encouraged to enact episodes from everyday life to depict how their migrant parents impacted on their situation and to reveal something of the children’s inner worlds.

The study identified the village community as the main unit for interviewing and for case studies. This approach allowed for a better understanding of left-behind children’s lifeworlds since it placed them within the social context of family, school and community and how these were affected by migration flows. The research combined semi-structured interviews and used participatory research methods with the children, their guardians, teachers, village leaders, and neighbours.

THREE CASE STUDIES OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

This section identifies some of the key elements associated with left-behind children. These are illustrated through the presentation of three cases that highlight the dilemmas the children, their families and guardians face when parents leave to seek work outside the village.

Case 1: Li Lu, a 12-year-old Girl from Bamudi Village in Beijing City Province

Bamudi is located some 5 kilometres from Zhenzhuquan Township and 65 kilometres from county headquarters. It is surrounded by mountains and enjoys rich natural resources and favourable weather conditions. For these reasons, in recent years efforts were made to stimulate ‘folk tourism’, though in the end this came to nothing, due principally to inadequate publicity. The roads connecting the village to the neighbouring Sihai Township are all paved, with four regular buses going to the county and township headquarters. The village also possesses five tricycles, five motor cycles and two minibus taxis.

The average per capita net income of 4300 yuan for Bamudi in 2005 was above the norm for rural administrative villages. This income derived from agriculture (15 per cent), poultry – chicken and duck eggs (15 per cent), transport activities (10 per cent), commerce (5 per cent), fruit – apricots – (5 per cent) and largest of all, earnings from migrant labour (50 per cent). Of the 86 households, 49 had migrant members. Of the 55 migrant workers, 31 were away long term (that is, more than four months in the year), and 24 were seasonal migrant workers. They numbered 49 men and six women, three of whom were married and three single and in their twenties.

Li Lu's father had worked outside the village for over ten years. Her mother had also wanted to make money outside but at the beginning was unable to do so because her in-laws refused to look after the children. When they later refused a second time, she enrolled the children in a residential school for martial arts and went off to town to work as a cook. But she often worried about them. When she one day managed to get a car to visit them, both the son and daughter cried on seeing her. The two children could not be comforted; and the mother could not hold back her tears. Their teacher tried to comfort her saying they were taking good care of the children, but in the end she persuaded the grandparents to look after the daughter back in the village. However the son remained at the school.

Their mother cooked in the town in the daytime, and picked cotton at night. Some six months went by and visiting the village on one occasion she found Li Lu feverish and covered in red spots. She changed Li Lu's clothes, and took her immediately to the hospital. Later she learned that the grandmother only changed the girl's clothes every one to two months and left them unwashed for her to wear again later. The mother threw the clothes away and bought new ones and concluded that the grandmother knew little about hygiene. She made sure the children changed their clothes when she was at home, while the grandmother did not care what the children wore. During the Spring Festival, the parents were able to discuss the problem and decided that the mother needed to stay at home. It was impossible for her to work at the same time as take proper care of the children. She remained at home and looked after the children, with no more thoughts of seeking work outside – that is until the spring of 2004, when someone asked her to work as a cook in the county centre once again. The children begged her not to leave and in the end the father persuaded her to stay.

Case 2: Pan Jiajia, a 12-year-old Boy from Dasha Village in Shaanxi Province

This case highlights similar issues within a three-generational family household of Shaanxi Province, renowned for its coal mining and ancillary

industries that offer employment to much of the population. The family consists of a grandmother, her son and daughter-in-law, and their two children, one of whom is Pan Jiajia.

Pan Jiajia's father migrated for work two to three months after his birth and his mother took care of him. When he was 3 his father returned, but later he left with his wife and daughter. Pan Jiajia's father is disabled, with only one hand, and therefore cannot use a hoe for farm work. But he nevertheless managed to secure work in the Shaanxi coal-mining industry and his wife remained permanently with him to take care of him and Pan Jiajia's sister. When the boy was 7, his parents took him back with them so that he could enter school near to the father's workplace. He returned to his grandmother in 2003, and has lived with her since, his parents considering that he is now old enough so do so without them worrying about him.

Pan Jiajia's family had moved into Dasha village from elsewhere and have no house of their own there. They had previously rented a house but once the contract expired they gave it up, and the grandmother was left to find new accommodation. She now rents a poor-quality building where she and her grandson live. The house was once a cattle pen and they spent several days clearing out the cattle dung before they could make it habitable. Pan Jiajia's father attaches great importance to working hard in order to save money to build a house. The grandmother says he aims to build a two-storey house in the village in preparation for Jiajia's eventual marriage.

Although disabled, the father is capable and intelligent. As a team leader in the mining industry he has acquired a reputation for contracting work teams. As he cannot stand the soot-laden atmosphere, he seldom works in the mines, but in good times he can earn more than 100 yuan per day. He seldom remits the money, though every year he returns to the village to deliver some 500 yuan to the grandmother to contribute to the costs of looking after his son. The money, however, only stretches to buying sufficient fertilizer and feedstuff for three pigs. Their living expenses and school fees have to be earned from cultivating the grandmother's 5 mu plot of land on which she grows maize and millet. On one occasion Pan Jiajia had to ask his father for his tuition fees. He sent home only 200 yuan, which was insufficient.

Except for a period of 20 days when the grandfather died, Pan Jiajia's parents have not been home for years. The boy keeps in touch with them by phone, but he has to borrow a phone to do so. His father calls him about once a month for about six or seven minutes. The father usually talks with him because the grandmother cannot help crying on the phone. He used to talk of many things with his parents when they were home, but

now he talks very little with them and can scarcely communicate with his grandmother who is now quite elderly. When he is worried or anxious he has to keep it to himself. He does not write a diary, but writes his feelings on walls with a knife or pencil and then erases them so that no one can read them.

When he stayed in Shaanxi with his parents, all his clothes and stationery were bought by his mother. She gave him 2 to 3 yuan a day so he felt easy about spending money. But now his grandmother only gives him 1 yuan every ten days, which he sometimes spends on cheap snacks and sometimes on school stationery. As this is not enough even to buy one notebook, he sometimes reuses an exercise book over and again. When he asks his grandmother for money for stationery she often says she does not have any.

Pan Jijia enjoyed his mother's cooking and explained that when he returned to the village he found it difficult to get used to his grandmother's dishes. Now he is used to it but still misses the eggs his mother used to fry him. On his birthday, his parents bought him a small cake to celebrate but since he has lived with his grandmother, there have been no birthday celebrations. Although his grandmother tries to please him by cooking dumplings four times a month and often buys fruit for him, this is not the same. Pan Jijia also explained that when he is ill he reacts to injections and pills by vomiting. Once when he caught a cold in Shaanxi, his mother cooked nice food and fed him and also bought him liquid medicines. Nowadays, if he catches a cold, his grandmother lets him sleep and will light a fire in the brazier to make him sweat, and she cooks sweet porridge for him, which is the traditional way to cure colds. Thus both the mother and grandmother try to take good care of him but he thinks his mother does it better.

When he stayed with parents, his mother did the housework but with his grandmother he has to help by collecting firewood and fetching home the corn and millet from fields. The land they rent is halfway up a hill, so his grandmother carries millet to the road and Pan Jijia takes it home in the hand cart. Sometimes he also helps carry water but he can only carry half a bucket as he is not strong. Every day when he returns from school he helps his grandmother for an hour because he sees she is working too hard.

The coal mine where his father works is located in a village where the environment is very bad. There are no trees to be seen and coal dust is everywhere. Pan Jijia performed badly in the primary school there and he did not think studying was important because the quality of education was very low. There were very few children his age and he had no friends. However, his father had fellow workers who owned books which he could sometimes borrow. He loves reading. When he returned to the village, he attended Dasha primary school. In the beginning he found it difficult to

keep up, but later when he got used to it, he started to love to study and now has a very good school record, such that his classmates often turn to him for help. He has many good friends in the village and gets on well with his classmates. As his grandmother does not have much money, he borrows reading material from classmates. He once got 5 yuan for a book from his grandmother, and read it to her. He said 'it is about President Mao and the Communist Party who bring a happy life, so we will never suffer the hardships of those old societies'. He wants in the future to go to college. He learned about the importance of education from his experience in Shaanxi where he learnt that without knowledge people can only get hard jobs such as coal mining. Pan Jiajia hopes that his parents will support him to achieve a college education. However, his father thinks the most important thing is to save money and build a house so that his son can have a good marriage. This is the influence of local tradition, even though he is now only 12 years old.

Pan Jiajia does not have such nice clothes as his classmates, which are mostly hand-me-downs from other people. Yet he is an understanding boy who does not compare his situation with that of others and rarely asks his grandmother for things. However, he envies children whose mothers are around and the thing he wants most is to go and visit his parents. He thinks being with his family is the happiest thing in the world.

As only he and his grandmother remain at home, they face many difficulties besides that of a higher workload. For example, the bicycle bought by his father was stolen and the thief escaped capture. His old grandmother's memory is poor and she once forgot to lock the back door after feeding the pigs and a bag of rape seed was stolen. On another occasion, she was taken advantage of at the mill where she took a bag of millet for grinding. When she went to pick it up, she was told she had already done so. He called his father about this and was told to let it be and not to think about it any more. Pan Jiajia commented that if his parents were home more, then they would not need to fear such things.

Case 3: Liu Zhifang, a Girl aged 14 Years from Cuijiapan Village in Shaanxi Province

Cuijiapan Village, in Jiaxian County of Shaanxi Province, is a traditional village, which follows many old conventions in weddings and funerals. Much veneration and worship of deities is still part of the emotional and social world of villagers and joss-sticks burn all year round in the temple located in the central hamlet. It is moving from seclusion to more openness towards the outside world with the introduction in a few households of television and phones. There is no doctor in this village of about 100

households and villagers still rely on folk recipes for curing ailments. Their effect is said to be very good. In their spare time, men will chat in public gathering spaces, while women stay at home, sew and hand-make children's shoes.

This is a typical poor mountainous county with depleted natural resources. Potato cultivation accounts for most of the land area (218 mu), followed by millet (200 mu), legumes (193 mu), broom, corn, and millet (180 mu), and a small area of some 27 mu devoted to maize. Because of geographical constraints and poor water sources, few farmers in Cuijiapan grow vegetables. Before the policy to convert farmland to forest, rearing animals was well developed and many households managed large numbers of sheep. However, under the land to forest policy, the number of domesticated sheep has declined and livestock now number only 100, with no more than about 50 families involved. Half of the households keep pigs but the population is not large. Some households have cattle, mules and donkeys but they number only about 15. Some keep a few chickens and ducks. Every household of the village grows *hong zao*, the jujube trees that bear the Chinese or red date. One hundred and fifty mu in the village is devoted to jujube. The jujube plantation has become the village's leading industry.

Recently, sponsored by Plan International, 90 per cent of village households have tap water. Those who could not afford the small contribution still have to fetch water from the river 2 kilometres away. All roads connecting the village to the outside are dirt roads and in winter are impassable because of the slippery mountain conditions. The main means of transport in the village is by bicycle, donkey-drawn carriage or pedicab. Without migrant remittances the annual income per capita is around RMB 400 yuan, mainly derived from jujube. Crop harvests barely meet consumption needs so little can be spared for sale.

One hundred and three households live in the village, whose total population is 405, 191 of whom are male and 214 are female. Of the 405 villagers, 219 are illiterate. Only 29 have high school education. Generally speaking, senior and young villagers are the majority. Single-parent and bachelor households also account for a large proportion of the total population. Of the 150 able-bodied workers of the village, 65 are migrant workers (six of whom are women). Forty-six villagers work as temporary labourers on construction sites and 17 are engaged in the service sector. Two villagers have contract projects in Shaanxi Province and most of the migrants work for them.

Education in the village has recently improved but it suffered in the past from a frequent change of teachers. No English is taught which puts the children at a disadvantage when it comes to joining middle school.

Families who can afford it send their children to the primary school in Jiaxian County. The remainder must put up with the poorer facilities provided in their natal village.

Among the 17 left-behind children interviewed, 16 had fathers working outside. Only one had both parents away. 14 had parents working in other provinces. The remaining three worked in other cities of the province. Labour migration is the only viable alternative for making a living and being able to educate children. Fourteen of the 17 left-behind children live with their mothers and the remaining three are cared for by grandparents.

Liu Zhifang is a silent and shy girl. When we met her for the first time, she was sitting at the end of the *kang* (sleeping platform) and looking at other children playing quietly. Dressed in a thin coat washed white, she sat with tousled hair and her hands were swollen and rough. How could she stand the nippy northerly wind outside wearing such clothes? When we asked her whether she felt cold, she just shook her hand gently.

Liu Zhifang’s home was in the neighbouring village, but with her father absent and her mother in poor health, she was sent to her maternal grandmother in Cuijiapan soon after her birth. She lodged at school on entering junior middle school and went to her grandmother’s at the weekend. Her father worked in Yulin City all year and his ailing wife tried hard to care for the younger brother and sister at home. She had to have an injection and take medicine every day and the two children often went hungry. The pot and kitchen range were often cold when they returned from school. Their mother was unable to work in the fields and the family land was contracted out to others. The whole family had to rely on potatoes and millet given by the grandmother and the father’s earnings. Liu Zhifang’s schooling was mainly made possible by the slender income earned by her grandmother’s odd-jobbing, and money given by the father on his occasional visits. She commented that she had never worn new clothes, not even during Spring Festival.

Liu Zhifang’s maternal grandmother told us that, as a sensible girl, she knew the situation of the family and never complained. Once when the grandmother took her to the market with torn trousers she very much wanted to buy a new pair for her. But a new pair of trousers cost RMB 20 yuan, which amounted to her living costs for several weeks, so she refused. The grandmother was ageing and her hands and feet were not agile. Before Liu Zhifang boarded in school, she was a good help to the grandmother and now faced a lot of housework when she returned at weekends. She was thrifty and spent only 15 yuan a week on subsistence at school. She shared steamed bread and a dish with others at breakfast and never spent money randomly. The family environment reinforced her introverted nature. She

seldom talked to others besides her grandmother and had very few friends to talk over her worries.

Liu Zhifang told us that she missed her father very much and looked forward to living with him. Sometimes when she missed her parents too much, she was so anxious to call or *see* them that she could not concentrate in class or sleep well at night. She thought her father worked very hard to make money. So she could only study hard in return, but she was often sad because her parents could not afford her education and the grandmother was too old to cover any of her school fees. She had even told her grandmother that she did not really want to continue to study, but the grandmother replied that she would even beg for her fees if she had to do so. The grandmother thought that the father's labour migration had little impact on the children and they were used to it.

MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

This last section of the chapter provides a synopsis of our major research findings through a discussion of a number of the critical issues touched upon earlier. We focus on questions of guardianship, communication, education, health and the emotional worlds of left-behind children.

Rural migrant labourers in China are predominantly young and single or young to middle-aged and married with children. The reasons for their migration lie in their communities' low level of economic development, impoverished household conditions, and dissatisfaction with their lack of income from farming and the heavy expenditure associated with providing for their children's schooling and care. In order to provide a better livelihood, have reasonable housing, be able to pay off debts and pay for school fees, they have to work outside the village, and as they cannot afford the tuition fees in the cities they leave their children behind in the care of guardians. These are the reasons for the prevalence of left-behind children in mid-west rural China. Parents regard migration as a rational choice and ignore the possible negative effects this may have on their children. Most left-behind children miss the care of their parents but must accept the reality of the incomplete family that migration imposes upon them.

Guardianship in the ten research villages falls into four types: care by the grandparent generation, care by one of the parents, care by some other relative, and care by same generation kin (for example, elder brother or sister). The overwhelming majority are cared for by one of the parents, followed by grandparents. The rest amount to very small numbers (see Table 10.1).

Table 10.1 Who takes care of 'left-behind children'?

Guardian	No. of cases	Percentage	Valid percentage
Father	4	2.5	2.6
Mother	118	73.3	76.6
Grandparents	26	16.2	16.9
Relatives	2	1.2	1.3
Elder sibling	4	2.5	2.6
Total	154	95.7	100.0
Missing data	7	4.3	
Total	161	100.0	

In cases where children are cared for by a parent, it is usually the mother, though the survey gave four left-behind households with fathers acting as guardian. A wife migrating while the husband stays at home is to some degree socially frowned upon. In the more remote mountainous region in which some of the research villages are located, it is uncommon to find women working outside the locality. Here women live within a strong pattern of patrilocal residence.

There are various reasons for seeking work outside, though all are related to improving incomes, livelihoods and family welfare. Educational costs for children, meeting health bills especially for families with long-term sick members and investing in house construction are the most mentioned reasons for leaving to find work. In most families it is fathers who migrate and they are away for long periods if their work is far from home. If they find work within the home province, county or nearby city then they will return home fairly frequently, although their children seldom know when to expect them. They often find temporary or seasonal work in the building industry or some other type of manual employment, and move from one job to the next. Nearly half the left-behind children were not clear about what their parents did outside the village, and if they knew they were not always willing to talk about it. Some, it seemed, said little in order to preserve their sense of dignity, while others were simply too young to take in much of the details. Indeed, for some their father had left before they were even born and they had seen little of him.

Most migrant workers did, however, return at peak farming periods and for the major Spring and Moon Cake festivals; and some would return to deal with emergencies. But in general, they spent only short periods with their children. A few days interacting with them could not compensate for the missing care and affection and lack of communication that prevailed when they were away.

Communication between absent parents and their children and guardians is limited, and is mainly by phone. They seldom write letters for want of an address, or limited literacy. It is normally the migrant parents who make phone calls home. Conversations are short and infrequent due to financial constraint and change of work place. Direct communication with the children is limited since in most cases the call takes place between parents and guardians. Parents ringing home mainly want to be reassured about the health and safety of their children and other family members, and to discuss major decisions with the guardians. They may briefly ask the children about their life and study, but it rarely amounts to an in-depth conversation. Such limited communication cannot compensate for the daily communication and care children need.

Educating Children

The general importance parents give to education and its cost, is a prime reason for migrating. The paradox for many migrants is that they can now afford to send children to school, but school work can suffer in the absence of parental support and supervision. Children left with grandparents often fare worst in this respect. Many of the grandparent generation are illiterate and unable to help children with homework or control whether it is done. In the absence of this guidance children's motivation to study may change. For some, the knowledge that their parents are working hard for them increases their willingness to try hard and meet their parents' expectations and ambitions. Others *see* their parents making money despite their lack of education and seek only to finish school and get a job. The following are some of the answers left-behind children gave on their motivation to study and their expectations for the future:

I would have to find a job even if I finish further study. So I want to work with my father after graduation to alleviate the economic pressure in the family.

I want to be a guard in the city after I graduate.

I will do construction work in the city.

Working as a migrant labourer makes money.

I want to learn some crafts and repair cars like my dad. But now I am small and can only raise rabbits at home.

I will do some manual work because I do poorly in my studies.

I want to own a factory and become a boss in the future.

The increased workload for those left-behind has an impact in many ways. Children are often co-opted into helping with farm and household

work and caring for younger children and this reduces the time and energy for school work or to play and socialize with friends. This has an impact on their well-being in that they might turn to peers for support, but have less time to *see* friends, which cuts them off from this source of emotional support.

The burden of farm work for the carers often means that meals are late and ill prepared and the children are left to get themselves up and off to school. They may return home only to cold food or leftovers. Many children reside during the week at school and must take sufficient food with them. Guardian’s attitudes to education are often ambiguous. They believe that having a full stomach is enough to meet their needs. Their knowledge of emotional well-being is also out of step with the needs of left-behind children and the heavy work burden often leads to a lack of attention to hygiene and the clothes of the children left in their care.

The safety and health of these children can also be compromised. Those who live in mountain villages must often walk along dangerous paths and thoroughfares, and overworked parents must leave their children to travel with friends or alone. Children’s health may suffer when guardians have little money for health services or clinics are too far from them to take a sick child without help. Or they may lack awareness. Take the example of the child who repeatedly told his grandfather that he could not raise his arm. The grandfather did not pay too much attention and thought it was a child’s naughty trick. Then when the child went to his aunt’s for meals, she noticed how serious the illness was. She brought him to hospital, and he was diagnosed as having a cerebral tumour. Only an operation saved his life. Customarily it is the father who is expected to take children to *see* the doctor when they are ill. It is difficult for guardians to do so, especially when a child is seriously sick. This puts guardians under heavy psychological pressure when there is no one to help get a child to a clinic or hospital.

Children get depressed and lonely in the absence of parents. They *see* themselves as different from children who live with their nuclear family. Apart from the difference in daily care they often feel envy and inferiority. Left-behind children expressed these differences in the following ways: other children could be cared for by their parents; they could talk with their parents everyday; they could turn to their fathers for help if they were bullied; they missed their father’s love and could never take them to school as other fathers did; they feel sad especially when they *see* other children embraced on returning from school and they then long for their own parents to come home; at parent–teacher meetings other students’ parents attended while it was their relatives who came; other children got new clothes at the end of the year whereas no one did that for them, and so

on. They felt other children ate better and had better school materials. One girl said 'I am not as pretty as others because I am not tidily and neatly dressed. My grandmother doesn't wash my clothes very often'.

The main thinking about migration in the research areas was that one parent should stay at home to care for the children and tend the family plot. If both parents left, the burden of care fell mostly to the grandparent generation and this was likely to be the most problematic solution. In reality four types of guardianship were identified: one parent, relatives of their generation, grandparents or someone of their generation, or the children themselves.

Care by one of the parents (usually the mother) was the most predominant and appears to work the best. For these children there is no general distinguishable difference in clothes and food, but the extra workload forced upon the parent, even when they can pay for help and exchange labour, inevitably affects their patience, time and energy to listen to children and supervise their studies. Indeed, their children tend to get more readily scolded and punished. In a few cases, fathers are left to do the caring. These children on the whole get less well cared for and there appear to be more cases of problem behaviour and emotional disturbance among them. Children taken by grandparents, who are mostly old and in poor health and lacking in knowledge, receive poorer care in terms of food and clothing. Sometimes grandparents indulge children and this creates other problems. Guardians who are relatives, friends or neighbours of the same generation do not necessarily really care about their education and do not communicate with them as parents would, though they may attend to their physical needs. Children looked after by sisters/brothers or who must take care of all their own needs (study, household chores, and so on) are at most risk of becoming exhausted physically and emotionally. Their high workload and little time for leisure and study can adversely affect educational performance.

Spending money is low for all children in the communities. And left-behind children showed an understanding of their parents' hardships and did not worry them for money. When they were given money it was usually spent on school supplies.

All children enjoy a network of family, village and school friends. But the social ties of left-behind children change after their parents migrate. Many become distanced from their parents psychologically and grow closer to other contacts. In fact it was found that guardians do not intervene much in the way children form contacts or with whom.

The majority of the children know little about the nature and significance of their parent/parents' work. Some are too young to know since parents often first migrate when they are still infants. Parents working away often does not wish the children to know how they live, or about the degrading

nature of their work, or the hardships and humbling conditions of their daily lives. They do not wish to cause children worries. They usually visit only for the Chinese New Year or for family emergencies or at peak agricultural periods when their labour is needed by wives or old parents.

Impact on Educational Performance and Study

In general we found no major difference in the level of educational performance between left-behind and other children, although the study habits and achievements of a few did deteriorate following their parents’ migration, due to a reduction in the quality of help and supervision they received with homework. We also encountered some emotional and motivational pressures that arose from the late payment of school fees, and so on. Not all parents are literate enough to help. However, for better-educated parents who are able to help, their absence is keenly felt unless their place can be taken by the new guardians or older siblings. Supervision is also generally affected by a guardian’s other obligations. Grandparents especially, normally lack awareness of the need to supervise children’s school work and in many cases the children do not readily listen to or obey them and less closely related guardians may care less to do this task. Children looking after themselves must fend for themselves and their lack of supervision makes it more likely for them to be late for school, have poor attitudes to study, play truant and fail to submit assignments. In poor communities, delayed submission of tuition fees is normal for both left-behind and non-left-behind children though for left-behind children the delay is usually greater. They must wait for their parent’s return to the village before they can pay. This causes stress and is often felt as a stigma with accompanying loss of dignity and confidence.

Parents’ migration can also impact on children’s education in more positive ways. Experiences from outside and the pursuit of income are conveyed in stories and attitudes to children which affect their world views. Some of the children understand better than others their parents’ hardships and their expectations of them. They *see* these as a reason to study hard and get to university to find a good job so that they can reduce their parents’ burdens. Some, of course, *see* gaining money as an end in itself, and *see* no great need to achieve at school and dropout in order to look for work.

Impact on Emotional Worlds

It is more difficult for a lone parent or elderly grandparents to meet the emotional needs of children when there is less time for care and no one

to share the burdens of care. Left-behind children miss parents and feel lonely and insecure, and feel themselves less happy than other children. They may well understand the need for a parent to leave but many become distanced psychologically from them due to the long periods of separation. Children left-behind with mothers have more opportunity to communicate than children with other guardians but it tends to be brief and superficial and for many reasons they have little opportunity for real contact with an absent parent. They seek help from their friends since although guardians may care for material needs they ignore or are ignorant of the need for emotional security. Left-behind children long to live together with their parents – either with parents at home or with them in the urban area but in reality often repress these thoughts and feelings.

The study concludes that the biggest difference between left-behind and non-left-behind children lies in the emotional sphere. They are lonelier, and not as free to play or free from the pressures and worries about their household life and their parents' health and safety. They lack the time and opportunity for interaction with parents and peers. Clearly, non-left-behind children are seldom as disturbed in behaviour and personality and are generally happier than left-behind children, who envy their happy demeanour and more complete family life. They experience their own family life as less lively, as more boring,

Measures Taken to Mitigate the Problems

School can be of influence in the socialization of children, but due to a lack of teachers and financial constraints no specific measures have been taken to support left-behind children. Although staff have frequent contact with them in school, their workloads and distance between the school and villages from which the children come, often means they know little about the children's family backgrounds and needs. Communities and local government are interested in promoting migration, which they *see* as the best way to develop the regional economy and peoples' livelihoods but they lack awareness of its impact on left-behind children and have clearly not so far addressed these issues through policy measures.

In summary, many of the impacts for children can be defined negatively, particularly for those taken care of by grandparents. The research demonstrates that it is not easy to guarantee their basic rights. There are many consequences for their health and safety. They have less time for play and study and are often not accompanied to school. Migration impacts on their emotional security and associated personal, emotional and educational development and potential. The research was conducted in the mid-west of China, where poverty and poor facilities predominate and

thus where migration is seen as a possible way to provide basic livelihood needs. Its impact on children is many-sided and solutions difficult to find.

Finally, one needs to look at the impact of labour migration on the left-behind guardians. Their daily life and psychology is also affected by the absence of family members. Their workload is increased and they must cope alone with the range of household and farming activities as well as having sole care of children’s daily lives. Difficult decisions are also often made alone (over tuition fees, sickness, agricultural production, and so on). Women whose husbands move away have often not long been married and the separation brings insecurity with nobody to depend upon, especially as custom dictates they go to live with their in-laws in the husband’s village. They lack the companionship and communication of their husbands and their own families. Grandparents, who might hope to be enjoying a more comfortable life in their old age, must likewise bear a heavier burden of work and childcare, and are thus more vulnerable to stress and ill health. They too often feel lonely, though they seldom complained much about the situation. They *see* migration as a rational choice and know the economic benefits that it can bring to the family. Compared to the hardships their migrant children have to face, their difficulties are not much talked about.

