

**Social Capital in the “New Socialist Countryside”: *Guanxi*, Community Solidarity,
and Resistance in Two Post-Socialist Chinese Townships**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Social Work and Sociology)
in The University of Michigan
2010

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To My Parents (Xinmin Dai and Aizhen Xie) and Tiezhu Dong

Preface

As Chinese cities at the dawn of the twenty-first century present a materialist “China miracle” with chic skyscrapers, technology obsession, and a bizarre culture blending traditional renaissance and global capitalism, the rural population of the nation is left behind striving for hard-cover roads made of cement or asphalt, regular tap water, basic hygiene facilities, schools furnished with adequate chalk-boards, and health-care stations equipped with necessary antibiotics. The drastic growth of the capitalist economy, in contrast to the official promise to benefit the villagers, often allows the powerful in the state and market to exploit their cheap labor and deprive them of their land. According to the Statistical Yearbook of 2008, the rural population constitutes 55% of the country’s total but only shares 13% of its Gross National Product (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008). Villager resistance, a subject with which newspapers worldwide are replete, has become so prevalent that the central government has identified it as a major threat to the social stability after the decades of post-socialist reforms. As for organized villager petitions and protests, local officials in rural China are now placed in a veto system of evaluation, which means regardless how well the local economy is running, one incident of collective resistance can deny the cadres’ opportunity for promotion.

Growing up in urban centers, I before my dissertation fieldwork had very few encounters and experiences of the distant countryside – or, the “other” China. Although I often talked with great sympathy about helping this disadvantaged group with family and

peers, as well as in school, the approaches discussed more or less fell into a category that social workers today would describe as “projecting mainstream values” and “assimilating the marginalized into norms.” As my graduate studies of sociology and social welfare progressed, I was increasingly appealed to develop a systematic understanding of the politics in the rural society, especially regarding how the villagers’ resistance was articulated and organized or dismissed. More so, I was called upon to use that knowledge to analyze the post-socialist politics and inquire about possible social services and welfare policy changes.

In spite of the burgeoning scholarship on the different causes, forms, and contents of rural unrest in China, the interrogation of the complexity in the processes and mechanisms of the organization of villagers’ resistance remains limited. The rural population is often imagined in the global media, as well as among urban citizens like myself, as being persistently oppressed, largely ignorant of political strategies, and in radical and constant antagonism with the local state. Based on extensive fieldwork spanning from 2006 to 2009, I hope to present in this dissertation an analytical insight of the life stories and rationales behind the formation of various tactics of the villagers struggling through the post-socialist reforms in the fast capitalizing rural China. Instead of the pure antithesis of the local rural state, I emphasize that villagers, through their strategic agencies in networking practices, configure a much more complicated relationship with the grassroots political and economic structure. The state-society dynamics, being re-shaped in these practices, contain skillful negotiation, tactful compromise, delicate conspiracy, space exchange, and of course severe and open conflicts. It is in the different local contexts that the personal ties of villagers are

translated into sharply different patterns of resistance behaviors such as individual-based disorganized resistance or organized collective action. By diversifying the role of personal networks in rural resistance, I try to point out that the impacts of the political reforms of democratization, the emerging discourses of “rule of law” and “citizenship” in the countryside, and the rural unrest on political changes in China need to be called into close and careful examination with empirical data.

During the process of my dissertation, I have accumulated numerous debts to people and institutions for their kind support in many ways. First and foremost, I thank the villagers in the two townships, who embraced me into their communities, families, and personal lives with generosity and trust, accepted my incessant questions, and tolerated my naivety and sometimes improper curiosity. Without their participation and cooperation, the fieldwork of the dissertation could never have happened. Although their real names cannot be revealed in these chapters, I hope they know my appreciation and gratitude to them.

My dissertation co-chairs, Barry Checkoway and Ching Kwan Lee, formed a priceless combination of unfailing support that encouraged my academic endeavors and guided me through the long and sometimes difficult process of dissertation. They read all my written work, no matter how preliminary, with patience, care, interest, and insight, and offered timely feedbacks, critiques, and constructive advice that saved me from dangerous and unnecessary mistakes. CK introduced me to the world of ethnography with delicate analyses and passion presented both in her class and her own outstanding works on China. Her challenging comments and remarks kept pushing me to constantly rethink my arguments and framework in key ways, and taught me about intellectual

integrity and commitment to a career in academia. Barry, with his expertise in community, helped me find my concentration of interest and position in the field of social work. As a devoted mentor, he persistently convinced me to pursue my own ideas and approaches in research by firmly stating that I should be creative enough to be unlike anybody else in the field. Meanwhile, as a completely strength-based social worker, he never failed to boost my confidence in the project during even the hardest times and amaze me that someone could actually be more optimistic about my future than me.

Rosemary Sarri supervised my progress from prelim exams till this last stage of dissertation, serving on my committees with enthusiasm and full commitment. With her keen interest in and sharp perspective on the development of social work in China, she supplied critical insights and advice not only on my dissertation project, but also my career plan. George Steinmetz read my entire dissertation and offered me valuable suggestions of theorizing massive field data into sophisticated frameworks, for which I am deeply grateful.

I also want to thank Daphna Oyserman for bringing me to the University of Michigan and introducing me to the principles of social research. Lydia Li and Jason Owen-Smith, my encouraging curriculum advisors in the Joint Program of Social Work and Sociology, oriented me through this innovative yet complicated doctoral program and simplified my life with their always prompt responses to paperwork requests. Lydia, a dedicated gerontologist interested in China, kindly included me in discussions on qualitative social work research and social work research on China, and presented me valuable opportunities to build my professional networks and develop my career in the global context.

I am indebted to Yu Jianrong, Lu Lei and Mei Donghai from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who via their own networks introduced me to the villages in W Township at the very beginning of my fieldwork and opened my eyes to the vast rural China. Zhi Jianping, Hu Quan, and several other friends and colleagues in China, who shall remain anonymous, generously offered help to secure my access to the field site of T Township and protected me from police attention. My gratitude to their sincere care is beyond words.

Many institutions provided generous funding for my fieldwork research and dissertation writing: Rackham School of Graduate Studies, International Institute, Center for Chinese Studies, School of Social Work, and Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan; Wang Family Foundation in San Francisco, CA; Harold T. and Vivian B. Shapiro Prize Fund in Ann Arbor, MI; and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, China.

I was fortunate to be a member of the Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research Workshop at the University of Michigan, the most dynamic and friendly research and writing group I could ever ask for. Jeannie Thrall, Brian Hilligoss, Nancy Baum, Brian Girard, Maria Souden, Airong Luo, Pilar Horner, Carla Pfeffer, and the late Katherine Luke read my drafts, offered crucial perspectives that often reshaped my arguments, and supported me with therapeutic counseling when life became hard in graduate school. My fellow students and friends in the School of Social Work and the Department of Sociology – Huei-Wern Shen, Melita Vaz, Irene Ng, Mari Kubota, Lai Sze Tso, and Ya-Wen Lei – often made the lonely dissertation process in the coldness of Ann Arbor bearable. My dear friends in Michigan China Fellows (MCF), Xu Li, Juan Chen, Yan

Long, Jiaan Zhang, Xiwen Mai, Meilan Zhang, and many more that I do not have space to thank, constitute my happiest memories of social and intellectual life in Ann Arbor. I owe many thanks to them, as well as my life-long friends Ying Lou and Li Li, for companionship, encouragement, unconditional support, and wise advice on my school work and life choice.

My parents belong to the Cultural-Revolution generation in China, and with their courageous attitude and life wisdom they inspired and nourished my pursuit for social justice and responsible citizenship. They taught me at an early age the habits of extensive reading, critical thinking, and insisting on my goals while caring about other members in the society. They may not understand why it has taken me so long to complete my degree, but they patiently observed my progress and took pride in all my achievements, no matter how trivial they were. I got married during a struggling period in graduate school, when nothing seemed certain. My husband stood by my side holding my hands in those days and cheered me on through the whole process of my dissertation, with his amazing courage and unbelievable confidence in me. It may sound cliché to say a loving family is the most precious treasure one can possess, but it feels true to me. This dissertation, as a token of gratitude, is dedicated to my family members.

I came to Ann Arbor in the fall of 2002 as a young and drifting soul, and in the eight years of receiving so much care, support, and love, I hope I have been growing as a scholar and a better person. “Thank you” is never enough.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Grassroots Politics, Production of Social Capital, and Collective Action

My body and heart trembled as on the coldest days of winter in Ann Arbor during the funeral of Chu Shuangjie in Chu Village of W Township, a 17-year-old truck driver who was killed in a catastrophic accident on highway, despite it being noon on a sunny summer day. His devastated father was holding a photo of him with a childish big smile. A weird atmosphere combining heart-breaking sorrow and peaceful silence fell in the small yard of the family as the strident tones of Chinese trumpets played by funeral performers on the scene overpowered the noises of the villagers coming to say goodbye, and as the relatives of the young man threw small pieces of white paper to the sky to wish him a good life in the other world. That was the third funeral of teenage truck driver that I attended in W Township during my fieldwork, and since none of the boys had a job or life insurance, their families received nothing in compensation from the truck companies. W Township is reputed for its prosperous truck transportation business, which attracts many local young boys to drop out of school and start the job as a driver to financially support their families and see the world. Having little road experience and receiving inadequate training from the companies, the boys often have no idea of the risks they take to complete the long truck trips until disastrous accidents happen. With the recurring news that someone is disabled, paralyzed, or killed on the road in the township, I could

easily envision the establishment of a labor union requesting for fair payments and better protection. However, no villager in the township seems to care for the idea, more because they believe it would be unrealistic and futile than they are unaware of the option. Although often in vain, they insist on searching for justice and some compensation through individual means, ranging from family networks with officials to violent physical attacks on truck bosses in desperation.

About 145 miles away from W Township in the same Hebei Province, T Township demonstrates an extremely different picture of villager resistance. Since 2006, the villagers in the township, who were deprived of land and local business opportunities in a real estate development project, have organized collective protests to the city government of Shijiazhuang every winter during the Chinese New Year holiday. They coordinate transportation to the location of protesting, share the tasks of designing slogans and making banners, and the organizers distribute water and snacks to the participants provided by community resources. “One for all, and all for one” was a tenet I heard many villagers cherishing, and they consistently choose collective action over standing alone as the more powerful means to fight for justice.

When the Chinese market economy – a puzzling combination of an opening market, active participation in global capitalism, and constant state interventions – gives rise to a stunning miracle of economic boom, it at the same time subjects the rural population in China, vulnerable due to low social status, poor education, and lack of social protection, to severe exploitation by the emerging capitalist production and the state. Although the recent state campaign designed by the central government to build the “New Socialist Countryside” pays particular attention to the grievances of the rural population and aims

at soothing the unrest there, villager resistance in China today is no news in governmental reports, mass media or academic research. The burgeoning scholarship on Chinese rural unrest has discovered various forms in the resistance of Chinese villagers coping with their different grievances, from everyday silent deviation (Yu, 2001; White, 2003), justice-seeking in the legal system (Zweig, 2003; Michelson, 2007), rightful petitions (O'Brien & Li, 2006), to radical protesting and violence (Yu, 2003; Thornton, 2004). In each of them, researchers noted with interest that the disorganized approach of individual based resistance and the organized approach of collective mobilization both exist (Blecher, 1995; Tang, 2005; Tanner, 2004). However, the accumulating literature, while presenting rich stories of variances, does not achieve much success in offering analytical explanation of the complex processes leading to the diverse modes of behaviors and understanding the intriguing mechanisms and rationales behind the actions of Chinese villagers.

This dissertation, through a comparison of resistance behaviors of the villagers in two townships in Hebei Province, inquires the actual organization and disorganization of villager resistance in rural China and hopes to understand why and how collective action occurs or fails to occur in the specific social contexts. The overarching argument of the study is that during the three decades of post-socialist reforms, variances in local political and economic structure have emerged at the grassroots level in the countryside. Two different modes of post-socialist political economy appeared in the two townships – one builds on the production of local entrepreneurship and a highly visible endogenous class society while in the other urban capital and rural governments conspire to grab rural resources and compel villagers to become laborers in cities. In the emergent

socioeconomic order, village cadres, as major organizers of rural communities, and villagers reconfigure and redefine their roles, agendas, and contents of exchange in their everyday tie practices. Their strategic networking through personal ties shapes the capability of their communities to mobilize resources and organize collective action. The resistance behaviors of villagers in the two townships underline the structure of inequality and the emergence of democratic ideologies and institutions in the two localities, and have twisted impacts on the settlements of their grievances and potential future social changes. The villagers do achieve some success in solving their problems through either disorganized or organized means of resistance, but meanwhile they encounter the limitations of their own actions in the process of negotiation and mobilization. The intriguing relationship between state and society at the grassroots level in rural China is also being contested and negotiated in the actions of villagers in different local contexts, and demonstrates rich fluidity, diversity, and complexity.

After presenting how the two different modes of local economy have evolved and been constructed during the post-socialist reforms in the two townships, I first look at the practices of personal ties of village cadres and villagers in W Township. Socialist governmental structure is well kept in the villages and the cadres at the same time serve as local patrons and state representatives exerting social control. They use diversified personal networks to deal with the villagers stratified into different class groups in the local capitalist production, and maintain a functioning “neo-clientelist regime” in the township. For common villagers, the vertical tie with their village cadres, which they use daily to receive buffering protection in the risky market and avoid state harassment, is the vital relationship for survival in the new economy and permeates their social lives in the

village communities. To exchange for favors from the cadres and preserve decency in the social circle, villagers support the cadres with respect and restrain from participating in organized resistance that would stain their career records. The villagers rely on their personal ties with the cadres, different for villagers in different class groups, to individually settle their grievances and search for justice, which ironically reinforces the structure of inequality in the villages and often mocks the newly established democratic institutions for villagers' political participation. In the process, the state, through its grassroots representatives – village cadres, recruits villagers as clients and patronizes rural communities in the classified personal ties between villagers and village cadres.

