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Rethinking China's Rural Revitalization from an Historical Perspective

Abstract

Rural vitalization calls for a new type of urban-rural relations in urbanizing China. Although the importance of urban-rural dichotomy has received increasing attention by scholars interested in studying urban development and governance in contemporary China, their interpretations about the connection between urban and rural areas remain fragmented and ambiguous. This article seeks to trace the origin of the Chinese city and its relations with the countryside in the imperial era. It generates a more complete understanding of the rural-urban relationship in the traditional Chinese society and to appeal for a more rounded research agenda for the Chinese urbanization based on a sound historical perspective. The findings of this study explain why and how the traditional urban-rural continuum has disappeared in contemporary China, and identifies the key lessons and wisdoms that can we borrow from the imperial era when we come to tackle the present urban-rural development.

Keywords:

Urban-rural relationship, dualist system, village society, Chinese cities, urbanization

Introduction

Rapid urbanization in the People's Republic of China over the last four decades has led to widening rural-urban inequalities. To address this problem, China announced its national strategy of rural revitalization which calls for a new type of urban-rural relationship.¹ This paper seeks to revisit the evolution of Chinese cities since its imperial era and explore their changing connections and disconnections with the countryside. Our objective is to provide a deeper historical understanding of urban growth in this traditional, agrarian Chinese society.² This study aims to answer this key question. What lessons may China learn from the Chinese history when it comes to tackle the issues of contemporary urban-rural development?

Rural and urban areas are often described as two dichotomous systems of economic and social structure in China.³ This concept of rural-urban dualism is not new in development studies. Dualism theories have been widely used to explain the co-existence of two sectors of the economy: the traditional subsistence sector, with high labour intensity but low capital intensity, and the modern sector of capital-intensive industry or commercial agricultural production, with an extensive division of labour.⁴ While there is no lack of literature about China's model of urban-rural dualist system, what appears to be less examined are the historical roots that shape its current development.⁵

Rural-urban Dualism: From Harmony to Dichotomy

Rural-Urban Continuum in Imperial China

The urban areas of imperial China can generally be classified into two categories:

administrative cities and non-administrative commercial cities. Administrative cities, usually enclosed by walls (*cheng qiang*), were the seats of imperial administration at various levels. Their primary function was to enforce central policies and consolidate the sovereign power of the monarchy, although some were also commercial centres. The city in imperial China, as Yinong Xu observed, was an administrative or regional centre rather than an independent corporate entity.⁶

City walls of administrative cities in Imperial China did not function to separate the urban areas and the countryside. During the Zhou dynasty (106 BCE – 769 CE), the Zhou people engaged in agricultural cultivation and kept quite a lot of arable land within the walled cities.⁷ Commercial and agricultural activities were carried out concurrently inside Zhou walled cities. The term “city” in Chinese was “cheng shi” which literally meant city and market.⁸ Non-Zhou people could enter the cities for trade and commerce, but they were not allowed to reside there. Therefore, city walls only served to demarcate the residence of Zhou people (conquerors) from non-Zhou people (indigenous residents who had been conquered). During the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279 CE), the concentration of population and vibrant commercial activities in the areas outside the city walls did not make them less urban.⁹ In the Ming Dynasty (1368 -1644 CE), a programme of wall building was initiated, but it served only a symbolic function of reminding the imperial subjects of the emperor’s awe-inspiring presence.¹⁰

On the other hand, commercial cities were market towns, which were usually spontaneously formed and unwalled. They mainly served as places for farmers to sell their agricultural surplus in exchange for daily necessities. The larger market towns were both collection or distribution centres and nodes connecting networks of long-distance trade. They served essential functions in the development of Chinese agrarian society. As Cho-yun Hsu concluded, unlike the feudal

system in medieval Europe, in which most of what was needed could be produced on manorial farms, family-farm production in China was not entirely self-sufficient.¹¹ Thus, a mercantile agrarian system was needed to support it. Through these market towns, a tree-like network was established in which scattered village settlements could be linked into an integrated market and economic prosperity could be achieved in a beleaguered agrarian economy. Simultaneously, these market towns were supported by regional networks and developed over time in step with the growing production and trading systems.¹²