Impact of Labour Migration on Rural Communities

For isolated poor rural communities, there are more benefits than disadvantages to be had from labour migration. First, it brings economic development to the community. In communities with limited natural resources, farming cannot meet the needs of residents. Thus income derived from migration is useful for investment in community infrastructure and education leading to further economic benefits. Second, migration will accelerate transformation of the community from often being isolated from, to opening up to the wider world. When farmers migrate to more developed locations, they pick up new cultural practices and ideas, as well as new skills and technologies. These are then popularized in their communities of origin and often stimulate new and often better modes of living. All this accelerates a community’s development.

On the other hand, we must also recognize the negative impacts of out-migration. In the first place, it affects farming. When the young, stronger and often better educated members of the village leave for work outside there is an immediate impact on labour inputs in farming and in the extension and dissemination of agricultural technologies. Second, migration also affects community governance, since out-flow of the more capable or elite families is likely to create a vacuum for filling leadership positions.

Workers themselves, having spent years living and working in the city without acquiring urban *hukou* status, are forced to return to their places of origin. It is unlikely they will have accrued a work pension and will not be entitled to social welfare payments. Thus their return to the community comes at a point when due to injury, sickness or old age they can least play an active role either in their families or as village leaders. Some will return to live at the expense of the community. Such circumstances serve to deepen the gap between rural and urban.

An important component of migration concerns the plight of women, who undoubtedly play a major role in care of their families and in relation to the community at large. From a gender perspective, women face many forms of economic, social and cultural inequality and deprivation, and bear the pressures of poverty and some degree of gender subordination within their families. On the other hand, they are usually accredited with making decisions that are good for the family as a whole, and are usually critically involved in the decision to migrate for work taken by the husband or other family members. Nevertheless, migration brings with it consequences for those who remain in the countryside. In the first place, being bound by traditional family ideology, they often lack the opportunities afforded to men. Women are supposed to support their husbands and play a major role in the general educating of children. It is therefore usually taken for granted that they will stay at home when opportunities arise to migrate to urban areas for work, and pressures on women dramatically increase when men migrate. Most guardians are women. They have to look after children, care for the home and undertake essential agricultural work. In addition, they must cope with all of life's insecurities and emergencies without their husbands. Furthermore, women do not generally take much part in public affairs even if, as a consequence of out-migration, there is a shortage of adult males. They are also often politically marginalized when it comes to selecting and electing village committee members and thus not much involved in the conduct of community affairs. Yet, on the other hand, they are widely acknowledged as taking the principal role in the rearing of their children and in the socialization of their grandchildren. The latter role has, of course, increased in importance with labour migration since education is less costly and village life is safer than the life of migrants in cities.

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PART IV

Politics of Policy and Participation

11. State policy intervention in an era of civic participation¹

Alberto Arce

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the analysis of policy intervention and the struggles that emerge from civic action in the process of rural transformation. Given the rapidly changing global environment, characterized by the way participation has reintroduced a ‘broader and more all-embracing notion of social policy’ (Hall and Midgley 2004: 36), it is I believe timely to re-examine the issue of civic participation, as used in international development studies.

An understanding of increased civic participation in emergent economies such as China has generally been connected with processes of rapid modernization and the penetration of neo-liberal discourses and strategy, although recently some scholars have challenged this position (see Nonini 2008; Ong 2007). One of my tasks here is to distill what one might learn from the recent upsurge of civic activism in Latin America. In this respect analyses by Foweraker (2001), Arce (2007) and Fox (2007) inform the present chapter. One consequence of this activism has been to expose the limitations of theoretical models of state policy intervention, as we used to know them, offering the possibility to rethink state policy intervention. Hence a main objective of this chapter is to move away conceptually from the search for policy utopias and instead to embrace the understanding of heterotopias composed of multiple contested meanings and practices (cf. Foucault 1986) in both the material and expressive components of actors’ worlds. In doing so, I focus on intervention processes as encompassing knowledge and social conflict in ways that are generated by the political creativity of social action.

A range of experiences, interests, and ‘first-world’ representational practices have generated powerful images depicting the political democratization of the world. This has brought to the fore new ways of framing development problems and developing modes of intervention in an era of heightened civic participation. Earlier conceptualizations of intervention

and the assumptions of policy models do not allow sufficient room for acknowledging how processes of intervention in fact contribute to peoples' social knowledge and political self-awareness, thus enhancing their self-capacity for democratic reflexivity and the realization of civic values.

In contrast, I recognize from the outset how civic action and the re-definition of intervention form part of a social process that has increased actors' capacities to imagine and anticipate contemporary forms of democracy and political accountability. Civic issues have acquired a degree of political independence and new relevant social meanings. In part, this is a result of how global mobility and global 'democracy' have transformed intellectual imaginations about the state (Abrams 1988) and society (Castoriadis 1977). It also results from focusing on the significance of citizens' participation within the contingencies and struggles of everyday life.

We encounter here a number of important issues concerning how actors relate to and experience state intervention, how they create space for change and how they draw upon various narratives of democracy. Policy models often leave unexplained new social trends that connect institutional organization with spontaneous ideological and normative transformations in society. These transformations may result from social groups trying to barricade themselves in and fend off the social ills of modernity – processes which generate a distinct, albeit ambiguous, feeling of urgency that prompts groups to act via powerful public displays of lived-through political experience. Examples of this include the transition from authoritarian military and centralized state rule to democratic and decentralized modes of governance. These processes cannot, of course, easily be categorized normatively as 'neo-liberal' or 'communal-moral'.

The public display of civic action can also lead to the questioning of global processes such as rapid spatial mobility involving the circulation of commodities, ideas and people, and the global intensification of social differentiation and inequality that result in the establishment of new social boundaries and self-organizing actions. This suggests the need to move beyond the charting of simple trends in grassroots organization and democratic governance to encompass local confrontations with inequality and the ongoing struggles that take place between participants involved in the democratic process. Such confrontations are positive in that they activate actors' interest in redefining certain policy issues and intervention practices.

KNOWLEDGE AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Let me now sketch how the relationship between knowledge and issues of civic participation has evolved over the years. Beginning in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, there was growing recognition that external forms of knowledge, technology and management skills could be grafted onto local or indigenous forms of organization such that local people could themselves demand greater social equality and political participation. In Latin America this established a strong connection between knowledge generation and dissemination and socio-political struggle (see Fals-Borda 1981; Freire 1970; Galjart 1980). This experience contributed to the emergence of a sociology of knowledge that eventually came to form part of the field of development research. For the most part, it embraced a social constructivist perspective, providing fresh insights into how expert knowledge and peoples' everyday knowledge interacted in processes of social change. This formed the basis for detailed ethnographic research on how specific types of knowledge were socially embodied in peoples' livelihood practices and their struggles against poverty and hegemonic authority, as well as in the ways in which they might contribute to science, development and political processes that conferred citizenship rights (for example, Chambers 1983; Richards 1985; Sillitoe 1998). Hence, a path was forged for critically evaluating state policy intervention and acknowledging that the everyday knowledge of local people could enrich science and improve development practice in ways that were constructive in regard to political participation and state policy making.

During the 1980s, a concern with gender issues, livelihoods and human rights took centre stage in rural development research, influencing researchers to adopt an actor-oriented approach for analysing the social consequences of peasant and government responses to planned intervention and how these responses affected political stability in society at large. The basic issue was to redress the linear model of policy formulation, implementation and outcomes that was at the time common currency in planning circles. This orientation was associated with an appeal to explore in more detail how various actors strove to create 'space for change' in their own lives as well as in policy processes (Long 1984: 11–13), a perspective that embraced and extended Handelman's (1976) pioneering contribution to the re-conceptualization of policy as transactional behaviour, focusing on the extended and complex nature of emergent properties.² Such emergent properties occur under the combined influence of external and internal forces, strategies and individual decisions. Focusing on emergent properties thus provided a major focal point for exploring strategic action

and choice (Whitten and Whitten 1972), and was a means to understand individual and institutional actions and to identify the pitfalls in game theory models.

These new theoretical directions coincided with state decentralization programmes, a growing awareness of the need for the sustainable use of resources, and the diverse ways in which new grassroots experiments in local savings and credit schemes and technical assistance sought to organize people collectively in the face of dramatic changes in centralized planned intervention.

However, by the late-1980s (see Long and van der Ploeg 1989: 233) the limitations of this participatory approach were clearly evident and, by the early 1990s, Booth (1985, 1994) had identified an ‘impasse’ or intellectual stagnation in development studies that generated a sense of unease and required a serious rethinking of civil society–state relations. This led social anthropological studies to analyse more critically local state institutions and the social effects of policy implementation and planning in everyday life (Abram 1998). Hence a set of practical and conceptual issues provided a platform for re-addressing knowledge and social issues, and for understanding how peoples’ everyday actions are situated within complex processes of policy intervention and conflict (Arce and Long, 1992). Thus, ethnographic studies brought into perspective a new set of images and representations concerning how the social world is constructed and organized by people, stressing how, in spite of the possibility of potential conflict in institutional interactions, actors were brought together in spontaneous encounters.

These social encounters were conceptualized as ‘interfaces’ (Archer 1985; Long 1984, 1989) that generated ‘partial connections’ (Strathern 1991) and emergent properties. The actors, in turn, responded to these encounters and publicly redeployed their experiences through the actions of everyday life. Thus, studies of planning and policy implementation began to situate actors’ knowledge, interests and experiences within a set of ambiguous institutional interactions. These interactions reassembled existing social repertoires and opened up room for manoeuvre, thus affecting the form and content of planning and policy intervention.

It had thus become clear that emergent properties could not be ignored in policy studies. Yet, to this day, literature on policy still ranges from its acceptance as a problem-solving tool shaping social life (Hall and Midgley 2004: 87–113) to critical perspectives that situate policy as a technical discourse that conceals the political aims of bureaucratic power and global dominance (Shore and Wright 1997). This leads to the suggestion that studies of intervention need to emphasize the analytical significance of dynamic social relationships and contradictions between different forms

of knowledge³ and the ambiguous effects of policy intervention. And this implies the need to recognize that state and civic society relations are part of a complex individual–collective process. Policy interventions are the starting point for these social interactions and in the process become contingent on locally specific issues embedded in empirical administrative realities. Recognition of these processes reminds us that we should not neglect the significance of interface encounters and their emergent properties. These properties are concerned with actors' social knowledge and political self-awareness. They respond to policy intervention and unveil publicly their capacity to open up possibilities for democracy. These social spaces in which actors make choices are spaces wherein people – drawing upon their own experiences – can engage with social issues and make possible the (re)shaping of their own societies through political action.

An actor-oriented perspective can thus help to explore the social intricacies of how intervention is in fact internalized, used and repositioned by the actions of researchers, local people and policy-makers. This active view of state and civic society relations necessitates close attention to how intervention processes enter the life-worlds of actors' and their collectivities, blending internal and external factors. In this way, intervention comes to mean different things to the different associations of interests, strategies and discourses of the individuals involved in questions of control and social imagining.

POLICY AND INTERVENTION PROCESSES

So what does all this have to say about how we look at intervention? One position in policy studies presents intervention as an instrument defining problems and achieving goals set by policy-makers through programme design. This follows a Weberian tradition stressing the primacy of means–end reasoning in guiding action that shapes human agency and autonomy and provides an understanding of why social scientists should study actors, such as project managers, who are attributed with the power of hegemonic reasoning over civil actors. To achieve such social change, the agenda of these studies is narrowed down to focus on global targets, with the reduction of poverty as a principal goal. This reasoning also encompasses good governance, prudent fiscal policy, political pluralism, and notions of a dynamic civic society and vibrant democracy (Mosse 2005). In other words, the final ends of policy are nothing short of reorganizing state and society under the template of administrative social engineering.

In policy studies long-standing criticisms exist of the model of 'administrative man as rational decision maker' (Lindblom 1965). The significance

of agency in the policy process is now widely recognized (Marinetto 1999), ranging from the ‘rational administrator’ to the ‘street level bureaucrat’ (Lipsky 1980). This has generated a tradition of ‘bottom up’ analytical policy perspectives that focus on the importance of actors’ interactions at the policy implementation stage and portray policy as a flexible bundle of social arrangements (Clay and Schaffer 1984), often related to political careers. Such studies have moved beyond an institutional cultural approach (Douglas 1987) to embrace the domain of emergent politics viewed as a medium for the distribution of power and the creation of public spaces for change.

Another body of literature emphasizes that policy is part of a vertical and dominant social order, a hierarchical management model that isolates state interventions from history – as evidence and consciousness – and from the political reality in which people live. Here policy is seen as the ‘ghost’ in the government machine administering capitalism (Janvry 1981) and stimulating the hand of bureaucracy to create policy objects. This capacity to kindle state capacities into action derives from the logic of diagnosis and prescription within social engineering (Long 2001: 32–4). It also stems from rational models of reward and sanction, which make some problems visible and some solutions legitimate; this is a political skill associated with ‘modernization’.

The process of objectifying issues as they are incorporated into policy agendas is normally assumed to be the prerogative of an administrative apparatus of government regulating a population through technical procedures and policies. The aim is to achieve cognitive control over the subjects of policy, and to locate them in a vertical hierarchy of integration with the state at the top of the pyramid (Dean 1999; Shore and Wright 1997). Mosse (2005: 4) captures this position neatly when he writes:

a now extensive literature argues that, like those of colonial rule, development’s rational models achieve cognitive control and social regulation; they enhance state capacity and expand bureaucratic power (particularly over marginal areas and people); they reproduce hierarchies of knowledge (scientific over indigenous) and society (developer over the ‘to be developed’), and they fragment, subjugate, silence or erase the local, all the while ‘whisking these political effects out of sight’ through technical discourses that naturalize poverty, objectify the poor and depoliticize development.

Mosse acknowledges that policy is more complex than his characterization above, especially when policy is considered an institutional practice and when the pragmatic rules guiding action within projects are concentrated and accorded preference to normative principles of intervention (Mosse 2005: 13). Following Scott (1990), he suggests that one needs to

explore how ‘hidden transcripts’ interact with ‘public transcripts’ of policy to document the awkward performance of the ‘monolithic notion of policy from above and the polytheistic reality of “scattered practices” from below’ (Mosse 2005: 7).

Thus, while an analysis of policy intervention can be informed by approaches that focus on interactive ‘cultural texts’,⁴ the result is likely to be a continuation of prevailing conceptual notions of the means–end model of policy intervention in social life. In this sense, Mosse’s reasoning is commendable in that it is more flexible than several of the authors cited above; nevertheless policy is still represented as a battlefield between different means–end models of conduct. In this respect his explanatory logic differs from others only insofar as he assumes that the policy outcome of interventions is based on an interpretation of how policy evaluation techniques legitimize policy practices.

As an alternative – and drawing on the much earlier work of Gil (1973) – policy intervention can be conceived of as an analysis of how people access repertoires of life-enhancing and life-sustaining resources through social policy practices (Lavallette and Pratt 1997). This process exposes people’s values, capacities and abilities as they emerge in social encounters with government policies, development projects and their implementers. In effect they represent a commitment to emancipatory social practices and politics that empower interactions that promote forms of solidarity. Yet, rather than focusing primarily on individual or group interests, it is my view that we should adopt an approach that delineates policy intervention as part of the complex area of social life that lies outside or on the margins of the market and community domains. This allows us to address more centrally the issues of knowledge and public protest in the quest for a more just society for everyone. This is in line with how the public (as a goal) was imagined by socially oriented intellectual reformers, such as Prebisch (1950) and Lewis (1954) in development studies, and Titmuss (1970) in social policy. Thus, by combining insights from these earlier policy reformers with an emphasis on interface encounters, wherein active actors partially create situations and events, we can provide a way of exploring – through the everyday life circumstances of the actors involved in policy intervention – how policy arenas are formed and reformed through the dynamics of social action. It also focuses on a detailed understanding of the material and ideological outcomes of such interactions.

In short, policy intervention can be characterized as an active field of generalized exchange (Ekeh 1974; Winckler 1969) wherein resource-allocating authorities (that is, government, non-government organizations and local associations and so on) attempt to address issues of social and

economic development and shape intervention processes which necessarily entail important questions of collective social responsibility and solidarity. The consideration of these interconnected policy dimensions carves out a field of study linking practice and theory located in the space where social life, experience, and the policy process are encountered (Arce 2003).

FRAMING RESEARCH ON POLICY INTERVENTION

Policy studies have contributed to an appreciation of how knowledgeable and capable actors manage knowledge interfaces in order to access and redirect public resources and social values. These policy interventions become dramatic performances involving individual interests and collective values, which shape the interplay and mutual determination of actors' actions in exercising degrees of power on a consensual basis. This transforms life-worlds and dissolves previous beliefs, crumbling certainties and reasserting the political engagement that makes civic action possible, while also recognising the fragility of what is delineated as 'democratic space' (Paley 2002).

Without entering into the debate about the appropriateness of particular policy interventions or their functional and political implications, a social view can be advanced for intervention studies. Social life is much more than just the background or the context in which to set up policy explanations about the rational or irrational orientation of actors' representations and the reinforcement or reproduction of norms in people's life-worlds, reconciling social integration and order, while healing the wounds of conflict. In short, the analytical importance of policy intervention in social analysis lies in its contribution to the study of knowledge interfaces⁵ and policy encounters involving people's interests and institutional values that contribute to the reinforcement of social normativity, while at the same time potentially contesting it.

Although such dynamics produce contexts for interaction and create particularistic spaces that disguise and distort knowledge and protest for change, there is always the potential that, despite their diverse experiences and interests, actors' will recognize themselves as holding to certain shared values. Indeed creative action generally results in the staging of a 'dramatic' public assemblage of various local narratives and accounts of 'reality'. And this points to the possibility of civic action through the generation of feelings of solidarity based on a range of conceptions and interpretations about truth, justice, ethics and politics. These feelings generate both ambiguity and partial connections through support for other people and through the tacit assumption that social interactions construct actors'

life-worlds. Indeed, the representation of 'life-worlds' involves knowledge, reflexivity and creative social action.

Although perfect social inclusion will never be achieved, the capacity of people to experience, protest and organize themselves is sometimes taken up by local authorities and policy reformers in order to expand the notion of democracy, institutionalizing and managing the process of public dialogue to avoid political challenges to instrumental socio-political and dominant knowledge coalitions. However, the emergent properties of social encounters between expert knowledge and everyday knowledge open up the potential for repertoires of social action that cannot be reduced to instrumental control by state intervention.

Broadly speaking, these policy interactions have challenged researchers in terms of how to theorize them (that is, as an interaction, transaction or exchange relation) vis-à-vis a more totalizing view of universal planning and democracy (Robertson 1984). However, as both Marxist and liberal positions were heavily criticized in development studies (see Booth 1985; Long 1992) and the hegemonic representation of the state confronted and overcome by Skocpol's critical rethinking on the state (1985), so has research turned to examine intervention techniques, such as national planning, governance programmes and implementation practices. These studies revealed that policy intervention is a contradictory rather than a dialogical process between state and civil society (Arce et al. 1994; Nuijten 1998; Torres 1997). These interactions reinforce or dissolve previous social and political elements. In general, the growth and consolidation of global networks for the production, circulation and consumption of commodities has also contributed to the proliferation of 'global' relationships, establishing long-distance connections between labour movements, women's movements, environmental movements and indigenous movements. These distant connections become a locus for ideas and representations of accountability (Arce and Fisher 1999).

Since the 1980s these connections have a 'virtual' corporeality in movements that send waves of social dissatisfaction and dissonance vis-à-vis the state of the world, increasing the significance of protests (Fox and Starn 1997). In parallel, development studies started to bring together different institutional achievements, positively emphasizing the use of power by members of both implementer and beneficiary groups. In this vein, the outputs of policy interventions (see Cernea 1988; Oliver-Smith 1996) and the social character of 'technical' reform innovations (Fox 2007) have facilitated new alliances, political representations and economic opportunities.

In effect, policy intervention has now become part of the broader analytical concern for issues of globalization, social movements and

the constitution of knowledge via social conflicts in project implementation and by which new social forms emerge and are consolidated or reworked through actions taken by local actors. This view allows a reconceptualization of intervention processes, as something other than just the competition and/or functional accommodation of state–society interests (Evans 1996). Actors' actions, whether associated with government or civic spaces, today are seen as partially influencing and redirecting symbols, practices and experiences⁶ in the reconstruction of everyday life and individual life-worlds.

In the following section, this theoretical perspective is illustrated through the discussion of a number of interconnected issues relating to the centrality of civic action and state-policy intervention. Vignettes of this intricate tapestry of social action are provided by reference to recent empirical cases which, broadly speaking, adopt an actor perspective.

STATE POLICY ENFORCEMENT AND GRASSROOTS CIVIC ACTION

A recent illustration of some of these political contradictions is the case of Bolivia. In 1995, I started research among *cocalero* farmers (that is, coca leaf producers) in Cochabamba. At that time national state policy units and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) were mandated to implement a package of development programmes aimed at stopping or diminishing coca leaf production. Diversification of agricultural production, credit and the establishment of agro-industries based on tropical products, plus the construction of roads, the development of commercial activities and environmental awareness were the policy measures that showed some relative success. However, local producers' considered coca substitution as a threat to their identity as citizens of their sovereign country and politically they resented such development intervention, not so much because they did not want social and economic progress, but because they interpreted this as US political intervention and interference in national and local affairs. The ambiguous representation of the policy process stimulated their growth into a strong social movement that led to the confrontation between local farmers and civil authorities over the question of the rights and wrongs of an anti-drug enforcement policy.

While the Americans saw in the cultivation and expansion of coca the origins of the cocaine drug problem, the Chapare farmers argued that the growing of the plant was their age-old rightful custom and part of their agricultural practice. Political discussion and confrontations involved

different Bolivian governments and the *cocalero* farmers' organization and the two positions proved incompatible. But as events evolved, farmers started to construct civic connections between them and the rest of Bolivian society, though the process was somewhat shaky, since the civic movement hinged on issues of legality and illegality, thus offering new space for a strong social movement to develop over an 11-year period which sporadically resulted in violence. In positive terms this led to civic protests seeking greater local autonomy and democracy.

The *cocalero* movement constructed partial connections between them and other Bolivian social groups and became their representative in negotiations with state officials. In the end, farmers organized themselves into MAS (Movement towards Socialism) and deployed their interests accordingly, creating a new version of the movement. This was organized in terms of indigenous and civic issues and networks, and was aimed at reclaiming and giving legitimacy to their own local knowledge and experience as farmers and miners vis-à-vis the more traditional indigenous and modern political parties. This generated a civic movement that culminated in the presidential victory of the 22 January 2006. President Evo Morales can now claim to be the first genuine 'indigenous' head of state in Latin America.

In order to understand this complex process of civic action we need to focus on the process of policy intervention that involved the enforcement, dissemination and utilization of a dominant knowledge consensus established between the Bolivian and US governments, and which excluded the *cocaleros'* everyday life experiences and priorities. The political activation of Bolivian society is part of a long and shaky interaction between dominant 'imported' knowledge and everyday local farmer knowledge (Arce 2000, 2007; Arce and Long 2000). This resulted in a variety of social constructions that incorporated ideas, experiences, beliefs and images that gave significance to farmers' worlds and eventually contested the dominant socio-political coalition. In this respect it was the knowledge interfaces between the different actors that publicly displayed the importance of different modes of understanding and commitment to democracy, which over time generated a process of self-made citizenship grounded in democratic values.

To place emphasis solely on the administrative processes linking government and society is therefore never enough (see Swartz 1968). That is, analytically we need to go beyond the capacity of bureaucrats to implement public programmes and projects in public spaces, where participation, resistance and civic social movements are located. Such movements and group actions constantly enlarge and widen 'civic-political' accommodations and coexistence.⁷ 'The public' is then a social property that

emerges out of the struggle between the excesses of the market and normative community control.

POLICY AND SOCIAL LIFE

In a recent case study, Jinlong (2006) explores the ways in which a natural forest protection programme in China is assembled by local farm officials through the combination of sustainable forest management expert discourse and the power of local groups. This knowledge, and the interpersonal political interactions associated with it, forms the basis upon which specific forestry projects are implemented in China and a pattern of social exclusion created. This approach places ‘technical-knowledge’ issues beyond institutional analysis and provides a grounded exploration of the controversial nature of the forest protection policy design. Using an actor-oriented approach, Jinlong provides a focus for identifying some of the most critical dimensions in forestry intervention:

[L]ocal government and state forestry farm officials interpret central government policy to reinforce their own power and a slice of the forest cake. To put their interpretation in place, they need to align themselves with more influential and powerful local groups in the communities. Power associated with benefits from forest has soared, with less and less space for accessing forest. However, village people live in the forest area and used to be able to benefit from it. Nowadays it is those from far away who benefit most . . . all in the name of ‘forest protection’. (Jinlong 2006: 230)

Such policy dimensions are explored through the ethnographic study of practices, experience and everyday knowledge. This orientation brings into perspective how the social world is assembled and organized by a multiplicity of actors (Arce and Long 1992) in compliance with or resistance to a variety of intervention processes (Arce 2007; Escobar 1997; Jinlong 2006; Otsuki 2007; Torres 1997; Villarreal 1994; Vries 1992). In Jinlong’s (2006) study, forest intervention is described as a technical intervention that was manipulated by local officials and implemented as a technological approach disregarding previous modes of local forest management, thus marginalizing existing bodies of knowledge, skills and experience.

As the above quotation demonstrates, international pressure for the adoption of sustainable forest management policy entails many demanding administrative tasks. It involves both models of rational and technical administration, based on a vertical organization of knowledge and practices whose outcome and benefits are largely ambiguous and unpredictable for both local populations and forestry interveners. This tends towards the

reinforcement of the idea that any local initiative is an unwelcome challenge to forestry experts and local politicians.

Thus, today we are confronted with strong ideological and practical views that presume a consensus about the trajectory of change and offer to policy interventions the function of ordering space. This implies a set of administrative and rational procedures which are de-coupled from actual actors' experiences and actions, ignoring how interventions are politically re-situated by local officials. This has prompted a critical view of policy studies and processes of intervention – depicted as unidirectional and linear processes, imposing economic and deterministic guidelines (Long and van der Ploeg 1989). Therefore, interventions should not be conceived of as exclusively under the control of technical experts and national policy-makers.

In brief, the theoretical incorporation of social life into policy intervention processes implies the need to treat policy and policy practices as part of a more general methodological imperative aimed at reassessing the importance of interaction, transaction, exchange relations, and the significance of social encounters.⁸ This should bring into the open issues of scale, complexity, power and social re-assembling in everyday life as well as in policy intervention events. This orientation may help us to decipher what is 'the social' in processes of governance (Arce and Long 2007).