In comparison, I then explore villagers' networks in T Township. After the township officials assisted a leading business to grab the land of the villages there, the village cadres feel betrayed by the rural government and quit the state system, leaving a “sundered regime” in the township. The village cadres migrated with villagers to cities to work and become organizers of their “localistic communitas” there, completely rejecting state duties. In both the anarchist villages and the cities, cadres and villagers depend on the social support embedded in the horizontal ties in their community to survive. Through their personal networks, the cadres lead the villagers to transcend the persisting boundaries among village units, class status, and lineage groups in rural China, and endeavor to collectively petition and protest to authorities against corrupted local officials and for land compensation. In the new political structure in T Township, state power withdraws from the villages when village cadres break away from the governmental bureaucracy and villagers are able to form solid communities under the evolving leadership of the cadres. However, with their ultimate goal of becoming the imagined

superior “urban residents with full autonomy” free from reliance on personal or community ties, the villagers submit to the urban-rural cultural hierarchy in China and have little interest in institutional change for social equity, democracy, or solidarity of marginalized groups. “Citizenship and law,” which they adopt as framing in their collective resistance, are in fact no more than an imitation of popular discourses in the realization of their material goals.

In his classic book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, James Scott (1985: 242-247) identified five elements that hinder the formation of open collective resistance and lead to the disorganized everyday resistance of peasants in Malaysia: a limited number of victims, lack of direct class confrontations, population flight out of villages, fear of repression, and adjustment for household survival. Anomalies emerge when I use his analysis to examine my field data. There are grievances shared by a fairly large group of villagers in both townships; direct class confrontations take place in the lives of the villagers in both townships; villager flight to cities is an issue in T Township (where collective resistance actually appears) yet not so much in W Township; the risk of state repression is no less in T Township than in W Township; and in both townships villagers are strategic for the survival of their households. But collective resistance is highly visible in T Township and largely unseen in W Township. Noticing that personal ties among villagers play an extremely significant role in the disorganization and organization of resistance in the two townships, I turn to the perspective of social network and social capital, particularly the local political economy that structures practices of personal ties, to search for explanations for the two distinct patterns of resistance behaviors in the two Chinese townships.

Personal Ties, Social Capital, and Collective Action

Scholars in and outside China have repeatedly pointed out that the Chinese society is “relation-based” (Liang, 1949; Fei, 1998; King, 1985), and personal ties or *guanxi* is one of the core social phenomena to study so as to understand the Chinese political and economic life (Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002). In socialist China, although the communist Party-state was reputed as among the most stable and the most thoroughly organized of all the varieties of modern authoritarianism, with its control extended to the slightest detail of the everyday lives of the societal members (Smith, 1976), it in fact relied upon particularistic personal ties of clientelism between cadres and societal members to implement state policies and regulate individual behaviors at the grassroots level, whether it was in an urban factory (Walder, 1986) or a rural village (Unger, 1989; Oi, 1985), whether it was during the Great Famine (Yang, 1996) or the Cultural Revolution (Yan, 2003).

Drastic changes may have happened in the political economy of China during the post-socialist reforms, but the significance of personal ties has not faded out. The political reform of democratization in rural China granted villagers the right to directly and openly elect the governmental heads of their villages, but instead of establishing formal and impersonal democratic institutions, village elections are usually embedded in the nets of personal social relationships (Kelliher, 1997; Pastor & Tan, 2000; White, 1998; Zhu, 2004). In the growing market economy tuning to global capitalism, both individual actors and corporate organizations are inclined to still count on personal networks in position hunting and recruitment in the job market (Bian & Ang, 1997), loan application

(Kiong & Kee, 1998; Vanhonacker, 2004), and business management (Guthrie, 1999; Luo, 2007; Xin & Pearce, 1996).

More recently, in the booming literature on citizen resistance in China, particularly the highly visible rightful petitions and open protests, personal network is also noted as a relevant factor in the mobilization of resources for collective action (Cai, 2002; Bernstein & Lu, 2003; O'Brien & Li, 2006). But it is far from clear how social ties actually influence the organization of resistance and what affects the mechanisms between personal network and activism. Such questions and challenges are presented not only in the studies of resistance in China, but also in the more general field of collective action and social movement.

Personal Ties and Collective Action

Empirical data analyses often easily identify a significant correlation between the existence of intimate personal ties in a community or organization and success in recruitment to social movement and mobilization of collective action (Bolton, 1972; McAdam, 1986; Snow, Zurcher, & Ekland-Olson, 1980). Researchers have demonstrated that networks among neighbors facilitated “block mobilization” during Paris Commune (Gould, 1991), informal ties among women were a major origin of Women’s Liberation Movement (Muller, 1994), and continuous conversations through personal ties not only recruited individuals to religious social movements but also sustained the organizations after the peak of confrontation passed (Lofland, 1978). Two different approaches were adopted to explore why personal networks encourage individual participation in activism.

The psychological or attitudinal account targets at the individual level and produces analyses of the emotions and motivations of movement participants. Deeply influenced by the individual choice model in Olson's (1965) classic book *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, scholars in this tradition argued that personal ties emotionally connect individuals and help them to see their "fitness" in a movement, which either compels participation or at the very least renders the individual susceptible to recruitment appeals (For a review, see McPhail, 1971). Although the approach enjoys seemingly theoretical sophistication, empirical support for the individual-based psychological accounts of participation has proved elusive. Survey data were collected to indicate that personal ties may give rise to positive attitudes towards collective action, however, individual emotions and predispositions have minimal direct impacts on the occurrence of rebellions and revolutions (Mueller, 1980). Meanwhile, for a new group of scholars caring about the role of social movement organizations in the process of movement expansion and support mobilization, the psychological account depicting a simple and direct logic of individual participation was deemed out of the interest of academic purchase.

The micro-structural approach, regarding personal networks as a structural element instead of an individual possession, takes a refreshed look at the impacts of social ties on participation in collective action. The major argument is that it is more important to investigate how personal ties place individuals in the structural location that facilitates participation than how networks give a person ideological or psychological motivation (McCarthy, 1987; Paulsen, 1990; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Gould, 1993). Researchers in this camp more specifically emphasized two types of structural positions that strong and

tense interpersonal networks in a community could give rise to: in contact with a movement activist, and in contact with a social movement organization. When there is a movement activist in the community, close personal ties encourage the extension of an invitation to participate to other members in the community and the networks ease the uncertainty of mobilization (Oliver, 1984; Heirich, 1977; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). At the same time, social movement organizations are much more likely to occur in communities with frequent personal contacts, and through informal ties the organizations can grow in size and capture more attention in the communities (Finkel, 1985; Sayre, 1980). These studies, in spite of their prominent influence, are deeply troubled by empirical imprecision and lack of theoretical nuance. Key questions such as why the micro structure of being in contact with a movement activist or a movement organization should overpower other social networks of an individual, and what makes the exchanges in the micro structure of networks appealing to individuals during recruitment remain largely unanswered (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999).

Relational and System Social Capital

Another thread of literature interested in the relationship between personal ties and collective action discusses the term “social capital.” Using “social capital,” researchers are describing and investigating two quite different aspects of the contents and mechanisms of personal networks: how the processes of using ties affect individual wellbeing, and how that impacts public goods and communities (Flap, 1999). Pierre Bourdieu (1986), one of the founding fathers of “social capital,” in his writing viewed social capital as “the sum of the actual and potential resources that are linked to possession of a durable relationship...of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” It is

what an actor individually possesses in his social relations and what he can individually invest with an eye towards reciprocal profits. “Social capital” as individual assets is prevalently adopted by scholars interested in examining how networks produce diverse individual social economic outcomes and inequality or stratification in the society. Empirical studies in various cultural contexts came to the conclusions that relations individuals enjoy and utilize are significant predictors of their chances of getting jobs (Beggs & Hurlbert, 1997; Barbieri, 1996; Marsden & Gorman, 2001; Lin, 2003), obtaining higher occupational status and better income (Lin & Dumin, 1986; Breiger, 1981; Wegener, 1991; Narayan & Pritchett, 1999), achieving educational goals (Chamberlain, 1988), maintaining safer living environments (Messner, Baumer, & Rosenfeld, 2004; Wuthnow, 1995), and even possessing better health (Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999; Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; Berkman, 1984).

On the other hand, some scholars are more concerned with social capital as a collective property or public good in certain communities. Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000), a major advocate for the concept of social capital, in his discussions on conditions of functioning democracies, perceived “social capital” as collective distribution and bindingness of norms and the bridging of otherwise separated collectivities, which consequently lower transaction costs and therefore benefit everyone individually including those who did not invest in it. He somewhat equated social capital with community trust and solidarity and believed its power to promote cohesive unity, civic engagements, political participation, democracy, and civil society. Social capital, in his view, is both a public good that constructs a democratic society and a private good that benefits every member in the community.

According to this approach of collective aggregation, social capital is a property of a group or a community or even a nation as a whole, produced by daily interactions of individuals in their practices of personal networks. Although there is less unanimity among authors what this property is, they more or less stressed community solidarity and collective unionism. Inglehart (1997) wrote about social capital as a “culture of trust and tolerance, in which extensive network of voluntary associations form” and took interest in how such cultural dimensions link to economic and political (particularly democracy) outcomes at the country level. Fukuyama (1995) emphasized the role of trust and “spontaneous sociability” in reducing transaction costs and increasing economic efficiency in the community of companies. Bowles & Gintis (2002) defined social capital as “trust, concern for one’s association, a willingness to live by the norms of one’s community and to punish those who do not,” and highlighted the role of social capital to bind the members of a group/community to cooperate. Echoing the similar theme, Hayami (2001) pointed out that social capital of mutual trust “would not only be effective in suppressing moral hazards between the contracting parties but would also promote collaborative relationships within the wider community.”

One strand of studies in this school connects social capital at the community level with social movement by asking how social capital can help circumvent collective action problem and lead to unions in the communities of subalterns. Ostrom and her colleagues (Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom, Gardner, & Walker, 1994) analyzed how social capital elicits cooperation among farmers through establishing trust and behavioral norms in their struggles for irrigation systems. Similar effects of social capital are also uncovered in the

research of Bardhan (2001) on peasants in south India, and Otsuka & Tachibana (2001) on community efforts to preserve forestry in Nepal.

Borrowing the terms from Esser (2008), I use “relational social capital” to capture social capital as individual properties, meaning the resources an actor can employ and use through direct or indirect personal networks with other actors who control those resources and in which the actor is intentionally investing. “System social capital” is used to capture social capital at the community level, which goes beyond the relationships of single actors and includes a collective attitude of solidarity. It can help to circumvent the collective action problem and unite individuals towards common goals. As generally in Chinese villages, villagers in both W and T Township are embedded in personal networks and rely on relational social capital in *guanxi* to survive in the post-socialist market. However, only in T Township, not in W Township, does relational social capital transform into system social capital and facilitate the organization of villager resistance. The conditions for this transformation to take place or fail to occur are at the center of the inquiries of this dissertation.

Why and how the two different aspects of social capital are linked has also become one of the most intriguing questions raised by scholars in this field. The “duality” of social capital is noted in the works of James Coleman, the author who has popularized the concept in sociology, as he stated (1988: 98): “Social capital is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure.” The conceptual difficulty with social capital is then how to deal with this duality theoretically. In his own studies of the Jewish diamond

merchants in New York, Coleman (1988) approached social capital as a whole with little analytical differentiation between the two levels. He claimed in conclusion that “social capital is defined by its function,” assuming an automatic mechanism from reciprocal personal relationships among individual merchants and group norms of mutual help. As Portes (1998) correctly noticed, Coleman includes under his analysis of social capital both the mechanism that generates system social capital and the benefits that accrue from it. By equating the effects of system social capital with the cause of it, his theoretical framework fell into the trap of tautology (Lin, 2001).

Coleman later added to his theories (1990) that social capital as collective cohesiveness is often a byproduct of initiatives in individual networks targeted at other goals (such as economic resources), and some more recent research (e.g. Sanyal, 2009) echoed this point. However, the statement of accidental byproduct, as a theory of convenience, does not tell us much about whether relational social capital in personal networks can always be accumulated into system social capital and give rise to positive outcomes such as functioning democracy as scholars have hoped. Can bowling together unfailingly increase willingness to rely on others, to participate in collective endeavors, and to build a robust civil society? Unfortunately, empirical data have proven this simple and automatic mechanism of byproduct inaccurate and sometimes naïve (Foley & Edwards, 1996).

“Bad” Relational Social Capital

Are tense and intimate individual ties in a community always a significant promoter of collective action and social movement? Does accumulation of relational social capital automatically transform into system social capital of solidarity? Researchers keep

discovering anomalies to the automatic transition and by-product theories of Coleman. Intense relational social capital, as some studies pointed out, can facilitate only private good within groups but diminish the chances of producing public good. Group-specific relational social capital causes exclusiveness and distrust in communities (Durlauf, 1999); nested close individual ties may even give rise to corruption of the powerful (La Porta et al., 1999) and authoritative political systems (Warren, 1999). Instead of promoting democratic participation and happy citizenry, as the authors pointed out, tense relational social capital can hinder community cohesiveness and union solidarity (Porte, 1998).

In the field of collective action and social movement, researchers also noticed in some empirical cases that intimate personal networks could actually undermine community mobilization and the organization of collective action by changing perceptions of movement goals and excluding individuals not already in the networks (e.g. Goodwin, 1997; Kanter, 1972). The research design and methods of the current studies on social movement have been targeted as a major reason that prevents scholars from interrogating the assumption that personal networks could be a double-edged sword that sometimes even undermines the organization of collective actions. Researchers usually start with a social movement that has already taken place and survey or interview the participants, if not organizers and leaders, as the research subjects. But discovering that the movement activists were recruited by some preexisting personal networks, even the authors adopting this approach of research have realized (McAdam & Paulson, 1993), does not prove that individual ties are a sufficient condition of participation in collective action. As Michael Burawoy (1982) critiqued, the scholarship on social movement often concentrates only

on why and how social movements occur but pays too little attention to why and how they do not.