The survival and growth of Chinese cities in an agrarian economy relied on servicing their hinterlands. These two types of cities, each with their own geographical features and functions, served as the focal points in the rural areas. None of them, however, were able to play a dominant role in regional development. The relatively low level of Chinese urbanisation during the imperial era testifies to this phenomenon. Chinese cities were by no means separate or distinct from the rural areas that supported them.¹³ Rural-urban relationship was complementary and cooperative, rather than exploitative. On this point, William Skinner has provided a remarkable conclusion; that is, urban-rural areas in imperial China were ‘internally differentiated, interdependent and integrated’.¹⁴

Lifestyle and cultural differences between urban and rural China did not produce a dichotomy for two reasons. First, imperial China had no legal institutions to stop the mobility of its people. The Chinese population at that time enjoyed a high degree of freedom to move between the cities and the countryside. Second, most people living in cities were described by Skinner as ‘sojourners’, who had very strong ties with their native places.¹⁵ Social structure within the city, organised along the lines of the native place, reinforced the ties with rural origins. In traditional Chinese society, the native place always constituted an essential part of

personal identity.¹⁶ It was common for the Chinese population, especially the gentry classes, to move to cities in their youthful years and later return to the countryside after retirement. Scholarly bureaucrats formed the gentry class in imperial China. They were schooled in Confucian texts to shape their junzi personalities.¹⁷ Many of them were from rural areas, and then gained academic degrees and bureaucratic offices in the city with the financial and spiritual support from their rural families and lineage. Their achievements in business or government offices were always regarded as honours to their native villages. Returning to their home villages, these retired bureaucrats and scholarly elites provided the links between rural and urban areas by playing a critical role in village governance. For example, they devoted their efforts to building temples and schools. Earning rapport and esteem from their fellow villagers, they and their descendants became the local leaders who acted as intermediaries between their self-governing villages and a centralized empire throughout the late imperial era. With such physical and cultural ties, urban-rural differentiation were hardly material.

Disintegration of Urban-Rural Continuum

Development of treaty port cities, however, caused a drastic transformation of urban-rural relationship in China since the late nineteenth century. Under the Nanjing Treaty signed between Britain and the Qing dynasty in 1842 to end the First Opium War, Hong Kong was ceded to Britain. In addition, five coastal cities (Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningbo and Shanghai) were forced to be opened to the British, where they could live and conduct business without being subject to domestic laws. France, America, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Belgium and Russia followed suit to convert more than 30 Chinese cities into their power enclaves by the early twentieth century. Development of treaty port cities transplanted Western development models, creating an exclusively urban phenomenon in late imperial

China.¹⁸

Treaty ports in China severed the traditional connections between urban and rural areas. First, the treaty port cities attracted a lot of foreign and local domestic capital to develop industries such as cotton textiles and garments for foreign trade. Rapid industrial development in these treaty port cities exploited raw materials from the rural hinterlands, but did not provide technology, capital or productive materials in return.¹⁹ The rising demand for agricultural products significantly increased the value of arable land within a 20 to 30 mile radius of each treaty port, compared with other parts of the country.²⁰ Most Chinese farming households were vulnerable to the appreciation in land value, because they cultivated on the agricultural land rented from landlords. The soaring land prices meant that Chinese farmers were forced to pay more rent, making it difficult for them to rely on farming for their livelihood. Under such circumstances, rural areas were increasingly ‘hollowed out’, giving rise to an urban-rural split in China.

Second, the treaty port cities were no longer administrative centres managed by governors appointed by the Qing emperor.²¹ All of the concession territories in the treaty ports had their own legal, judiciary and administrative systems, overriding China’s indigenous jurisdiction. In addition, before the 1860s, the Chinese population was prohibited from living in most of the concession territories. Even these restrictions were later relaxed, most Chinese people living in the concession territories were treated as second-class residents. As a result of these changes, the Chinese business elites and the gentry class were either displaced from the city cores, or permanently disconnected with their native villages. Once these strong economic and cultural ties were broken, the urban-rural continuum could not be sustained.