SHIFTING OPTICS: BEYOND THE STATE

One of the contemporary arenas in which we find contradictory voices and variations in the social visibility of intervention processes is concerned with general claims associated with political representations that originate from the centralized command organization of state forms of planned intervention (Long 1977). Another area relates to the policy significance of international development institutions and agencies (see Goldman 2005). However, one needs to recognize that planning issues are not new; for instance, Mannheim stated in 1948 that planned activities could exist side by side with the unplanned spheres of life, as long as the latter predominate in society (1948: 155). Yet, in rethinking issues of planned intervention, the state continues to be very much present as an entity of rational order (Scott 1998) that constantly extracts resources from society and supports a variety of coercive styles of administration. Thus recent studies present the state as constantly increasing tension between individual economic interests and national political values focusing on national integration (Kapferer 1988; Neiburg and Goldman 1998).

The lack of political integration with economic interests was, of course, explored much earlier by Lockwood (1964) and has recently being taken up

again by Archer in her critical analysis of culture and agency (1985) where she convincingly challenges the ‘cultural myth of integration’ – so important to British structural-functionalism (also *see* Vincent 1978: 184–90). These discussions have contributed to demonstrating how processes, such as transnational migration (Inda and Rosaldo 2002) and political-ethnic violence (Krohn-Hansen 1994; Stepputat 2000) analytically challenge the representation of state sovereignty as an integrated value system, which is democratically and legally recognized for the control and management of civil society. This critical and reflexive view redirects us to recognize multiple sources of authority and power, while at the same time moving us conceptually beyond a simple recognition of the organizing nature and knowledge of state ‘holistic’ views of planned change and its rationality (Herzfeld 2005; Long 2001; Murray Li 2005; Sivaramakrishan 2005).

DISCOURSES AND POLITICAL SPACES: ACCOMMODATING SOCIAL ACTION

Analyses of western discourses on development demonstrate how international policies of development have shaped national policy fields and arenas of legitimation, thus constituting and reproducing national bureaucratic practices (Ferguson 1990). This perspective, challenges once again the assumed integrated nature of state policy intervention. The novelty of this point of view is that it contributes to a closer understanding of government policy and implementation as practised. This focus highlights the political consequences of contemporary global development discourse and its different political functions (Gardner and Lewis 2000; Olivier de Sardan 2005).

Exploring the discursive nature of politics in development contributes to an understanding of the multiplicity of policy arenas that arise through the way the state attempts to coopt civil society groups and entrap them in a field of functional and ‘participatory’ political relations. These relations, however, tend to widen the repertoire of policy narratives and discursive spaces that emphasize difference rather than homogeneity (Arce and Long 2000; Crewe and Harrison 1998; Grillo 1997; Olivier de Sardan 2005).

Recent studies have identified the ‘political nature’ of such openings (Fox 2007) and revealed significant gaps of interpretation between actors’ narratives of their political experiences and researchers’ interpretations of these same events.⁹ Transitions to democracy and the free market economy (Paley 2002) have exposed once more the contradictory nature of public policy intervention, combining expert knowledge, science and normative control, in the reconstruction from above of these newly formed ‘global

democracies'. This process has led to further local conflicts that result from the fact that government policy decisions cannot reconcile widely different citizens' private interests and public values. In addition, the institutions involved have tended to represent the nature of the social tension between expert modes of knowledge and peoples' knowledge repertoires too simplistically, thus generating unnecessary obstacles in collaborative planning (Abram 1998).

This lack of strategic understanding of the nature of political interactions and how these amplify conflicts between central bureaucracies and local people have undermined the possibility of restoring legitimacy to central policies. Hence a generalized lack of political trust has questioned the democratic value of contemporary plurality and has led to larger divisions and networks between different local interests. In this context, sporadic political eruptions have contributed to a negative view of institutional policy and its incapacity to deliver public results (Hajer 2003a). However, a proliferation of empirically based studies on contemporary policy issues led Booth (1994) to suggest that a new intellectual style of micro-sociological research was emerging that challenged the macro interpretations 'of neo-Marxist development sociology – peripheral capitalism, agrarian transitions, and so forth – but also the official ideologies and institutions of rural planning and agricultural modernization'.¹⁰

Towards the end of the 1990s, one notes a revival in theoretical interest vis-à-vis rethinking local and practical dimensions of global processes (Long 2000). This marked a renewed interest in action theory,¹¹ addressing contemporary issues, as perceived as situations and events which could not be reduced to individual intentions, rationality or pure calculations. In other words, cognitive approaches and decision-making analysis were seen problematic in their explanations of social action.¹² Hence, the repositioning of 'the social' and the 'social actor' through focusing on knowledge processes became a central concern in the field of rural development and policy intervention (see Hobart 1993).

Knowledge and science were always part of both modernization and neo-Marxist discourses but they were conceived mainly as static resources. It was only when knowledge was finally conceptualized as part of the social reconstruction of the processes of development and ethnographically documented in people's everyday knowledge interactions with 'experts' that one realized its significance for questioning (implicitly or explicitly) the appropriateness of planned interventions and their impact on social life (Arce and Fisher 2007). Furthermore, these social encounters contributed to local peoples' self-awareness and enhanced their own capacity to organize democratic spaces.

This challenged the postmodernist notion that western power-knowledge

regimes exclusively shape the responses and actions of so-called ‘subaltern groups’ (Olivier de Sardan 2005). Rather, it was the value of lived-in experience, everyday practice, and processes of reflexivity – or as Uzeda (2005: 350) puts it ‘the arabesque of local knowledge’ – that were identified as critical to the emergence socio-political struggles committed to pursuing democratic values (Arce and Long 2007: 101–2). This ‘reality’ finally oriented us to conceptualise policy interventions around actors’ properties of reassembling actions, bodies of knowledge and generating space for change (McGee 2004).

MODES OF IGNORANCE AND AMBIGUITY IN POLICY INTERVENTION

In contrast to the position of Mosse, I argue that social scientists seeking to study and analyse policy intervention should not accord evaluation techniques a pre-eminent role in explaining the social life of interventions, even though they may recognize that policy evaluation techniques can be important components in legitimating policy practices.

The legitimation of policy is composed of a complex array of relations and language games, value contestations and ways of deploying various technical, institutional, political and civic materials, as well as organizational and cultural resources (see Greenhouse 2005). Above all, it is the social life of development that directs our attention to actors’ (in)ability to reinterpret institutional scripts and to study the importance of analysing policy encounters and the emergent properties involving different actors, as well as the legitimating function of policy practices.¹³

Performances based on institutional interpretation and social interaction have the capacity to develop spaces that potentially can de-institutionalize existing habits of organization, thus creating intervals for cooperation and communication, and building interpersonal support and exchange networks based on frequent and extended encounters. Hence, not only is it essential to remember the significance and creativity of human action in re-imagining policy intervention, but it is also necessary to recognize the significance of institutional conditions for stimulating self-awareness as to the limits of policy intervention. This is a central issue that Mosse (2005) fails to address effectively in his ethnography of aid policy and practice.

There is no doubt that it is important to distinguish between the interests of experts in the marketplace of development and the equilibrium and adaptive conditions (values) of, what Mosse calls, ‘a tribal livelihood’ at the frontiers of development intervention. However, we should not reduce this to an institutional, reciprocal and restrictive mechanism, whereby the

'morality of international cooperation' refers exclusively to the interests of the West and to the ignorance and adaptive passivity of beneficiaries, at the frontiers of development. A policy discontinuity brought under control by institutional techniques of legitimation (cf. Mosse 2005) should not then be simply represented as a development process incessantly driven to extend the relations of 'development cooperation' and policy legitimacy. Instead we should fully recognize the variety of knowledge, spaces and actors' agency and ability to coordinate in these development encounters. This may help us to move beyond the constant lament against colonial traditions and the effects of international development policy and, instead, focus on the modern untranslatable conditions of 'cultural scripts' embedded in global development networks and usually based on miscommunication and ignorance (Hobart 1993).

If we open up the components in Mosse's study (2005), which he characterizes using the metaphor of 'cultivating development', we are confronted with the inefficient results of UK 'frontier' intervention strategy. Here the question to ask is, how likely are these so-called 'ignorant' experts (see Hobart 1993: 1–30) able to address the negative properties of specialization so as to take account of the social effects of the fragmentation of knowledge and inadequacies of technocratic rationality that permeate the practical environment of contemporary development experts? At the same time, is our growing awareness of knowledge differentiation and its social effects simply submitting ourselves to the current jargon of the development industry, thus further blurring the difference between advocacy and political anthropological analysis¹⁴ and therefore increasing existing modes of ignorance and ambiguity? Clearly it is important to minimize the social effects of rationalist intervention trajectories, strategies and institutional policy control procedures that implement remedial measures, which compel people to follow paths of transformation mapped out by experts. Grappling with issues of civic society participation and the significance of public spaces is politically important and requires a return once again to questions of intervention.

CREATIVITY, SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS AND REFLEXIVITY

The sociological contributions of Etzioni (1968) on knowledge processes as a window on contemporary society, together with Touraine's (1985) contribution on social movements, have prompted Joas (1996) to assert that social transformation is not the result of the capacity of 'a state that has become capable of universal planning, but [of] an increase in the capacity

of society to influence itself' (Joas 1996: 238). In my view, this statement opens up the possibility of assessing the significance of political reflection and action in contemporary intervention processes. That is, Joas's important analytical summary of the relevant characteristics of contemporary state–civic society relations stresses the need to locate changes and to explain heterogeneity in contested contemporary political settings. This encompasses a concern for the dynamics of policy interdependence and the values of both state and civic society interfaces, or what Fox (2007) calls the 'public spaces of citizenship'. These spaces are intervals of time and terrain that fall partially outside the domain of the state and are a precondition for citizen engagement – that is, as something other than just a space for the clash of individual interests or the performance of rituals of legitimation.

In his book on accountability politics, Jonathan Fox (2007) found that 'the most significant innovations in accountable rural governance were peoples' independent actions to move away from "traditional" political parties' (2007: 332). He mentions that local policy initiatives in Mexico, such as community police in the state of Guerrero, Chiapas's good governance councils and Oaxaca's indigenous municipal self-governance, have stimulated the participation of their migrant populations in raising the necessary resources to match federal government funds earmarked for social investment. These voices from the grassroots even held the World Bank accountable for 'its pro-participation discourse' (Fox 2007: 333). These situations and events are presented by Fox as manifestations of civic activity that open up political spaces and new processes of accountability. Fox goes on to argue that it was the impossibility of Mexican traditional parties to control these new political spaces, especially after 1997, that created the possibility for Community Food Councils to defend and fight for the control of the rural food store programme. Later 'the relative nonpartisan management' of the government's Opportunities Programme (Fox 2007: 333–4) generated, following the 2000 elections, a new discourse of 'transparency and accountability', 'but it was the independent media, civil society organizations, and social movements that were primarily responsible for keeping those issues on the agenda' (Fox 2007: 334).¹⁵

It seems that a mobilized civil society can make a difference in reassembling political accountability, although this tendency is in need of more comparative analysis (Fox 2007: 334). Using Hirschman's (1970) concepts of 'exit' and 'voice', Fox convincingly demonstrates that migration is not just an individual act, nor a simple sending back of remittances from the US to Mexico. Such population mobility is also about learning how to create political spaces in the US and Mexico. Fox, for example, shows how political actors with experiences of migration can, after their return, challenge 'old' Mexican party styles of politics. This political awareness

– in part a direct result of peoples’ experience in the US – led to fascinating discussions on the ‘directionality’ of migrant political experience and the nature of political repositioning. This characterized how people exit to work abroad and yet eventually develop a political engagement that challenges powerful images and ‘other voices’ supporting both segregation and discrimination in the US and social exclusion in Mexico. Thus, Mexican migrants seem to transcend traditional interpretations and this provides Fox with a different way of viewing migration mobility. In this way, peoples’ experiences seem to be one precondition for redefining policy objects and political agents within local populations.

According to Fox, in Mexico this knowledge-mobility process has the potential to achieve civil vertical integration and a more active and engaged civil society for tackling social issues. Thus, in Fox, the policy actions of civil society are presented as a ‘policy pathway’ through which local campaigns lead to transparency and accountability. Knowledge and experience are thus relational processes involving ‘two cross-cutting issues: positioning and scale, which are not controlled by the government, but by the ‘agency’ of social actors who claim and enforce their rights vis-à-vis the state in the US and Mexico. This process of empowerment involves transformation in power relations in ‘three interlocking arenas – within society, within the state, and between state and society’ (Fox 2007 335).¹⁶

In other words, knowledge, experience and mobility (agency) in a world increasingly interconnected have triggered off a form of social action based on blended public and private repertoires (through transnational migration) – a process that redefines notions of traditional policy intervention and does not correspond with market or community frameworks. This blending of repertoires emerges out of the combination of experiences and struggles that take place vis-à-vis peoples’ life-experiences and larger processes, such as immigration laws, the cumulative pluralist impact of society organizations and the effects of events such as transnational migration, which today is one of the main reorganizers of contemporary rural life in Mexico, and an important contributor to the opening up of political spaces. These spaces are larger in origin than the locality in which they develop and represent a kind of grassroots creative commitment to the solidarity of social action and to an autonomous and coordinated type of emancipatory politics (see Blanco 2009).

RETHINKING POLICY INTERVENTION

Focusing on these various examples of civic action and policy intervention has the advantage of giving analytical space to social interactions,

connections and disconnections in the development process. This immediately helps us to conceptually locate ambiguity, as one of the properties of intervention which, together with systematic modes of ignorance, perpetuate the modernity-assembled active present and the public institutionalization of national government.

A focus on situations and events¹⁷ locates policy intervention within the flow of social life, and not simply as part of a rational planning procedure associated with institutional intervention. Social life is highly diverse and replete with multiple realities and practices that may not coincide with the margins of the nation-state, or with the eminent collapse or failure of a government or with the scope of a particular policy intervention. In this respect, policies are part of an anthropology/sociology of action involving not just a variety of courses of action and connectivity, but also binding people together in policy and political situations. This is not to be achieved by means–end reasoning, but by the experience of how a diverse nature of associative ties interact, thus generating a critical and reflexive ‘end-in-view’ set of properties (Dewey 1927 [1954]) that organize social action (Joas 1996).

This orientation shows a concern for how various actors or parties organize themselves and their actions to create or dissolve boundaries, thus generating unexpected outcomes. It also contests the common ground between ‘the motives’¹⁸ of government policies, peoples’ political actions, and their different feelings and interpretations of these processes. Here the point of departure is to explore issues that relate to the actors’ capacities for dealing with new situations in their life-worlds.

This lived-in set of situations is actor rather than a policy-observer defined. It involves discovering how a policy intervention is constituted and performed. These elements may reveal the reordering of the world, deploying images of the past and future in the here and now of actors’ existence, bringing a sense of relative security and partial insecurity, creating a space for ‘contemporary anxiety’ about political ideologies out of touch with practices, dispositions, and the limits of social actors’ life-spaces and their sense of being in the world.

Obviously, today’s situations of policy entail an ambiguous and complex mixture of how the political events of democratization affect the capacity of society to influence itself, reversing or not some of the undesirable social effects of the rapid process of contemporary differentiation.

Ye Jingzhong et al. (2005: 3) report that in China there are approximately 150 million ‘farmers’ working in urban areas and that population is increasing by 5 million a year. This population movement, favoured by communities and local government actors, is presumed to facilitate the appropriate strengthening of the regional economy. However, serious

doubts have been raised about the social effects that such labour migration has on left-behind children¹⁹ in China. The study states there are 20 million left-behind children in China, whose basic rights of education, safety and secure livelihoods are threatened by the existing policy of modernization that has dramatically worsened the quality of life of rural children and their grandparent population.

The study recognizes that migration has increased farmers' incomes and accelerated the economic development of urban areas. However, the situation of left-behind children has now been widely reported by the media, academic studies, and international organizations (UN). And this coverage of the issue eventually orientated civic society to start paying attention, especially to those extreme and distressing situations, wherein it was reported that the majority of children kidnapped and sold were from migrant families. When, finally, public voices started to manifest their concern and relevant institutions and state departments began to apply policy measures, it emerged that some regions demanded solutions for left-behind children, and civic organizations (committees) emerged together with parents and teachers who signed contracts to deal with the children's needs and established novel forms of guardianship.

In other places, it was the army and police who took the lead by establishing children's safety and information systems for tracing missing children. Ye Jingzhong et al.'s 2005 study brings to light an urgent policy issue, a collective social drama, based on first-hand research experience that provides clear insights into the measures and relations that should be set in place to rectify the social problem. Nevertheless, there remain a number of varied courses of action that have been proposed to address and alleviate this critical problem. In short, there remains a degree of uncertainty as to how to tackle the problem in the context of China's modernization project that fluctuates between the 'realities' of the market, issues of individual freedom and nostalgic memories of community that offer security and quality of life.

There is no doubt that, in the objectification of the social problem and policy measures, the issue is experienced differently at local level. However, it seems that the civic orientation with its different courses of action tends towards a redefinition of agents of change within local populations and new modes of leadership and institutional commitments. It is here that the notion of solidarity may help us to understand that actions to provide solutions to social problems eventually are a result of reflecting on the social effects of economic policies. They also underline that individual autonomy cannot make acceptable the exclusion of 'others' (see Croll 1993). In other words, by experiencing new relations between state institutions, school, village and family, the boundaries of responsibility

of private and public relations became more flexible and redefined. One also should point out that a degree of anxiety and emotional deprivation, between left-behind children and migrant families has generated tensions and divisions concerning the expectations of policy intervention and, in the context of media, certain negative sanctions.

It is interesting to note that the media presented this issue to the public by delivering emotional accounts and stressing a sense of nostalgia for rural communities experiencing dramatic changes and insecurity. Thus, '[t]he left-behind children were losing the nature of diligence and simplicity. Their objective was no longer to make a living through hard work but to make money through migrant wage labour. Few of them set their minds on staying in rural areas' (Ye Jingzhong et al. 2005: 9).

The phenomenon of left-behind children became a public drama (Hajer 2003b) that led to a public recognition of the social and political effects of migration and the uncertainties and fragilities of modernization in China. It also represented a clear call for localized intervention. This did not take the form of an official discourse, but was rooted in grassroots and civic narratives that demanded from the authorities the resolution of a modern predicament of everyday life. This contributed to the repositioning of actors vis-à-vis each other and public authorities in recognition that individual moral choices and uncertainty have displaced community solidarity from real life. The critical event generated a series of social interfaces aimed at managing the situation of the left-behind children and, in the process, redefined policy intervention. Hence this became an issue at the margins of the market and in part a return to a feeling for solidarity, which is part of individuals' and social groups' creativity searching for partial connections in order to assert the sense of public common good. This civically blended social concern and peoples' democratic rights to participate and act in the affairs of society.

In my view, the above illustration shows the importance of ambiguity in controversies over knowledge of migration, protest and social values embedded in the social differentiation process and in the tinkering with social problems of such left-behind children. Institutional and mass-media imaginations surrounding competition, negotiation and solidarity constitute a field of interactions mediating and trying to control expressive manifestations of the materiality and political dimensions of the social. As such, emergent properties are not just a question of experts' actions or their expert capacity and ability to enact a set of moral or rational means-end practices in order to legitimize a policy model. A way to elucidate and analyse knowledge and social conflict in policy intervention processes is to depict how actors' create space between various possible courses of action in order to resolve their everyday problems.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear in this characterisation of policy intervention that we need to look for peoples' awareness of the interface between modes of knowledge, language, discourses and the ambiguity of differentiation and, thus, how these often relate to the global interdependence of social interactions and differentiation (Hetherington and Munro 1997), which affect the constitution of particular political fields and arenas. Here we finally move beyond Bailey's contribution to understanding political competition, which he sees as the action between a set of rules that specify the nature of the reward and orientate actors' competition.

In contradistinction, the contemporary field of interdependent social and political interactions places no limits on the combination of global processes and local political and technological dangers. This includes the type of information involved and actors' engagement in what they understand as their contemporary livelihood and democratic rights afforded to them by their experiences of differentiation.²⁰ The conclusion one can draw from this is that contemporary differentiation processes raise new policy issues, which are more attuned to civic controversies, as collective political reflexivity, rather than to the demise of traditional or the maintenance of marginalized groups (Janvry 1981).

In summary, the perspective of analysing localized policy intervention, both as situations and events, is geared to providing a baseline that addresses the significance and relevance of social reforms and the idea of solidarity. It also is an attempt to bring out the potential usefulness and problematic elements of contemporary policy intervention models and approaches. In this vein, the chapter makes five main points in relation to the significance of policy intervention in the field of the anthropology of development.

1. Literature on policy intervention, whether of the rational goal-oriented theoretical variety or of that based on a dominant social order management model, conceptualizes policy intervention as an objective reality measurable in terms of universal means-end reasoning and applied to interpreting governmentality and analysing social interconnections/human action in situations of policy intervention within the sphere of the modern state, and between the state and its citizens. Important as they are, these approaches have paid little attention to the dynamics of local transformations, for instance, to the countertendencies that lead to new political or organizational alignments within existing state organizations and institutional regimes.

2. Rather than viewing contemporary rural–urban transformations in terms of binary end states based on tradition–modernity or *Gemeinschaft–Gesellschaft* types, policy intervention can be thought of as a situation that mutates from being understood as a property of policy-makers, planners and bureaucrats (who possess specialized knowledge) to becoming embedded in long-standing local arrangements, not just as a policy object, but also in the form of problem-solving repertoires on which people draw. These repertoires are based not on fixing final-ends but on preceding images and experiences that serve the choice of ends by delimiting the challenges actors choose to tackle. The notion of a problem-solving repertoire encompasses a more complex combination of social actions vis-à-vis policy intervention than the traditional explanation of people rationally adjusting to means and ends of the market or community policies (for a discussion on these issues, see Bulmer 1986: 223–42). Instead, policy intervention is part of a set of situations in which policy is just another course of action, worked out, embedded and redeployed through actors' feelings and practices (Hastrup and Hervik 1994; Turner and Bruner 1986). This constitutes actor appreciations of the social environment and different potential political arenas. A response to policy intervention needs to interconnect several elements and make itself bodily present in a particular situation.
3. Mainstream development policy literature treats global political configurations as part of a relatively undifferentiated universal capitalism or a linear global process within which social movements, standards, knowledge and skills are expected to flow unabated from the freedom of the market to the collective security of community. In these representations, policy interventions universally influence how people construct themselves, thereby developing local norms of conduct and/or resistance. Actors, therefore, contribute (although not necessarily consciously) to governance models of social order, which are subjected to the categorizing system of experts (Shore and Wright 1997) who organize surveillance techniques and patrol the boundaries of contemporary society with policy texts.

The above representations of policy needs require rethinking in order to appreciate the creativity of social action in the constant recreation of social worlds and existing institutions (Arce and Long 2000), including the crucial links that exist between the sense of social belonging and the practical dimensions of everyday life. Indeed, the main thrust of this chapter has been to reveal the relevance that civic actions can have for rethinking policy intervention. What we need now is a theoretically informed body of detailed ethnographic case

studies that focus on actors' knowledge and strategies in conditions of solidarity, interactions and social change. On the basis of this, we can reposition knowledge and social protest in policy intervention studies.

4. A description and analysis of policy intervention is bound to the ethnographic detection and understanding of micro–macro or local–global relations in 'grounded and situated capitalism'. In this respect, it is possible to study when and how political objects/artefacts are deployed in the presence of policy intervention, and how their circulation contributes to the emergence of new social forms and visions of society.
5. Therefore, a re-conceptualization of policy intervention, as deploying potential interactions and not just destroying existing social relations (that is, the collapse or failure of the notions of state, market and community), presents an agenda whereby policy intervention is represented as made up of processes of 'objectivation' and 'artefactualization', between ideas of the state, market, society and modern social change.

Finally, if my analysis of policy intervention is valid – and I hope I have shown that it is – then what we have here is an active social field bundling together a series of social, natural, technical, economic and political encounters (or arenas) that throw light on the issues of civic participation, which in the end also encompass the larger questions of liberation, domination and exploitation within modern political regimes.

This chapter has proposed the use of an interactional approach to policy intervention issues, and has traced theoretically the significance of encounters between the fields of social life and policy interventions (encompassing knowledge, protest, and emergent political spaces). This is a focus of enquiry driven by an actor-oriented perspective and carries with it a different expectation in relation to the politics of 'spaces for change' constructed by the 'exit and voice' of mobile actors and their social actions. Indeed, this is a rather different approach from the more traditional assumptions of policy intervention which view intervention as a residual category of state institutions characterised by vertical and hierarchical organization of the 'governance machine'. Nevertheless, I have tried to avoid assuming that government institutions are irrelevant and have sought to look critically beyond the dichotomy of market/individual freedom versus collective/community responsibility. As Dewey once observed, 'looking in the wrong place for the public may posit the danger that we may lose sight of the location of the state' (1927 [1954]: 37) and indeed, we may add, the importance of policy intervention as a mode of social enquiry.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Eleanor Fisher for editing and commenting on several earlier versions of this chapter. Thanks are also due to Kei Otsuki for her insightful comments on how to organize this chapter, and to Norman Long for his generous inputs.
2. This idea of complex emergent properties (Handelman 1976) is rather different from Bailey's (see 1969) orientation which places interactions in a larger frame, often featuring group identities based on collective political strategy. In contrast, Handelman stresses the significance of cumulative interactions, as history and expansion of the intervention field, but also in the creation of a series of arenas. This brings back the issue of how to avoid, in interactional analysis, the reduction of social interactions to cause-and-effect explanations as the single most important factor constructing social life.
3. As systematic knowledge increases, so do the systematic modes of ignorance that arise out of the specialization and thus fragmentation of development policy expertise, and the inappropriateness of rationalistic assumptions (see Hobart 1993). This process of specialization tends to generate conflictive encounters between different individuals and groups. This has generated conceptually the contemporary idea that knowledge is socially distributed.
4. These texts show that policies – in this case, aid policies – may not transform local feelings of opposition to policy intervention. Behind these practices of participating in development projects and programmes, there are of course 'hidden transcripts'. This constitutes an important methodological step for identifying how dominant power works within existing projects (often referred to as 'hegemony'). Certainly, this approach could expand our understanding of the dialectics of compliance and opposition (Fox and Starn 1997). Nevertheless, it does not contribute to changing our assumptions about human action within the classical model of development policy and the conduct of beneficiaries.
5. The notion of 'interface' in Whitten and Whitten (1972) refers to the interface between subsystems and whole systems and whole systems themselves, while in Long (1989) interface focuses on the critical points that generate emergent properties. Although both positions are related to the significance of social action, Long's interface is oriented to dealing with social change and not merely the analytical integration of everyday life and history. Rather than stress social order or simply reciprocities as a unifying frame, Long highlights the tensions, conflicts and struggles. Here, continuity and discontinuity constitute dynamic processes, rather than being based on a principle of homeostasis, balance or equilibrium. This distinguishes the actor-oriented approach from Barth's game theory model. Another author, whom I referred to earlier, who uses the concept of interface is Archer (1985). She does so in order to demystify what she calls the 'myth of cultural integration' involving the perennial search for a better explanatory form. In this she innovatively re-examines the notion of 'cultural structure'.
6. It is interesting to note that Swartz (1968) questioned the assumption of coincidence between government and society and stressed the importance of the concept of 'field', stating that one needed to supplement this with the concept of 'arena', which includes those people indirectly involved in a political process. Field and arena expand and contract in relation to each other.
7. These spaces for the deliberation of civil society have been called: by Fung and Wright (2003) 'empowered participatory governance', by Evans (1997) 'state-society synergy', by Avritzer (2002) 'participatory publics', by Bebbington et al. (2006) 'bargaining spaces', by De Sousa Santos (2005) 'democratizing democracy', by Ackerman (2004) 'co-governance' and by Cornwall (2002) 'state invited spaces' (quoted from Fox 2007: 216).
8. For a discussion of how to treat interactions, transactions and exchange, *see* Homans (1961), Ekeh (1974), Whitten and Whitten (1972) and Handelman (1976).
9. The background to these studies is the period of political transitions that arose during

the 1990s in Chile, South Africa and Eastern Europe. This provided opportunities for analysing cases of political openings for peoples' grassroots actions and social movements (focusing on resistance or participation).