Communities in rural China today, hit by drastic social changes and unsettled as an experimental field of democratization political reforms, provide a unique opportunity to study the formation of villagers' resistance, collective or atomized, in the contexts of the accumulated grievances of villagers and the power negotiation among different levels of state. With ethnographic data on the contents of everyday networking practices of villagers in the two townships in China, this dissertation aims at investigating empirically and theoretically the dynamics between personal ties and collective action, embedded in local political and economic conditions and producing social outcomes in non-linear and sometimes contradictory directions.

Remedy 1: Contents

In order to clarify the connections between individual ties and collective action, one remedy that the literature suggests is to pay attention to the actual contents of exchange in personal networks and investigate whether only certain types of relational social capital can benefit the construction of system social capital (Lawler, 2001, 2002). Schaefer (2009), for instance, identified two resource dimensions that affect exchange and the building of cohesion: duplicability, that is, whether a resource's provider retains control of the resource after exchange; and transferability, that is, whether a resource's recipient can exchange the resource in another relation. He pointed out that duplicable and transferable social exchanges in personal networks are more likely to shape a cohesive collectivity. Flora & Flora (1993) made the distinction of hierarchical and horizontal relational social capital, the former as personal ties and reciprocities binding individuals

who occupy similar social locations and the latter as personal networks binding individuals who occupy different social locations. They believed both types, though via different mechanisms, can lead to the enhancement of system social capital that prevents social fragmentation and isolation.

Remedy 2: Contexts

To demystify the connection between relational and system social capital, the micro focus on the detailed contents and processes of exchange in personal networks has adequate explanatory power. However, one analytical difficulty lying in the approach is that community solidarity and collectiveness involves a lot more individuals than the two parties in one specific social exchange. It requires the majority of community members to perform duplicable and transferable network practices, or follow similar mechanisms to transform hierarchical or horizontal relational social capital to system social capital. How the consistency can be explained challenges researchers and compels them to look into the contexts of personal networking practices.

Amaney Jamal (2007), in his recent book on social and political associations in Palestine and the Arab world, shifted his inquiries to national polity. Due to the centralized authoritarian context of Palestine, associational life there is embedded in corruption, patronage, and clientelism. Although individuals through associational life develop close intimacy with one another, relational social capital of interpersonal trust has no apparent link to patterns of community solidarity, civic engagement, or democratic participation, or in other words system social capital. When the national political context is non-democratic, relational social capital in individual ties loses its relevance in producing collective action and social change. The book echoes the previous conclusion

that relational social capital does not necessarily lead to system social capital and provides a trying and refreshing macro explanation of national political contexts.

China today is still deemed as a non-democratic country, but under the same national polity with strong state influence and control, the two townships in the same province demonstrate extremely different processes of system social capital production. Instead of the general national political context that does not solve the empirical puzzle, my explanation lies in the distinct modes of grassroots post-socialist political economy in the two townships. The importance of local contexts in understanding the accumulation of system social capital has been noted in previous research. Woolcock (1998) mentioned community contexts as a future direction for research on social capital in developing countries; Rosenblum (1998) and Warren (2001) discussed that associational type – based on its vision or composition – may influence the production of social capital at the collective level; Putnam (2002) pointed out that community processes of the transformation of social capital from private goods to public goods could enlighten us on social structure and inequality and its mechanisms need to be recognized and studied. Although the scholars were aware of the significance of an approach of grassroots contexts in understanding personal ties and community solidarity, none of them supported the statement with solid empirical data. And in rural China where voluntary associations with clearly defined goals and recruitment plans are rare, their research model examining mainly how internal associational characteristics mediate the establishment of system social capital often falls irrelevant. In my examination of local context, the focus is on grassroots politics played by officials and cadres at different

levels of government and how changes in local political and governmental institutions are interwoven with different patterns of capitalist production and social inequality.

In addition to seeking for explanations in the grassroots political economy, I also incorporate the emphasis on contents of exchange in personal ties in my examination of the mechanisms between relational and system social capital. In my analyses, I try to address the questions of what types of networks are available to villagers, under what circumstances they utilize the different ties, and how they strategically safeguard their interests in their practices of networks in the different local contexts. Combining and developing the two remedies previous research suggests, I hope to produce a more complete and thorough understanding of individual networks and the organization and disorganization of collective resistance in today's rural China.

Grassroots Politics in Rural China

In a massive country as China, how state wills from the central government could reach and be fulfilled in grassroots villages and shape local political economies, through the various levels of governmental bureaucracies and in confrontation with the “society” that includes the whole spectrum of organized and unorganized interests (Oi, 1989), is a prominent field of inquiry in Chinese studies (Perry, 1994; Kennedy, 2002). A totalitarian model, which depicts the fulfillment of state power in the communist regimes as mainly via coercion, is presented to stress the absolute power of the communist party and its efforts to mobilize and control (Friedrich & Brzezinski, 1965). The model discounts the ability of the civil society in the countryside to affect state actions and the citizens are described as atomized, passive, and politically ineffectual. Villagers' resistance to the state power majorly falls into the disorganized and non-institutional

category of “everyday resistance” (Scott, 1985), making troubles for the state in mundane life.

This model has been widely criticized for its simplicity and rigidity in understanding grassroots politics in China, with its problematic negligence to agencies and strategies of villagers and flexibility in their practices. Scholars discovered that villagers in China, via interesting means such as clientelism (Oi, 1985; Walder, 1986) or unconscious collectivity (Kelliher, 1992), can manage to maneuver state regulations at the local level, negotiate with state representatives about program implementation, and even exert influence on policymaking and policy changes in the nation. Villagers with strategic agencies, they concluded, are never absolutely silenced and docile.

Another twist that researchers taking a closer look at the “Chinese state” have added to the totalitarian paradigm is the fragmentation within the state system. While the totalitarian model sees the communist state as a massive and coherent top-down structure, Shue (1988, 1994) critiqued that state control in communist China is unequal and incomplete due to the fragmented and cellular honeycomb nature of the state. Local cadres often achieve discretionary authority and freedom to maneuver, which gives rise to the popular local protectionism and the patronage networking. The parcellized power structure prevents the everyday reach of the state to individuals and their resistance is organized based on social units under state socialism, such as schools, villages, or factories. Lieberthal used “fragmented authoritarianism” to describe the state system in China, arguing that governments at different levels and across parallel branches usually have distinctive and sometimes conflictive motivations and tactics (Lieberthal &

Lampton, 1991), which allows citizens the leverage to resist and negotiate the goals of the regime (Mertha, 2008).

The three decades of post-socialist economic and political reforms in China have re-structured the national economy and the Leninist Party-state organization, and how the contemporary Chinese state exerts control to the grassroots level and construct the variety in local political economies has become an increasingly intriguing but not fully studied question (Perry & Selden, 2003). Observing the appearance of influential new economic elites and persistent and violent protests of citizens, scholars wonder if the Chinese state is “waning” (Walder, 1995) in its power at the local level. Interested in the relationship between grassroots officials and entrepreneurs, Wank (1995) noticed that a new form of “symbiotic clientelism” has replaced the old dependent Party-clientelism. In the material exchange of the symbiotic clientelism, the power shifts to the end of the entrepreneurs as they provide significant goods and advantages, and the state officials together with their clients involve in willful deviation from the central-state policies. Chen (2007) examined the Party’s organizational control in the countryside and confirmed that the power of the reform regime is significantly declining in the villages. She argued that the loss of the regime’s grip on village cadres – the grassroots agents of state power, and the loss of command by village cadres on peasants have almost synchronized, causing the traditional structure of organizational control to crumble in the vast rural areas.

Lily Tsai, with her body of work on Chinese villages (2002, 2007a, 2007b), on the other hand is a bit more optimistic about village governance in today’s China. She paid particular attention to “solidarity groups” in villages, which are social organizations such as lineage groups or temples that encompass all the villagers and include state cadres.

She pointed out that if the power of the village government is embedded into the solidarity groups and mobilizes the social capital of the groups, state tasks like efficient and adequate provision of public goods could still be achieved by the village state.

Meanwhile, both Tsai and Chen agreed that variances in patterns of grassroots politics and modes of village governance in contemporary China are tremendous. For Tsai (2002), provision of public goods in villages could range from none to rich; and for Chen (2007), failed organizational control in Chinese villages can be summarized as in three distinct categories: vacuum of authority, abused and defied authority, and depoliticized authority. Chen believed local economic affluence (including natural endowments, geographic location, pre-existing collective economy, number of villagers engaged in profitable businesses, and traditional advantages and disadvantages) as an explanation for the diversity, while Tsai investigated political and social institutions, especially solidarity groups, in villages. In my examination of the diverse grassroots politics in the two townships in today's rural China, I take a historical and evolutionary perspective and combine economic (development of capitalist production) and political/social (officials' roles, governmental institutions, and stratification of social groups) changes in the two places during the three decades of post-socialism. I argue that capitalist production has emerged differently in the two townships in its interaction with the transformations of local governmental, political, and social institutions, and connect rural grassroots politics with resistance actions of villagers. The distinct modes of grassroots political economies shape how villagers and cadres practice their networks, and through the contents of exchange in villager personal ties, affect the organization and disorganization of villager resistance.

In both W Township, where local rural entrepreneurship builds the basis of economy and a highly visible endogenous class society occurs, and T Township, where urban capital in conspiracy with local governments carries out violent deprivation and drives villagers to migrate, local officials, particularly village cadres, reconfigure and redefine their interests in the local regimes and play significant roles in the changing patterns of interpersonal networking and resistance action. Their behavioral logics and rationales in the new political economies, I hope to demonstrate, can provide fresh and crucial insights on personal ties and collective activism in today's Chinese countryside. These local actors, in their interest-based networking, connect the structural political economies with the organization or disorganization of social movement in rural communities, and are important subjects of analysis in the development of a better understanding of grassroots political changes and social unrest in contemporary rural China.

The Changing State and Society in China

Through the comparison of villagers' personal networks and collective action in two different local political economies, I also hope to bring in some nuances to understand a changing and dynamic relationship between state and society at the grassroots level in China. The scholarship on state (meaning the totality of administrative, bureaucratic, and coercive apparatuses at different levels represented by officials from top national leaders to grassroots cadres) and society (meaning the organized and disorganized interest independent of the state) in China, although supplying a crucial and vibrant perspective on the Chinese political system, is often troubled by two core questions that call for further clarification with close empirical studies. First, how do we define state? The concept of state is often times aggregated as governmental powers in contrast with social

forces. Although it has been made commonly understood that the state system in China is deeply fragmented (Yang, 2004), how this fragmentation of state, more specifically the different interests of governmental officials, affects the processes in which the state deals with forces in the society is under examined (Oi, 1999; Kelliher, 1997). While paying attention to the dynamic and scattered elements in the society, it is of equal importance to scrutinize the various components of the state that encounter the same pushes and pulls, the blurring of boundaries, and the possibility of domination by others that social organizations and individuals face. By including local rural cadres as a crucial part of my analysis in the dissertation, I disaggregate state representations through investigating the diverse and changing interests of officials at different levels facing the local development of capitalism. State, in its interaction with the society, is depicted as a fluid variable being contested in the actions of officials and villagers instead of an invariant constant of suppression and dominance.

Secondly, is there a zero-sum power relationship between state and society? Though this state-versus-society perspective has been constantly called into question, it is still adopted implicitly in research. Perry (1994) urged studies on China to eschew the dichotomy of state and society, and Migdal, Kohli, & Shue (1996) proposed alternative hypothetical models of state and society in China such as state-in-society, co-development, and mutual empowerment. However, in empirical studies especially on resistance in China, related to the first critique, the state is still approached as an analytical entity of the whole repressive apparatuses, having a clear boundary and consistent antagonism over power with the society (e.g. Hurst, 2004; Solinger, 1999). This dissertation, with comparative ethnographic data on practices of personal ties and

collective action of villagers in two distinct local political economies, suggests two twists to this underlying assumption.

Do state and society have a clear-cut boundary? The Chinese villages in the study, where state and society encounters one another every day, provide unique settings to probe how state and society are differentiated and defined. I argue in this dissertation that state-society boundary in the villages, instead of being stably settled, is under flexible and strategic construction in the networking and resistance behaviors of cadres and villagers in the local economic and political contexts. In these processes, they enter each other's space, exchange resources, and their domains are explored and rearticulated. In W Township, where village cadres are recruited as agents of the functioning state structure and the newly emerged successful entrepreneurs, they use both their cadre status in the state and intimacy with villagers in the society to fulfill their administrative goals. On the blurring brink of state and society, the villagers are patronized to survive in the new local economy and atomized in resistance actions to preserve their ties with the village cadres. In T Township, massive destruction of local economic opportunities facilitated by the township government compels village cadres to withdraw from the state and become tactful organizers of the forces in the society. Without this grassroots level of the bureaucratic system, the state boundary is pushed back to the malfunctioning township level. Meanwhile, in the village state vacuum, the villagers, including cadres, are united as collective actors to defend their interests.

And does the state always gain strength as the society loses power, and vice versa? In W Township, the state seems to be powerful enough to patronize the society and prevent collective resistance that harms its goal of social stability. But at the same time, there is

increasing negotiation leverage on the side of the society in the neo-clientelist regime, which could succeed in constraining dimensions and effectiveness of state control and bargaining over the implementation of state programs. In T Township, the despotic and strong state at one time grabbed the land of the villagers regardless of their property rights. Yet instead of ruining the society, the state's arbitrary actions resulted in a reconfiguration of its boundary and relationship with the society that paralyzes the grassroots state structure and produces a more solidified society. Because of a persistent stalemate in the settlement of the villagers' grievances and their submission to the higher level of state authority which are revealed in my field data, whether or not the society has now gained more power over the state is still questionable. I present in this dissertation that at the local level, state and society have a much more fluid boundary than commonly described and they exert mutual influence on each other in a vibrantly interactive manner. In different modes of grassroots politics, actors in the society can be recruited as partners of officials in state control and cadres on the other hand can become organizers and leaders in social movements against local governments. The effects of these exchanges between state and society cannot be captured by a simple zero-sum model of power struggle, or a linear optimistic relationship between "a progressive/empowering society" and "a regressive/waning state" in the post-socialist world. In this dissertation, I use variances in local political economies to explain the distinct patterns of personal networking practices and resistance behaviors in the two townships, and meanwhile investigate the changing state-society dynamics as outcomes of the actions of villagers and grassroots cadres. With this perspective, I hope a nuanced perspective of individual

networks and collective activism, as well as a better understanding of grassroots politics, villager resistance, and institutional changes in rural China, can be produced.