Socialist Collectivisation of Rural China for Urban Industrialisation

After the collapse of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese cities encountered a lot of devastations by regional Chinese warlords, Japanese invasion, and finally a civil war between Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). When the CCP eventually seized power with the support of rural farmers,²² it did not seek to restore the traditional urban-rural connections. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the CCP aimed to rapidly achieve heavy industrialisation in order to build up a powerful, modern country. Chinese cities were positioned as the industrial bases for socialist industrialisation and modernisation. Rural China was used as a workhorse to subsidise the urban sector with cheap grains and other raw materials to help the socialist state realise its national industrialisation strategy.²³

To achieve this objective, the rural areas were transformed by socialist collectivisation. The main objective was to establish an institution through which the state could extract rural surplus by levying agricultural taxes and requisitioning low-priced farming products for industrial development in urban areas. The collectivisation of rural China involved more than 500 million farmers, accounting for nearly 88% of the country's total population in 1952.²⁴ The traditional practices of farming cooperation in village areas were fundamentally built on kinship, lineage relationships and neighbourhoods.²⁵ Collectivisation was aimed at fundamentally transforming the long-standing organisation of China's rural society, which was deeply rooted in a system of small-scale family farming and mutual-aid collaboration.²⁶

There were two stages of collectivisation: voluntary collectivisation and compulsory collectivisation (Table 1). The first stage took the form of an 'elementary cooperative' (*Chuji Hezuoshe*), consisting of approximately 30 households. The cooperative had several key

features. First, farming households brought their means of production, such as labour, land and farm tools, to join the cooperative. These resources were centrally managed by the cooperative during the production process, but they were still owned by the individual farming households. Second, cooperative members had a dualist identity: employees and shareholders. They were organised by the cooperative to work together. They received incomes from the cooperative in two forms: (1) dividend payments for the land, draft animals and farm tools contributed by each farming household, and (2) remuneration for the work performed by each individual member (Figure 1).²⁷ Finally, participation in the elementary cooperative was voluntary and members had the right to opt out and reclaim their assets if they decided to withdraw.

[Table 1 here]

[Figure 1 here]

These elementary cooperatives were soon replaced by ‘advanced cooperatives’ (*Gaoji Hezuoshe*), each of which was approximately seven times the size of the predecessor. All assets of the cooperatives that had originally been owned by cooperative members were now collectivised. Individual households could no longer retain private ownership of land and other production resources. Members were entitled to monetary compensation paid by the cooperatives for confiscating their collectivised assets.²⁸ No dividend was paid and all income was henceforth based on work points.²⁹ Legally, farmers still had the right to opt out. In practice, however, they were usually prevented by the local officials from doing so, especially at the later stages of the advanced cooperatives.

Establishment of the advanced cooperatives still failed to achieve CCP’s total control of the rural production because farmers were unwilling to sell their products to the state at a low

price.³⁰ In 1955, the central government introduced a centralized procurement and marketing system (tonggou tongxiao) to monopolise the allocation of all agricultural outputs from the countryside. Under this system, farmers had to sell their farming outputs to the central government at predetermined prices. The private market for farmers to exchange their agricultural products was almost entirely replaced by the official market. Furthermore, the central government was prepared to establish a more centralised system through which it could seize absolute power over not only the production, but also the distribution, of agricultural products in the countryside.³¹

In August 1958, the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee passed a resolution³² to establish people's communes throughout rural China. Participation was no longer voluntary and all farmers were forced to join. As a result, 753,000 advanced cooperatives were amalgamated into 24,000 communes. By the end of 1958, more than 90% of rural households had been incorporated into the commune system.³³ They were required to hand over all of their private property to the new people's communes, including their private plots, farm tools and equipment. Even private cooking was prohibited and replaced by communal dining in the commune's canteens. The distribution of daily necessities to individual villagers was largely based on subsistence needs.

The collectivisation movements gave birth to a dualist rural-urban system in China. By organising the rural villages into large communes, the CCP extended its power into the countryside to exercise authoritarian control of land, people and resources. Administrative cadres in the communes were directly appointed by the state to implement central directives and national strategies. Cities and rural areas were managed under separate governing institutions and administrative regulations. Rural surpluses and resources were centrally

administrated and directed to support urban growth. However, the collectivisation of rural China was catastrophic resulting in drastic reduction of agricultural output and widespread famines in the early 1960s.³⁴ Subsequent restructuring of the communes helped restore rural productivity and social order, but it did not replace the collectivised system. The urban-bias development strategy of the CCP continued to benefit the urban sector at the expense of rural China.

