

Editor's Foreword

Whither Rural China: Capitalism, Socialism, Or?

Philip C. C. Huang

We lead off here with Forrest Zhang's overview of the current state of Chinese agriculture. He outlines the main characteristics of the three main types: agribusiness, family farms, and cooperatives (co-ops). He argues that the relative development of each is highly dependent on the local political economy. Agribusiness, even if engaged partly or mainly in "contract farming" with small family farms, requires local government support and availability of large tracts of land. "Commoditized" family farms, on the other hand, require ready access to public markets, often constructed by the local authorities, typically in suburban areas. Co-ops, similarly, require state support but are nevertheless often subsidiary or subservient to agribusiness. In this paper, Zhang does not attempt to forecast possible future tendencies.

My two short articles (one co-authored with Dr. Yuan Gao) each seeks to demonstrate a simple but basic (and surprising?) finding. First, that small peasants, rather than the state or agribusiness, have been the main agents behind the capital investments in the new-age Chinese agricultural revolution of the past 15 years—the article presents detailed quantitative information and analyses to show that peasant agricultural (fixed and liquid capital) investments in the aggregate dwarf both those of the state and of agribusiness. Second, that the divide between a formal economy enjoying the protection of the state's so-called "labor" laws 劳动法 for "employees-workers" 职工 and the accompanying social benefits, on the one hand, and an informal economy outside the protection of such laws and without (or with only low) benefits, is a paramount issue in the social crisis that confronts China today—on the basis of the latest and most reliable data, the article demonstrates that while the former accounts for just one-sixth of all employed persons, most of them privileged by status, the latter amounts to fully five-sixths, including especially the peasant migrant workers and their other employed household

members. Combined, the two articles point both to optimism and to alarm about the present state of Chinese society-economy.

Forrest Zhang and I are agreed that under current realities, the main concern of “farmers,” or what I continue to refer to as (commercialized) peasant family farms, are today principally concerned with their relations with the market (see Huang Zongzhi [Philip C. C. Huang] 2012). But Zhang and I do differ on a deeper level. Zhang, after Harriet Friedmann and others, is inclined to think that a highly “commoditized” agricultural economy will tend to be governed ultimately by capital, and that there is little chance of much else given the overwhelming predominance of capital in the contemporary world. I, however, am inclined to a different view, namely, that market economy, which has been quite highly developed in China for centuries, does not rule out other possibilities, such as co-ops or state-sponsored social-equity projects. The present trajectory of development of China’s new-age small peasant agriculture, as well as the great divide between China’s formal urban and informal urban-rural economies, in fact cry out for stronger state efforts to search out an alternative to agrarian capitalism. The issue raised here is not unlike that between Lenin and Chayanov a century ago. Zhang and I have both written multiple other articles on these issues. Readers are invited to judge for themselves, and the most interested are encouraged to comment on this question in our forthcoming issues.

The final article in the symposium is by Yulin Zhang. Its focus is on land inundations caused by the torrent of coal mines in Shanxi province, China’s leading center of coal production, which accounts for one quarter of the nation’s total. The resulting environmental devastation has caused hundreds of casualties, and harmed thousands of villages and millions of peasants. The government, however, has been slow and inadequate in its response, delaying for years and then providing just partial compensations for just a portion of those harmed.

For Zhang, what the Shanxi example points out is a crisis in governance, shown in shared interests between coal-mine owners and their official sponsors, a part of the linking up of the global capitalist system with China’s political system. That is what has prevented satisfactory resolution of the damages done by coal mining. That is what Zhang means by the “crisis of governance.” Here too we invite interested readers to consider participating in further discussions of the subject.

References

- Huang Zongzhi 黄宗智 (Philip C. C. Huang). 2012. “小农户与大商业资本的不平等交易：中国现代农业的特色” (The unequal relations between small peasant households and big commercial capital: the special characteristics of contemporary Chinese agriculture), in *开放时代*, no. 3 (March): 89-99.

编者前言： 中国农村往哪里去？资本主义、社会主义、 还是？

黄宗智

第一篇文章是张谦关于当今中国农业的概述。他点出了三种主要农业类型——企业农业、家庭农业和合作农业——的一些特征。他强调，不同地方的政治经济环境是这些不同类型农业发展程度的关键。企业农业，即便是主要依赖其与小农户订的“契约农业”，需要当地政府的支持，一定程度上也需要大片的土地。“商品化”的家庭农场则需要公共（专业）市场，多是地方政府所建，多处于城市近郊。合作农业则同样需要政府的扶持，但迄今它们多从属于企业。在此篇文章中，张谦并没有试图预测未来的趋势。

我自己两篇较短的论文（一篇与高原博士合作）分别论证一个基本（而出乎意料的？）研究结果。一是最近15年以来的新时代中国农业革命的投资主体主要是小农户，而不是政府或农业企业——文章根据详细的计量资料论证小农户所做的（固定和流动）资本投入总量要远高于国家或企业。一是今天中国的社会危机的关键问题是受到“劳动”法规保护和具有优厚社会福利条件的正规经济的“职工”与没有受到劳动法规保护并没有（或只有低等）社会福利的非正规经济员工两者间的差别——根据最新的可靠资料，文章论证前者只包含全社会就业人员中的六分之一，多是具有一定程度的特权身份的职工，而后者则包含足足六分之五，主要是农民工和其家庭的其他就业成员。合起来，一篇文章勾画的图景比较乐观，另一篇则令人担忧。

张谦和我同样认为中国今天的小规模“农场主”——而我则继续称作（商业化的）小农家庭——最关心的是他们和市场之间的关系（见黄宗智2012），但我们之间有比较深层的不同。张谦，与Harriet Friedmann等一致，基本认为一个高度商品化的农业经济只可能被资本摆布，尤其鉴于资本今天在全球所占据的压倒性霸权。而我则倾向认为，相当高度发达的市场经济在中国已经有数百年的历史，并不一定排除其他的可能，例如合作社和国家各种社会公平工程。其实，中国近年来开始的新时代小农经济发展路径，以及城镇正规与城镇-农村非正规经济间的巨大差别，强烈呼吁国家探寻资本主义之外的另一种发展方向。张和我之间的不同其实类似于百年前列宁和恰亚诺夫之间的争议。我们俩

都写过多篇关于这方面的文章,欢迎读者自己做出判断,也欢迎最关心这些问题的读者在我们刊物未来的各期中作进一步的讨论。

最后的一篇文章是张玉林聚焦于山西煤矿的研究。山西是中国的“能源基地”,煤炭产量占到全国的四分之一。煤炭采掘在当地已经造成极其严重的地质灾害,所导致的土地塌陷已经造成数百人的伤亡、数千个村庄水资源的破坏、数百万村民的饮水困难。但政府的补偿性“惠民工程”则一再拖延,最终只为部分受害人提供了部分补偿。

对张玉林来说,山西煤炭采掘案例说明的是当前的“治理危机”,体现于煤矿资本家和当地官员利益的结合,最终来自全球资本主义体系与中国行政体制两者的结合。正是那样的结合导致了当前的治理危机。在这个问题上,我们也谨此邀请读者考虑参与进一步的讨论。

引用书刊:

黄宗智 (2012):《小农户与大商业资本的不平等交易:中国现代农业的特色》,载《开放时代》,2012年第3期(《中国新时代的小农经济》专题讨论):89-99。