The Chapters that Follow

The task in this project is to specify the mechanisms between everyday practices of personal ties and mobilization of resistance in the Chinese countryside, and answer why and how distinctive behavioral patterns of resistance – atomized vs. organized – have occurred in the two townships in Hebei Province. I explore in each site the emergent local political economies and changes in agency rationales behind individual networking practices and how those shape the capacity of villagers’ communities to start collective action, and suggest the importance to re-examine the grassroots dynamics of state and society in the new behavioral patterns of the rural actors.

Chapter 2, together with the appendices, is a reflection on my ethnographic fieldwork in rural China. It describes the political, moral, and human landscapes of the field, and critical events and dilemmas encountered in the course of data collection. I also discuss the implications these have for the generation of data and the arguments presented here. I explore the emergence of different local political economies in W and T Township in Chapter 3, where I outline the development of capitalist production, under the guiding influence of the governments at various levels, in the two townships in the past three decades of post-socialist reforms. Adjacent to the provincial capital, T Township is under the persistent radar of local officials who eagerly follow policy shifts to avoid making political errors; while W Township, distantly under the administration of a peripheral municipal, is often treated in a *lasses faire* attitude by the local state. The difference in state intervention produces two different modes of post-socialist political

and economic structures in the two townships, which shape the villagers' behaviors of networking and resistance.

Chapter 4 and 5 investigate villagers' interpersonal networks and their disorganized resistance in W Township. Chapter 4 describes a newly occurred endogenous class society in the township, and how village cadres bridge state power to villagers in different class groups through different exchanges in reconfigured clientelist ties. In the "neo-clientelist regime," cadres use personal ties to build collaborations in governance, patronize villagers, and prevent and control social unrest. Chapter 5 then discusses how in such patterns of personal networks, collectivity among common villagers is dismissed in the "classification without class consciousness," when villagers often feel isolated in their differentiated class positions in the villages and understand the meaning of their status through individual and hierarchical ties with the village cadres. They often voluntarily give up collective action to exchange for patronage from the village cadres, which they deem as the only plausible means to solve problems and seek for justice.

Chapter 6 and 7 shift to T Township, where state intervention and policy implementations have destroyed the local rural economy, and comparatively look at how villagers practice personal ties and organize collective resistance there. In Chapter 6, I show how village cadres withdraw from the state system and paralyze the governance at the grassroots level in the township. In the anarchist village communities, villagers staying at home see each other as similarly victimized by the rural governments and form horizontal networks of mutual help; while in the cities, migrant workers, the breadwinners of the households, establish inclusive "localistic communitas" to buffer discrimination, strive for urban survival, and fight for social justice. Chapter 7 then

depicts how collective action of villagers is organized and mobilized in their communities in the cities and in home villages. They use the now horizontal personal ties among village cadres and villagers, as well as family ties between migrant workers and at-home villagers, to initiate plans, execute actions, negotiate with the local governments, and monitor their progress. Over the years of collective movement, they increasingly fit themselves into their understanding of “citizenship,” which on the one hand equips them with a powerful discourse of framing but on the other hand submits them to the problematic cultural hierarchy of urban-rural in their sense of Chinese modernity.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by summing up empirical findings and connecting them to theoretical expansion and reconstruction. I suggest an approach focusing on strategic agencies, in their responses to institutional changes, in networking practices at the grassroots level to understand social activism, and emphasize the interests and tactics of local actors, such as the village cadres in a disintegrate post-socialist state system. I follow to discuss how this approach can shed light on our understandings of social inequality, class politics, and political change in contemporary China, and its implications for community social work practices.

Chapter 2

Research Methods

This is a project on social capital made possible mainly through social capital. I left China for graduate studies in the US right after college, with limited encounter and knowledge of the *guanxi* society of China that the sociological literature thoroughly discusses (Fei, 1998; Bian, 2002). It was by condensing chaos, opportunities, fights, compromises, excitements, frustrations, and angers into what I call field notes that I began to see a social world built on a large net of ties and myself as no more than a cog in the complicated structure. When the villagers used their judgments of my character and the closeness of our relations to decide whether to accept my interviews and when my access to the field became a personal decision of a local official, I often could not help commenting in my field notes on the paleness of research procedures in textbooks and the unpredictability of field adventures. What follows is a description of the processes of collecting ethnographic data for this study and the experiences of understanding oneself through understanding others, in which both contributions and limitations of the project are defined.

Fieldwork in the Two Townships

With a comparative study of village governance and villager resistance in mind, I began my fieldwork in May 2006 with some colleagues at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Professor Yu Jianrong, who was leading a research team to study

political reforms in rural China, introduced me to many villages and suggested I start my project in W Township in Q County, where local officials were his close friends. W Township is fairly small and mediocre in terms of economic development in the county. As many of the townships in the area, it is reputed for social stability. I decided it would be a good idea to start with a non-outlier and the county officials almost immediately accepted my request for carrying out fieldwork in the villages of this township, largely due to their established friendship with Professor Yu. In addition, they were quite confident that my research on this seemingly peaceful township would not embarrass them or tarnish their career records. The election of village cadres were taking place in the villages that summer and the county officials enthusiastically gave us, the research team, a week-long guided tour of every village in W Township. I met with the villagers, observed their meetings, and strived for some time alone to talk with and interview them. When the other members of the research team were leaving, I proposed to stay in one of the villages with a villager family and was then arranged to meet with Wang Mei, the Party secretary of Chu Village and the only female village cadre in the township. After the township Party secretary told her that I, an over-sea female graduate student, was looking for a place to live in the villages, Wang Mei offered me her own house for my residence during my fieldwork that summer.

A charismatic woman at my mother's age, Wang Mei treated me with full respect mainly because I was "sent down" by the county and township officials. She ordered her daughter-in-law to completely clean the guest bedroom and purchase new washing basins

and toilet stand¹ for me. She inquired about all my life habits and tried to accommodate them by changing her family routines regardless of my objections – e.g., cooking rice (my southern life style) instead of noodles for supper and having hot water ready every evening for me to take a shower. She called me Dr. Dai and asked her son, who is ten years my senior, to call me “aunt” in order to show that I was an equal part to her in the family. During the first few days, I accompanied her to visit villagers and work in the village government, and she always introduced me as a PhD and a friend of the county officials. I could tell that the villagers were confused and a bit suspicious.

To make things even worse, the township Party secretary paid me a welcome visit in the village governmental office three days after I moved to Chu Village. He came in his handsome Nissan sedan with two staff members of the township government, passing many of the villager houses and bringing a large basket of assorted fruits and a nice summer quilt as their gifts to me. In front of the crowd in the office, he advertised my academic achievements and commented that it was a great honor of Chu Village to have me there. After they left, I tried to distribute the fruits among the villagers present but few accepted my offer.

Frustrated that the villagers would treat me as a state agent with vigilance, I turned to what community social workers call “persistent presence” (Reisch & Lowe, 2000) for my rescue. I went to the office of the village government everyday and talked with the villagers who were there searching for some help. I insisted on taking the job to deliver mails that had arrived at the office to villagers’ homes and grabbed the chances to meet and talk with different individuals. I spent a lot of time roaming in the village to make

¹ Since the bathroom is always built outside the family house in rural China, people use toilet stands at night and clean them in the morning.

myself visible, observing men's poker games, joining women's chat after dinner, and helping the set-up of performances of a local band of folk music. In response to their questions of what I was doing in the village and whether I had permissions to be around, I diligently explained that I was a student interested in rural life and planned to do some research in the township for my dissertation, making every effort to defy the image of a "sent-down" supervisor.

One evening after dinner, I was taking a stroll in the village as usual when a woman villager waved at me to invite me to her house. Her son, a middle-school student, was struggling with his mathematics homework and could not figure out a puzzle. After I helped him solve the problem, his parents gratefully poured me some tea and inquired if they could be of any help to my research. I had a nice and free chat with them, about my research, my fieldwork, their life, their coping strategies, and their opinions of the local governments. Although they neither fully understood my project nor had much interest in it, I with my excitement sensed acceptance and vaguely saw an emerging true entrance to their community – through helping with the education of the children in the villages.

I volunteered to teach English at the W Township Middle School, located in Chu Village, in addition to working in the village government as a temporary staff. I held sessions for students in the eighth and ninth grade twice a week to prepare them for their incoming high school entrance exams. I also organized an after-school program to help them with their homework and additional questions that they did not raise during class. The teachers welcomed me to the school and some even attended my class to observe and "learn from" me, as they put it. I was worried that they might see me as an intrusive competitor, but it turned out that my educational background granted me legitimacy and

they regarded me as a temporary helper instead of a grabber of their rice bowls. Through the teaching activities, I finally felt like a welcomed part of the village communities of W Township. Students from all of the 15 villages were interested in my experiences at Peking University and in the United States, and some high school students were attracted to the after-school program to practice oral English as well. Their families appreciated me as some unusual educational resources for their children, promised to offer me any help I needed for my research, and cordially invited me to their homes and community activities. I felt blessed to be finally able to get acquainted with people from all the villages, participate in their social circles, and gather my ethnographic data. It often amazed me how a village in rural China is a close community based on personal ties, in which people could hardly keep any secrets. By chatting casually with the parents and grandparents who came to pick up their children, I was able to learn about major events and characters in their villages. And it never seemed a problem if I wanted to interview a particular villager that I had never met, because he or she could easily be reached through the networks of the villagers I already knew. They either gave me the person's contact, or more often took me directly to his or her house and introduced me. In this way, the interviewees found some attachments to me, through connections via their friends, and were often willing to disclose their stories to me.

As her grandchildren became my students, Wang Mei, as well as her family, became more at ease with my presence. I started to go with my full name in the house and Wang Mei and her husband would call me "Little Dai" – a normal nickname for someone their junior. They stopped paying excessive attention to my food, shower, and safety when I made new friends and developed an active social life in the township. However, it still

took a longer time for the villagers of Chu Village to put off their guard in our interactions, because they were constantly reminded that I was staying at the Party secretary's house and could pass along their inappropriate comments to her. I could only wait patiently for that tension to cease, after they knew me better and as time went by. That summer, Chu Village was home and I socialized with the villagers there more than any other villages. Many of them befriended me eventually and some became my closest informants in that area.

My fieldwork with the villagers was going smoothly when I began to worry about having too much *guanxi* with the local officials. They continued treating me as a guest of honor and invited me to their meetings, gatherings, and banquets. A seat was reserved for me in the county conference hall during the annual meeting of the People's Congress of Q County, and one county official asked me to privately tutor his son who was in the 11th grade and facing the National College Entrance Exam. I was aware that data on the local political structure, an important component of my dissertation, could be obtained by socializing with the officials, but on the other hand, I was afraid to impose the impression of a state representative on the villagers. I ended up attending the events but I insisted on using public transportation or riders from my closer informants in the villages to get there. To the county official, I said I was too occupied with my fieldwork to do private tutoring yet I gave him my phone number and told him about the after-school program I was running in the township middle school. His son called a few times but never showed up in the school in Chu Village.

For a male ethnographer to develop a true tie with officials in rural China, he generally needs to get drunk at the banquet tables for a couple of times. In that way,

intimacy is demonstrated and mutual trust could be established. Members of Professor Yu's research team shared stories of being hospitalized for days after consuming too much alcohol and told me that my allergy to alcohol could be a big problem. However, when the officials had meals with me, a young and educated woman, with Wang Mei around attesting that I had no experience with alcohol, they never pushed me to empty my cup and sometimes even ordered juice and yogurt for me. I then wondered how I could possibly develop a similar relationship of trust with the officials if getting drunk with them was not an option. The strategy worked out was to collaborate with my gender and age and get into a "front stage role," if in Goffman's term (1959), of an innocent female student from the city that fit into the imagination of the local officials when socializing with them. I tried to remain quiet at the tables and restrained myself from debating with them about policies or making provocative statements. They felt quite comfortable with my submission and discussed, as well as gossiped, about events in the township freely in front of me, an unchallenging and unthreatening audience. Meanwhile they found amusement in my naivety in the "liquor culture" and many other implicit rules in rural China, and made jokes about how a woman at my age in the villages should have several children and could shamelessly beat men in drinking. When reflecting on these experiences in the field, I realized what I might have missed by playing overly passive, yet still it was a feasible way I discovered then to collect crucial data on the local regime in W Township and governance in the villages.

I started my second round of fieldwork in W Township in June 2007 and this time I stayed at the staff dorm in the township government, which is located at the geographic center of the township and has regular public transportation to all the villages. In

addition, I liked the opportunity to hear stories and paparazzi news in the township from the staff members. I resumed my teaching at the township middle school shortly after I arrived. By that time, many villagers in the township had known me as an acquaintance and accepted my presence. They sometimes let me stay overnight in their houses when I tried to catch up with some significant events in the villages. At the same time, as patterns of local governance and resistance in W Township began to emerge in my field notes, I sought for the other half of my comparison. My partner was then doing a project in a bar in Beijing that one of our friends owns, where we got to know Zeng Hui and many other bartenders from rural China. Zeng Hui became a good friend of ours and he and his local friends told me about the land deprivation and their persistent organized resistance in T Township, which was my entering point to the site of T Township.

The localistic communities of the migrant laborers from T Township in both Beijing and Hangzhou have high levels of mutual trust and solidarity. Snow-ball sampling worked out smoothly when I was introduced to my interviewee through one of his or her local friends. I had several trips, ranged from three days to three weeks, to the villages of T Township to visit the villagers remaining at home. My close informants, including Zeng Hui, the Party secretary of Zeng Village, the Party secretary of Wu Village, Wu Hao, the governmental head of Hundred-Flower Village, etc., accompanied me to the township for the first few trips and I later on went alone. In contrast with my fieldwork in W Township that started through official channels, my approach of T Township was from the grassroots. I was always referred to as a friend of a relative or a local friend and received acceptance and trust in the villages, as well as in the localistic communities in the cities. The villagers, often claiming that they had nothing to lose, were willing to talk

about how they suffered loss in their hometown and how they were determined to get justice through protesting. To maintain social stability, the government largely tolerated the organized resistance of the villagers, and in the past years, no one was hurt or imprisoned because of their participation. That allowed my interviewees even more space to discuss their feelings and experiences in the petitions and protests.