Three Pillars of China's Rural-Urban Dualism

The traditional rural-urban continuum in China was henceforth replaced by segregation under the control of the CCP. In imperial era, the countryside and the Chinese cities were intimately connected. Mobility of people and resources were unrestricted. Chinese villages were largely self-administered, enabling the local gentry to play a vital role in village governance.³⁵ Influenced by Confucian traditional education, these elites served as the loyal intermediaries between the emperor and their fellow villagers. In socialist China, however, the state-village connection was based on hierarchical, administrative bureaucracy reaching down from the central state to the village neighbourhoods and even individual households. Village collectives effectively absorbed all the villagers into the powerful apparatus of the socialist state. The rural sector was administratively segregated from the urban sector. This rural-urban system was reinforced by three interconnected institutions including the household registration system, the collective land system and the centralised administrative system.

Household Registration System

Household registration in China originated in the Zhou Dynasty and developed into a fairly

mature institution in the Tang Dynasty as a vehicle for social welfare and social control.³⁶ However, in the imperial era, it was not used as an administrative tool to distinguish between the urbanites from rural residents. In 1958, Socialist China established the *hukou* system under the Household Registration Ordinance, which imposed direct restrictions on farmers' migration to cities. Under the *hukou* system, rural-urban segregation was institutionalised. Chinese people were legally divided into two social classes: 'non-agricultural' urban residents and 'agricultural' rural residents. This strong emphasis on demarcating the legal identity of urban residents from rural farmers also distinguished socialist China's *hukou* system from its counterparts in imperial China and other countries.³⁷

Rural farmers with agricultural *hukou* were deprived of the right to move to cities and enjoy state welfare such as subsidised housing, education and health services. They had to rely on a welfare system offered by the village collectives. Moreover, the unequal *hukou* status was hereditary. It became so enmeshed in the lives of rural farmers that the inequality between urbanites and farmers passed from generation to generation. Under this dualist system, 'farmers' or 'peasants' represented a legal and social identity rather than an occupation.³⁸ This bore little resemblance to the European and American farmers working in industrialised agriculture. Chinese villagers became an inferior social group that was defined by law. While the rural areas and peasants were strictly sealed off from the benefits of urban state welfare, they were required to shoulder a heavy tax burden and contribute low-priced agricultural surplus to support industrial development in the cities.

Collective Land System

Rural China has long been plagued by the shortage of arable land. This constraint occurred as

early as in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE). In socialist China, the scarcity of arable land became more acute when the rural population had expanded by approximately 50%, from 530 million in 1952 to 790 million in 1978.³⁹ Opening up new cultivation land could no longer keep pace with the soaring demand of peasants. Population migration to cities was a possible mean to release the pressure. The dualist rural-urban system, however, stifled this possibility. As a result, urbanization in China since the 1980s has not accompanied with a widespread proliferation of urban squatters and informal settlements by rural migrants. But, when farmers were prohibited from leaving the countryside, recurrent adjustments to their land entitlements, as a result of demographic growth, became necessary to meet the continuously increasing demand.⁴⁰

In rural China, land was collectively owned by the villagers and managed by the village collectives. This vaguely defined property rights system of land provided the opportunity for periodic adjustments of land entitlement. Incomes generated by the collective land were used to fund village welfare provision. Furthermore, it supported an autarkic welfare system under which farmers relied entirely on the village collectives and the collective assets to satisfy their welfare needs. Village medical system was an example of this self-sufficient welfare model. Its operation in each village depended on a collective fund contributed by village collectives and villagers. Villagers could use the money to appoint a village doctor⁴¹ to take care of their basic health, such as immunisations and curing simple ailments. In the absence of state financial support, most of the resources required to maintain rural infrastructure and services came from land-based incomes. Therefore, guaranteed access to land resources was a key component of subsistence and welfare in rural China. Rural land was never merely a means of production; it was an essential part of the autarkic rural social welfare system.