10. The new research agenda included: first, studies of the heterogeneity of agrarian structures and the dynamic of farming systems (Long and van der Ploeg 1989); second, policy studies that work downwards from the national level to particular sectoral institutions and programmes (Grindle 1980; McClintock 1980) third, ethnographies working upwards from social actor practices for assessing the significance of 'the space for change' (Arce and Long 1992; Long 1989; Arce et al. 1994); and fourth, studies stressing the creativity of indigenous and local knowledge (Chambers 1983; Richards 1985; Sillitoe 1998) in rural transformations.
11. See Joan Vincent's much earlier paper (1978) on this issue and the significance of political anthropology in action theory.
12. See Vincent for the difference between action theory in political anthropology and behaviouralism in social psychology and political science (1978: 175).
13. For a recent discussion on this issue see Rossi' report (2004) on 'Order and Disjuncture: theoretical shifts in the anthropology of aid and development'. This report is an interesting account of recent research in the anthropology of development, yet it reproduces the same ambiguous discussion on the issue of agency and structure, despite assurances from the author on the novelty of the present discussion and its difference vis-à-vis the earlier 'impasse' discussion of the 1990s in development studies.
14. On this issue see Hastrup et al. (1990).
15. It is interesting to note that Foweraker (2001), drawing cases from Chile and Brazil, reported that grassroots organizational experience had accumulated over the years in Latin America and today forms part of civil society and grassroots organization, resulting in an activism ever more plural. This adaptation to 'the conditions of democratic rule and neoliberal policy prescriptions' may explain: first, the decline of social movements or their transformations (or both), and second, the emphasis on negotiation rather than mobilization and an increasing interaction with state agencies' (Foweraker 2001: 839–41).
16. Fox distinguishes empowerment in terms of social actors' subjective capacities as against rights that are institutionally guaranteed entitlements. 'Actually existing rights are those that are strong enough to constitute enforceable claims on the state' (Fox 2007: 335, quoting Tilly).
17. In Gluckman's view (1964: 159), an understanding of events affecting the everyday lives of people, such as the effect of rainfall, soil types, books and language differences, means that social scientists should not distinguish between exclusive domains of practice associated with the social, political or life sciences. He goes on to argue that any event which influences how men live together may thus be part of the field which an anthropologist studies (comments by Arce and Long 2007).
18. That is, a public vocabulary legitimizing a political action (see Wright Mills, 1959).
19. These are sons and daughters of farmers. The father and sometimes father and mother work in urban areas.
20. Contemporary processes of differentiation extend well beyond issues of legitimation or actors' standing outside existing orders. See the case of Bolivia coca farmers' producers (Arce 2000, 2007).

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12. Stalemate of participation: participatory village development planning for poverty alleviation in China¹

Li Xiaoyun and Liu Xiaoqian

INTRODUCTION

The populist notion and practice of participatory development was instigated in China by international organizations in the 1990s and aimed at facilitating change in China's system of top-down planning. This has resulted in a complex situation. The spread of such a project-based participatory approach – applied to both overseas donor and government-funded interventions – led, in the 2000s, to its scaling up to influence national policy-making. Its achievements, however, present uneven evidence. On the one hand, it has levered open arenas once closed off to the voice of citizens or to public scrutiny, and draws upon alternative visions of democracy. Such moves have helped to widen the political space so that citizens can play more of a part in the making and the shaping of decisions that affect their lives (Brock et al. 2001; Webster and Engberg-Pederson 2002). The rich experience gained has become a 'model' for 'mainstreaming' at the macro level (Li Xiaoyun 1999), and as a means of further broadening the scope of policy-making through so-called 'bilateral policy dialogue'. This has been ongoing with bilateral agreements, and some positive effects of the participation can be articulated. For example, official and political discourse has changed to being 'people-centered'; public hearings concerning public goods delivery in urban management have become widely practiced; and likewise with 'information transparency boards' concerned with rural governance; and there is more evidence and recognition of 'ordered democracy' found in the official Communist Party document of the seventeenth Congress. On the other hand, however, although the open policy strategy of acquiring benefit for today from the past as well as from the West has opened up space to improve efficiency and effectiveness in a

programmatic way, the opportunity for real empowerment is still limited. Participation therefore has been partially accepted, but only on 'one leg'. Nevertheless, the battle has actually changed the structure that has dominated the country, and has created interesting interactions among the different actors involved, leading to a complex entanglement of actor relations.

The large-scale application of village-level participatory planning exercises in China over the past five years is a typical example. This longstanding and costly process was aimed at improving fund targeting for poverty reduction and thus at improving program efficiency. At the same time, it aimed to decentralize decision-making powers to the poor in order to shift poverty reduction planning from 'traditional top-down to participatory bottom-up' (Li Xiaoyun 2006). As a result, the targeting accuracy has, over time, been substantially improved. However, varied results from all over the country indicate that the process has not sufficiently lived up to the promise of empowering villagers by shifting to them control over decision-making vis-à-vis resources (Li Xiaoyun 2006). In fact, such processes of participation as have been applied have been themselves transformed by the multiple actors involved, both individually and collectively, and in a manner much more complicated than was monolithically expected.

Social actors in development have been depicted as social constituencies belonging to different 'life-worlds' and separated by epistemological and social 'interfaces' (Rossi 2006). Life-worlds exist as specific time, space and experiential configurations, where some coexist, some clash, some mix, and others separate or retreat into themselves. This generates different combinational patterns, which are variously described in the literature in terms of 'syncretism', 'hybridization', 'creolization', and 'cyborgs' (Arce and Long 2000). All forms of external intervention necessarily enter the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way they are mediated and transformed by the same actors and structure (Long 2001). This chapter, which primarily adopts an actor-centered approach, aims to identify multiple outcomes, such as anonymous control by powerful groups, hidden resistance by villagers, and the production of new ways of controlling and resisting that arise from the interplay of external and internal aspects. In addition, we assess the role, interests and perspectives of the actors involved in empowerment processes driven by government intervention. Theoretically, while actors affected by different social logics may accommodate to each other's viewpoints, the interfaces – wherein different types of knowledge and power are manifest – reveal how various actors are contextually and closely interconnected through political, economic and cultural ties, with the result that development interventions are transformed and social change

is reinforced. The analysis demonstrates how different actors grasped the opportunities created by government intervention either in order to reinforce their own powers and/or to form new types of social relations. The chapter also demonstrates the usefulness of combining discursive and actor perspectives when analysing social change. It also underlines how certain modes of internal agency may generate significant changes in processes of external intervention.

NARRATIVES OF POVERTY AND POVERTY REDUCTION POLICY IN CHINA

As the result of the well-known economic reforms instituted in 1978 onwards, China has made remarkable progress in the alleviation of rural poverty.² In 1986, China set up the Leading Group Office for Poverty Reduction and Development of the State Council for national level planning and management of the poverty reduction fund. However, the deceleration of rural poverty has slowed down since the 1990s. There are two reasons attributed to this. On the one hand, the large proportion of remaining rural poverty is concentrated in those areas where social, economic and cultural conditions are lagging. Therefore the regional economic approach that used to be the major force for massive poverty reduction throughout the 1980s and 1990s is no longer effective in bringing benefits to the remaining poor population. On the other hand, deviations in targeting and insufficient participation of the poorest are also considered to be one of the major institutional constraints, and it was suggested that the county-targeting strategy³ should be changed (World Bank 2001). Following this circumstance, the Chinese government began to consider developing more effective targeting mechanisms that would ensure that the funds allocated would reach the hands of the poor. The Asia databank (TC 3610) was initiated to help China develop a participatory methodology for better targeting and participation. The central point of this methodology is to shift China's poverty targeting from county to village level and to further empower the poor to make decisions instead of conforming to top-down planning. The methodology, developed through intensive participatory processes, includes three major components (Li Xiaoyun et al. 2001), as follow.

Identification of Poor Villages⁴

Villagers ranked eight indicators for their village which were classified into three categories:

1. Basic livelihood: per capita annual grain yield, per capita annual cash income, proportion of households living in mud and stone houses.
2. Physical infrastructure: drinking water for humans and domestic animals, electricity coverage, road coverage.
3. Social conditions: the proportion of chronically ill women and the drop-out rate of girls from primary and middle school.

Then a two-level weighting method was used to calculate the Participatory Poverty Index of the village. The poor villages were identified according to this index. During 2002, 148 000 poor villages all over the country were selected by using this method as targets for the next ten years' resource allocation.

Participatory Village Development Planning

The process includes nine steps:

1. Collecting basic information on the village.
2. Classifying the households into different categories.
3. Identifying problems in the village relating to poverty alleviation and analysing the reasons.
4. Formulating the village development project.
5. Analysing the project's weaknesses and strengths and conducting a feasibility study.
6. Identifying the beneficiary groups and participant groups of the development project.
7. Identifying the support it needs.
8. Designing a process for implementing the project.
9. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation system for village poverty alleviation planning.

The plan is made by the village development planning group. The villagers are encouraged to use participatory tools to express their viewpoints.

The County-level Integration of Village Participatory Development Plans

Village-level development plans must be effectively integrated into county-level plans if management costs are not to be too high. Generally speaking, this includes the following five steps:

1. An overall analysis of the development needs of poor villages and an assessment of any proposed development projects.

2. The identification of goals and tasks of the county-level development plan.
3. The formulation of county-level development projects and the steps needed for their concrete implementation. This is an important link within the whole planning process, including project design, evaluation, ranking, and selection of a support system. The next two steps relate to
4. The implementation of the county poverty alleviation plan, which mainly includes the arrangement of money and time, institutional safeguards, a support system and a monitoring and evaluation system; and
5. The establishment of an integrated balance among the important components.

The county-level plan is not simply a sum of all the different village-level plans. The funds, labor and land for different project activities, and the development of the whole county have to be taken into account.

FLAUNTED PERFORMANCE AT THE MACRO LEVEL

Theoretically, accuracy of targeting can only be increased at the expense of increased management costs (Liu Dongmei 2003; World Bank 2001). For this reason, a system of village-level targeting is considered almost impossible (Liu Dongmei 2003). However, it was proved that identifying poor villages using the Participatory Poverty Index (PPI) is possible. Since 2002, the Local Office for Poverty Alleviation (LGOP), through 27 provincial Poverty Alleviation Development Offices (PADOs), has identified 148 000 poor villages, which account for 21.4 per cent of the administrative villages in China. Of these 130 827 are located in the central and western part of China, accounting for 88.4 per cent of all poor villages in China and for 26.7 per cent of the local administrative villages in those regions. In addition, 17 224 of the poorest villages located in the eastern part of China account for 11.6 per cent of the poorest villages and 8.5 per cent of the local administrative villages in the region. All these poor villages were distributed in 1861 counties across the whole country, accounting for 68.8 per cent of the total number of counties of China (*China Rural Poverty Monitoring Report 2003*). This targeting covered 83 per cent of the poverty population in China (LGOP 2004). In contrast, when the county-level targeting system was applied, there were 592 poor counties in China, accounting only for 21.9 per cent of the total number of counties in China

Table 12.1 Actual participation of the poor in village poverty alleviation planning in XX village

	No. of yes	% of yes	No. of male yes	% of male yes	No. of female yes	% of female yes
Do you know about the VPAP?	52	83.9	30	88.2	22	78.6
Are the projects formulated by farmers?	6	9.7	5	14.7	1	3.6
Do you know about the procedure for project application and approval?	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Have you participated in the formulation of the VPAP?	26	41.9	20	58.8	6	21.4
Did your family get the project?	38	61.3	21	61.8	17	60.7
Did the projects meet your urgent needs?	7	11.3	3	8.8	4	14.3
Are the majority of project households poor households?	11	17.7	5	14.7	6	21.4

and covering about 53 per cent of the poverty population (Li Xiaoyun 2006). In other words, after adopting the village-level targeting system, the county-level coverage rate of the poverty alleviation resource increased to 46.9 per cent and the coverage rate of the poor population increased to 30 per cent.

Although using this methodology to identify poor villages necessarily excludes many other villages with a similar socio-economic development level (Wang Sangui 2006; Li Xiaoyun 2006), the targeting rate is still relatively high. Table 12.1 shows the targeting rate for selected provinces.

The village development planning policy ensures that extra funds are allocated to those villages identified as 'poor'. This has meant that, first, the identified villages have easier access to poverty alleviation support. Although they account for less than 50 per cent of the total number of administrative villages in the country, these poor villages still make up 67.2 per cent of the administrative villages which have been given support (non-poor villages can also get support) (*China Rural Poverty Monitoring Report 2004*). In 2005, 49.1 per cent of the poor villages won support, while only 26.5 per cent of the non-poor did so. Second, the poor villages win, on average, more support than ordinary villages. In 2005, each poor village obtained a yearly fund of 96000 yuan (including a 12000 yuan loan) as

against only a 53 000 yuan grant and a 8000 yuan loan for the non-poor villages. Thus, compared with 2002, funds for both poor and non-poor villages have increased, but more so for those classified as ‘poor’. Third, the rate of household-level participation in the poor villages is higher than in non-poor villages. In 2005, this number was 19.8 per cent in poor villages and 9.4 per cent in non-poor villages.

In 2002, each household obtained on average of 52.5 yuan. By 2005, this had reached a much higher figure of 747.5 yuan, with the households in poor villages averaging 839.1 yuan. In the meantime, more households have achieved access to household-level project funds. In 2002, households granted projects made up 6.6 per cent of all farm households, and by 2005, this number had increased to 9.5 per cent. The proportion of households awarded household-level funds consisted of 13.3 per cent in the poor villages as against 6.2 per cent in the non-poor villages. In addition, the fund was concentrated largely on those groups with an income between 100 yuan and 5000 yuan. For those groups, the funds were increased annually – those with less than 100 yuan came within ‘the social protection group’ and those with more than 5000 yuan were not considered poor.

REINFORCED STATE POWER AND ANONYMOUS CONTROL

The poverty fund has often been reported as being misused and even corrupted at different levels. The Poverty Village Development Program (PVDP) regime strictly regulated funds being distributed to the poor counties and further to the poor villages. According to the mid-term review of the program, funds to poor counties and villages had increased steadily over the past five years (Wang Sangui 2006). This helped to regulate fund allocation in a more strategic way to serve the developmental and political goals of the program. But it also created a complex arena wherein the different social actors and their lifeworlds cross. Previously, in the absence of effective supervision, local government had always found justifications for any misuse of the fund. However, the PVDP provided an institutional framework for allocating the fund and, more importantly, opened up an arena for negotiations between the various parties, such that the poor counties, poor villages and poor households could now fight more strategically for their own interests. According to China’s political incentive system, the personal performance of officials at all levels is evaluated in terms of their ‘development’ achievements in their areas of responsibility and management. Extracting funds for development activities is an

important performance criterion for evaluating county leaders at the upper level, as well as at the level of county colleagues who are asked to comment on their leader's performance. This dual review is vital for promotion. Therefore local leaders try their best to obtain more funding – even if it requires bribing those who control the fund, justifying this as a means of obtaining vital funding for their people. For poor counties, the PVDP has become the legitimate weapon by which county officials fight against any plans to reduce or appropriate the funds designated to their counties. It is a common practice in funding-raising campaigns at all local government levels in China.

The director of a provincial poverty alleviation development office, said to me once at dinner:

Professor. Li, you have developed this methodology. It is theoretically good! But it has brought me lots of problems. I need to follow the instructions of the governors to concentrate the fund, to show a visible impact, but the county leaders whose fund will be reduced just came to my office to complain that they cannot present this to the poor villages. He mentioned that rural stability is priority work for the party and government and if those villagers mobilize to protest and appeal to our county government it will cause a big political problem.

The director continued, and maybe it was true. But did I really think he was concerned about poor villagers? He was concerned about his performance. True, if villagers really made trouble, he would also have trouble.

The PVDP has also, interestingly, become a weapon with which to negotiate with the upper level should they have plans to reallocate or even transfer the fund for other purposes. Normally if an official agrees with a decision, for instance, to take away his county's quota, then he would negotiate for personal reasons a change or possible promotion. If he complies with some senior level authority then he can also convince his colleagues in the county not to oppose it. Then he would be considered a 'good comrade' and would have a better chance of obtaining a good position or of being promoted. This also applies at the township level. However, if compliance does not necessarily lead to benefit, then presenting a consistent image would certainly give some advantage.

A township governor would aim for promotion to deputy county leader, but if not, then at least to be a department director in the county town. Mr Wang, a township governor in one of the townships visited, had recently changed to a pleasant job in the county town. No one knew how he obtained the position, but only that he was at least a good comrade. He had agreed to concentrate all five villages' quota to a single village where the county government wanted to develop a model village for

‘demonstration’ purposes. Initially he did not agree and negotiated with the county governor by explaining that all the villages had made their plan and knew that the fund would arrive after the planning. He expressed his difficulty in convincing them but to no avail. So, after he realized that the government was adamant, he went back to the villages to inform them that the fund would be delayed. One year later, only one village had received the planned fund, the others were still waiting. One of the village leaders commented that Mr Wang had promised to give them the fund but that he had since changed his job.

Within the government structure, the fund is managed by a dual system, the PADO body and a financial management body called the Department of Finance (DOF) at provincial, district and county levels. The delivery of the financial quota to different lower levels is controlled by PADO under the leadership of the governors at the different levels. The leaders in this system have to follow their upper-level line agency as well as the orders of their own direct authorities. The PADO, for example, has to take its instructions from the LGOP at national level as well as from the provincial government. Hence they often face contradictory instructions. The PVDP makes life difficult for them by causing them to devote their attention to central government as well as more local government pressures. In this way they become entangled in various brokerage roles; and no one can estimate how many packets of good quality cigarettes or famous brands of liquors, or other expensive goods, they might receive. Thus planning processes entail various types and levels of power.

One poor county PADO director said that his county government had decided to use the fund to develop dairy production and, as a consequence, some of the villages would not receive any funding. He was very afraid that the PADO at the upper level would criticize the scheme, but he said that he could not disregard the county government decision. So what he did, he explained, was to raise the necessary capital from a business company which his office had supported for over ten years.

At village level, because village leaders are elected by villagers and endorsed by the township government, they are constantly subject to control both by the villagers themselves who pursue their own specific interests and life concerns, while at the same time always having to seek approval from the township officials. Nevertheless, the very presence of the PVDP increases the socio-political leverage of local elites since it allows them to wield the principle of ‘participation’ to increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the different parties. Of course, it goes without saying that village leaders are usually very careful in dealing with township leaders in order not to offend them. Yet sometimes they align with villagers in order to secure specific resources, while on other occasions they cheat them by

withholding information or by arguing that those responsible for certain matters are not themselves but their township superiors. Furthermore, although the PVDP underlines the principles of transparency and participatory decision-making, village leaders will often call only on their sub-village group to negotiate or propose a compromise solution.

During a village field trip, villagers were once asked how their project was formulated and who made the decisions. One villager answered saying that the group leader had once asked him for his ideas about the project list proposed by the village committee. The village leader then suggested that, due to a lack of matching funds, he was prepared to put into the project some of his own money so that together with the poorer villagers they might make a success of it. The villager went on explain that 'Now the village leader and his relatives ran the business and controlled the procedure for benefit distribution. Other poor members can also get benefits, but very minor'.

When asked why the villagers did not resist, he replied: 'How can we?' Later the township leader was asked why he allowed the village leader privileges for funding. He explained that he knew how all rural activities required by the upper level relied on the support and help of village leaders. 'This leader is a good manager who can get benefits from which others can also benefit. This' he argued, 'was at least much better than that the fund be misused by the government.'

'Blueprint plans' indeed moved to become 'bottom-up ideas' through the PVDP,⁵ which has certainly challenged the existing power structure embedded in political, social and cultural settings. However, the decision-making and control over resources has not empowered the poor. The PVDP has not been able to prevent such a highly visible blueprint for 'development' ending up performing extremely sensitive political operations involving – almost invisibly under the cover of a neutral, technical mission to which no one could possibly object – the entrenchment and expansion of institutional state power (cf. Ferguson 1990).

Table 12.1 gives the survey results of one of the most successful villages that has implemented the PVDP. The table indicates clearly how this participation process takes place. 83.9 per cent of villagers interviewed knew about the PVDP, 41.9 per cent participated in the process, but only 9.7 per cent considered the projects were decided by farmers themselves. Eleven per cent regarded the projects as responding to their needs, but almost no one knew about the procedure through which the projects were actually finalized.

It is something of a paradox that government has launched this decentralized program, since it still strongly promotes rural modernization. This is reflected in the policy guidelines for rural poverty reduction

programs, which embrace both the promotion of modern agriculture and agri-business to generate scale in the rural economy, as well as measures aimed at consulting and educating farmers. These guidelines are applied during the PVDP with the requirement that the proposed projects should concentrate on a small number of activities, otherwise the fund is likely to be used inefficiently. Li Xiaoyun (1999) documents, in Indonesia, how, through the promotion of development projects, the state takes away from villagers the freedom to choose the configuration of their village and the types of agricultural practices to be practiced. In addition, poverty reduction programs develop the means to stabilize rural society but at the same time increase the disparity between the rich and poor. Local PADOs are trained to bring together these guidelines and the political agenda, to which is added more development agendas deriving from different levels. The villagers usually comply with the instructions and technical supports because it is better to get something than nothing. Hence we witness a process of manipulating or modifying the development machinery so as to improve local livelihoods in accordance with local conceptualizations of need. Alongside this, local people express their conformity with development projects in order to benefit from development within the parameters of the state rationales of modernity (Rossi 2006). It is also clear that development policies orientated to 'people first' have not been successful in modifying existing development hegemonies; instead they have provided new ways of advancing external interests while concealing the underlying political agenda (Mosse 2003). The PVDP has functioned to legitimize this process and has assisted government to improve its bureaucratic accountability without losing control of designated development agendas. Thus participation has been transformed into a useful tool for controlling and thus reinforcing the power of the state. Ferguson sharply points out that development programs may not raise the standard of living, as they are expected to do. Instead, they facilitate the expansion and entrenchment of the ruling, national ideology (Ferguson 1990). The PVDP broke down the previous power structure, creating new spaces where the actors involved could gain new knowledge and strategies, pursue their own interests and benefits, thus both losing power and then rebuilding it. Hence projects of this kind instrumentally enable the state to further its control over new hinterlands (*ibid.*).

OBEDIENCE AND HIDDEN RESISTANCE

In China, truly autonomous farmers' organizations are deemed illegal and therefore not allowed, since the party is said to represent the interests of

all farmers. This is the traditional political belief, held even by farmers, because the party was rooted in the peasantry. The state exercises control through a dual village administrative system, the village party committee nominated by the township party committee, and a village head who is elected by the villagers. According to the constitution, the whole country falls under the leadership of the party. It makes the party leader legitimately more powerful than the village head. Therefore development policies are often transformed into 'political tasks' which the village party leader has to take seriously. Usually the party leader first discusses with the village head the substance of policy and how to develop the process and procedures. The village head is usually placed under him in the hierarchy. Thus the agenda is primarily decided before opened up for public consultation. However, the PVDP has made this process somewhat difficult, and so village leaders have to deal with villagers differently. Resistance is never in opposition to exteriority in relation to power, and whoever is exercising power is, at same time, exercising resistance within a given network of power (Foucault 1976).

On visiting one of the poor villages to check if there was conflict between village leaders and villagers, one villager mentioned that originally they had a made plan under the support of the county PADO, which was intended to become a model plan to show to their upper PADO. Within the plan, there was a large component of pig rearing, because that is what the majority of villagers had agreed. However, the village head wanted to change part of the plan to focus on cattle and the villagers did not like to confront their leader. This happened just during the Chinese Spring Festival. The son of one of the villagers knew the problem and informed his friend working in the county PADO office, and the official then called the village leader to say that the plan could not be changed because it would become the 'model' plan. Finally the village leader gave up.

Sometimes village leaders, also with their own particular agenda in mind, build an alliance with villagers in order to fight against some other group interest. Once at a meeting with one of the provincial PADO leaders a village leader with five villagers arrived at his office to appeal against the county PADO taking away his village's fund to use for other purposes. The village leader said that he had announced the projects to all villagers and everyone now knew about the PVDP. The PADO director indicated that this could all be very complicated since the village leader would not easily agree to anything. Finally, he said to the group that he would ask the monitoring group to investigate their problems.

People actively engage in shaping their own worlds, rather than their actions being pre-ordered by capital or the intervention of the state (Long and Long 1992). Villagers always try their best to seize the opportunity

Table 12.2 Difference between government and farmer priorities in eight villages of four provinces of China

Government priority	Project input total	Rank of the project	Farmer priority
Road construction	2783.97	1	Road construction
Land arrangement for Resettlement	1311.30	2	Support for house building
Biogas-generating pit	527.67	3	Animal husbandry
Water for humans and animals	405.00	4	Education subsidies
Training and extension	367.00	5	Biogas development
Farmland and irrigation projects	220.00	6	Water for humans and animals

and safeguard their interests in a social manner. Instead of confronting government, villagers usually opt to follow the instructions or decisions made by higher authorities or by the village committee. Table 12.2 shows the difference between what actually is implemented and what the farmers preferred. As Scott points out, peasant modes of formal political organization are often too risky and costly and so peasants tend to avoid direct confrontation with the government. Instead, they pursue subsistence strategies and draw upon community-based resources in order to create their own internal political spaces. This allows them to pursue a variety of forms of hidden resistance, including everyday actions against government (Scott 1990). Villagers involved in poverty reduction projects are fully aware that their powers are limited – even when ‘local participation’ is high on the agenda. A central reason why this is the case in China is that the village is not permitted to open its own bank account. The fund is managed by county government via township finance units. The expenditure of such projects has to be reimbursed with the signature of the village leader, the endorsement of the township governor and finally is checked by the county PADO and DOF officers. Villagers usually adopt strategic positions in order to either resist or make compromises, or they simply follow what the government demands so that at least they gain something from such intervening projects.