The villagers have been trying to attract more public attention to their stories so as to push the city government of Shijiazhuang to settle the case for them. After repeated attempts of writing to newspapers and talking with journalists, the villagers are aware of the power of the media and often equaled me, an educated person caring about their life, with another media outlet of their experiences. Although I kept telling them that I was merely a student working on my dissertation and might offer little help to their case, they requested me to pressure the city of Shijiazhuang by “submitting my report to officials in Beijing” or “telling their stories to my foreign friends.” My explanation of the difference between an academic dissertation and a journalist report often seemed senseless to the villagers and in the end, I sometimes let them keep that hope if it could ever help to relieve some of their desperation.

Interested in the governance structure in the township, I had to encounter the township government when I was in the villages. While I sometimes felt having too much *guanxi* with the local state in W Township, I had to struggle for my access to T Township due to having too little. Even though I brought with me an official letter on my behalf from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences assuring the local government that I would not cause troubles during my research, the township officials, highly suspicious of my intention, warned me not to mess up with the politics in this hotbed of social unrest,

rejected firmly my requests for communication, and tried to kick me out of the township. The township head even threatened to report my presence to the police department if I refused to leave the township soon. I still stayed in the villages trying to escape from the radar of the township government when I asked for help from my colleagues in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and my friends working in the state system. They made personal phone calls to the local government and some contacted their acquaintances in the area to work out some *guanxi* for me. The latter strategy, to my luck, eventually succeeded in connecting me with a high school classmate of the township Party secretary. He, a close friend of one of my friends in the state system, made a phone call to the township Party secretary and offered to accompany me to visit him in his office.

This time, with the presence of his friend, the secretary was mild and almost amiable. He finally agreed to tolerate my research activities in the township, on two conditions: first, I should not participate in any activity that would cause trouble to the local government; and second, if I knew of any plans of protesting of the villagers, I should inform him. I immediately wanted to make it clear to him that I could not be a spy on the villagers while carrying out dissertation fieldwork, but his friend gave me a subtle glimpse indicating that I probably should not argue with him or challenge his authority. I nodded trying to hide my reluctance, but I knew that I would not report anything to him as I could always use the excuse that I discovered nothing unusual in the field. Still, I had to restrain myself from walking with the villagers to the streets to protest, in order to keep my access to the site. The township Party secretary called me every week to his office or on my cell phone to check on my activities in the township and I basically told

him that I was making progress on the project via regular research activities. Because I entered the township through villager friends, instead of governmental officials, the villagers of T Township were far less cautious of my connections with the local governments than their counterparts in W Township were initially. In the summer of 2008, they at first tried to keep the actual date and location of the protest secret, but in the end disclosed the plan so that I could observe them as a passer-by on the spot. In this community of solidarity, trust often beats pressures from the outside.

In July 2008, the township Party secretary told me that a Party official in the county wanted to talk to me about what I was doing in the area and the county might not be happy to have me researching there. I sensed that I probably would be kicked out of the township and felt depressed for a few days. I decided to expedite my interviews in the villages while avoiding contact with the local officials as much as I could. However, two weeks passed and this issue was never brought up again in my weekly correspondence with the township Party secretary. I figured either him or the county official had completely forgot about it and cheered for my fortune in my heart. Yet later on, when I was trying to write about the political structure and governance in the township, I regretted not talking with the county official, from whom I might have got some first-hand data on the local mode of economic development and political transformation. The other side of the debate I had with myself would say, well, I could have been forced to leave the township if I had gone to the county government. I still do not know for sure how wise that decision was, and in the field I could only do what I thought at that moment was the best for my project.

I travelled back and forth between Ann Arbor and my fieldwork in China between 2006 and 2009, and when I was not with the villagers, I stayed in touch with my informants by phone and email and kept track of the events in the two townships. I sometimes carried out short phone interviews with villagers and cadres when needed. Over the years, the villagers in the two townships accepted my existence, many welcomed me to their lives and struggles, and some treated me as a good family friend inquiring about my parents, marriage, and future plans. I often doubted whether I could truly maintain a neutral position in my accounts of their life stories and experiences, and for quite a few times in the field, I purposefully paused my interactions with the villagers for a few days to check on the neutrality of my stance in the field notes and interviews. I tried my best to balance the views from different standpoints in my fieldwork, but after all, an ethnographic account is a world constructed and understood through the eyes and emotions of the ethnographer.

My fieldwork experiences sometimes challenged the rules of good fieldwork that I was determined to follow before entering the two townships. A lot of the villagers thought an interview with me, made possible only via our personal connections, was a talk between two friends and found my consent form funny. They asked me to skip that part of nonsense and refused to sign the form, which seemed too formal and “official” to them. I in the end had to give up written consents and sought for oral consents at the beginning of the interviews to fulfill the IRB requirements. The villagers had little awareness of the protection of their confidentiality when participating in my research and had no interest at all in my explanation of my procedures of data use and storage. Some even suggested me using their real names instead of pseudo ones, as one of them said, “I

am no coward and could be responsible for every word I told you!” I was always grateful to their courage and trust, yet insisted on following the rules to protect them as my research subjects. Witnessing life hardship of many of the villagers, I told myself to pay for my food and lodging every time I had meals or stayed in their houses. But it became extremely hard when they treated me as a welcomed guest and friend. They always told me it was their honor and pleasure to have me, and when I insisted on paying, they became quite upset requesting me not to insult them with cash and make them look bad in front of the other members of the community. I in most cases decided that I should follow the local conventions and withdrew my offer. The only exception was in the summer of 2006 when I stayed at Wang Mei’s house for over three months. Although she and her family members firmly rejected my compensation, I put the money and a thank-you note in an envelope and left it on their dining table on the day I left. I met them often in my later fieldwork but neither of us ever mentioned the money – I hope it was a sign that they accepted it and understood my appreciation.

Although I prepared myself for the fieldwork by reading extensively books and news reports on life in rural China, the suffering and grief of the villagers still shocked me. I particularly recalled a heart-breaking funeral of a truck driver merely 18 years old in W Township, who died in an accident on highway but had no life or job insurance. Losing their only boy and a major source of family income, his parents were devastated. I could often hear his mother weeping and crying when walking past her house during the day or sleeping on my bed at night. My urge as a social worker wanted me to do two things: a. when meeting the boss of the truck company in the field, discuss possible compensation plans with him on behalf of the family; and b. initiate a community project to help the

family during this difficult time. For several days I debated with myself on whether the plans were appropriate for me as a researcher (*vis-à-vis* a practitioner) in the community. I dropped both plans eventually and let the family figure out their own strategies of survival in the local political structure. My project goal being to understand the structure of the local regime, I argued that I should not intervene in the processes of problem settlement in the community, and in order to be able to get data from different interest groups in the township, including the owners of truck companies, I needed to maintain an “aura of neutrality.” Still, I felt entirely depressed about this “compromise against conscience” for a while and escaped from the villages to Beijing. Thanks to my friends and colleagues there, I regained confidence in the project and cherished the belief and hope that through producing fresh perspectives and knowledge of problems in rural China, I might be able to bring social changes on a larger and more macro scale. I struggled among my roles as an observer, a researcher, a social worker, and a guest member of the community during the whole process of the fieldwork, and being what Patricia Hill Collins (1998) called “an outsider within,” I began to understand the limitations of each of them.

I concluded my fieldwork in W Township in July 2008, and exited completely from the two townships in July 2009. The villagers called or emailed me now and then, inviting me to visit them again. The villagers of T Township were anticipating land compensation and urban household registrations promised by the city government of Shijiazhuang and all I could give them were my best wishes.

Data Collection

I gathered my qualitative data in the field through three ways: participant observation, in-depth unstructured interviews, and archives of meeting minutes. The instructor of qualitative research methods practicum at the University of Michigan often emphasized the importance of ethnographic observation, sometimes over in-depth interviews. This piece of textbook knowledge was vividly put into reality to me during the fieldwork. I set up an interview with Wang Mei, the Party secretary of Chu Village, at the beginning of my fieldwork in W Township and found her completely lost in my questions. She had little to say in response to my topics, because “there was no real change in village governance after the democratic reforms” and her everyday duty as a village cadre was “nothing more than sitting in the office and waiting for villagers to come.” I asked her to walk me through the experience of settling one specific problem for a villager, and after thinking for about five minutes, she came up with almost nothing that she thought would be worth my knowing and writing about. Not only did we use different sets of vocabularies, but also she made the efforts to tailor her accounts to fit into my research interest, which became a fatal barrier in our communication. Participant observation in the villages, on the other hand, was much more rewarding. By joining the villagers in their mundane lives at meetings, at dinner parties, in their farmland, and in casual chatting, I began to understand their life and got accustomed to their way of talking and discussion. I realized that an in-depth interview with a villager had to be based on some particular events and a relationship of rapport and mutual trust between the villager and me needed to be established before carrying out the interview.

My interview data, therefore, were collected in accordance with my observation data. I followed up significant events in the two townships and interviewed individuals around the events, asking them particularly about their experiences of and attitudes towards what was going on at that time, in addition to some more general questions. I used an unstructured guide (see Appendix I) for the interviews and usually let the flow of our dialogues lead us to in-depth discussions on those events. In this way, the villagers were at ease during the interviews, as we talked about the very specific people involved in a very specific issue instead of some concepts that they assumed would be interesting to me. They stopped organizing their stories and emotions to fit into my research agenda, and treated me more or less as an outlet of their views on their own communities.

Participant observation was also an effective way to build relationships with the villagers. They gradually accepted my presence in the townships largely because I persistently showed up in their lives with care and true interest. The longer I socialized with the villagers through ethnographic fieldwork, the easier it became to conduct the interviews. In some later interviews, the villagers talked about the circumstances naturally as among friends, comfortably expressed themselves, and even made jokes about my fieldwork and me. It was to my amazement how participant observation had dismantled the barriers of communication that frustrated me during my initial interview with Wang Mei, and rescued my project from falling apart.

I used snow-ball sampling for my interviewees, asking the villagers to refer me to the people that I wanted or needed to meet. In total, I completed 102 interviews in the two townships – 59 in W Township and 43 in T Township. The demographic distribution of

my interviewees is listed in the following tables. Some more detailed information about my interviewees could be found in Appendix II.

TABLE 1: Gender of Interviewees²

	W Township	T Township
Male	45	31
Female	14	14
Total	59	43

TABLE 2: Age of Interviewees

	W Township	T Township
Minimum	18	20
Maximum	65	79
Median	43	41
Mean	43.9	42.2

TABLE 3: Education of Interviewees

	W Township	T Township
College	3	3
High School	12	3
Middle School	27	22
Elementary School	13	9

² In rural China, women are largely excluded from talking about things outside the household, politics in particular. Male interviewees constitute the majority of the sample.

Illiterate	4	6
Total	59	43

TABLE 4: Party Membership of Interviewees³

	W Township	T Township
Party Members	36	18
Non Party Members	23	25
Total	59	43

Minutes of villagers’ meetings in village governments, lineage groups, and cities where they work are used as the third source of qualitative data. Village cadres and lineage leaders kept these documents, and when they felt that my ties with the communities were well established, they let me access the minutes and make copies of them. These documents, complementary to my field data, record interactions at the gatherings when I was not in the field. I studied them carefully and double checked the facts with the villagers to confirm their accuracy during the fieldwork. As an example, the minutes a meeting in Chu Village in W Township and its English translation could be found in Appendix III.

Data from the different sources were put together to form an “extended case study” (Burawoy, 1998), and coded along the hypothetically significant elements – rural governance, local capitalization and stratification, major conflicts of interest, villager

³ All the county and township officials and almost all the village cadres interviewed are Party members, so the percentage of Party membership in the sample is higher than the average in rural China.

organization, villager resistance, etc. The coded data were then analyzed to demonstrate a comparison of local political economy in the two townships, investigate its relationship with villagers' methods of resistance, and explore how that extends the theories of social capital, social movement, and community development.

Chapter 3

Development of Capitalism in Rural China: Diverged Paths and Modes

“In rural China, there suddenly appeared people involving in various professions, in commodity economy, and in all sorts of small enterprises. Nontraditional entrepreneurship in the countryside has mushroomed unexpectedly and become an important and beneficial complement to the economy.”

– Deng Xiaoping (1987) “On the Unexpected Development of Township and Village Owned Enterprises (TVEs),” in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Volume 3): 238.

“We must support the survival of the fittest among enterprises. Large companies and enterprises that have advantages in the market must be supported with local resources for their further growth. They should be encouraged to become crucial pillars of the national economy and major participants in global competition.”

– Premier Zhu Rongji (2003) “Government Work Report” at the First Annual Full Session of the Tenth National People’s Congress.

China has experienced massive development of its capitalist economy in the last three decades with the countryside as its frontier. As indicated in the quotes from top national leaders and noted by some recent scholarship (e.g. Huang, 2008), the development process of capitalism does not take place under consistent and universal principles and rules throughout the whole post-socialist era or across different geographic locations in the country. Instead, it contains complex and intriguing variances that shape the heterogeneity in local modes of economic growth and grassroots political relations. Many of the rural officials whom I encountered during my fieldwork often complained about shifts in central policies and constantly changing interpretations of them by their super-ordinates at different levels, which they had to “busily follow to appeal to the

upper-level.”⁴ In those interactions, constrained by the interpreted policy spirits and local resources, they designed plausible approaches of policy implementations that have sculptured diverged local modes of capitalism and grassroots state-society dynamics in the two townships.