Land collectivisation did not totally forfeit the entitlements of individual villagers to rural land. In socialist China, rural burial grounds and self-occupied houses still belonged to the villagers. Furthermore, under the Household Responsibility System, farming households could receive allocation of arable land by signing contracts with village collectives and agreeing to meet a production quota as rental payment.⁴² This contractual arrangement gave rise to an explicit landlord-tenant relationship, which had been common in the traditional Chinese agrarian society. Most Chinese farmers dreamed of owning land to produce food for their subsistence rather than to sell it for profit. Land was never treated as a mere commodity. The concept of 'land ownership' to Chinese farmers was based on user rights rather than the right to sell or mortgage land. These perceptions of land and land ownership were also influenced by China's village-based social structure built upon kinship networks and ancestral lines. A farmer's ancestry determined one's eligibility to make claims in a village. Outsiders often found it difficult to buy or lease land from villagers, even though the law did not prohibit it to happen. Development of a free regional land market was rather limited. Collectivisation of rural China under the socialist regime did not fundamentally alter this social structure, which had been externally exclusive but internally collaborative.

Centralised Administrative System

Formation of communes in rural China allowed direct penetration of the power of CCP into the villages leading to major disasters. Soon after the compulsory collectivisation movement, the people's communes were reorganised into a slightly less centralised structure comprising communes, brigades and teams in the early 1960s. Under this structure, the commune performed a role akin to that of a local state. Brigades were an extension of communes to supervise and manage the activities of production teams. At the lowest level, the production

teams organised farmers' participation in everyday activities. Administratively, production teams were the basic accounting units of the rural collective system. They were responsible for the management of the collective land and assets,⁴³ and they took care of all profits and losses from the production activities of their team members.

In the Chinese official lexicon, this governing structure was defined as 'three-tier ownership structure, with production teams as the basic accounting units' (*sanjisuoyou, duiweijichu*). Under this three-tier structure, the administrative authority in rural China was shared by the communes, brigades and production teams. Since the 1980s, communes and brigades were gradually replaced by township governments and villagers' committees. As part of this organisational restructuring, production teams were reorganised as villagers' groups (*jumin xiaozu*),⁴⁴ to become the legal entity for holding, managing and leasing collective land. Under the Household Responsibility System, villagers' groups were entrusted with the legal authority to enter into land contracts with farming households.⁴⁵ (Figure 2)

[Figure 2 here]

This hierarchy structure of the CCP in managing rural China destroyed the decentralised, self-governing mode of governance that had long existed in traditional Chinese villages. Cadres were directly appointed by the state as local state representatives and managers to implement central directives and national development strategies in the rural sector. These cadres replaced the gentry who had originated from the villages with strong family ties with the local community. Many cadres failed to perform their duties to enhance the welfare of the villagers. For instance, communes and brigades were given considerable power over land management, allowing the cadres to make recurring adjustments to land entitlements in response to

population growth. This land re-allocation process also created loopholes for communes and brigades to abuse their power and manipulate the land system in rural areas. Villagers often lacked a formal political means to monitor the performance of these appointed cadres. Nor could they exert informal social pressures on them so as to restrain their exploitative behaviour.

Conclusions: Dualist Rural-Urban System, Urbanisation and Governance

During the last seven decades, the CCP has managed to turn an agrarian society into an urbanised country. It has established a dualist rural-urban system that largely severed many of the traditional connections between the rural and the urban sectors in China. This dualist system was essentially segregation underpinned by three interrelated sets of measures: the *hukou* registration system (as a measure for demographic control); the collective ownership system (as the foundation of the property rights system); and the hierarchical administrative system (as a means of social and political control). All these measures worked towards sustaining CCP's authoritarian control of the people, land and resources in rural China to support rapid urbanization of the country and fuel the economic growth of cities.

This exploitative relationship between the urban and rural sectors in China was not sustainable. The CCP has now proposed a national strategy of rural revitalisation with a view of integrating the backward rural sector with the modern urban development. What lessons can the Chinese history inform an integrated rural-urban development? This study has identified three major lessons. First, it is about strengthening rural leadership by restoring and facilitating the 'reverse' flow of urban elites back to the building of their native villages. Second, it relates to the strengthening of the collective land system in the countryside as a safety valve of the villagers in safeguarding their subsistence and welfare provision. Finally, the CCP should

exercise restraints in the administration system to enable a certain degree of decentralised decision making and self-governance at the village level in responding to local circumstances.