Development interventions constitute important sites of contest between people and bureaucracy (Robertson 1984). In order to implement the PVDP, the government requested its technical agencies to provide technical support for planning, particularly in respect to project design. They have to evaluate the technical feasibilities of any proposals made by

villagers or local officials. As Escobar suggests, such practices are made up of a corpus of techniques which organize certain types of knowledge and power. 'The expertise of development specialists transcends the social realities of the "clients" of development, who are labeled and thus structured in particular ways. Clients are thus controlled by development and can only maneuver within the limits set by it' (Escobar 1995: 47).

After five years' experience with the PVDP, it is notable that the many changes that have occurred have been reported positively to government, even though they may remain largely unchanged in the eyes of the villagers. The PVDP has had to modify its approach from time to time and from place to place, and, facing the same fate as many other development interventions, it has 'entered the existing life-worlds of the individuals and social groups affected, and in this way they are mediated and transformed by these same actors and structure' (Long, 2001: 12). Finally, as one high-ranking state official joked, instead of this complicated and costly process, why not give the money directly to the poor?

NOTES

1. Li Xiaoyun was appointed team leader to develop this methodology, was involved in the whole process of implementation, and also undertook the mid-term review. He thus collected many different stories that occurred over last five years.
2. The absolute population in poverty in rural China decreased from 250 million in 1978 to 125 million in 1985, with an annual average decrease of 17.86 million. Thus the poverty incidence also decreased from 30.7 per cent to 14.8 per cent with an annual average progressive decline rate of 9.4 per cent. It dropped further from 125 million in 1985 to about 30 million in 2000, with an annual average decline of 7 million; poverty incidence dropped from 14.8 per cent to 3.2 per cent. In 2006 the figure dropped to 26 million.
3. In 1993, China designated 592 counties all over China as needing poverty alleviation program support. The study of Park et al. (2002) indicates that 'as time progresses, the effectiveness of targeting has been weakened and omission has increased'. In 1993, the new list of poor counties defined at national level further worsened this trend. This situation demonstrated that existing targeting mechanisms that used the county as a basis caused severe targeting deviation. The Poverty Alleviation Funds are only used for the poor living in the poorest counties as defined by the state, but this accounts for only half of the remaining population living in poverty in China. The other half, living outside these state-defined counties, are basically unable to get government poverty alleviation funding. The list of 592 poverty counties is thus no longer an appropriate method for targeting these funds towards the remaining poor.
4. Each poor county ranks all villages along the Participatory Poverty Index to prioritize which villages can be designated as 'poor villages'.
5. According to the middle-term review, over 90 per cent of the poor villages identified made a village-level development plan. However, the level of participation varied from place to place.

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13. How local politics shape intervention practices in the Xiaolongshan forest region of Gansu, NW China

Liu Jinlong

This chapter focuses on the local politics of village and township relations and examines the contradictions that arose when an attempt was made to introduce a European Community (EC) funded project to establish village committees for forest management planning. The location is a village in the Xiaolongshan Forest Region of Gansu Province, northwest China, where the Natural Forest Protection Programme (NFPP) had been implemented. The case data relate to a series of highly charged political situations that highlight both continuities and transformations in the structure of power and authority in present-day rural China. All the struggles and conflicts that followed the attempt to form a planning committee in the ten project villages were conducted in the name of forest management, but in reality they had little to do with forests at all. Forests are intimately interwoven in rural people's livelihoods, daily practices and politics, and in China the forest protection programme created arenas of struggle in which both trees and local forest dwellers usually found themselves on the losing side (Doornbos et al. 2000). The high visibility of these unresolved conflicts has spurred theoretical developments, policy interventions and institutional changes (Fairhead and Leach 2000), yet neither local actors nor researchers have developed a solid basis for resolving them. Using an actor-oriented approach (Long and Long 1992; Long 2001), this chapter reveals and describes the various actors – institutional and individual – and their lives and strategies associated with forests. That is, it details the conflicts and accommodations that have to be made in relation to forestry policy and forest use practices.

THE SETTING

The Xiaolongshan Forest Region

The Xiaolongshan Forest Region of Southeast Gansu is administered by two separate government units: the Xiaolongshan State Forestry Bureau (XSFB), directly under the supervision of the Gansu provincial government, run in the usual hierarchical style, and the county-level forest authority, which is the key body for administering forest management. Over 80 per cent of the forests are managed by the XSFB. The rest are located on collective lands and are either managed collectively or are contracted out by the village collective, under the administration of county forest bureaus, to individuals. The Xiaolongshan forest area lies in the upper reaches of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, the two longest river courses in China, within the nationally well-known Qinling range¹ and Longshan Mountain,² identified by the Chinese government as an ecologically fragile region for water and soil erosion. The region falls within a warm temperate zone and enjoys a wide variety of flora and fauna of which many are endangered species. The XSFB was established in 1962 and is responsible for 21 state forestry farms, 15 commercial service units and has a total active staff of 6232, 1166 retired people, and 694 laid-off staff who continue to enjoy a policy-based subsidy paid by the bureau. It administers an area of 12.43 million mu³ of land, of which 9.45 million mu are forest lands and a further 5.86 million mu that have some forest coverage. Its standing timber reserves are 27.71 million mu. It constitutes the largest group of state-owned forestry farms nationwide. The Elm Forest Farm, within whose bounds Estuarine is located, is one of 21 Bureau farms.

Estuarine is an administrative village in Willow Township, and Stamp County of Gansu Province. It includes 205 households and a population of 795 spread across five production teams or natural villages. It covers 1570 ha, including 140 ha of farming land, though only 55 ha lie close enough to the river bank for potential irrigation and high production. Estuarine is 5 km from township headquarters and is known to be one of the eight most scenic areas of Stamp County. The village has 63 per cent forest coverage, mostly owned by Elm Forest Farm, and is rich in tree species of white bark pine. Its major economic activities are farming, walnut production and eco-tourism. In 2004, the average net income was 1680 yuan per capita.

THE NATURAL FOREST PROTECTION PROGRAMME

The NFPP was launched to improve China's forest resources and to protect the ecological environment of its large rivers (Zhao et al. 2001). It involves a great diversity of actors – rural farmers, foresters, officials in various hierarchies of government agencies, as well as communities, state forest farms, and government institutions (Zhang et al. 2002). The areas chosen for the programme lie along the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River and the upper reaches of the Yangtze River, where natural forests have provided significant ecological value through the logging of timber and associated employment opportunities. The NFPP is responsible for afforestation, forest protection and for imposing a ban or reduction on the amount of logging in its areas. This has involved the redeployment of 1.2 million laid-off workers and has affected the subsistence needs of some 5 million people living within the forest areas (Zhang 2002). Thus the introduction of the NFPP brought with it a whole series of new social problems and contradictions (Zhang et al. 2002). In the Xiaolongshan forest region, where logging was banned, equipment was stored away, timber transportation halted, and many of the wood-processing industries shut down. The inhabitants were then required to protect the forests. However, it was simply impossible for over 1 million rural people living in this forest region to protect the natural forests and at the same time satisfy their own basic needs, most of which were related to various forestry and forest activities (Liu Jinlong 2003b).

Hence, the NFPP resulted in considerable upheaval rather than a smooth gradual process of change. Faced with these abrupt changes in forestry policy and practice, rural people, foresters, communities, and the state forest farms themselves have had to get used to, and seek, new livelihoods. In similar vein, officials have had to adopt new and unfamiliar policy laws and enforcement measures. Such social change brings with it a reconfiguring of power, knowledge and networks, and raises the question of how far the NFPP has been able to promote environmentally friendly practice.

THE EC-FUNDED VILLAGE FORESTRY MANAGEMENT PROJECT

On the basis of my long experience in the Xiaolongshan Forest region, and as part of the debate on approaches to resolving the conflict between rural livelihood improvements and environmental protection in this part

of China, I suggested in 2002 that we might pilot a village forest management planning exercise with funding from the EC. The objective was for Elm State Forest Farm, the local forestry authorities and rural farmers to jointly design and implement a plan to manage the forests. The intention was to achieve a ‘win-win’ situation by which natural forests and rare species would be protected, while at the same time local inhabitants would develop improved and more sustainable livelihoods. The programme was ambitious and had the following objectives:

- To develop unified village forestry management planning (VFMP) in each selected village through combining and coordinating forest protection with the state programme for converting farmland into forest and pasture; to co-manage the collective and state-controlled forests within village boundaries; and to set up, with the participation of local people, village forest management committees (VFMCs) in ten selected project villages.
- To promote eco-tourism, participatory land-use and landscape planning for improving local livelihoods.
- To widen people’s involvement in the implementation of the forest protection programme and help local farmers to develop cash crops by taking advantage of the organization and technical capacity of the state-owned forest farms.

The direct beneficiaries were to be those living in Estuarine and a further nine administrative villages in Willow Township. Estuarine was chosen as the pilot village. Based on the experiences gained there, the multidisciplinary team would then develop guidelines for use in the other nine selected villages. The planning would include piloting and testing the protection of unique species without setting up a protection zone, and would focus on providing technical and financial assistance, especially to poor households and rural women, to set up forest protection and environmentally friendly activities. It was hoped that the project would also provide, through the setting up of such new community-based organizations, incentives for rural farmers to organize themselves. A seed fund was made available to initiate the committees and explore ways of covering future running and management costs. In addition, the project would provide environmental education and promote farming and eco-tourism training for farmers.

As I later demonstrate, the outcomes of this pilot planning exercise highlight efforts to develop a strategy for improving livelihoods for the rural poor and for forest protection through increasing the level of participation of local farmers and their households, proved difficult. It was

obstructed, and to a degree dismantled, by the politics of local life and by the leverage exercised by actors representing dominant sector interests and institutions. Of course, neither was it made easier by the fact that these efforts coincided with the three-yearly county elections of village leaders and village committees.

LOCAL AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND POLITICS

The administrative and political set up in Estuarine is nothing special for an administrative village.⁴ Figure 13.1 provides a diagram of the local political context. The individuals named in the chart were important actors in the village elections and in the attempt to get a village planning committee elected for the EC programme. Their positions, ambitions and personal histories, together with their specific political leanings and

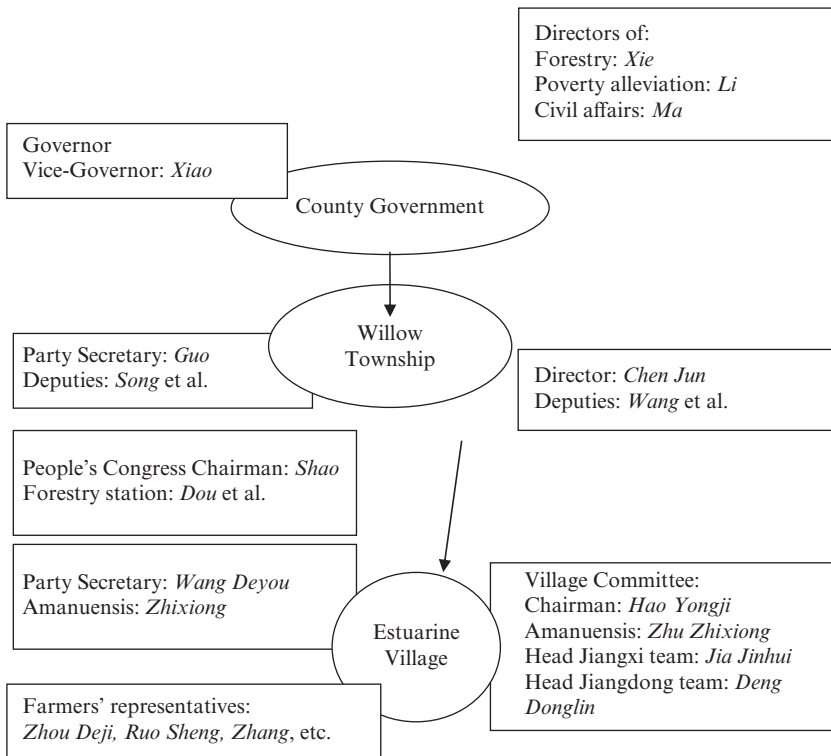


Figure 13.1 Local political organization

alliances with respect to Estuarine, all had some bearing on the outcomes of our effort. Some had years of government service or had a Communist Party background; and some were drawn from the local communities, among them those of a more lowly education and farming background. For example, Guo, the township party secretary, had worked in several township and county positions, was good at calligraphy (a skill much appreciated in Chinese culture), and had experience in dealing with people. He was transferred to Willow Township in 1998 as its director, and in 2002 was promoted to become its party secretary. His home is at the county headquarters, where his wife works in the county branch of the China Agricultural Bank. His is the most influential position in the township. Chen, the township director, had held that post since 2002. His home was also at county headquarters. He was relying on Guo's recommendation for further promotion and thus always tried to please him, often inviting him and his family to dine at the state farm restaurant. Promotion to the next level of the hierarchy gives additional power.⁵ His next promotion would take him to township party secretary level. He was 35 years old, thus young, and if he got that promotion, after one government period he could climb even further.

Song, Guo's deputy, came from a farming background. He had high school level education and when, in 1988, a provincial decision was taken to recruit local well-educated peasant farmers to be township officials, Song benefited from this policy, though he could not chair any township unit. He was over 40 years old with no prospects of promotion. His wife was a peasant and lived in the village with their two children. Like Song, Shao, chairman of the township people's congress, also had family living in the rural communities. These men had less power in township matters but had strong networks with village cadres. Song is, what is called, 'a shirt-tail relative' of Hao Yongji, the village head of Estuarine.

At Estuarine village level the party secretary was Wang, one of three Wang brothers, and he had a large network of kin and other relations. He had been the village party secretary since leaving the army in 1980. He is not well educated, but his son and son's wife are, and had worked for some time in the township government, and later in bureaus at county level. His son worked in the statistics bureau and the wife in the forestry bureau. Hao Yongjie, the chairman of Estuarine, as well as being a driver, had worked in electricity and house construction. He had a wife and two children. Zhu Zhixiong, was the village amanuensis. He was around 30 years old, with middle school education. He looked smart, and had a wife and two children. He was not on the village committee, nor was he a member of the committee of the Communist Party. He was secretary of the youth group, a title that has little meaning beyond village level. But his role in

Estuarine was very special: he acted as village accountant and had charge of the village committee's official stamp, though he needed the chairman's signature to make payment of village expenses. Only three people in a village receive a salary (called 'a subsidy') for their work – the party secretary, the village chairman and his amanuensis. In Estuarine, the county finance department pays village chairman and party secretaries 1200 yuan per year, and amanuenses 1000 yuan.

Other members of the village committee and heads of the various production teams that form Estuarine also played a role in village politics. Jia Jinhui, for example, chairman of Jiangxi production team, had elementary schooling and no special skills but he was from a large family of five brothers and his uncle had three sons with their own families. His wife was from the same village team. He was thus well connected with strong village networks. His son graduated from the local agricultural high school but, as there was no job for him, in 2005 he joined the army. His daughter of 19 years graduated from junior high school and served in the fast-food department of the supermarket at Stamp County headquarters, receiving 400 yuan per month.

Jia is a typical village cadre with a reputation for hard work. He has no exceptional abilities but is neither aggressive nor easily compromised. He is experienced in dealing with people and is enthusiastic about his job as production team leader. Zhou Deji, a farmer, is part of the 'Feng' and 'Cai' families, two of the earliest households to settle in Estuarine. The Feng family had no son and their daughter married a man from another production team and, having no children of their own, they adopted a girl from the Cai family of the same production team. She later married Zhou Deji and, although it broke with custom, as the family had no son, the husband came to live with her in Estuarine in 1988. The Cai family have several daughters who have married men living near to the county headquarters and have thus extended the family network beyond the village. Zhou worked in Stamp County state liquor factory as a machine repairer for a number of years and developed an extensive network there. In the early 1990s, the factory generated two-thirds of county revenue. Because of this, Stamp County became one of three counties in Gansu Province that was able to balance its budget. From mid-1995, the profits from the factory sharply declined, followed by large annual losses. Then in 2000 it went bankrupt and sold out to a private company. Many of the workers were dismissed. Zhou is related to the Wang family through his wife, a cousin of Wang.

As Guo commented, it is hard to work in rural areas. Wang's job as village party secretary is to complete township government assignments and to inform villagers about government policies, and so he had to serve

many interest groups. Those people who did not like Wang commented that ‘in the eyes of some villagers, he is an illiterate and knows nothing about the law, and behaves like a hooligan’. Others described him ‘as hanging around the streets with the village stamp in his pocket’ (the stamp represents official status). Yet the impression I received as a stranger to his community when I interviewed him was that he was kind, competent and kept a low profile. He was willing to admit to problems and dilemmas.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE VILLAGE AND EC PROJECT ELECTIONS

The Estuarine Village Committee Election

The 2004 village elections were held as usual in December across the county and organized by the township authorities. A village committee had to be composed of the chairman of each production team, the amanuensis, the head of the village women’s federation, and the administrative village chairman. Such elections are usually a straightforward affair but, on this occasion, Estuarine was a special case since Hao, its leader, no longer wanted to be a candidate for the post. Moreover, the elections were further complicated by the fact that the township had decided to run the EC programme and village committee elections at the same time. Also, Wang, the party secretary, lived in Jiangdong village/production team, but was chairman of the Ta’an team, located in the upper part of the mountains, with some 20 households and a place with extremely poor transportation.

Campaign by the Willow Township Authorities

The campaign was supposed to proceed in conformity with the law of village autonomy in China.⁶ But the real situation deviated from this. The township organized a group to lead the campaign and sent an official of director level to each village to work with the township officials in nominating candidates. Generally speaking, if there has been no crisis-like incident in the village over the previous three-year governing period, and township officials have had no confrontations with the village committee over issues, then there would be no major change in the composition of the current village committee. A candidate for leader and an alternative would be nominated by the township leaders and these two would then stand against each other at the election meeting. The heads of the production teams, plus one or two extra candidates would stand as committee

members, and these then became the list of nominees for election to the committee. But, in this situation, Hao Yongji wanted to resign and had called Guo at his office to let him know. He had given as his official reason that he no longer wished to be head of the village family planning committee. In Stamp County there exists an informal rule that the chairman of an administrative village should also be the head of the village family planning committee; and the provincial government had ruled that heads of family planning committees would be remunerated 1000 yuan annually, though Hao had only ever received 50 yuan. As he remarked to me on one occasion:

There are a lot of troubles associated with family planning. Authorities at all levels undertake checks and balances and the work means dealing directly with people. When a woman has given birth, she has to use a contraceptive ring, but many of them are allergic to it, and if she gives birth a second time, then she is required to have a tubectomy within 45 days.

Hao used his dislike of this job as an excuse to resign as village chairman. But he admitted to me that it was only an excuse. It was easier than being direct and saying he really no longer wanted the post of village head. He was very confident of his power base in the village and had been re-elected five times. But he no longer wanted the position, for as he explained:

Firstly I lack real power. It is the village party secretary who has real control over village affairs. When a decision is made during a meeting held by the village committee, it has to be submitted to him for approval. If he vetoes it, the decision cannot be implemented. But when he makes a decision, he never consults the village committee before acting. This was reported to the township authorities but the township director simply said that the village committee should obey party decisions, and therefore the village party secretary's decisions have to be strictly followed. Second, there is no consensus among village committee members. I am corruption free and want to make a contribution to village development. A few members in the committee are too selfish and have no intention of doing good things for the masses. For example, some office equipment was shipped to the village committee office for the start of a village forest management committee. Although the members were notified, no one showed up to move it into the rooms. During meetings to discuss collective issues, it is very hard to reach any agreement. Lastly, it is getting harder to do the job in the village. In the past it was easier. Villagers were willing to follow the policies made at higher levels. But now that policies are more transparent and beneficial to them, it is becoming harder to win their follow up. For example, in the past it was easy to mobilize villagers to contribute their labour free for a farmland water conservancy project. But now, everyone is aware that there are cash subsidies for such work and they want to know where the money is and how it has been spent. There have been cash subsidies in the past, but the township government and village committee have never received them.

Guo had no interest in getting involved and requested his deputy, Song, to deal with the issue. From Guo's point of view it was disgraceful for a village chairman to want to quit his position, though this is becoming increasingly common in many villages in China for the reasons Hao gives, and also because of the loss of influence and income now that central government has abolished almost all rural taxes and levies. Even so, Guo did not want to accept Hao's request for there were too many in Estuarine competing for the post, which spelled trouble. He was right, as will become increasingly clear.

Wang tried his best to prevent his poor relationship with Hao from exploding. Failure in village affairs would reflect on him and indicate poor leadership and authority and suggest that he was not capable of fulfilling his mission as party secretary. So he repeatedly stressed to me that Hao wanted to resign simply because family planning work consumed too much of his time. He was not expecting Hao to change his mind and already had a successor in mind – Deng Donglin, from his own village of residence. As party secretary he had the power to recommend a candidate for the post on behalf of the village party committee, and his recommendation mattered. Song, the deputy party secretary at township level, and a relative of Hao, disagreed with Hao's position and insisted that, as party secretary, Wang had the final right to decide and it was Hao's fault if he could not keep in step with the party secretary. His remarks reflected the fact that township authorities still basically support a command structure wherein the higher authorities must prevail. This pattern of vertical control is locked into a traditional family pattern whereby a good cadre is expected to manage collective interests as if they were his own. However, as Estuarine's story shows, in contemporary rural China public resources are often used to pursue more individualist interests.

Compromise in the Selection of Nominees for Village Leader

Guo finally endorsed looking for a successor and Wang duly proposed Deng to succeed Hao. However, the chairman of Jiangxi team, Jia Jinhui, where Wang resided, opposed his selection. Jia had twice failed in his attempts to become administrative village chairman, attributing his failure to the lack of support from party secretary Wang. Meanwhile, Jia thought he had won the support of his own constituency and had canvassed those in the broader community who opposed Wang – not from any failure in his public duties, but because of disputes with neighbours and for other personal reasons. He had organized four meetings before the selection of nominees for village leader, hoping he himself would be the chosen nominee. He argued that the new chairman should not come from the

same village team as the party secretary. Wang commented that this behaviour amounted to betrayal.

Song considered these tensions as serious and discussed the situation with other township officials. They came to the conclusion that the best solution to this impasse would be to persuade Hao to stand as nominee and remain in office. Song also arranged a meeting with Wang and Hao and warned Wang that if he did not support Hao as the candidate, the situation could become even more complicated. Jia had knowledge of many undisclosed issues in village affairs and if irritated he could publicize them and thus also jeopardize Wang's position. Song also visited Jia, to ask him to pull out and comply with the decision of the township government and agree to Hao as nominee for village chairman and head of the village committee.

It was hard for Jia to agree but in the end he could save face by emphasizing the need for continuity in the power structure of the village precisely because the incumbents had successfully dominated the village over the previous 15 years. Moreover, since Wang had been village party secretary for so long, the number of under-the-table deals not disclosed to villagers had accumulated, making all village cadres in one way or another culpable. Indeed, as a member of the village committee and head of Jiangxi production team, Jia himself had been party to many such deals.

Hence Song's request to Hao to continue in his position, and for Wang to support Hao, was therefore an attempt to stabilize power relations, which was the best solution for all those involved. If Jia rocked the boat, then all of them, including a few township leaders, would go down with it.

Now that a consensus had been reached among all parties, the next step was to legitimize this and complete the legal requirement of voting for candidates from among the seven nominated as candidates for village chairman, including Hao, Deng and Jia. In the end, Hao won by a large majority with Deng in second place and Jia third. The first two were then announced as candidates for the position of administrative village chairman. And five of the seven were then nominated as candidates for the village committee.

Junior officials in the township government were accustomed to receive small gifts and other small bribes from Wang, but senior members of the township government behaved differently. They could not afford to enter into this kind of petty bribery, fearful of undermining stability in their territory that could affect their own chances of promotion. As a matter of fact, although Wang did not want to *see* Hao as village chairman, he knew that if Deng won the campaign, the villagers would be separated into two factions, and hidden controversies would be brought onto the agenda that

would cause township leaders a lot of extra trouble. The failure to elect a suitable village chairman would be the worst scenario for the township and so they manipulated the situation to make sure this did not happen. Hao was duly elected and the township authorities appointed someone else to take charge of family planning since he had made it clear that he no longer wanted the position.

Organizing the Nominations for the Village Forest Management Planning Committee

I had gradually become aware that I could not rely on township officials to mobilize farmers to implement village forest management planning and elect a VFM Committee, and that I would need to change my work plan to get this done. So I decided to hire two consultants and participate in the campaign personally. Our activities included: (1) to request Guo to organize a meeting at which we would brief them and village leaders about the VFMP project; (2) to conduct a household survey, gather individual opinions and thus again publicize the project; (3) to organize round table meetings with farmers; (4) to put up posters; and (5) to list the functions, membership and nature of the required forest management committee as preparation for voting one into place.

We made rules for electing the committee:

1. It would consist of seven members and would include a leader, an accountant, a treasurer, and two forest guards, one of whom must be female. The election must be undertaken by the whole village, but with each production team having its own representative.
2. Each production team would select two candidates, one male and one female. Following this an election would be held across the administrative village and the proposed candidates ranked by the number of votes cast. The candidate who was ranked first would become the leader of the VFMP. Those candidates coming first in each of the five production teams would be appointed to the committee and an additional member by the total electorate.
3. Any member of a production team could stand for election providing he or she had three supporters. A pre-election run would be undertaken in each production team. At least half of the villagers must participate and the two candidates with the largest number of votes would be selected for the final round. A run-off was to be allowed in cases where there were no outright winners.
4. The approach used for administrative village elections would be adopted for this election. Villagers would cast their votes confidentially.

In the case of a draw between male and female candidates, the latter would be preferred. If they were of the same gender, the candidate from the less populated village would be announced the winner. This was an attempt to maintain a balanced village and gender representation.

5. The number of voters must amount to more than half of all eligible villagers. If a villager was not available then some other person could act as proxy.
6. Careful attention would be paid to participant interests since committee members would be required to carry out their duties without payment.

An outside consultant organized the meetings attended by township officials for each production team. Each village was urged to recommend one male and one female candidate, making ten in total. In Ta'an, where Wang was chairman, the township officials strongly recommended Wang as Estuarine candidate. Hao Yongjie had already made it clear that he did not want to stand and of course at that time Wang and Guo were trying to persuade him to accept the nomination for village chairman, which would rule him out as a candidate for the VFMC. Jia Jinhui from Jiangxi production team remarked to me that his village had recommended two farmers as candidates, but they had been rejected by Wang. He asked me, 'Did he have the power to veto them? The ones nominated were all either village cadres or their relatives'. He was already aware that he would not be chosen as administrative Estuarine village chairman but felt that village and production team officials should not be eligible to vote in the VFMC election, including himself. 'In tomorrow's election' he told me 'I will only give a short message to the 72 households from Jiangxi production team – the forest management committee members should be nominated directly by the farmers.' Jia's comments highlighted what had been the key message stated in the survey and posters, that is, that the committee should indeed be a farmer organization. He was angry that officials had been put forward as candidates for the forest management committee. He had already sought, in his village leadership bid, the support of those who were dissatisfied with Wang, which implied opposing a powerful interest group. But Jia was one of the few who openly challenged the status quo. Of course, township officials never supported this kind of behaviour and it was therefore destined to fail from the beginning. Also Wang and the township officials would not wish to give up control of any money or authority by allowing an EC-funded pilot VFMC to be run by farmers themselves. This lay behind their manoeuvrings.