In this chapter, I explore how two different types of political-economy have been constructed in W and T Township in the 30 years of post-socialist reforms and provide structural and historical contexts for the comparison of the current different patterns of state-society interactions, relational and system social capital, and villager resistance behaviors in the two locations. Located on the vast North China (*Huabei*) Plain, both townships prior to 1978 concentrated on agricultural production and strictly followed state quotas, with an output of large amounts of grain crops (mainly wheat) to feed the residents in Beijing and Tianjin, the two major urban centers nearby. In the emerging post-socialist market, different organizations of capitalist production have occurred and competed with each other in the Chinese countryside, including small rural entrepreneurship, TVEs, urban-rural collaboration, and leading urban or global companies. In the two townships, under the nested influences of central policies, local implementations, and economic resources available, distinct paths of capitalist expansion are adopted, along which the interests of grassroots officials are invested and local modes of governance are contested and shaped.

W Township consists of 15 natural villages and the villager population is around 20,000. It belongs to Q County under the municipal of Cangzhou City in Hebei Province in north China. The municipal of Cangzhou has a population of 6.9 million and ranks 5

⁴ Interview in Q County, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, 5/21/2006.

in GDP among the 11 municipal cities in the province in 2007 (Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2008). From Q County, it takes more than an hour by driving to get to the city of Cangzhou, and with C County standing in-between, it is not immediately adjacent to the city center. Although W Township, as well as many townships of Q County, lies on a major national route that connects it conveniently to Tianjin and Beijing – an advantageous benefit for economic development, local officials have the consensus that the county receives merely secondary attention from the municipal government and Cangzhou, with its limited size and natural resources, is not on the priority agenda of development of the province either.

T Township about 145 miles west of W Township in the same province includes 21 natural villages and has a population of around 50,000. It on the other hand belongs to Z County under the municipal of Shijiazhuang, the capital city of Hebei Province. Shijiazhuang is the largest municipal in the province with a population of 9.8 million in 2007 (Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2008), and as the provincial capital, it is categorized by the State Council as a major city responsible for the area growth that should enjoy preferential policies to attract foreign direct investments and build an open financial industry. Z County is immediately adjacent to the city of Shijiazhuang and is less than 10 miles away from the city's central business district. In our casual conversation, the officials in T Township often pointed out that one of the biggest challenges for their administration is too much guidance and intervention from the municipal government of Shijiazhuang, which shoulders too much pressure of development in the province. These grassroots officials are supposed to concentrate on the wellbeing of this particular township, but at the discussions and meetings in

Shijiazhuang that they are constantly called to attend, the city governments frequently instruct them to think about and contribute to the larger picture of economic growth of the municipal.

The two townships in the study are both in the periphery of municipal cities and in convenient distance to major urban centers. Local economy, political structure, and practices of personal ties could be very different in the more remote countryside and they by no means would be able to represent the rural China in general. However, as they are located closely to each other in the same province and share many similarities in cultural traditions and historical changes, an interesting comparison may be established to understand the relations among grassroots politics, individual networking, community solidarity, and collective action.

As Philip Huang (1985, 1990) argued, peasants in north China, including Hebei Province, during the communist revolution, echoed strongly to the tenets of the revolutionary party and served as strong allies to its take-over of the state. Several of the counties or county-level cities in Cangzhou and Shijiazhuang Municipal are named after heroic soldiers and martyrs in the communist army. Villagers took pride in recounting how members in their own families sacrificed youth and life for the communist victory and often delightfully told me stories of how local people used smart tactics to fool and beat Japanese enemies or armies of the Nationalist Party during the Second World War and the Chinese Civil War. After the People's Republic of China was founded, the two townships, as generally in the area, implemented with faith and loyalty the central policies of socialist land reforms and established people's communes.

“We are so near to Beijing and I remember that top leaders of the country sometimes came down to the village to check on things. I was still young back then but I

remember my parents going to work in the fields to earn ‘work credits’ and always attending meetings of the commune. Life was hard yet they said we, people in Hebei, were a showcase of the policies and needed to follow all those rules strictly... I guess it was quite different for villagers further down in the south. When the central government is far away, they probably had the opportunity to have some private agricultural production or even some private business... People in this area were too loyal and that is why we are now behind the south in economic development...” The DVC (Director of Villagers’ Committee, i.e. the governmental head of a village) of Chu Village told me in an interview⁵.

The legacy of the Mao era could still be sensed in everyday life of the villagers in the two townships when they refer to the village Party-government as the “brigade” (*dadui*) and their residential location in the village as “production team number X” (*di X shengchandu*).

However, it is misleading to think that there were no industrial enterprises in the two townships at all in the socialist times. As many scholars claimed (e.g. Nee, 1992; Putterman, 1997), TVEs existed in China’s countryside much earlier than the reform-oriented leadership took charge in 1978. These factories and enterprises, managed by brigades and communes, were direct “ascendants” of some of the TVEs during the post-socialist reforms and served as the main sanctioned outlet for rural nonagricultural energies (Byrd & Lin, 1990) in the commune system. In my conversations with the elder villagers in the two townships, as well as in some scattered governmental reports on industrial development stored at the township governments, at least 11 commune and brigade enterprises in W Township and 14 in T Township were consistently mentioned. Those included iron factories, paper factories, cardboard factories, brick factories, and lumber factories. Villagers remember going to work on the shop floors to earn extra or substitute “work credits,” and they told stories of how relatives, close friends, and

⁵ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, 7/3/2006.

mistresses of commune leaders unfairly took the positions of managers and administrative staff in the enterprises and avoided the intensive labor on farm fields. Those factories and enterprises, with primitive machinery, poor technology, and disorderly management, made products sometimes according to the state quotas, and often times the quotas designed by the local commune officials that they could boast to the upper-level, particularly during the Great Leap Forward era. Under the planned or command economy, the villagers recalled, there were constant wastes in the factories, raw materials on the shop floors and final products in the crude storage space, and the production was by no means efficient. The post-socialist economic reforms encouraging an open domestic market and foreign direct investments started in 1978 and brought dramatic changes to the development of entrepreneurship and capitalism in the two townships. As the following sections detail, W and T Township had a similar start in the process, but due to their differences in structural locations and local resources, two distinct paths of post-socialist economy were shaped and adopted in the next three decades.

1980s: Small-Town Approach of Industrialization and Local Entrepreneurship

Industrialization in both urban centers and the countryside was among the top priorities on the state agenda after the Cultural Revolution. A “small-town” consensus of localized industrialization, which forbade floating population and promoted utilization of resources nearby, was reached in the central government in the early 1980s (Kirkby, 1985). With the discourse of egalitarian collectivism, the policy approach was articulated as “no central city should be allowed to dominate and exploit the resources in the area” at a major national conference on industrialization that was convened in Beijing in October

1980. The essence of the small-town consensus was summarized in the slogan: “Strictly control the development of the large cities, rationally develop medium-sized cities, and vigorously promote the industrial development of small cities and towns (*yange kongzhi da chengshi, heli fazhan zhongdeng chengshi, jiji jianshe xiao chengzhen de gongye*).” (People’s Daily, Oct. 16-17, 1980). From 1978 to 1991, the number of cities in China, defined by a majority percentage of industrial outputs in GDP, increased from 193 to 479, at a rate of 22 more new cities per year, and “almost all the newly established cities were small county-level cities, not large municipal area cities” (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2007). Under the small-town policy spirits of the central state, local industrialization became a prominent theme of the early economic reforms.

The 1980s in rural China is often regarded as the decade of local entrepreneurship, and TVEs that mushroomed during the time, as many researchers believe (Xu, 1991; Jefferson, 1993; Harrold, 1992; Rawski, 1994), were a major contributor to the Chinese economic miracle during the post-socialist period. However, in contrast to how it is popularly depicted, the transformation of commune and brigade enterprises to rural private or collective TVEs in the two townships did not take place in an all smooth process under the consistently encouraging and benign view of rural industrialization of local officials. Instead, confusion, risky pilots, contestation, negotiation, and fractured or sometimes vacuum state guidance surrounded the changes, which produced the demise of many commune and brigade enterprises and the birth of new forms of private and collective entrepreneurship. Learning-by-doing experimentations were apparent approaches of industrial development in both townships (Naughton, 1996; Rodrik, 2007), but variances in state intervention by grassroots governments, based on the different

amount of anxieties of the local officials caused by unclear central policies, marked the prelude to diverged paths of post-socialist economy in the two places.

W Township: Bold Attempts of Privatization

In the early years of the economic reform, some post-Mao leaders in the central government were wary of rural industrialization and tried to warn the local state to be cautious about the emergence of capitalism in the countryside (Wong, 1988; Putterman, 1997). Unsure about the direction of the evolution of political atmosphere, local officials were confused and lost in their dealing with the commune and brigade enterprises. In W Township, as the DVC of Lai Village remembered⁶, when the communes were disbanded, the factories stopped producing yet nobody knew the next procedure with the workshops and the machinery. The cadres and villagers were waiting for commands and policy guidance from the county and the city of Cangzhou, but nothing ever arrived. In this relatively small-size and politically secondary municipal, the city officials figured in a time of uncertainty the best action to avoid mistakes was probably to remain inactive and wait to see policy changes. At the same time, news about villages in the south dividing up state-owned farmland and leasing the land to individual villagers for their private use was widely covered in the national media and to the villagers' excitement, the central government praised the pioneering innovations instead of suppressing the privatization. Ideas of making individual and family profits from the existing enterprises became prevalent among the villagers in the township and several different approaches were tried out after fervent discussions at frequent villagers' meetings in villages.

⁶ Interview in Lai Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, 8/19/2006.

Two smaller brigade enterprises, as I learned from the villagers in W Township, were sold to individuals who possessed business ambition in the opening market and willingness to take high risks. They gave the village government a certain amount of money, decided at the villagers' meetings, for the buildings and machines left in the enterprises, and since land had to be kept as public property, they signed leases with the village government and paid monthly or yearly rent for the land use. Chu Wenda, father of Chu Wei – the current owner of a large rubber production company, was one of the bold early entrepreneurs in W Township.

He admitted that the money he paid the village government⁷ for the brigade iron factory at the time was a sweet deal, but he joked, “I was taking the risk of life-time in jail or death penalty, for privatizing public property. And I put together the money by selling almost all the family belongings and borrowing from every relative and friend. That was all my family had, given that we were all so poor in the early 80s. Who else in the village was willing to do that?!”

The payments of the pioneer entrepreneurs went to the pot of public funds of the village governments, but the money did not stay under the administration of the village state. As dividing public properties for private profits reached acceptance and consensus in the villages, villagers requested that the money be equally distributed to villager families who used to have a share of the collective factories. After living for decades in the authoritative command economy strictly controlling exchanges of commodities, it was probably the first time for the villagers to have some cash flow in hand, and a few of them decided to organize the resources in their extended families and start some private businesses in the emerging market. Chu Wei, in one of our casual conversations, proudly pointed out that his family, especially his father, should be credited for today's prosperity

⁷ Official record of the transaction could not be found, and the village cadres and the Chu family gave different estimations of the amount. It should be between 1500 and 2500 *yuan*.

of small businesses in the village. He stated, “Without my father giving all the family savings to the village government, how could they ever gather enough seed fund to grab the precious business opportunities in the 80s?”

A few of the collective enterprises, usually the larger commune owned ones, attracted no interest from the villagers, and the residents of the villages where the enterprises were built decided to get rid of the factories by cashing them from the township government. The villagers of Tan Village always hated the noisy and filthy lumber factory in the village run by the commune, and when the production was ceased in late 70s, the villagers at a self-organized meeting requested the township officials present to sell the factory and give them a share of the cash for occupying their land for two decades. The township officials, as some elderly villagers in Tan Village remembered, responded to them with extreme hesitation because they were confused if it would be appropriate or politically acceptable. They wrote reports to the city government of Cangzhou and the reply said the city government would discuss the issue but no direction or guidance was ever sent from the city level afterwards. The villagers at the same time persistently pushed for the sale and the township also saw it as an opportunity to make some profits, therefore in the end, the township officials, reading the silence of the city government as default permission, made the move on their own. The factory workshops were torn down and a construction team in the county, whose leader was a friend of the Party secretary of Tan Village back then, purchased the construction materials. The machinery was sold to a state-owned factory in the city, the manager of which approached the township government – it was regarded as a crucial sign by the villagers and the township that the upper-level would allow this transaction. The land of the lumber factory was returned to

Tan Village for public use and the cash from the sale was divided between the township and the village. Similar to what happened in Chu Village with the iron factory, the villagers claimed their private family shares of the money and several of them invested it in private small businesses.

The paper factory in Gold-Bull Village was among the rest of the commune and brigade enterprises in the township that continued being collective after the post-socialist economic reforms began. The cadres and villagers were convinced that keeping the enterprise as township and village owned would bear the least political risk and generate safer profits for individuals in the still unsure political economy. Township and village governments, as well as individual villagers of Gold-Bull Village, invested and participated in the production of the factory. The Party secretary of the village was appointed as the manager and reported to the township government about the operation of the enterprise. These collective enterprises at a larger scale enjoyed political and economic advantages in the early post-socialist market and villagers benefited from having collective enterprises in villages with steadily increasing family income. In the early 80s, fresh new collective TVEs, which had no connections with the former commune and brigade enterprises, were as well established in W Township, when villagers perceived them as a profiting form of entrepreneurship and had financial resources in families to collaborate with township and village governments in investments.

In a friendly national environment for local entrepreneurship, collective TVEs, private factories, and small family businesses in W Township employed rural laborers in the non-agricultural sector and resumed industrial and commercial production shortly

after the commune system was abandoned. The different forms of early development of capitalism in the township vibrantly stimulated economic growth in the area. Local governments played significant roles in the prosperity of all sorts of local enterprises and constructed what Oi (1999) described as “local state corporatism.” In the collective TVEs, county and township officials had the power to appoint and remove the managers, through whom they were able to supervise the production and administration of the enterprises. The owners of private factories and small businesses remained close to the state cadres and officials because their products, as well as those of the collective TVEs, found buyers in the county or nearby cities – oftentimes some larger urban state-owned enterprises through the connections of the cadres and officials in the state system.