The gentry and elite classes provided the nexus between the urban and the rural sectors in imperial China. Their contributions were highly instrumental towards enhancing the wellbeing and prosperity of their native villages in rural China. The dualist system established by the CCP, unfortunately, tended to encourage competent villagers to migrate out of the countryside in order to get a better quality of life. This brain drain was leading to a vicious cycle of rural development. If the elites could return to build their home villages, like the traditional gentry class, they could contribute their capital, expertise and entrepreneurialism to benefit their fellow villagers. Their leadership in the villages tended to be more effective than that of a non-native cadre directly appointed by the CCP.

Collective land system in rural China created both constraints and opportunities for urban transformation. It made the privatisation of rural land difficult, but permitted the state to pursue urban growth through massive land requisition. Despite the criticisms against collective ownership, China faces an unavoidable historical legacy. More than 750 million villagers were still excluded from the state welfare, and their livelihoods depended almost entirely on the collective assets. With collective land constituting an indispensable part of rural welfare, privatisation of collective land and assets would lead to a complete breakdown of the indigenous life support of Chinese villagers. Unless the state is prepared to shoulder the welfare of all the villagers, it is practical that the collective land system has to persist in rural China.

In building an authoritarian socialist state, the CCP further expanded the tradition of centralised governance, which had taken root since the Qin Dynasty (221 - 206 BCE). Instead,

it reinforced the centralisation system by extending the power of the party-state to all levels of society. The power of the state was ubiquitous and little space was provided for the growth of autonomous institutions. The CCP made continual attempts to absorb self-governing villages into its hierarchical bureaucracy. Excessive compulsory collectivisation in the form of assembling villages into large communes proved to be a complete failure. A village-based society continued to exist in the rural areas such that the CCP was compelled to reorganise the rural governing structure by decentralising the authority, and recognise villages as the basic units for administration and governance. The traditional social organisation in rural China that influenced interactions through personal ties and customs continued to take effect. Rural revitalisation strategy of the CCP should allow sufficient decentralisation of administrative authority and delegation of power to the villages and effective decision making at the grassroots level.

- END -

Notes

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27. Remuneration was equal for women and men to promote gender equality and win the support of women. See Ngo, "A Hybrid Revolutionary Process: The Chinese Cooperative Movement in Xiyang County, Shanxi".

28. This was normally paid by the cooperative in instalments over a period of three to five years. See Li Shenglan, *Woguo Nongcun Chanquan Zhidu Gaige Yu Nongcun Chengzhenghu Fazhan [Institutional Property Reforms in Rural China and Urbanization]* (Guangzhou: Sun Yat-Sen University Press, 2004), 45. [Text in Chinese]
29. Work points were primarily calculated on the basis of the time committed by an individual member without addressing the actual work output that had been accomplished.
30. From 1949 to 1952, the total grain and cotton output went up by 44.8% and 193.7% respectively. The government food stores, however, decreased because farmers were unwilling to sell their products to the state at a low price. As Wu and Li reported, with private land ownership, which was derived from the CCP's land reforms in the 1940s, farmers enjoyed a high degree of autonomy to make decisions on the production and marketing of their products. Due to economic considerations, they preferred to sell their output on the private market rather than to a government that could only afford relatively low prices. The emergence of this dilemma reinforced the CCP's position that the small-scale family farming system was a major obstacle to national industrialisation. See Wu Jinglian, *Dangdai Zhongguo Jingjigaige, zhanlue yu Shishi [Economic Reforms, Strategies and Their Implementation in Contemporary China]* (Shanghai: Shanghai Far East Publishers, 2003). [Text in Chinese]. See also Li, *Institutional Property Reforms in Rural China and Urbanization*.
31. See Li, *Institutional Property Reforms in Rural China and Urbanization*. Apart from food requisition, as Lin explained, the compulsory collectivisation movement was rooted in another important notion: that it could better mobilise rural surplus labour for the construction of large infrastructure projects, such as irrigation systems and dams. See Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959-1961".
32. The title of the policy document is Guanyu Zai Nongcun Jianli Renmingongshe de Yijie

[Resolution on Establishing People's Communes in Rural China].