Views about Rural Affairs

Today, rural policy changes tend to favour farmers. In an interview two days before the Estuarine and forest management committee elections, Wang repeatedly stated how this was the case and how it was increasingly difficult to be a village leader. Chen, Willow Township Director agreed: ‘Yes, compulsory labour input is being phased out and agricultural taxes and levies are being abolished. It is impossible to manage or govern the farmers. But the restructuring of the agricultural sector cannot be done by the farmers themselves’. He added:

One way of restructuring is for farmers to be submissively included. For instance, in Yongning Township of the County there was insufficient land to farm so the township authorities persuaded farmers to take off-farm jobs, and the educated farmers to plant vegetables to replace grain production. Another way is to get farmers more actively involved with the government planning is by programme officials taking the lead and providing services and the farmers doing the implementation. But nowadays the farmers do not want to follow the officials and we have no means to order them to do so.

Chen also added a comment saying ‘Central government does not understand the real situation in the rural areas. If the current policy is implemented over a long time, the regime at grassroots will collapse, and stability in the rural area will be threatened’. Generally speaking, it is hard to be an official in the rural areas and this is felt in different ways at all levels.

Views about the VFMC

Wang was of the opinion that either the village chairman or party secretary should lead the forest management committee, and that the head of each production team should form the committee. He also suggested some administrative procedures for the future VFMC, and that members should receive a subsidy of perhaps 8–10 yuan for each working day. In other words, the village and VFMC should be the same. But he was prone to contradict himself, for in principle he agreed that pragmatically it was better for the forest to be managed at local level. On the other hand, he argued that it was not easy to trust farmers and they might use their position as an excuse to log timber – trees of 20–30 cm diameters were logged in the past for household fuel. What really lay behind the contradictions was a conflict of interests. He was Estuarine party secretary and should therefore act in the interests of all villagers, but he was also contracted by Elm state forest farm to look after all new plantations, amounting to 10000 mu, with an annual protection fee of 1 yuan per mu.

At township level, officials likewise believed that the village leader should also head the forest management team. They seemed to think that the person who got the most votes was necessarily the best man for the job and said so openly at the meeting to organize the village and VFMC elections. When I told Chen that Hao had excluded himself from the VFMC nominations he became quiet, and then quickly changed the topic. He declared to his audience:

The township government has many difficulties. The salaries of the village cadres and township officials are too low. If there was no room for them to use their power to work for their own interests, nobody would have the incentive to work. But of course officials elected by the villages should give priority to public interests and only then to their own. I would rather have a village head who wants and is able to achieve something and has some tensions in his relationship to the farmers than one who is nice to everyone but incapable of doing anything.

Chen seemed to be setting standards for both village and forest management committee members. Such sentiments were echoed by Shao, chairman of the township congress, who was in charge of counting the votes. According to him, the leader of a VFMC did not need to be the person who won the largest vote. The one who was the most competent of the seven candidates selected should be offered the job. Those with the most votes were not necessarily the most competent. A leader who wanted to make changes would come up against opposition, and the township government made it very clear that Wang would be the leader of VFMC of Estuarine village, no matter what, or who was elected. The core township officials – the party secretary, the director, and a few deputies, who hoped for future promotion – all had strong networks at the county level. They made moves at township level to become leaders and waited to move on to another good offer. They had to keep moving until they had no further opportunity for promotion. And from a local viewpoint they were outsiders, as I also was in Willow Township. They could not have much insight into the interest groups in the village, but nevertheless they exercised decision-making rights over them.

Some township officials, such as the farmer recruits Song and Shao had few prospects of promotion, but they did have family and social networks that cross-cut the township and surrounding villages in such a way that some of their interests interlocked with those of specific local groupings. Thus it is not difficult to *see* that despite their low incomes they nevertheless enjoyed the status and perks offered to them of good food, drink and cigarettes. They were also able to set up some activities to generate income, such as running a printing and copying store, a grocery, and acting as

middlemen for local products. Patronage for these activities relied on the village chairman and party secretary. Patronage and networking is the reason why Wang spent more than 10 000 yuan annually on treating officials. To exploit opportunities for money he needed their cooperation.

Election of the Village and VFM Committees

The election was finally undertaken by strictly following procedures. Ta'an, Dashan and Jingping production teams were far from the elementary school where the election was to take place and so Song and Zhu Zhixiong, the amanuensis, carried the ballot box to each household, asking each of them to cast their vote. Most of these voting slips were filled in on 26 December 2004, one day before the official election.

I arrived in Estuarine Village early morning on 27 December 2004. The township director Chen and the others were already there. The election meeting was scheduled for 10.00 a.m. in the playground of the elementary school. It was winter. We were asked to remain at a household some 500 metres from the school where we were kept waiting. Later I was told that this had been because of the unwillingness of farmers to participate and they had had to be mobilized to attend. They had felt dishonoured by this. Finally, at 1 p.m., most of the farmers had come and the election could be started. There were about 150 of the 579 eligible to vote in attendance though, as mentioned, others had already voted in their villages.

The meeting should have been chaired by Wang but because there had been controversies over the election, he was afraid that some villagers would speak out about against him. So Wang asked Zhu, the village amanuensis to chair it. Zhu announced the agenda of the meeting and invited the candidates to speak. Hao spoke about the four major tasks given him by Wang for the coming term, which were: (1) water for drinking and animal use, the village system had been the first in the county but was now obsolete; (2) repairing the school house. It had taken four years to raise from 50 yuan/person annually the total fund of 80 000–90 000 yuan to build the school eight to nine years ago. Now the school houses needed renovating at an estimated cost of 120 000 yuan; (3) repairing the television receiver. There had previously been seven television programmes available, but now there was only one, due to a lightning strike; (4) rehabilitation of the river banks. Some 100–200 mu of land had been flooded. The flood had totally destroyed the land of some families. However, there was no mention of who would pay the bill. They were expecting the 'emperor', that is, 'higher-level government', to pay (*Wei Guan Yi Ren, Zao Fu Yi Fang*⁷). No one was interested in how to improve the management of collective properties. The township officials and villagers had a common

understanding – public affairs in the village should be managed by the community elite, who had strong personal contacts with upper-level officials in charge of resource allocation. Although they were more and more unhappy with the elite, they saw no other choice.

Hao mentioned nothing about electing the forest management committee, which was also to take place. The other candidate for chairman, Deng Donglin, did not give a speech. He was aware that he had no hope of winning. In a series of questions and enquiries, farmer representative Zhou Deji, took the opportunity to criticize:

Over the past 17 years what has the village committee done for us? The only change is that the road in the village has been paved with sand and stone, and that was paid for by the villagers. All the collective property of the village has been sold out. No matter who is elected as village head or committee member, please put less public money into your own pockets, and do more work for the villagers.

This speech was applauded more loudly than Hao's. Wang looked awkward and wanted to give some explanation, but Song checked him and said he should wait until the election was completed. Song then made some remarks and said yes, it was only right that they should elect their own leaders, who were accountable to the 592 voters. 'The village committee should work for the interests of villagers, under the direction of the Party, and work out more ways of lifting farmers out of poverty.' His words mitigated the tension and the election started with a show of hands, at which point Jia Jinhui jumped in and said, 'for the election of the VFMC, if you do not support the candidates you can recommend others', but he did not raise his voice to be heard above the noise, showing a very different confidence and firmness to what he had displayed in my interview with him.

VILLAGE LIVES AND OPINIONS

There is great heterogeneity among the farmers who live under the authority of Estuarine administration. I interviewed many of them about their views on the forest management committee and explored with them views and information about politics. Take for example a farmer in Estuarine village – a major opponent to Wang. Zhou had openly criticized the village cadres at the election meeting. The tension between Zhou and Wang originated with the matter of family planning, when Zhou's wife gave birth to a second child. He had broken the family planning laws and would therefore be fined. But he claimed that he had paid the fine in his hometown, and had a document to prove this. Usually women live in the husband's village

on marriage and they and their children are registered there. This was not the case with Zhou who lived in his wife's village and had obtained land there. He showed his document to a Willow Township vice-party secretary who went with him to discuss the matter with Wang. Wang's response was that since he had not paid the fine in Willow Township, he would now reallocate the collective land, meaning that he would withdraw the collective land given to Zhou and redistribute it. Wang obtained support for his action from the township and officials visited Zhou to ask him to pay the fine. Not wanting to embarrass the officials, he paid, but after they left he assaulted Wang, whose head was injured and blooded. He told him that if he sought help from his brothers he would fight them too. And so the issue escalated.

Wang reported the assault to higher levels. Of course, they all stood on his side. The township party secretary requested the local police to arrest Zhou. But the policemen at the station headquarters had been Zhou's colleagues in the county liquor factory and did not follow through with the order, giving the excuse that the road was too rough to walk. At that point, the party secretary of the county was called in, urging the county public security bureau to arrest Zhou. In the end, with the help of his friends in the bureau Zhou was detained for only a week, but had to admit he had been detained by the law enforcement unit for a crime.

He was completely negative about the village officials, and put his case by complaining of: (1) a water charge of 4 yuan/ton, collected by Deng Donglin, head of Jiangxi production team; (2) a television cable, 36 yuan/year, collected by Wang; (3) the fact that the agricultural machinery and warehouse of the village had all been sold; and (4) that the fund to build the school was raised by villagers, but the school building was now leaking. Wang's retort was dismissive, with a commonplace saying: 'a few flees cannot erect a blanket'.

Zhou had confided to me, pointing out that the villagers had not been willing to attend the meeting, 'because they were not satisfied with the cadres. Over the past 17 years they have not delivered us any services'. When I asked why better people were not elected as village officials, he answered that those who were capable of taking on the job were not willing to do it. Zhou also continued to work outside the village to support his family and pay his children's school tuition.

Some of villagers thought Zhou odd. He was a middle-aged man who had spent the least time in the village, having worked in the county liquor factory and taken other jobs outside since he first moved into the village. He had just built a house in the town where the county headquarters had recently been relocated; and he had followed the unusual path of living in his wife's village when custom dictated the opposite. Hence there were

several reasons why he was not so much a part of or involved in the community. Nevertheless, he felt upset by not being included and accepted by village people. His livelihood did not depend on resources from the community and his major income was not generated by farming, which was why he said he was not afraid of being set up by Wang. He opposed Wang openly. Actually, all those who dared to oppose Wang openly earned incomes from outside and were therefore not dependent on community resources. Also at present, there is no formal institution that farmers can resort to in order to voice their needs. This largely explains the rationale of the behaviour exhibited by government officials, and its deterioration.

***Ganbu* Residing in the Community**

Ganbu are those who earn a monthly wage from government agencies or state-owned enterprises. They are known locally as ‘state babies’. A majority of such local *ganbu* were sceptical about the state forest agency and government initiated-afforestation programmes ever being managed well. Comments such as why afforestation was undertaken every year but trees never seen, or why trees planted by individuals did well but the trees owned collectively did not do so, were common. This, they said, must be due to poorly defined responsibilities. One retired official from the township government agency claimed that if one added up all the areas afforested over the last two decades, the total would cover all the land in the township including the river, road and houses. When asked if cadres should be excluded from the forest management committee the general response was that if they were excluded they would not support the work – but neither would they do it well if they were involved. The same farmer commented that ‘people who received an education in Mao’s era served the people. Nowadays, they only look after their own best interests. If there is no significant action taken by top government, there is little chance that local officials will perform well’.

The majority of farmers interviewed supported the views of the *ganbu* in the community. One explained that it was ‘more practical to form a VFMC in the village. It is easy for us to observe problems and make reports to the state farm. It is hard for the state farm to make such observations. There won’t be much for the committee to do, just keep the domestic animals out of the woods’. But he nevertheless declined to become a candidate. He needed, he said, to concentrate on farming as he had no other source of income. He thought that the young and competent should be elected, just like party members and cadres. One woman interviewed also refused to engage with the committee for a contract to

manage a plot of pine trees because she had ‘no power and networks to deal with those who might damage the trees’. She recalled what happened to her neighbour, Zhang Zhengchun, whose daughter was married to Hao. He had been confident about managing the forest and said he would do this in the interests of the next generation and all were deserving of his hard work. However, a few days after this interview, Wang had fired him because he had found a few footmarks of domestic animals in the plantation that Zhang had contracted to look after, and he had not reported whose animals had made them. Zhang was simply unable to deal with violations of this kind.

All those ordinary villagers I interviewed were unwilling to be members of the VFMC. It seemed as though it did not matter to them whether a committee was formed or not, nor whether they participated in the management of the forests. In other words, it appeared that I was imposing upon them the setting up of this VFMC.

THE DIFFICULT BIRTH OF THE ESTUARINE VFMC

Reappraisal of the Township and Village Leaders

Guo made efforts to implement the VFMP pilot project based on his own understanding of what it was all about. He implemented the elections for the VFMC in ten villages, but took no responsibility for the election in Estuarine itself, and I myself was dissatisfied with the election there. Only Jia mentioned the election of a forest management committee during the election of the village committee. But his intent was more to express his anger at failing to be elected village chairman rather than to support the need to elect a separate committee for forest management.

I had asked Shao to stay in the village and raise awareness of the election, but there was no evidence that he did any effective work of this sort. Furthermore, the work plan of the village party secretary and chairman made no mention of the forest management issue. It made no sense to expect township staff to raise awareness of the project in the community since it bore no relevance to how their performance was evaluated by their superiors. Hence they did not take this work at all seriously and did not apply their efforts and wisdom to it.

When half the votes had been counted the township officials said the result could now be predicted and several times called for the count to end. They were tired and did not *see* the need to proceed further. But my invited consultant insisted they continue and her own cold was made worse by helping them to count votes in the chilly wind.

Opposition to Wang Being on the Committee

Although I had no good idea myself as to how to organize the committee to manage the forest, I did recognize that it was not a move in the right direction to have Wang play a dominant role. If he became a member, he would take the lead, and the divisions in the village would continue and the current power structure would be fed and strengthened instead of creating a new one. It would not become, as intended, a farmer-based organization. But the villagers and village officials, all seemed to go along with the notion of Wang as committee leader. So I started to look myself for a candidate for the post. So who might be a qualified candidate?

I had learned a lot about the villagers and had started to learn more about the elite in the community. But by the time the election was held, I had not identified any candidate that was acceptable to both villagers and the elite. In addition to the time constraint, the divisions in the community meant that any such candidate would not be endorsed by the community as a whole and no concessions would be made. My expectation of the committee was that some members would be opponents of Wang, and others his supporters; one member would be outside their list of candidates; and the chairman would have to be one of the elite, otherwise he or she would be unable to conduct a dialogue with the village committee and Wang. This was not exactly what I had originally expected or intended.

In view of this, I took the following steps to convince the township officials of my position. First, I tried to change their attitude and declared I would veto their decision regardless, if things did not go to my satisfaction. I emphasized that the project would be terminated if it failed in Estuarine, and spelled out what the likely results would be. I hoped this would force officials to give more attention to the project and remind them that they did not have sole decision-making rights. I hinted to the township officials that I might intervene in the election. They had no idea what form that might take and I thought this might make them cautious to act. Finally, while votes for the village committee were being counted, I talked to Song about the villagers' comments on the candidates and proposed that the election of the forestry committee be held separately. Another option was to have no overlap between the forest management committee, the village committee and the party unit. I was aware that neither of these options would be acceptable to Song and Shao. Wang was party secretary and Hao had been elected as village committee chairman.

After the results for the village committee were known, I benchmarked my own bottom line, namely, that each production team should have one female and one male, and those with the most votes should win. This would drive Wang out of the competition since in the Jiangdong production team

Deng had won the most votes. At this point, Shao argued that Wang could therefore be the representative of the Ta'an production team, to which I strongly objected. When Song realized that I was so resolute on this issue, he said: 'let us accept the result instead of holding another election, changes can be made later if necessary'. And so the forest management committee became Deng, leader of Jiangdong production team as chairman; and second in votes was Jia Jinhui who became his deputy. Wang supported Deng and was hostile to Jia and so the committee became Deng Donglin, Guo Zhixiong (head of Jingpin village team), Ms Zhou Yangqin (leader of the women's federation) who became treasurer, and a lady from the Jiangdong team as accountant.

AFTER THE ELECTIONS

The Drinking Water Proposal

The Estuarine VFMC held several meetings, but Wang did not show up. The township officials asked him to attend, but he refused. Even after Guo rebuked him for this, he did not show up. Hao was enthusiastic about the proposal and asked whether the EC forest programme could support a drinking water project costing some 20000 yuan. I supported the proposal reasoning that as the result would be immediately visible this might encourage villagers to get involved in the forest management programme. I went to talk to Guo and put my point. He said not to worry about it. The works would be completed after the Spring Festival holiday, and the project only needed to contribute 10000 yuan, since the rest would be covered by Chen, the township director.

Village Project Fund Administration

Under the VFMP programme, there were ten administrative project villages, with a budget of 15000 yuan for each village forest management committee, of which 6000 yuan would be used as wages for forest guards, 3000 yuan for office equipment, and 6000 yuan for start-up costs and operation. The township government would co-finance some activities, for instance, workshops for farmers.

Guo never made any inappropriate requests for funds, and never challenged my plan for allocating funds. But, after the VFMC was formed, he claimed that the township government should control the funds allocated to villages, and guaranteed that funds would not be held back and would be distributed to villages on time. So I agreed, because the Spring Festival

was approaching and it would take a long time to complete registration of the committee. The drinking water project needed funding. All local institutions were in need of money. After I gave the green light to this, Guo kept calling my colleague in charge of financial matters, requesting that the funds be transferred to the township project fund account. I was told later that Guo had opened a project fund account in the bank where his wife worked. As a consequence, I lost control of this money.

The project fund chain was broken and nothing changed as a result of our intervention. After the New Year, Guo who had authority to allocate project funds suddenly sent me a note saying he would be going to the provincial party school for three-months training and that Chen would be charge of the project. I did not return to Estuarine until two months later. Meanwhile a rumour had spread that the project had been cancelled and that we had therefore cheated them of their drinking water project. We could not trace the source of the rumour. The villagers were surprised to *see* us back. Over the intervening two months, none of the activities under the programme agreed by the VFMC had been implemented, that is, the drinking water scheme, the plantation for wood fuel, the assembling of the forest management programme which also involved organizing technical training for villagers and renovating the access road for tourists, and so on. Moreover, it was difficult for me to understand why the state forest farm continued their afforestation programme without consulting the villages in terms of species selection, or ways of organizing the plantation. And the management of the forests had been again contracted out to Wang, the party secretary of Estuarine administrative village. Thus nothing much had changed following our attempts to set up the village forestry project.

Chen and his assistants came to *see* me and advised strongly that the fund should be administered by the township and not transferred to the villages. His justification was that a village head in his township had made off with 100 000 yuan and no one could find him. After the man was caught and the case was brought to court some of the money was returned. Chen admitted that the township had opened separate accounts for each village and controlled the funds because 'village cadres are fearless; they are corrupt'.

I was not convinced and insisted that funds for the VFMCs be transferred to the villages. Chen argued that project staff 'cannot approve whatever the villages want to do'. Here he referred to the drinking water project which I had supported. He stated that the township government had to maintain a balance among the administrative villages under its jurisdiction. It was therefore impossible for activities to centre only in Estuarine. Otherwise, how could they face the complaints made by other administrative villages? He continued his arguments saying that the

leaders in the township and county bureaus were about to be rotated and so many officials were busy lobbying for posts. This involved activities to strengthen networks such as sending presents to the boss and lobbying. I was irritated and informed him that the money transferred to the township account was debited from my own personal bank account. It was therefore a personal and not a state fund, and if it was not used as stipulated in the project programme, I reserved the right to claim back all of it. It was clear that Guo wanted to use the fund for road building and a bulletin board on the roadside, but did not want to raise the issue with me directly and so had asked Chen to approach me about it. Both realized that I could not be persuaded and so one day Guo returned to the township and handed the bank account cheque book to Chen, who later explained that it had not been his intention to use the fund for purposes other than specified by the project.

The Drinking Water Works in Estuarine are Delayed

Before the Spring Festival, the estimate for the water works was 20 000 yuan. Song, the deputy party secretary in the township, and Hao, chairman of Estuarine invited a water engineering specialist to make the calculations. Costs for the materials were 16 500 yuan, excluding labour (which farmers would contribute) and compensation for crops. They produced a breakdown of costs and I endorsed it.

Initially, Chen told Hao that the town would approve 5000 yuan for the water project and requested Hao to raise the rest himself. Hao complained that this was less than one-third of the costs for materials and that he would not be able to raise the rest himself. Every time I went to the village to have discussions with the forest management committee, the water project would be first on the agenda. The village cadres insisted that villagers would only be interested in forest management after the drinking water was provided by the project. I called Chen and requested that he make full use of the project funds. He did not turn me down, but he later blamed Hao and Wang saying that all the other villages had applied for funds from the county water conservancy bureau for their water supply project. The township would not give the village more than 10 000 yuan. The village should raise half the amount by applying for funds from the county bureau or raise it themselves. After careful review, Hao thought it was not viable to raise such an amount of money.

I lost patience when the work was delayed for five months. I talked to Chen and insisted that it must be paid fully out of the project fund. Chen finally said: 'Well, it is your money. It is up to you how you use it.' But he insisted on getting invoices first before disbursing the money. He stated

that he could not as township director release money without an invoice. He asked me to put myself in his shoes. In fact, my experience of rural areas had allowed him to make a fool of me. I explained to him that we had all agreed to buy the equipment from a place 250 km away, which stocked good quality products and had a good after-sales service, and it was cheaper. But we needed cash up front. Later he asked me why Hao had not consulted him. If he had done so, there would have been no such problem.

The Request for a Bulletin Board

Bulletin boards can be seen everywhere in Stamp County. Ironically, there was a huge one along the road from the township to the county city. It read 'whatever people want, the government will provide'. Chen denied ever having seen it, as I suspected he might. One day, he came with his deputies and raised the issue of constructing a bulletin board. He said: 'You must approve its construction. Every official in the township knows we have a big project here, and as director I cannot be accountable for it to these officials as well as to about 10000 people in my township.' He knew I would never endorse the plan using our EC funds. On ending the debate, he told me frankly that plans had already been made and it would cost 29000 yuan. He instructed his deputy to hand the proposal to me and requested that I sign it. I refused but later was told by local people that in any case the bulletin board had been constructed. It actually cost less than 8000 yuan.

Successful Registration of the Forest Management Committee

The only thing that made me feel happy was the successful registration of the VFMC. After a long challenge, the township had finally allocated part of the project funds to each village management committee. Looking at the legal document of Estuarine VFMC, I noted that the chairman had been changed to Hao, instead of Deng. As an outsider, one never wins under-the-table games, and the same applies to the struggles taking place between the state forestry sector and local government, or between the state forestry sector and village people. The acting power implants the rules, which are often latent. They are intangible and not to be found in writing. For example, Guo left office and handed over his official powers to Chen. Chen was not entitled to make decisions on how the project funds should be spent and could not claim the right to do so through Guo, nor officially talk to others about this. Chen required Hao Yongji to take up the challenge and settle the drinking water project precisely because he

thought Hao had destroyed these unspoken rules. By the end of the pilot project, I asked township officials whether they knew how much I had transferred to township accounts. They acknowledged that no township officials knew this except for Chen and Guo, and that it was not politic to inquire into this. That is what is meant by 'latent rules'.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Sharma (1992) argues that in today's era forests are on the front line of debates about environmental protection and livelihood improvement in many countries. This is particularly the case in China. The various policies associated with forest lands and their dynamic nature are widely accepted as having a profound impact on farmers' behaviour and social welfare (Ntsebeza 2004). Continued deforestation and forest degradation globally call into question the effectiveness of the current legal, institutional and policy framework. Many international agencies and national forestry bodies have developed measures targeting the sustainable management of forests (FAO 2001; Wiersum and Ros-Tonen 2005; World Bank 2001), including decentralizing forest resources to local people (FAO 2006; Liu Jinlong 2007), developing community-based organizations (Liu Jinlong 2006), and promoting win-win strategies aimed at improving local livelihoods and income. Community-based organizations should be self-organized, relatively autonomous and representative of the interests of community members. However, as this case shows, it is often impossible in China for the leaders of such organizations to be elected through fair and transparent processes. Community leaders are either selected by officials from the township and/or through compromises negotiated with members of the village elite. As the case of Estuarine highlights, none of these leaders measured up to my expectations; and this forced me to become involved directly in the selection process for the forest management committee.

Historically the Chinese have been used to top-down authoritative governance and obedience to 'emperor-like' figures. Hence it is not surprising that villagers in Estuarine look to an honest government official or emperor with integrity to lead them. They admit they are followers and not key players who command the right to control the decision-making process. This can be illustrated by dragon dancing, a popular traditional cultural activity that requires participants to stick to their assigned roles and to respond to the drum player who wears a dragon's head mask. It is he who guides the movements and the rest of the dancers who must follow. The dance provides a representation of how people in society are expected to know their positions within the society. Everyone is expected

to keep their place; otherwise they betray the harmony of the whole. Wang would *see* such followers as good citizens who play an important part in constituting Wang's hegemony in the village. Since the moral order of the Mao era – as spelt out in the famous slogans 'all for the collective, nothing for self interest' (*da gong wu si*) and 'serve the people' (*wei ren ming fu wu*) – has passed away in the rural areas, residents have little expectation of integrity and honesty from officials or the imagined good 'emperor'. One of the village elite expressed the need for significant action to be taken to correct this but it quickly became apparent that this was meant to be taken by some 'emperor'. Such a position of course runs counter to the commitment by both the state and the party to increase democratic modes of governance at village level. On the other hand, the ballooning self interest of village cadres is in part balanced by township and village cadres needing to give some priority to collective interests. Otherwise, the populace would express their strong dissatisfaction with them. Villagers have no formal institutions to rely on to voice their needs but fewer and fewer of them are exploited by village political regimes, as they become less dependent on community resources for making a living. For the moment, they are monitoring the acts of village officials and the expectation is that more and more checks and balances will emerge within the community.

As my case shows, it is as yet impossible to achieve a win-win situation for better livelihoods and more sustainable forest management. In Estuarine, the household responsibility system destroyed the social structure formed in the era of the people's commune. But a new community-based system of governance that is in tune with the market economy has yet to be established. Village governance needs to be restructured but in what direction? And where does endogenous motivation come from? In this village I felt confused as to whom I should work with, and yet this attempt at partnership was, I believed, consistent with the development of the community. However, it will take a long time for administrative villages such as Estuarine to evolve an effective model of good governance. I would, therefore, support a 'deconstruct first and build later' model. Deconstruction is in process, and during this process there will be more confrontations and disorder in public affairs, and a lower efficacy in the supply of public goods. Deconstruction in Estuarine is under way but rebuilding might be long in the making. As a consequence – and much to my embarrassment – there is no right way for development interventions. The conceptually ambiguous intervention aimed at establishing a forest management committee at village level was initiated but hardly understood by local people. It was therefore difficult to draw them into action using their own discourses on collective forest management.