T Township: Hesitant Maintenance of Collective Ownership

Similar processes leading to the emergence of capitalist production and market economy took place in T Township as well. However, due to the political significance of Shijiazhuang as the provincial capital and its hands-on control of Z County, emphasis and insistence on collective ownership of rural enterprises was more articulated in the township while privatization of commune and brigade enterprises was treated with much greater caution. The DVC of Phoenix Village, whose father was once the manager of a township lumber factory in the village, shook his head when I told him the practices of villagers in W Township with the commune lumber factory – selling the properties and dividing the money.

“If it had been in our village, such thing would never have happened.” He said⁸. “Shijiazhuang, unlike Cangzhou, always wants to be the role model in the province and set high standards. The county government is close to the city government and the city government to the provincial government – the officials at different levels

⁸ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

meet so often with one another, and they always try to be on the ‘right’ route and in the same pace with the upper-level... I remember in the early 80s, some county officials came to my father’s factory and lectured the villagers to support the development of socialist collective economy, a slogan by the city government, and be very careful about privatization and selfishness accompanying it... Hebei Province surrounds Beijing and Shijiazhuang is the capital city – you see the importance. The leaders at the time were quite conservative so as to avoid terrible mistakes. Cangzhou is different, it is more remote politically, and the officials could just stay back and do nothing about what was going on at the grassroots. That in fact benefitted those private businesses...”

When malfunctioning commune and brigade enterprises were demolished and sold in T Township, the cash from the sales went directly to the local rural governments, usually at the township level. The governmental officials made the decisions of re-investment and established new TVEs that they assumed efficient, with better machines or in different industries. Private ownership of the former commune and brigade enterprises was forbidden in the early years of the 1980s. A woman from Mian Village, whom I met at a social gathering of villagers in Beijing, told me a story of his elder brother, who was reckless enough to visit the village Party secretary’s office in 1981 and asked whether he could take the brigade cardboard factory in the village that had halted production and make it profitable. The village secretary was initially attracted to the idea and wrote a report to the township government seeking for permission. The proposal was immediately and brutally rejected, and both her brother and the village secretary were attacked with severe criticism for being utterly devoid of political common sense and possessing dangerous capitalist ideas. They were required to reflect on their “mistakes” in thoughts and submit pages of reports to the township Party branch. The village Party secretary was removed from his post shortly afterwards and the relationship between her family and that secretary’s has been a bit awkward ever since.

Tendency of privatization in the collective TVEs was rejected and suppressed in the same manner. The father of the DVC of Phoenix Village, in his term as the manager of the township lumber factory, got frustrated when the township government constantly interfered with the operation of the factory, requested him to reserve lucrative positions for the officials' acquaintances, and made him report to the officials and wait for their slow responses about every business transaction. He was concerned that priceless opportunities were missed in his delayed communication with the upper-level state and the unfair and non-transparent personnel assignments would agitate the worker and damage the collaborative work environment. He therefore wrote a report to the township Party secretary, proposing reforms. He, with a group of villagers in Phoenix Village, offered to take the full responsibility for the gain or loss of the factory, asked for more autonomy in administration, and planned to involve more villagers' efforts in factory investments. He suggested committing villagers to the factory by allowing more voluntary investments from them and larger shares of profits to them – a system similar to stockholders in modern companies, on which his son commented as “genius.” His hope to make the TVE more efficient to match its counterparts in the south that he read about in the newspaper, however, was extinguished by the township government with little hesitation. The township officials referred to him as a delinquent of the socialist economy and soon replaced him with a new manager for his inadequacy in leadership. It was not until 1984 that the local governments in the Shijiazhuang area became eventually more lenient towards private management of collective enterprises. A risky experiment of “leasing” the paper factory of the city of Shijiazhuang to an individual named Ma Shengli was carried out in 1980 and in his four years as the real administrator, the profit

margin of the enterprise increased by 22 times (Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 1985). Together with the clearer policy direction to an open market of the central government, this case of exceptional success boosted the confidence of local officials in independent management of collective enterprises. However, “leasing” from the state, instead of private ownership as in W Township, was widely promoted and practiced, which left more space for the local state to intervene in or manipulate the operation of the enterprises.

The newly emerged private businesses in the area also suffered from the active and hostile interventions of the local officials out of their uncertainty of national policies and skepticism of the legitimacy of private ownership. Because his wife is a renowned cook in Yan Village whose dishes are always welcomed at banquets, Yan Sui’s family decided to start a small restaurant along a county road in 1981 serving customers mainly from the villages nearby. When the hardworking family was merely beginning to make profits, two township officials, accompanied by village cadres, paid them a visit to discuss the collectivization of the small family restaurant.

“They said the township and village governments, as well as the other villagers, should invest in the restaurant and expand its scale. But we only had a small group of customers in the area. My wife was the only one cooking in the kitchen and we had about six tables to serve. I told them it did not make much sense to increase investments if we could not earn the money back.” Yan Sui told the story to me⁹. “They thought for a while and then had a few meetings in the township, and in the end, gave up the plan of collectivization. But they were never supportive or even friendly to my restaurant. I guess they did not want it to grow and become visible to the upper-level. Because it was private, they were worried that the city government would be pissed... When the village cadres had guests from the outside coming over, they never had welcome banquets in my restaurant, even though the Party secretary and the village head both liked my wife’s dishes... Without such patronage, my business was just surviving and it was never really prosperous.”

⁹ Interview in Yan Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 9/12/2007.

The Chen family's business of farm tool repair in Phoenix Village experienced similar attempts of collectivization by the local officials. During the post-socialist reforms in the countryside, villagers could individually lease farmland from the state and make their own plans of cultivation. Unlike what they did with the farm tools in the communes, they started to appreciate and take detailed care of the tools in their families. Seeing the repairing business of the Chen family boom, the township and village governments claimed to the family that opportunities of wealth should be collective and needed to be shared among all the member of the local society. Chen Shi, the family head, accepted the proposal of collectivization of the officials and was appointed as the manager of the T Township Farm Tool Repair Shop.

“It was good to have the investments from the governments. We had a larger place, more tools, and more staff members were recruited to work in the shop... But you know who had the biggest share of the business profits? Of course the township government. The officials said they invested the most so should take the most...” Chen Shi said with some sarcasm¹⁰. “I was doing fine. Actually, I earned a bit more with my manager wage after the family business was collectivized and expanded... Yeah, I did have the idea of expansion but did not have means to fulfill it. So I was still grateful to the local governments back then.”

In mid-to-late 1980s, when the central government in Beijing, through speeches of top leaders like Deng Xiaoping, acknowledged family businesses as legitimate compliments to the economic structure of the post-socialist nation, officials in the municipal of Shijiazhuang adjusted their approaches and demonstrated more tolerance of the growth of private entrepreneurship. But under the arbitrary and insistent prevention from the local governments, private businesses in T Township had already missed the rapidly emerging opportunities in the market in the earlier years of the 1980s. As shown in Table 5, compared with Cangzhou municipal, where local officials played more

¹⁰ Interview in Phoenix Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 9/3/2007.

passive roles in the economic changes, the contribution of private businesses and enterprises in the total economic output in Shijiazhuang municipal was consistently lower in the second half of the 1980s. As Huang (2008) argued, flourishing private entrepreneurship during the 1980s in China occurred more in the poor and backward parts of the nation because of apparent vacuum of intervention from the confused local state. Cangzhou, as a more peripheral and politically less significant municipal in the province, fostered a better environment than Shijiazhuang for private businesses and enterprises in the beginning years of the post-socialist economic reforms.

TABLE 5:
Percentage of Private Sector Output in Total Area Economic Output, 1986-1989

Year	Cangzhou Municipal	Shijiazhuang Municipal
1986	0.97%	0.55%
1987	1.17%	0.58%
1988	1.21%	0.56%
1989	1.10%	0.62%

SOURCE: Hebei Economic Statistical Yearbook, 1986-1990

NOTE: Output of private sector includes private enterprises in both urban and rural settings in the municipal area.

Collective ownership, on the other hand, was carefully maintained and protected in the early years of economic reforms in Shijiazhuang Municipal. Compared with the Cangzhou area, collective sector in Shijiazhuang constituted a much more important and vigorous part of local economy. From 1980 to 1985, the output of collective enterprises in Shijiazhuang increased 85.4% while in Cangzhou only 14.7% (Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 1985). In addition to the collective TVEs transformed from commune and brigade enterprises, new ones were built with collaborative efforts of local

governments at different levels and contributed to the area economic growth. Villagers of T Township particularly recalled a well managed soap factory established in Pine-Tree Village in 1983, in which residents of three villages, village governments, and township government all invested. Z County and the city of Shijiazhuang provided matching fund and the products of the factory, under state patronage, were on sale in several leading stores in the municipal.

“Many members of my family worked in that factory. It was large and very new – all the machines. Those were good years, you know, we had increasing savings and could afford radios, bikes, etc... Things we’d never imagined before.” A villager of Pine-Tree Village shared some of his sweet memories with me in a casual discussion.

Another observation that the villagers had was intimate connections among officials at different levels – city, county, township, and village. Officials in the city government, accompanied by their subordinates, would come to the soap factory and sometimes talk with villagers on the shop floors. They gave suggestions to rural cadres on factory management, which usually were adopted later, making sure that the investments of the city would be rewarded. At the time, many villagers took pride in the attention from the upper-level and regarded it as a sign of appreciation and recognition of the “important status of the township.”¹¹ But some, as they reflected today, pointed out that the collective TVEs facilitated relationships too close among state officials in the area and obliged them to conspiracy, which gave rise to serious problems in the township years later¹².

¹¹ Interview in Pine-Tree Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/18/2009.

¹² Interview in Beijing, 6/27/2009.

Since 1990s: Central City Planning and Resource Integration to Build Flagship Enterprises

The policy shift in China regarding industrialization and economic development in the 1990s has remained intriguingly controversial. Scholars and analysts debated about what triggered the changes, whether it was the political turmoil of Tiananmen (Naughton, 2007), the chaotic market competition resulted from a decade of trying policies (Stiglitz, 2006), or the need to re-address the urban-rural distinction in distribution (Roland, 2000). Neither have they reached an agreement on whether the policy changes have further deepened the reforms and developed capitalist economy (World Bank, 1996) or have led to a great reversal to the earlier attempts (Huang, 2008). For the industrial and service enterprises and businesses in the two townships, one thing in common was that their fate was challenged and they struggled for survival, however, some succeeded and continued to grow while others failed and demised in the local contexts. Living through these changes, grassroots politics, power relations, and community dynamics in the two places are reconfigured and restructured.

The policy of the 90s, as quoted at the beginning of the chapter, emphasized the development of larger flagship enterprises that have global competitiveness and encouraged active roles of governments in fostering economic restructuring towards that direction. Major municipal cities as area centers were instructed to mobilize and integrate local resources available to assist the growth of leading companies, and securing foreign direct investment was listed as one of the top priorities of local governments in order to build internationally recognized star businesses (for a review, see Huang, 2008). The small-town approach of industrialization through scattered small-scale local

entrepreneurship in rural China in the 80s was replaced by central-city planning of resource distribution to large enterprises with advantages in the market.

To fulfill their mission to integrate local resources, many municipal cities expanded their territories by taking over townships, counties, or smaller cities nearby to ease the process of incorporating their resources into the development of leading enterprises. As shown in table 6, since the 1990s, urban population in China has steadily increased, however, the number of cities, particularly county-level small cities, has slowed down in growth and has even started to decrease more recently – a trend extremely different from the 1980s. Land, raw materials, and laborers are increasingly gathered under the control of central area cities and distributed in favor to flagship businesses, usually former state owned enterprises that governments still play as significant shareholders, large private businesses well connected to the state, or foreign and joint venture companies.

TABLE 6:
Growth of Cities and Urban Population in China, 1992-2007

Year	Cities	Growth in 10/5 Years	County-Level Cities	Growth in 10/5 Years	Urban Population (10,000)	Growth in 10/5 Years
1992	517		323		32175	
2002	660	27.66%	374	15.79%	50212	56.06%
2007	665	0.76%	368	-1.6%	59379	18.26%

SOURCE: China Statistical Yearbook, 1993, 2003, and 2008.

TVEs and small private businesses in the countryside, which crucially contributed to the Chinese economic vibrancy in the 80s, on the other hand encountered a new political environment of inhospitality. Deemed as small scale, low in technology, labor intensive, and inefficient in management, rural enterprises were constrained from expanding and became main targets of the industrial restructuring facilitated by local governments.

Deprived of fair opportunities to compete with state owned and foreign companies in the urban sites, many of the rural enterprises in the two townships went bankrupt in the latter half of the decade. T Township, closely tied to the city of Shijiazhuang both politically and economically, presented an apparent example of area “resource integration.”

T Township: Experiencing the Struggles of a “Central City”

Although it is the province geographically surrounding Beijing, Hebei possesses an economy incompatible to its political significance in the post-socialist era. Having a fairly small coastal portion and often more conservative political orientations, Hebei Province has lagged behind the southern provinces in economic development. Among the 31 provinces and direct cities in China, Hebei’s GDP per capita has been consistently ranked in the range of 11 to 14 since the early 90s (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1991-2008). In terms of foreign direct investment, an emphasized criterion to evaluate local growth in China, Hebei Province is left further behind due to its distance to the frontier coastal region. In 2007, Hebei Province ranked 20 out of the 31 provinces and direct cities in securing foreign direct investment (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008). I heard officials in both T and W Township complain about the pressure of working in Hebei, especially from the sometimes unrealistic expectations of the provincial level. They often cited the speeches they were given at conferences, pointing out that efforts should be made to fasten the pace of economic development in the province to match the prosperous Beijing-Tianjin Area.

If there were one place to implement these goals via faithful policy practices in Hebei, it would be Shijiazhuang, the capital city. Yet an inland city with an old industrial infrastructure, Shijiazhuang does not enjoy privileged resources or foreign investments to

boost economic boom, and similar to Hebei Province, its GDP per capita ranks in the middle range of the 36 major cities of China throughout the 90s and the early 21st century (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 1991-2008). The city government has to focus on re-organizing the resources in the municipal area for the purpose of growth, and enterprises, land, materials, and residents in the close peripheral countryside – such as T Township – are usually the preys of exploitation.