33. See Lin, "Collectivization and China's Agricultural Crisis in 1959-1961". See also Wu, *Economic Reforms, Strategies and Their Implementation in Contemporary China*.
34. There were more than 30 million deaths and an estimated 33 million lost or postponed births. See Basil Ashton, Kenneth Hill, Alan Piazza, and Robin Zeitz, "Famine in China, 1956-61," *Population and Development Review* 10, no.4 (1984). 613-45.
35. Lin Yu Tang, *My Country and My People* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935); Fei Xiao Tong, *China's Gentry: Essays in Rural-urban Relations* (Revised & edited by Margaret Park Redfield, with six life-histories of Chinese gentry families collected by Yung-teh Chow, and an introd. by Robert) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); Hsu, *Han Agriculture: The Formation of Early Chinese Agrarian Economy, 206 B.C.- A.D. 220*; Liu Jinhai, *Chanquan Yu Zhengzhi: Guojia Jiti, Yu Nongmin Guangxi Shijiao Xide Cunzhuang Jingyan [Property Right and Politics: State, Collectives, Peasants and Villages]* (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Publisher, 2005). [Text in Chinese]
36. Zhou Zhiqian, *Guojia yu Shihui: Qingdai Chengshi Guanlijigou yu Faluzhidu Bianqian Yanjiu [State and Society: Urban Management Institutions and Evolution of Legal System in Qing Period]* (Chengdu: Bashu Press, 2009). [Text in Chinese]
37. Compared with the household registration in the Soviet Union, from which the concept of hukou was derived, socialist China's control over farmers under the hukou system was even more rigid. See Lu Xueyi, *New Perspectives on "Three Agricultural Problems" [Sannong Xinlun]* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academia Press, 2005). [Text in Chinese].
38. King and Bond describes Confucianism as "primarily a secular social theory" which suggests that an ideal, orderly and harmonious society can be achieved when everyone acts properly towards others in accordance with his/her role. A society is therefore perceived as a "complicated role system". See Ambrose Yeo-chi King and Michael H. Bond. "The

Confucian Paradigm of Man: A Sociological View” in *China's great transformation: selected essays on Confucianism, modernization, and democracy*. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press 2018), 37-56. In the imperial era, the social group of “peasant farmers (nong)” was ranked below the “gentry scholars (shi)” but above “artisans/craftsmen (gong)” and “merchants/traders (shang)”. However, the household registration system introduced by the CCP turned rural farmers into an underclass, despite the substantial contributions of rural farmers to industrial and urban development.

39. In the imperial era, the social group of “peasant farmers (nong)” was ranked below the “gentry scholars (shi)” but above “artisans/craftsmen (gong)” and “merchants/traders (shang)”. However, the household registration system introduced by the CCP turned rural farmers into an underclass, despite the substantial contributions of rural farmers to industrial and urban development.
40. Despite the strict enforcement of the one-child policy from the late 1970s, the rural population in China still kept growing. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the population of rural China increased by approximately 12.5%, from 760 million in 1975 to 860 million in 1995.
41. Per-capita arable land in rural China dropped from 1.23 mu in 1949 to 0.56 mu in 1978. Given that urbanisation was controlled by the state during the 1950s and 1970s, such a dramatic shrinkage was obviously the manifestation of redistribution rather than the result of encroaching urban development in rural areas. See Zhou, *State and Society: Urban Management Institutions and Evolution of Legal System in Qing Period*. Similar adjustments continued during the reform period. In the 1980s and 1990s, three land adjustments involving more than 60% of Chinese villages were recorded. See Wang Jing Xin, *Zhuongguo Nongcun Tudi Zhidu de Shiji Biange [Revolution of Land System in Rural China]* (Beijing: Zhuongguo Jingji Publisher, 2001). [Text in Chinese]

42. Village doctors (or barefoot doctors) were not medical professionals by urban standards. They usually received a very basic medical training in the areas of epidemic disease prevention, family planning and tackling hygienic and sanitation problems that were common in a specific locality.
43. Initially, the contract period was five years. It was extended to 15 years in 1984. Upon their expiry in 1993, all land contracts were renewed for an additional term of 30 years by the central state.
44. People's communes were required to return all collective land and assets to the production teams (not individual farmer households) after the organisational restructuring in the early 1960s.
45. Villagers' groups have another identity, called rural economic cooperatives (Nongcun Jingji Hezuoshe), to reflect their economic functions in operating village cooperatives or enterprises.
46. See the Decree No. 1 document issued by the CCP Standing Committee in 1984 to guide reforms in rural areas, and the Rural Land Contracting Law (Nongcun Tudi Chengbao Fa), which was promulgated in 2002.