When we enter a community, we cannot readily figure out who is our ally. One is obliged to cooperate with existing dominant actors and groups, thus strengthening their power base and accelerating the polarization of interests within and/or between communities. Whether this will speed up the deconstruction of current village political regimes remains to be seen and evaluated. It is also necessary to explore how far villagers continue to remain attached to the idea that effective change can only come through the mediation of imagined ‘good leaders’ or ‘emperors’. These reflections shifted my focus away from attempting to bridge the gap between the state and collective sector through promoting some kind of ‘win-win’ partnership in development, to seeking concrete methods to emancipate villagers from being no more than subordinated ‘hangers-on’.

In the foregoing case study I documented how issues of forest management became part of village politics and thus inextricably linked into political and administrative hierarchies and power. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to implant new institutions, procedures and priorities orientated to forest protection and management and the improvement of local livelihoods. The case also highlighted how, in the process of electing a VFM Committee, each key actor sought to manipulate the goals and the resources of the project to his own advantage. In short, a planned intervention in the field of sustainable forest management became a critical arena in which state management practices, latent rules and customary rights, alongside those who saw trees as nothing more than a lucrative source of income, were played out.

NOTES

1. Chhin-Ling (Qinglin) range is generally accepted to be the transition belt between the deciduous and evergreen broadleaf forests. To its south, is China’s sub-tropical area while to its north is China’s warm-temperate zone.
2. China’s topography features higher western areas and lower eastern areas, from the coastland in eastern China, after two rises of altitude, to the Tibetan Plateau in western China. Longshan Mountain is a general term. It refers to the mountainous area in southeastern Gansu, which lies in the first rise in altitude. To the east, is the famous Guanzhong Plain, where 1000 years ago, in the Tang Dynasty, the then capital city of Chang’an was located.
3. 1 ha = 15 mu.
4. Throughout China, townships are internally organized into a number of ‘administrative villages’ that function as the lowest level of politico-administrative authority. Each administrative village elects a village committee whose constituency will include a number of hamlets or natural villages termed ‘production teams’.
5. It is interesting to note that the notion of *Quan* (power) and *Li* (benefit) in Chinese are usually combined in one character – *QuanLi*.
6. According to this law, the position of village leader and the members of the village committee are community-elected positions, whereas the party secretary of the village

is appointed by the party. Both are supposed to run village affairs, though it is the party secretary who has the overriding authority in most of China's rural regions.

7. It is a slogan often used by officials. It means 'to take a turn in an official post, is to create happiness for the people under one's authority'.

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14. ‘Accountability’ in contemporary rural China: Yu Lu Village case study

Solange Guo Chatelard

This chapter will present a theoretical argument on the increasingly popular concept of ‘accountability’, together with a specific local case study of development policy implementation in contemporary rural China. According to Isunza Vera, accountability has three primary functions: informative, explanatory and enforcing. In other words, accountability is a three-dimensional process whereby responsible political actors have to enumerate their actions, justify them, and finally be in a position where they may be sanctioned for these actions (Isunza Vera 2003). As a conventional concept developed and debated within western social sciences, accountability may be problematic as an effective analytical tool to understand contemporary Chinese social reality. This is primarily due to the implied semantic field of possible complementary concepts that can be associated with ‘accountability’ which do not exist per se in Chinese political culture (that is, sovereign citizenship, individual and collective ‘rights’, political transparency, political participation, rational contracts or agreements, and so on), although there have been efforts to translate these concepts into the modern Chinese language.¹ Together with other buzzwords like ‘good governance’, ‘transparency’ and ‘civil society’, ‘accountability’ is often used in the discourse on policy implementation and development work by government officials, non-governmental officers (NGO) workers and development practitioners. Within these discourses of social policy and implementation, the more fundamental question of the philosophical and theoretical groundings of such a concept is usually ignored. This chapter does not deal in particular with the ‘western’ concept of accountability, or with its other correlating concepts, but it will instead focus on describing and analysing what kind of cultural concepts similar to what we call ‘accountability’ in English might be relevant in policy implementation in China. These particular notions fulfil in their respective ways functions that make actors and institutions ‘accountable’.

PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ON THE ‘CONCEPT’

According to Reinhart Koselleck (see Prost 1996: 126), there are two different kinds of concepts used in conventional social analysis within the social sciences. The first are inherited from the past or from specific social contexts. These ‘indigenous’ concepts are heuristic tools to help understand the social realities of the context in which they emerged. The second are constructed concepts, developed independently from the spatial and temporal context they are applied in, therefore one must apply them critically in social analysis. In other words, the former are analytical tools developed within their own context, and latter are analytical tools developed either *ante* or *ex post* of the phenomenon being studied. Both concepts, however, imply interdependent causal relationships with other concepts. They can be summed up as Weberian Ideal types – the best possible abstract model of a messier and never equalled reality – which rest on a core of similar constitutive elements that can have general application in various unconnected contexts.

In contrast, according to the French historian Antoine Prost (1996: 128), ordinary or ‘common sense’ concepts are used in everyday life as descriptive tools to facilitate communication. In other words, ‘common sense’ concepts do not allude to a theory; instead they have a practical utility which allows local descriptions according to contingent realities. In this sense, they are necessarily polysemic, their meanings vary from one context to another and in accordance to the persons using them. In accordance with Norman Long (2003), this type of approach implies a clear epistemological standpoint: ‘By acknowledging the existence of “multiple social realities” (that is, the coexistence of different understandings and interpretations of experience), it questions the ontological realism of positivist science (that is, of a “real world” that is simply “out there” to be discovered).’ By adopting an actor-orientated approach inspired by the works of Long, this chapter first describes the implementation process of a national development programme in a mountain village in Hubei province, central China, by using common sense concepts. The gathering of factual data and the initial description of the local government policy precede any attempt to explain, theorize or analyse the events being described. The second section of the chapter is dedicated to identifying the different and complex interrelationships which may or may not influence the existence, creation, affirmation, negation or opposition of elements of accountability in a localized rural Chinese context. In this section I analyse the empirical construction of accountability in a rural Chinese village and suggest that individual strategies which produce meaning and legitimacy are free to determine themselves within relatively stable operative logics governing and enabling the process of negotiation.

1 'CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW COUNTRYSIDE' IN YU LU VILLAGE

Introduction to Yu Lu Village

Yu Lu is a mountain village located in Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, which is situated in south-western Hubei province, in central China.² The village is composed of around 2200 households, with a population of 4262 persons, half of which are classified today as Tujia, Dong and Miao minorities, and the other half as Han Chinese. In the last couple of centuries, these different populations have integrated into a local culture which combines both Han and minority traditions. Identification as a minority group does not play an important role in everyday life. Almost all locals share a common language, the Enshi dialect, and common customs such as ancestor worship, patrilineal inheritance and intermarriage.³

Since the 1950s, most rural areas in China have undergone countless administrative reforms. In the past few decades the scope and title of administrative units in the area studied has changed on average every six years, which is probably representative for most regions in central China. In 2003, the last major administrative reform in the area brought together three smaller hamlets to create one large administrative village today called Yu Lu.

Because of the steep and constraining hills in the region, most villages here do not have a nuclear settlement. Instead, most of the farm houses are dispersed over the mountains. In the past, most farm houses formed 'courtyards' (*yuanzi*) or hamlets of families that all shared the same surname, for example the 'Tan courtyard' (*tanyuanzi*), and everyone was called by his kinship title within the hamlet.⁴ Kinship ties can partly be identified by one's name because they are generally made up of three different indicative components. The first character of one's name indicates the surname (that is, Wang, Chen, Liu, and so on), the second character usually indicates the position within the clan's genealogical ranking (*beifen*), so all the siblings within a generation carry the same generation name, and the last character is the person's given name, for instance: Guo (surname) Zhen (generation name) Dong (given name). The name which indicates the generation is generally prescribed by a family poem. These can vary from 12 to 100 characters; when the poem is completed and the last generation carries the last character of the poem, either the cycle begins again and the first character of the poem is reused or, in some cases, the poem is extended. The given name, or the third character in a name, is usually chosen by the grandfather who ensures that his grandchild's given name is compatible with his or her generation name.

Although this tradition is maintained in Yu Lu village and some relatives still live together in family hamlets, the most important criteria related to where to build one's new house nowadays in the countryside is not exclusively kinship ties any longer, but also, and increasingly, the proximity of the new house to the asphalt roads which lead to the nearest commercial township. Major transformations in local infrastructure are effectively both causes and consequences of deeper structural social and economic changes in China today.

Despite its relatively scattered population and inconvenient geographical location,⁵ one of the particularities of Yu Lu is that it has been a regular experimenting ground for changing government policies. Since Mao's radical push for China's 'modernization' through his personal interpretation of socialism,⁶ Yu Lu has been a showcase community for shifting government policies and rural development strategies over the past few decades. In the 1970s it was given the Maoist title of a 'red flag brigade' (*hongqi dadui*), in the 1980s it became a 'model village' (*shifan cun*), a label which it still carries today, and more recently it gained the additional honorary title of a 'small healthy village' (*xiaokang cun*), a term fashioned by Deng Xiaoping in the 1990s. These honorary titles express the different ideological orientation of the shifting leadership at the time.

'New' Policy Guidelines

'The Construction of a New Countryside' programme (hereafter referred to as CNC) is in fact in many respects a continuation of earlier Maoist development policies under a new name. As mentioned above, many national development or modernization programmes under Mao were both experimental and rural in nature. Furthermore, they were conditional on the delicate balance of power that shifted incessantly among the top leaders of the Communist Party at the time. The CNC is a relatively similar contemporary reflection of the landscape of China's current political leadership and its declared national priorities. The basic targets of the CNC programme echo some of the larger focal points of contemporary national modernization policies for the whole of the People's Republic of China, such as economic development (*jingji fazhan*), scientific development (*kexue fazhan*), population quality (*suzhi*),⁷ civility (*wenming*), improved education levels (*wenhua shuiping*), and so on.

In effect, as part of the government's pledge to reduce the widening gap between China's countryside and its booming urban centres, in late 2005 the central authorities released a nation-wide policy which called for the 'Construction of a New Countryside' as one of its foremost tasks over the next five year period 2006–10. The basic principles underlying the

objectives of the programme are embodied in the '20 character principles' (*20 zi fangzhen*) (see Ye Jingzhong 2006):

- increased production (*shengchan fazhan*)
- acceptable standards of living (*shenghuo kuanrong*)
- civilized countryside lifestyle (*xiangfeng wenming*)
- orderliness of village landscape (*cunrong zhengjie*)
- 'democratic' governance (*guanli minzu*).

In Enshi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture, at the village level this translated into the 'Five Changes (*wugai*), Three Constructions (*sanjian*), Two Improvements (*liangtigao*) and One Opening (*yigongkai*)' plan:⁸

- Five changes: roads, water system, household kitchen, toilet, and pig sty.
- Three constructions: more productive and market orientated agricultural industry, hygienic school campuses, individual household methane gas tank.
- Two improvements: individual cadres' 'quality' (*suzhi*) and local government coordination.
- One opening: more transparency in local government affairs.

These official statements are guidelines, and they are often more meaningful as political slogans than as actual development strategies delivering sustainable change. Nonetheless, below we will examine how these statements translated into real action and subjective meaning by examining the piecemeal implementation process in Yu Lu village.

CNC's Working Group

Although a particular administrative framework was set up in 2006 to implement the programme in Yu Lu and its region, the government structure responsible for the CNC is in fact rather complicated. The CNC is a national programme initiated from the central government (*zhongyang*) and targeting the improvement of basic living standards in the countryside (*nongcun*). The village (*cun*) is the smallest administrative unit situated at the lowest level of the party–state structure which is more or less divided into six echelons. From top to bottom there is: the central government (*zhongyang*), the province level (*sheng*), the prefecture level (*diqu*) or 'zhou' for autonomous minority prefectures like Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, the county or district level (*xian*), the township level (*xiang*), and finally the village level (*cun*) where Yu Lu is located.

At every level of the administrative hierarchy there is a dual track system whereby a ‘government branch’ is responsible for operational affairs and an equivalent but separate ‘Party branch’ supervises government affairs.⁹

Following several internal Party meetings and strategic plans by members at the prefecture and county levels, a ‘working group’ of cadres from the village, township and county level was made up to lead and organize these programmes. This working group included four cadres from the Enshi city government, of which one was from the Department for Education (*jiaoyu bu*), one from the Council for Minority and Religious Affairs (*minzu zongjiao weiyanhui*), and two more from the city government office. None of the cadres from the working group are from Yu Lu village itself. The Party-Secretary from the level of the village who participated in the working group was not originally from Yu Lu. He was purposely dispatched to Yu Lu by the Party branch at the county level. Furthermore, members of this working group maintained very limited personal relationships (*guanxi*) with the local villagers, except with some of the more powerful families they had to establish working relations with, as we see further on in the chapter.

The overall length of service to such a village project by any single cadre is relatively short, around six months to a year. Cadres tend to use these small assignments as platforms to launch their careers or to climb higher in the government structure. Therefore, there is relatively little dedication and commitment invested by the cadres in these projects, often just enough to ensure a professional promotion. This form of mixed working committees is not specific to Yu Lu, instead it is a common mechanism for distributing different responsibilities during policy implementation, as well as an effective method to keep a check on different levels of power and authority in the process. In addition to the working committee, there is also a separate local village council (*cunweihui*), composed of both ‘elected villagers’¹⁰ and local Party members, who were actively involved in the different stages of the policy implementation.

However, there was no public deliberation in the choice of key objectives for the programme. As the policy guidelines above indicate, the preliminary process of identifying and determining targets, goals, means and forms of resource distribution was not directly discussed with the inhabitants of the village. While instructions for the distribution of money and material were both disclosed in open village meetings and announced on the public announcement boards, it was in fact very difficult to follow the exact trail of resources coming from higher government levels down to their material distribution on the ground. Nonetheless, as we will see later, through specific case studies, local villagers did in fact have active and ongoing roles in the implementation process of the development

project. Rather than a fixed unilateral government policy which set formal 'state' agency against local passivity, the programme unfolded like a web of mutual, complex and overlapping negotiated relationships between a large set of different actors each conveying their own set of personal or collective interests.

How the CNC is Presented in Yu Lu

The first time I visited Yu Lu was in winter November 2005. I was taken there and guided around for about one hour by a delegation of Party members from the city government of Enshi. Teaching staff from the city's main university were also part of our delegation. I was driven around Yu Lu in an official car along the main asphalt road which cuts through the village.¹¹ From there I could *see* an impressive number of new houses, recently constructed, flanked along both sides of the road up the mountains. I remember the car stopping at a 'successful peasant's house' (*funong*), which according to my hosts meant that the head of the family was making around (or at least) 10 000 RMB a year.¹² I was shown around the peasant's 'model tea factory' (*shifan chachang*), as well as his 'model home' (*shifan hu*): he had a separate tiled kitchen instead of a conventional earth and cement 'chimney' from which ordinary peasants cook, and a private toilet with a running water flush. Usually peasants combine their disposal system with the pig sty or alternatively, if they do not have a pig sty, they dig a hole outside somewhere discrete next to the house. A tank underneath collects the waste and eventually its contents are emptied out onto the land as fertilizer. Some houses have installed methane gas tanks underground which transform the collected waste into organic biogas used to produce cooking fire and also to heat water if the household is equipped with a water tank.

After the visit, I was taken along a winding foot path that criss-crossed through the mountain tea fields to get a closer look at local tea pickers in action. Overall, in the time space of about one hour I was presented both a 'macro' view of the village through the drive along the main road which cut through the village, and a 'micro' view by going into and visiting the house, factory and fields of a successful peasant. The second time I visited Yu Lu was in the summer of the following year, June 2006. When I returned this time, there was a large construction site next to the old village primary school which was being transformed into the main administrative headquarters. About 20 construction workers, who were all in fact local peasants, were mixing concrete and shuffling bricks around the site. I was told by one of the officials accompanying me that the workers are renovating the building and constructing a car park outside for guests and tourists

who come and visit. As Yu Lu is an exemplary village (*shifancun*) in the area, it is usually marked up as a commendable site for visiting officials and tourists foreign to the region. As a result, appropriate facilities had to be constructed to welcome and receive the guests.

Action and Actors on the Ground

The actual 'rural construction' carried out by the selected working group in Yu Lu itself included a few technical workshops (primarily for tea cultivation), the distribution of agricultural subsidies (namely, forestry subsidies)¹³ and the construction of small community facilities such as a village 'library' in the main village council, a 'women's service centre' for help and support with family planning and some decorative ornaments along the main public road. Some of these efforts were extensions or improvements of existing policies such as the forestry subsidies, but they were on the whole relatively small actions with minor impact on pre-CNC village life. For instance, very few villagers knew about the village library, and when they did they would rarely have the instinct to consult books for advice about issues that were usually resolved through discussions with knowledgeable friends and contacts, or passed-down through family tradition like farming or craftsmanship.

However, in its initial phase the largest part of the programme included two major architectural 'face-lifts' to the village. The first task involved plastering, painting and decorating all the key houses visible from the principle asphalt road that runs through the village, the same road that I was taken on my first 'guided tour' in November 2005. The second major task was the conversion of the old village primary school into the main administrative headquarters, hence the construction work that I saw in June 2006.

Regarding the first target, members of the working committee visited almost every notable household along the asphalt road and asked families whether they wanted to plaster their exterior walls, but only the ones that were visible from the road, the side walls were not directly concerned or eligible for aid (see Figure 14.1). They also suggested painting the main façade of homes and decorating them with lamps, calligraphy scrolls and other traditional ornaments according to a generic 'Tujia minority' design created by the government (see Figure 14.2). To supply the material and labour for the housing renovation along the road, members of the working group used contacts (*guanxi*) they had with one of the largest construction companies in Enshi city and subcontracted two of their employees to carry out all the work in the village. In addition to the external refurbishment, the working committee also offered to help a limited number



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2006).

Figure 14.1 Renovating the houses by the main road. Only the external and visible façades of the homes were painted and adorned. The other sides were considered unnecessary



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2008).

Figure 14.2 Latest prototype of a lavish 'Tujia' type house in Yu Lu village



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2008).

Figure 14.3a Old kitchen in a home built in the 1970s. The surface of the integrated cooker has been recently tiled



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2008).

Figure 14.3b New kitchen, built with subsidies from the ‘Construction of a New Countryside’ policy funds. Some of the primary improvements are tiled walls and additional cabinets

of families in Yu Lu to install modern cooking and washing facilities in their houses (see Figure 14.3a and 14.3b), like the 'exemplary house' (*shifanhu*) of the wealthy peasant (*funong*) I had visited in 2005. This part of the programme, which was limited in its reach and unequal in its impact, corresponded most explicitly to the main objectives declared in public disclosures, for example, the 'Five Changes' strategy which aims to improve and sanitize rural living conditions.

The Politics of Government Assistance

Government help came in different forms: part of the cost was subsidized directly by the working group, part of the materials were given to the households like plaster, paint, lamps, seeds, and so on according to the nature of the intervention, and part of the cost of construction had to be supplied by the peasants themselves. In other words, 'aid' was rarely 100 per cent subsidized; families who wanted to benefit from the programme had to possess sufficient disposable income first (or had to be able to borrow money) in order to finance part of the refurbishment themselves. However, the proportion of personal contribution varied from one household to another. This public-private co-responsibility system meant that families were always expected to provide either labour, money or both in the implementation process of the development strategy. According to two cadres from the city government, state intervention was not a substitute or a stand-in for anything; instead, the underlying purpose of the CNC was to provide encouragement and support to those families who showed a keen interest to improve their own livelihood themselves.¹⁴ According to these spokesmen, the primary mission of the Chinese Party-state in remote and rural areas like Enshi is first and foremost to ensure social and political stability '*bawending gongzuo zuohao*' and to help solve basic living needs like food and shelter '*wenbao wenti dashu jiejie*'. When and if those priority tasks are met, the Party-state's other responsibilities include encouraging rural 'modernization' and supporting families who demonstrate skilful independent initiative (*rencai*) and goodwill by providing them with partial support offered in programmes like the CNC: '*ruguo zuodehao, nawomen zhishi tamen, bang tamen yi dian*'.¹⁵

In terms of real intervention, not all villagers were direct beneficiaries of the programme. The utility and proportion of government subsidies received or requested by inhabitants often depended on the status of their income and their family situation:¹⁶ was the home rundown or in the process of being constructed? Are they preoccupied with other priorities and costs such as weddings and funerals for instance? Do they consider

renovation useful and necessary, and so on? Another essential criterion which determined government support was the house's geographical location. Indeed, while the homes closest and most visible from the asphalt road were offered 'aid', the majority of households, especially those higher up the mountain or behind the valley of the extended Yu Lu administrative unit, were never paid a visit by the working group nor offered help. One peasant who lived relatively far removed from the main asphalt road on a steep hill told me 'there are no eyes to *see* our house (*meiyou yanjingkan*), why would they offer us help?'

In addition to disposable income and proximity to the main asphalt road, the third and perhaps most important criteria to become a beneficiary of the programme was proximity and potential service to members of the working group or, better still, members higher up in the Party apparatus. A small number of notable families belonged to those most favoured by local government and they each received subsidies to renovate their kitchens and toilets; some households even got computers. The closer one was with local officials and the more one could deliver them 'face' (*mianzi*), which means honour and respect, the more likely one would be considered for subsidies. In effect by giving 'face' through mutually sustained constructive relationships (*guanxi*), participating families were by extension delivering 'face' (honour) to the overall CNC project and helping its strategic development.

For example, the Jing family was a major beneficiary of the programme in Yu Lu. Even though Jing did not have any effective kinship relations with any of the leading cadres, he sustained 'fictive' kinship relations (*qinqi*) with local powerful bureaucrats which connected his interests to those of the Party cadres. For instance, among the leading cadres responsible for the CNC, one is an 'adoptive father' (*gan die*) and another is an 'adoptive uncle' (*rende jiujiu*) of his 5-year-old son.

In 2005, Jing began construction for a new house which had three floors and two balconies, one on each side of the front of his home. At the time, his house was the only one built in a particularly lavish minority style: the main façade was decorated with columns, carved wooden window frames and traditional lamps; even modern-lit street lamps were installed on the public road opposite his front door. Although Jing himself only spoke about the hard work he endured to build his new house, other villagers often pointed to his connections (*guanxi*) with the officials in the township and county government to explain how he managed to build such an ostentatious home. Even those who were benefiting from the subsidies often complained that other families were getting more. They felt they suffered from some form of unfair distribution. Meanwhile, others who already benefited from the programme were dissatisfied with the material

provided, claiming that the plaster, paint, cement and so on were of bad quality and that they could get better products elsewhere.

In this situation, Jing clearly benefited from his proximity with officials. Conversely, the officials also profited from this collaboration as they needed reliable partners to present the results of their work. Both negotiating parties, the Jing family and the local cadres, were mutually dependent on each other for different reasons: the officials needed real showcases or 'model households' (*shifanhu*) to legitimize their work to their supervisors and the family needed the material and official support to build their new home. On both sides there was a clear instrumentalization of *guanxi* (or interpersonal relations) which respectively produced benefits and 'face' for the other party.

More than just a network of personal connections, *guanxi* is as communicational channel which enables the endless formation process of complementary and mutual subjectivities (cf. Kipnis 1997). Although their *guanxi* certainly does not solely comprise this exclusive instrumental rapport, in this particular case personal interests were mixed with professional and Party interests. The same pattern of privileged connections was observable among the other families who benefited most from the programme. The tea factory and wealthy peasant house that I had visited was another case in point. It was this dialectic relationship of personal negotiated interests that appeared to move the implementation of the programme forward.

Disputed and Subjective Interests

Although many people spoke out against the Party's favouritism, there was no single unified and coherent critique from the villagers of the government's action. Different people used different arguments, in different contexts, and to different extents, to hold the government 'accountable' for different things. Let us consider three different cases to illustrate.

First, in some instances (more often with the older villagers), peasants invoked Maoist notions and testimonies to speak out against the apparent government neglect: 'We are all from one brigade (*dadui*), how can it be that only those next to the road are getting money?' A 'brigade' was a collective productive and administrative unit under the Maoist era. It was abolished in the 1980s together with the ideological foundations it was based upon. Although some of the villagers still use the concept of brigade, it has been on the whole eliminated from the contemporary language used by party and government officials. Other common remarks by the villagers were: 'the officials are helping the rich and not the poor' (*tamen fu fu, bu fupin*), or 'they are serving themselves, they are not serving the people'

(*wei geren fuwu, bu shi wei laobaixing fuwu*) – echoing Mao Zedong’s famous quotation ‘to serve the people’ (*wei renmin fuwu*). Finally, one of the younger men from Yu Lu who had spent five years working (*dagong*) in Shanghai told me that in Yu Lu the CNC project might be ‘one of the best exemplary showcases on the surface, but in reality it was one of the most deficient’ (*mianzi shang shi zui haode, shiji shang shi zui chade*). In other words, villagers drew upon the principles of the Maoist era and used discursive tools of resistance to complain about perceived violations and unfair treatment from the cadres.

In the second case, one elderly woman claimed to have endured repeated cases of malice and corruption by the local cadres, who she accused of colluding with her neighbours against her and her family. As a result she went to ‘a day of the open door’ that the prefecture government was organizing and holding in the nearest town to root out corrupt and incompetent officials. This session was part of a nation-wide ‘accountability’ strategy (*gangwei zerenzhi*) aimed to strengthen the Party’s visibility, legitimacy and operational efficiency at lower levels of institutional practice.¹⁷ The Party-state is effectively striving to enhance its command chain structure partly by involving peasants in the process of monitoring the actions of local village-level bureaucrats. During this public deliberation session, the elderly woman met the Party Secretary of the prefecture government in person and reported her family’s injustices. In other words, she voiced her concerns and made her accusations within the framework of a national anti-corruption campaign. She relied on formal inventories of legitimate action and tried to denounce the local cadres for transgressing these ‘acceptable norms’. Although the chairman of the session ordered an immediate inquiry into her case and her story was even published later in the local newspaper, after the assessment no action was taken and finally her case was dropped.

Finally, our third case is one of public criticism of Yu Lu’s development programme on an Internet bulletin board of the city government by an anonymous Internet user or ‘netizen’ (*wangmin*). Indeed, the programme had commonly been designated by the locals as a ‘face project’ (*mianzi gongcheng*) because it was apparently more concerned about ‘face’ (*mianzi*) and external images of the village rather than the substantive improvements of people’s lives. The notice read:

Why is Enshi’s rural construction programme only focusing on Yu Lu, Baiyang, and Xiaolongtang? [These are all prominent showcase villages in the area]. The basic conditions of all these places are already very good. Carrying out ‘face projects’ (*mianzi gongcheng*) and ‘image building projects’ (*xingxiang gongcheng*) is betraying the original meaning of ‘Constructing a New Countryside’.¹⁸

According to Li Changping, former township and county Party official and current anti-corruption researcher in Beijing: 'Since there are no controls from below, and supervision from above relies heavily on reports of official accomplishments, demonstration of such accomplishments becomes the main task of administrative work, and exaggeration and falsification the norm in: documents submitted by local governments at all levels' (Li Changping 2003: 209). Are there therefore no mechanisms of accountability in Yu Lu, neither from below nor from above, which control the use and abuse of power? Andreas Schedler rightly points out: 'in politics, first comes power, then the need to control it' (1999: 13). Despite the apparent uncontrolled and arbitrary manner that the CNC unfolded, there were in fact various ways that local villagers took part in the programme, as well as existing social conventions, which I propose to call 'modes of being' and/or 'modes of doing', that influenced, determined and sometimes even controlled the overlapping social and moral representations which mobilized people's actions. Indeed, Norman Long reminds us that: 'Social action is never an individual ego-centred pursuit. It takes place within networks of relations, . . . is shaped by both routine and explorative organising practices, and is bounded by certain social conventions, values and power relations' (2001: 49–72). Let us consider how this unravelled in Yu Lu.

2 ANALYSIS: IMAGES OF THE PARTY–STATE, '*GUANXI*' AND ACCOUNTABILITY

First, what is common to all three accusations mentioned above is an unclear and uncertain image of the Party-state itself. According to Plato's analogy of the 'Ship of State', comparing statesmanship to an art or a craft is erroneous: 'the more deeply we consider the meaning of power, the more likely we are to reject Plato's analogy' (Walzer 1983: 286). Drawing on a well known analysis of Plato's argument by Bamborough, 'The true analogy is between the choice of a policy by a politician and the choice of a destination by the owner or passengers of a ship' (Renford Bamborough, in Walzer 1983: 286). Bar the democratic underpinnings of Bamborough's argument which are not applicable to China, we can ask ourselves whether it is possible to effectively understand or evaluate the role of the state by looking at what its ultimate objective is or should be. For instance, is it possible, or is it problematic, to analyse and interpret the role of the state from a perspective which gives it an explicit normative purpose as convention would have it? Is it pertinent for us to consider the state as a predetermined and fixed category, like an established and unquestioned truth such

as ‘the crucial agency of distributive justice’ as Michael Walzer points out (Walzer 1983)?

In the case of the CNC, perhaps the success of a policy is less conditional on its objectives and more a direct result of its piecemeal implementation by different systems of interested actors. As Bryan Roberts rightly asserts: ‘social policy analysis needs to put as much emphasis on how policy is implemented as on what that policy is’ (Roberts 2001: 3). This implies relaxing pre-conceived notions about the state as well as reducing its role in favour of a more actor-orientated approach which highlights action and processes rather than fixed categories.

Categories versus Processes: Politics at the Interface

On both the discursive and real administrative levels, there seems to be uncertainty about the underlying structural principles legitimizing and guiding the Party-state’s existence altogether in China. It is not surprising that some of the major interests for current observers of contemporary China centre on the longevity and nature of the Chinese Communist Party-state. Is the Maoist discourse which established the ‘modern state’ in China still a legitimate basis to support and legitimise the Party in power? The literal translation of the CNC policy name is ‘the construction of a new socialist countryside’ (*shehui zhuyi xin nongcun jianshe*). However, according to Chinese syntax, the Chinese title does not emphasize the ‘socialist’ attribute of the word ‘countryside’. Instead, the term ‘socialism’ (*shehui zhuyi*) is carefully placed at the start of the title to respect the original ideological canons of the Party, but in everyday vernacular the term is dropped to keep the simple expression ‘Construction of a New Countryside’. As the supremacy of political ideology is weakening fast in continental China, the use of familiar political terminology may be regarded as a delicate strategy to offer people a reassuring sense of continuity and stability, while at the same time granting additional space for new and dynamic creative forces through an optimistic tone which alludes to attractive forthcoming prospects, that is, Construction of a New Countryside. Both the normative and cognitive boundaries of the Chinese state, even in its intervention in the case of Yu Lu’s development programme, seem unclear, indistinct and often changing. This makes it indeed harder to identify a single coherent ‘responsible’ actor for protesters to point to.

In contrast, what is much clearer for the villagers in terms of stable norms, modes of conduct, and routine legitimacy is their direct contacts, relationships and positioning within a socially integrated network of people. This interpersonal network governing social interaction has often been called *guanxi*, however, *guanxi* is more specifically made up of

dynamic relationships (*laiwang*) which are endless and mutually connected processes of individual formations of the 'self'. The term *laiwang* means to come (*lai*) and to go (*wang*), encompassing the dual action, which can be simultaneous, of receiving and giving. In effect, according to Andrew Kipnis, *guanxi* can be summed up as a relatively stable and an ongoing process of 'subject making', which somehow facilitates the constant process of negotiation of one's symbolic representation of reality and of oneself. In his own words: 'In a very real sense, when Fengjia villagers re-create their networks of relationships they also re-create themselves. If one considers the self to be socially determined – then one's relationships in fact constitutes one's self' (Kipnis 1997: 8). In the process of reciprocal exchange, the individual's subjective representation and expectations are confronted with those of others. It is through this mutual and creative dialectic action, which Long calls the interface, that representations of the world and the boundaries of what is legitimate, are adjusted and affirmed.

Although many definitions of accountability have emerged in recent years as a result of its seemingly innovative and valuable explanatory value, Norman Long's concept of accountability as an interrelational connecting nodal point appears to be the most pertinent and instructive for our study. According to Long: 'Interfaces typically occur at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social fields intersect, or more concretely, in social situations or arenas in which interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints' (Long 1999: 1). Accordingly, in many respects different and particular versions of accountability were manifested and measured through the subjective but shared norms of expectability and acceptability determined during every negotiated 'contact' at the interface of different lifeworlds. Elsewhere he adds that 'Interface analysis, which concentrates upon analysing critical junctures or arenas involving differences of normative value and social interest, entails not only understanding the struggles and power differentials taking place between the parties involved, but also an attempt to reveal the dynamics of cultural accommodation that makes it possible for the various worldviews to interact' (Long 1999: 5).

Accountability is therefore not defined in fixed political or normative terms, but in terms of what is considered acceptable and expected by the engaged parties at an instance of intersecting lifeworlds. Moreover, rather than a transcendental concept enshrined in and upheld by fixed institutions, accountability becomes an action, an inter-personal, subjective and multifaceted engagement between actors who, through a shared procedural 'mode of being' which is constantly changing, determine, negotiate

and simultaneously embody what is accountable. As the anthropologist Yan Yunxiang points out in his seminal book *The Flow of Gifts*: 'In contrast to many other societies, the structure of social relations in China rests largely on fluid, person-centred social networks, rather than on fixed social institutions' (Yan Yunxiang 1996: 14). In other words, interpersonal relations or *guanxi* are not only necessary interactions which construct, challenge and confirm our different subjective 'lifeworlds', they are also essential mechanisms of social regulation which are historically embedded in centuries of contrasted yet constant practice.

The procedural form of negotiation or 'mode of being', being an indicator of possible forms of action, does not influence or determine the content or legitimacy of an action. Instead, the latter is determined by the contingent circumstances considered relevant or valuable for the groups of interested actors involved. Because there is no such thing as a constant 'object' but only constant processes and 'modes of being', this perspective offers alternative and more flexible accounts of accountability that are propitious to greater adaptability to our existing and changing reality.¹⁹

How can we link this back to our analysis of the CNC? The development strategy was not a detached policy which applied itself objectively or arbitrarily onto a bare social fabric. Instead it unfolded into an existing web of interconnected nodal points of conflicting and conciliating agreements, where local social dynamics and individual and/or collective representations of power carried it into existence. It is at the interface between formal policy requirements and informal yet embedded social practices that we are to find the keys to a better understanding of contemporary forms of accountability in rural China today.

Let us consider a few examples to illustrate. More than a top-down unilateral government policy, the programme evolved in proportion to overlapping official and unofficial micro agreements which made up the actual implementation process. Many families along the road for instance who were eligible for help rejected government subsidies. Different households had different reasons for withholding: some were financial, some were personal, and some were political. For example some families preferred to spend their limited income on more valuable things such as family ceremonies (that is, weddings, funerals, banquets) or invest it in a motored vehicle for transportation (that is, motorcycle, three-wheeled tow vehicles, small truck). Meanwhile, other families did not consider the renovation work useful or necessary. They did not estimate that extra coatings of paint on their walls or renovated kitchens and toilets would benefit them substantially. Finally, some villagers claimed that they did not want to accept 'favours' from officials. They preferred to keep a distance from village politics because they suspected that local cadres would use small actions to

eventually extract disproportionate favours from them as reciprocal signs of gratitude.

As most of these cases demonstrate, villagers are capable of judging for themselves the utility of government collaboration, and they can refrain from participating in the programme if they wish to. What is common in the cases where government help was refused by the villagers was that the Party-state was generally not considered a serious institutional partner who was offering valuable forms of assistance. To some extent, the renovation part of the policy unravelled like a commercial contract. Local officials, like salesmen, were offering home improvement formulas to individual households at an advantageous price. The villagers were treated like consumers who could either 'purchase' parts of the programme, adjust it to their own particular needs and negotiate their own private deal like the Jing family mentioned above, or they could refuse the offer altogether.

Nonetheless, refusing to partake in the village embellishment project did not prevent some villagers from playing an important role in the implementation process itself. This was the case of Wang 'the third' who lived opposite the primary school that was transformed into the seat of the village government in 2006. Wang 'the third' is a good counter-example for two reasons: first, his own house is one of the most rundown constructions in the village, in fact it is more of a shack, and furthermore it is situated directly opposite the new village administration in the main centre of the village. Secondly, despite his circumstances, Wang 'the third' was nominated the chief coordinator of the renovation project for the village administrative building. In other words, it was precisely one of these 'critical' peasants who refused to participate in the CNC development programme that carried out one of the major parts of the policy: renovating the internal and external structure of the village headquarters.

Wang 'the third' is the third son of the Wang family, his father came over to Yu Lu in the 1950s from a poorer neighbouring village, he married a local woman and stayed in Yu Lu for the rest of his life. The Wang clan are known for their bad temper (*piqi*). Wang 'the third' himself is a heavy drinker and is fond of gambling. His disobedient nature and his accumulated losses over the years have prevented him from establishing a stable home (*jia*) for his wife and two daughters who are both in their early twenties. Despite a lifetime of hard work in the construction industry, their home is one of the smallest and most precarious constructions in the village. It only has one bedroom, a small living room and a separate kitchen, and they have a rundown pig sty next to the house. While growing up, his two daughters slept in a small converted room under the staircase of the old primary school. Since the conversion of the building into the village administration, the girls have kept their sleeping room

under the staircase and stay there when they come back to Yu Lu from the city.

In terms of 'good image' for the CNC's development goals, Wang 'the third's' home clearly tarnishes the stage of Yu Lu's asphalt road. His dilapidated house is the closest to the village council and all visitors necessarily pass in front of it when they visit. Nonetheless, he has always fervently refused to participate in the CNC's home-refurbishment policy, partly because he thought that this was of no valuable use, partly because he did not want to spend his limited funds on this kind of project.

While Wang 'the third' was renowned in the village for his bad temper, he was also widely considered an industrious and reliable worker, as well as a capable father. Despite their family's precarious circumstances, both of his daughters made it to universities in different cities in Hubei province, a rarity in the village and an undisputed source of pride for him. In the past few years, all of his efforts have gone towards supporting them through higher education. When I returned to Yu Lu in March 2008, Wang 'the third' and his wife had both left the village temporarily to work (*dagong*) in the cities and make more money to support the family.

In addition, as mentioned above, in 2006 Wang 'the third' was made the chief coordinator for the renovation project of the village council. Although he had nothing to do directly with the CNC or the formal working group, and even though he never participated in the 'face project' by refurbishing his house, Wang 'the third' was a significant actor and organizational nodal point in the overall development of the CNC programme. He was in charge of the entire process of renovating both the internal structure and external area of the old primary school. For this, he was given full control of budgetary and operational affairs. For example, he was responsible for purchasing the construction material, for recruiting the workers, and for coordinating and overseeing the entire construction process which involved over 20 people and lasted altogether about three months. In addition to a profitable seasonal work contract, Wang 'the third' also provided additional sources of income for the 20 workers he had contracted. In sum, besides the direct and formal intervention of the CNC, there were other ways that local inhabitants could both benefit and participate in the programme itself. Although formal frameworks of governance do not account for these types of informal conciliating actors and real-life multifaceted participatory processes, they do in fact play a crucial role in the accomplishment of official policies like rural development strategies.

By June 2006, Wang 'the third' had finished all the internal work of the building and was constructing the car park outside. When I returned in August 2006 the car park had become a basketball court, which appeared

to be more useful considering that no one in the village, except for the village Party Secretary, owned a car. However, contrary to my personal estimations, within the first few weeks the new concrete platform quickly became a convenient flat surface on which nearby peasants could scatter and dry their tea leaves, vegetables, and corn (see Figures 14.4a and 14.4b). Indeed, wide and flat open spaces were rare in mountain villages like Yu Lu. Visibly, the new edifice blended quickly into the ordinary routines of local inhabitants who made use of the new structure to their advantage. The car park turned basketball court finally served more purpose in everyday customary activities like farming and tea cultivation than as the beneficial object formerly determined in the original planning procedure.

The Invisible Politics of 'Models'

Many of the CNC's goals had similar tangential results and unexpected consequences. In some respects, the imperative of the construction had little to do with the actual result, impact and utility of the construction itself. The developmental value was in the process of 'image creation' and 'image propagation' rather than in substantial developmental impact. In *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control and the Dangers of Modernity in China*, Børge Bakken highlights a valuable yet under-acknowledged aspect of long-standing Chinese governance: the use of model examples. Despite the increasing emphasis on economic competition and success, and the relative decline of authoritarian control since political and economic liberalization in the last few decades, Bakken argues that contemporary politics in China are still imbued with an age-old tradition of moral teaching through the use of model examples. The author claims that the use of exemplary models and cases is still a dominant form of governance in China despite being ever more challenged today by global and globalising forces (Bakken 2000). Whether these demonstrative mechanisms are effective or not is not the central concern of this chapter. However, what is interesting and relevant to our study is pointing out the invisible tangential value of arranging 'model cases' like the 'model household' (*shifanhu*) and 'model tea factory' (*shifan chachang*) mentioned earlier, or even planning 'model villages' (*shifancun*) like Yu Lu itself.

Indeed, visibility was a crucial aspect of the programme from its inception. Yu Lu and the CNC were conceived and instrumentalized in the past decades partly with this objective in mind. Not only was it considered beneficial to the image of the interventionist Party-state, but the circulation of positive images of Yu Lu retained by visiting guests or posted on the Internet and printed in the media would indirectly benefit the villagers too. For example, through the establishment of a recognized 'exemplary



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2006).

Figure 14.4a Workers building the ‘car park’ outside the new administrative building (on the left)

model’ the local reputation of the village and its inhabitants would spread, public credibility would increase and this could subsequently attract the attention of new intermediaries and customers for the various individual and household enterprises in Yu Lu and its surrounding area. Local business and tourism could potentially flourish as a consequence. As well as creating a virtual social, moral and economic standard to live up to for the inhabitants of Yu Lu, the ‘exemplary models’ also have a propagating influence on surrounding communities who have heightened awareness of development standards elsewhere.

In the city government’s response to the disparaging Internet enquiry mentioned above, the objective of displaying a ‘model village’ is clearly contrasted with to the aim of actually embodying one. The official answer posted on the public Internet bulletin board highlighted that the project was, in fact, a *model* village and that the objective of the ‘Construction of a New Countryside’ is to provide an exemplar for other villages to follow.²⁰ As it seems, the title ‘face project’ (*mianzi gongcheng*) given by some of the



Source: Photograph by Solange Guo Chatelard (2006).

Figure 14.4b Once the flat surface was completed it was transformed into a basketball court. Here a neighbouring peasant uses the surface to scatter and dry her corn

local villagers to the CNC project was more than just a criticism of superficial government intervention. Indeed, this term was also commonly used by the officials themselves to designate part of the actual work the CNC programme.

According to Isunza Vera's operational definition of accountability which is based on its three primary functions – informative, explanatory

and enforcing – we can conclude that these were to some extent respected in the CNC's case. Having demonstrated how local government both informed and then explained the nature of its objectives in respect of the CNC, let us now consider to what extent it enforced these statements.

Formal Accountability and Personal Accountability

The working group was not simply arbitrarily carrying out the policy. There were in fact regular check-ups from higher Party officials as well as other monitoring activities such as household interviews and feedback surveys designed to control the local government's work on the ground. Moreover, there exist more structural nation-wide mechanisms of control such as the Cadre Responsibility System (*gangwei zerenzhi*) and the national Petition System (*shangfang gaozhuang*) which are both designed to increase the efficiency, compliance, accountability and legitimacy of the Party-state apparatus at the lowest levels of the administrative command chain, namely, township and village levels. Although these systems cannot guarantee the successful accomplishment of a policy or the outcome of an individual or collective complaint, they nonetheless provide real channels of communication which enable people to present their grievances to higher levels of the administration. While we tend to consider these mechanisms routine procedures in modern liberal democracies, similar practices have in fact existed for centuries in China in a different form (see Balazs 1968; Huang Ray 1982; Will 2007). Despite these formalities which prove that, contrary to conventional wisdom, certain forms of political accountability can and do exist within authoritarian states, it is important to bear in mind that the clear separation between 'state' and 'society' as two distinct and rational entities still remains more complex and problematic.

In effect, according to Kevin O'Brian and Li Lianjiang (1995: 782):

It is important to remember that villagers do not experience the Chinese state as a single entity with a single face. At (and within) the township, county and higher levels, complainants encounter actors with diverging interests and multiple identities. The same central state that discriminates against villagers can be a 'benefactor' that listens to their complaints. The same village cadres who at times mediate state power and protect villagers can be an 'enemy' when lodging complaints.

In other words, rather than simply executing orders under an unequivocal form of political and legal authority, it was contingent realities and momentary distributions of interests and power which determined the boundaries of legitimate constraint for political decisions. The orders of the CNC working committee were not carried out arbitrarily, nor did they

strictly respect political guidelines given from their superiors. Instead, they unfolded according to a long-standing innate practice of endless negotiations, which was embodied in a constant 'mode of being'. This 'mode of being' or crystallization of shared rules is in fact a procedural form of negotiation which enables the substance of the negotiation to be renewed and changed all the time.

Some of the local cadres responsible for the implementation of the CNC in Yu Lu openly recognized that they had limited resources to carry out this project. They confessed that their primary goal was twofold: to maximize the visible impact of the project while simultaneously cultivating their personal and professional *guanxi*. The success of their work would indeed result out of a good balance between these two interdependent and complementary tasks. This difference, which is inherent in the concept of *mianzi*, 'face', is crucial for us to understand at which level the possible norms of legitimacy, and thus accountability, are to be found. Not only does every actor have the 'capacity to process their and other's experiences and to act upon them' (Long 2003), but in the case that we have studied so far they have the capacity to categorize and to qualify something as 'acceptable' or 'legitimate'. Through his or her negotiated action, or the social interface according to Norman Long, the actor becomes the source of his own reality and author of his or her concept of accountability.

Rather than a transcending ethical value such as 'justice' determining the situation, it was the situation itself and its perceived contingent configuration of interests and power which determined the most effective action to be taken. As a result, accountability is not a law, enshrined in a fixed constitution, but a personal and provisional rule applicable when relevant. Despite this ubiquitous mode of action and interaction, Jérôme Bourgon reminds us, against standard historical interpretation, that the principle of legality and the rule of law do, in fact, have a long record in China's juridical history. However, he concludes that the ultimate competence of a judge is not to rationally apply the law – guardian of Man's rights according to Montesquieu and Rousseau – but rather to know when to refrain from using it, to understand the particularities of a circumstance well enough to transform and adapt the law, or to avoid it all together when necessary. Bourgon (2007: 170) explains:

According to one of the most renowned legal experts of the Qing Empire, Wang Huizu (1731–1807), you only need a legal clerk to associate the name of a crime with a set of facts. In contrast, the true legal expert knows when not to cite the law (literally 'to avoid it' – *bi lü*), in other words, he knows how to refrain from mechanically applying a sentence when it would amount to another injustice. . . . One could cynically conclude that the essence of legal knowledge

consisted in how to influence the law, thus how to liberate oneself from the rule of law.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while the notion of ‘accountability’ has in recent years been readily applied by scholars and practitioners, its underlying assumptions have been consistently ignored. Most commentators observing social and political change in China have tended to yield to what Latour has called ‘the temptation to jump to the “context”’ and provide the absolute scale of the ‘bigger picture’ on which everything can be seen (Latour 2005:184). ‘Accountable cadres’, ‘good governance’, ‘public participation’ and so on, are constructed notions which imply a linear continuity in the values, interests, structures and sources of authority, as well as the relationships between them, which underpin the social fabric from which they emerge. Although the origins of a concept do not necessarily prevent its application elsewhere, applying social categories which posit a social whole can sometimes produce misleading results and obscure more detailed and revealing interaction taking place at micro or local levels.

By focusing on the everyday interactions around the implementation of a development policy in a village in central China, this chapter has sought to capture the different possibilities of what ‘accountability’ means for different actors at a local level in rural China. I have argued that analyzing the politics of accommodation which take place at the interface of competing and interested actors can reveal more about the efficiency, success, value, and relevance of a policy than its formally stated objectives or than conventional expectations. In other words, the procedural *how* sometimes determines more than the normative *why*. Accountability is not an objective notion ‘out there’ which has a rational application in everyday life; instead it is a configuration of possibilities constantly subject to ongoing debate and redefinition by its practitioners according to the material constraints of a particular situation and the interests of the parties involved. Despite the seemingly unaccountable character of the CNC, each step of the implementation process unfolded thanks to a multi-faceted web of individual and collective negotiations which helped accomplish public goals largely through private action. The locus of constraint and thus of legitimacy was to be found in the complex processes of negotiated action carried out by the different actors themselves. This constant ‘mode of being’, of exchange, confrontation and accommodation, is therefore a convention which provides a common platform of shared understanding

which protects the institution of 'negotiation', and subsequently the necessarily incessant reinvention of the boundaries of the 'legitimate'.

NOTES

1. For a critical analysis of the translation of modern western concepts at the turn of the twentieth century into Chinese, via Japan, see Lydia Liu (1995). See also Lily Tsai's extensive study of 'accountability without democracy' for villages with influential local 'solidarity groups' which can curb the arbitrary actions of local officials (Tsai 2007).
2. Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture has a total population of 3.5 million inhabitants of which about a third are classified as Tujia minority. Enshi was approved as an autonomous prefecture in 1983, one of the last to be nominated in the People's Republic of China.
3. For an analysis of the management of minority groups in Enshi prefecture and how the classification of minority groups is manipulated for instrumental purposes see Brown (2002).
4. The most common form of social assemblage in China before the Maoist period was familial or clannish, thus in the countryside up until the 1950s families would constitute entire villages where people share the same surname.
5. Yu Lu is remotely located in the south-western mountains of Hubei province. The construction work for a national motorway and a train station which connect Enshi city to the rest of the national transport network was due to be completed in 2009.
6. According to Wang Hui, one of the most distinctive aspects of China's recent historical experience is the active quest for modernization through Maoist socialism. Indeed, in order to 'liberate' China from the conventional teleological and dominant western discourse of modernization, Wang Hui (2001) suggests looking at the country's specific Maoist experience as a starting point to understand China's own sense of 'modernity'.
7. *Suzhi* or a person's 'quality' refers to a social and duty bound concept of the individual. For an analysis of the social history as well as the contemporary use and instrumentalisation of the term see Kipnis (2006) and Murphy (2004).
8. Official documents from the village council.
9. For an analysis of how these two branches are separated at the local level see Edin (2003a).
10. Under the Organic Law of the Village Committees promulgated in 1987, formally every village should have a village council, elected by local villagers, as well as a separate Party branch to supervise village affairs. However, in Yu Lu, as in many other Chinese villages, it is hard to distinguish the actual borders between the two groups. The boundaries of these two administrative systems are often blurred, sometimes intentionally, but they continue regardless to govern village affairs. In 2003 for instance, Yu Lu did not have a council leader (*cunzhang*) for one year due to confusion about the effective distribution of power and its technical organization. Furthermore, the election process in Yu Lu lacks impartial mechanisms of campaigning and procedural surveillance. According to the results of the last village elections, most elected representatives of the village council are either prominent village members who have played a historical role within community life, or people who are considered to have a better education (*suzhi*) and experience of 'city' life outside the village than the rest of the community.
11. Major road works in Yu Lu and its surrounding region were completed in the 1980s. At this time, local officials outsourced the construction work to retired friends from the national military service.
12. This is about US\$1439 at the 2007 exchange rate.
13. Central authorities introduced nationwide ecological subsidies in the 1990s to encourage reforestation in line with new environmental policies. The policy '*tuigen huanlin*'

means ‘to retrieve the plough’ (*tuigen*) and ‘to convert to the forest’ (*huanlin*). This government incentive was combined with an existing national economic strategy to develop a market-orientated rural economy in China by promoting new industrial activities and high-income cash crops in the countryside. Tea bushes, which effectively fall into the category of subsidized trees under the reforestation policy, also provide a higher source of income than conventional agriculture. Almost every land-labouring household in Yu Lu has converted their fields into tea plantations, and subsequently benefit from the forestry subsidies as a result.

14. These remarks are from two semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Enshi with a chief financial officer and an official from the Agricultural Department, both from the city government of Enshi, 22 March 2008.
15. Remarks from the interviews of 22 March 2008. (See above.)
16. It is nonetheless worth mentioning here that during the period that I visited Yu Lu, between 2005 and 2008, many houses in the village and in neighbouring villages were either new or under construction. This was a clear sign that living standards were rising in the area. The money for most of these houses, however, is coming from migrant labour in China’s mega-cities where most of the young or working population from the village (aged between 16 and 50 years) temporarily live and work to provide for their families. A family needs a relatively substantial sum to buy the necessary materials for the foundation of a house, as well as to pay the workers who build it (who are often relatives, neighbours and/or friends). If a family or a couple do not have enough money to build a house, they generally borrow the necessary sum from relatives or close friends, which is also a sign that prospects for work and earning money are relatively promising and secure.
17. For further analysis about the Cadre Responsibility System *see* Edin (2003a); Burns (1985).
18. Comments listed on the internet bulletin board from the Office for Agriculture of the Party Branch of Enshi City and the Department for Agriculture in the City Government of Enshi, May 2007.
19. According to the French historian Jacques Gernet: ‘Si la plupart des choses nous semblent stables, cette stabilité n’est qu’apparente : elle tient à ce que, dans les substances qui les constituent, les énergies se renouvellent constamment. Ce renouvellement est indispensable à leur maintien, car ce qui ne se renouvelle pas dépérit et meurt. Il est donc une condition nécessaire de la vie’, in Gernet (2007: 33).
20. Response uploaded on the Internet bulletin board from the Office for Agriculture of the Party Branch of Enshi City and the Department for Agriculture in the City Government of Enshi, 6 May 2007.

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