The majorly collective TVEs in T Township in the 1980s, in addition to the geographic closeness of the township to the city of Shijiazhuang, fostered intimate connections among cadres and officials at different levels in the area and facilitated their collaboration or conspiracy in integrating local resources in the 1990s. When we talked about the collapse of all the collective enterprises in the township, the current township Party secretary told me that he was not at all surprised, because “the city and the county governments regard the collective enterprises in the township as their own territories.” He said bitterly,

“They could legitimately interfere, change the structure of production, and even sell them. Since the enterprises were ‘collective’, they, the upper-level officials could decide their future and the municipal city was always ready to sacrifice them for the growth in the whole area... We are only the subordinates, you see, what are our options? Follow them and do what they demand us to do.”¹³

The township soap factory, which villagers of T Township happily recalled in interviews, was sold to the management of a Japanese company in 1994 at almost no cost. The city government initiated and executed the plan in their desperation to convince the Japanese company to establish an office branch in Shijiazhuang to attract foreign direct investment. The city, county, and township allocated some cash compensation to the

¹³ Interview in T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/12/2008.

villagers who previously invested in the factory, an amount which in the eyes of villagers at that time was “acceptable but not great.” Later on, when they witnessed the consequences of completely losing ownership and control of the factory, everybody in the villages realized that the buy-out money was too meager. The Japanese company used the factory as a sweat shop to produce soaps and some other chemical products and commanded extremely high output rate to take advantage of the cheap labor in the countryside. Meanwhile, the management never cared about machinery updating, pollution to the local environments, protection on the shop floor, or workers’ benefits. In late 1990s, when some news agencies in the city angrily accused the company of ruthlessly violating the Environment Law and the Labor Law, the management, under enormous social pressure, abruptly closed the factory with no notice to villagers. The out-of-date machinery was sold shortly afterwards, and in 2001 the Japanese company entirely withdrew their investment from the city of Shijiazhuang, leaving behind an abandoned factory and lost villagers in T Township.

Other collective TVEs in the township underwent similar restraints of development imposed by local governments and many were forced to be integrated into larger urban or joint venture companies in the area. In the struggling economy of the municipal of Shijiazhuang, these rural enterprises or branches were among the first to go down in the industrial restructuration, via claimed bankruptcy, closure, and abandonment. Private ownership of some of the local businesses may have shielded the enterprises from arbitrary decisions of governmental officials, but the unfriendly policy approach towards rural enterprises still made it difficult for the businesses to survive. Chu Hai, who owns a truck transportation business in W Township, in fact started his company in the

Shijiazhuang area in late 1980s, assuming that there would be more business opportunities around the provincial capital. He moved the focus of his business to W Township (his hometown) in early 1990s because, as he told me, “It was impossible to continue the company in Shijiazhuang.”

“Those were probably the hardest years for my company. I applied for loans to buy more trucks and was repeatedly denied because it was a rural private business... I wanted to rent a corner in the Long-Distance Bus Station of Shijiazhuang to park my trucks and was rudely rejected. The person in charge there said, and I will always remember this, ‘we are a state-owned *Danwei* (work unit), and will reserve resources only for large enterprises that have a future.’ They treated me like shit although I was offering them money... Running a private business, one always has to develop networks with local officials, and I am friends with several officials in the city of Shijiazhuang and in the counties around. Still they could not help me. I tried to send them expensive gifts and even cash, but they honestly told me that there was nothing they could do. They had to follow the policy that small private rural enterprises like mine should yield to the larger and more competitive companies and did not want to make mistakes that would hurt their careers... So I understood and decided it was time to find a new location for my company.”

Chu Hai is a particularly shrewd and resourceful businessman who made the blessed decision to relocate his truck company, unlike most of the private entrepreneurs in T Township. Their small businesses, already constrained and unwelcomed in the 80s, further suffered from the governments’ efforts to re-organize resources and opportunities. The small restaurant of the Yan family in Yan Village was closed in the fall of 1996 after repeated harassment of different departments of local governments.

“In the 90s, things kept getting worse.” Yan Sui told me¹⁴. “There was this policy to reinforce supervision and control of the chaotic rural market, and everybody wanted to keep an eye on us... The Bureau of Industry and Commerce, the Bureau of Tax, the Department of Food Hygiene, and even the Fire Department all came to do inspections, with all sorts of excuses. They had free meals and I had to bribe them with gifts and money. It was only a small family business and we were not making much money. How could we continue to afford those bribes? So it was just better to close the restaurant and focus on farming.”

¹⁴ Interview in Yan Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 9/12/2007.

Villagers of T Township remembered the 90s and the early 21st century as a time when local factories and businesses were abandoned or closed, and the number of migrant workers swiftly increased due to the need to earn supplementary non-agricultural income.

Integration of resources in rural enterprises into area planning, however, apparently did not help the municipal of Shijiazhuang to create the economic boom to match its political significance. As shown earlier in this chapter, GDP per capita in Shijiazhuang and Hebei Province has remained out of the first tier in the nation. The next target of exploitative integration was the farmland in the adjacent rural peripheries. Although denied by the Chinese government and its official media voices, almost every Chinese citizen I talked with during the fieldwork agreed that a major contributor to the double-digit annual GDP growth in the country is land trade from local governments to enterprises, especially real estate developers. In the expanding housing market and from the skyrocketing housing prices in cities, real estate companies have become star enterprises and one of the critical pillars of local economy in many provinces. The municipal of Shijiazhuang decisively and extensively used this strategy to increase economic growth, and a large amount of luxurious apartments, townhouses, and single family houses have been built on the farmland around the city to establish modern suburban neighborhoods for the rich and upper-middle class city residents. In 2007, the average housing price in the municipal of Shijiazhuang is 2378 *yuan*¹⁵ per square meter (about 10.76 square feet), 16.97% higher than that of the municipal of Cangzhou (2033 *yuan* per square meter); but the average price of new and high-end housing (generally

¹⁵ 1 US dollar roughly equaled to 7 *yuan* in 2009.

built in the countryside nearby) in the municipal is 5102 *yuan* per square meter, 60.29% higher than that of Cangzhou (3183 *yuan* per square meter) (Hebei Provincial Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Happy-Home Real Estate Development Company, a formerly state-owned now privatized company based in the city of Shijiazhuang, has appeared in media coverage as a heroic economic leader who brought amazing revenues to the municipal government and single-handedly promoted the social development in the area. Under the policy to allocate resources to flagship enterprises, the real estate company is a beneficiary of preferential support from local governments at different levels. In the late 1990s, the company started a series of colossal housing projects constructing high-end apartments and townhouses in the suburban areas adjacent to the city of Shijiazhuang, and the land of T Township became more alluring to the developers than ever. In the spring of 2003, the company management successfully got the Party secretary of T Township to sit down with them at the table and “represent” the village governments in the township to sign the land sale agreement. They through the contract were entitled to use the farmland of 6 out of the 21 villages in T Township to build an apartment complex, and officials in the local governments, as the villagers in the township believe, got their shares of the profits from the transaction. Accompanied by county and township officials and police, Happy-Home implemented the contract in the villages with violence and chased the villagers and their crop plants out of the farmland. The housing project in T Township, although interrupted by villager resistance now and then, progressed and the sale of the apartments had just started when I left the field in 2009. Villagers of the township, with their enterprises and land resources “integrated” into the industrial planning of the municipal of Shijiazhuang,

now have to migrate to large cities far away from home and contribute their labor to the further development of magnificent urban centers.

W Township: Maneuvers of Private Capital around a “Peripheral City”

The municipal of Cangzhou certainly is not immune to the policy shift to resource integration designed by the central government, but it often puzzles the local officials which region their planning needs to fit into. The municipal city is located in Hebei Province and supposedly could play as a central city and take share of the quota of economic growth of the province. But since the 1990s, efforts have been made to build a special economic region called the “New Economic District around the Bo Sea” (*Huan Bohai Jingji Xinqu*) that includes the center city of Tianjin, parts of Shandong Province, and parts of Hebei Province where Cangzhou is located. The purpose of the new district is to utilize the geographic advantages of the harbor cities in the region and boost the development in north China. Today, officials from different bureaus of the city government of Cangzhou are required to read *Hebei Daily*, the provincial Party newspaper that reports significant events within the province. Meanwhile, in *Cangzhou Daily*, a local Party newspaper also required, the cover stories and main coverage always pay attention to incidents and social changes in the new economic district, usually in Tianjin or somewhere in Shandong Province.

When I pointed out these observations to the officials in Cangzhou, they frequently joked that their city suffers from political schizophrenia, and while it seems to belong to both of the regions, its growth is prioritized in neither. A smaller municipal with a mediocre economy, Cangzhou is often too remote to get onto the top agenda of development of Hebei Province and in recent years, the provincial government has

increasingly recognized it as a part of the promoted new economic district that have some independency from the province administration. In the new economic district, however, the focus of growth is always the direct city Tianjin and some wealthier cities in Shandong Province that have a better industrial infrastructure. One official in the city government commented, “We are just stuck there, neither close to father nor loved by mother. Nobody cares much about how we are doing.”

A peripheral municipal in a bewildering area administrative system, Cangzhou has mainly escaped from the monitoring radar of Hebei Province on its efforts and outcomes of resource integration and flagship enterprise establishment. One city official told me his experiences of attending a provincial conference in Shijiazhuang in 1998. A leader in the province sat at the same discussion table with officials in the Bureau of Industry and Commerce of different cities and inquired about how resource integration was implemented in their municipals. He asked, starting with the officials of Shijiazhuang, for the number of large enterprises with an annual output exceeding 5,000,000 *yuan* and the amount of foreign direct investment. The city official said:

“I was really nervous, because I did not have that data with me that day... Finally it was my turn. He asked where I was from and I told him Cangzhou. He nodded and then just moved to the next person at the table! ... I don't know why. Maybe he did not think we are really a part of Hebei (laughed). Or maybe Cangzhou did not have many large state-owned enterprises to start with, and foreign investors are not that interested in this place either. So he knew that I would not give any impressive numbers and he just lost interest...”

W Township, still distant and non-adjacent to the city of Cangzhou, experienced the reform of industrial restructuring of the 90s quite differently from T Township, which is closely connected with an area central city – Shijiazhuang. The township was not ignorant of the policy shift, as many village cadres told me, and numerous meetings to

study the spirits of the new approach were organized. The village cadres were instructed to support larger and more profitable enterprises and aim at fostering pillar companies that could make significant contributions to the local economy. Collective rural TVEs directly managed by the rural state were the main targets of resource integration, when rural cadres tried to appeal to the upper-level governments with some actions of policy implementation. Similar to their counterparts in T Township, the collective TVEs in W Township were treated as backward and inefficient and underwent an inhospitable policy environment, in which many of them demised. Resources and economic opportunities in the countryside, following the new policy, were re-organized, yet local cadres and officials were uncertain into which destiny these resources should be integrated. No large state-owned enterprises in the city of Cangzhou came in, nor did foreign investment claim interest, and it was the ambitious private entrepreneurs that in the end grasped the chance and took advantage of the policy change.

Rural private entrepreneurship flourished in W Township in the 1980s and after a decade of competition, some went out of business while the survivors expanded their scale and scope of production. In the early-to-mid 1990s when the new wave of industrial reform started, several leading private enterprises in the township had achieved a fair size and stable outputs. In addition, these entrepreneurs, well aware of the importance of networks with local officials to their businesses, established strong and close ties with the state system and formed what David Wank (1995) called “symbolic clientelism” with the local bureaus. When the local governments were lost in the directions of economic restructuring, the private entrepreneurs through their strategic networking practices with the officials managed to maneuver policy interpretation and

convince the local state that their businesses should be supported as the competitive flagship enterprises of the area.

Chu Hai, who moved his truck transportation company from the Shijiazhuang area to W Township in the 90s, told me how his frustrated business prospered in the township.

“The municipal of Cangzhou was totally different. Unlike the officials in Shijiazhuang, the officials here did not have all those quotas to meet and they did not really have any huge enterprises on a blueprint that they needed to work on. They were sort of lost and it was unclear to them where to go... The township head at the time was my classmate in middle school, so I approached him and discussed my thoughts with him. I said since it was unlikely that large state owned or foreign companies were going to come to the township, they should consider supporting private enterprises like mine. We could bring revenues to the local governments and could employ the local rural laborers and increase their income. I was sincere and he is a good friend of mine who believed in my ability to succeed. So he agreed with me. I leased a piece of land in the village where there used to be a village paper factory, and used it as my parking space. That was a starting point. This village is literally on the National Route and it worked out fine... The county and the city officials, I had to make them happy for the growth of my business. The township connections did help a bit, but majorly, I bribed them (smiled) and socialized with them. In Shijiazhuang, they would not accept my offers because the officials had on their mind plans of developing certain large enterprises and did not want to make mistakes by giving me favors. But here, they did not identify those quotas and were searching for something that they may support according to the policies. I gave them the same rationales and they could benefit personally from allowing my company here, why not? It was still possible to ‘work on’ them in this area, unlike in Shijiazhuang...”¹⁶

Through similar strategies, Zhang Zhenshan, running a family business of trading iron pipes in Upper-Gao Village at the time purchased the bankrupted village iron pipe factory and took over the production. When the collective paper factory in Gold-Bull Village went out of business, Chen An, who kept a small family workshop making bricks, bought the remains of the enterprise and reorganized the machinery. Merging his family workshop and the village factory, a new medium size brick factory occurred in the village. Chu Wei’s family had successfully transformed the iron factory they purchased in the

¹⁶ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, 6/7/2006.

early 80s to a company dealing with rubber products, and expanded the enterprise by leasing a large lot of land from Tan Village neighboring Chu Village after a village lumber factory was closed. The private entrepreneurs achieved their business growth via contacting, socializing, and bribing local officials, which further reinforced their connections with the city and rural governments at different levels.

Meanwhile, the increasingly strict implementation of the Environment Law in Chinese cities in the 90s mandated polluting urban enterprises to relocate. Lower price of land, cheaper cost of labor, and its distance to the city of Cangzhou made W Township a desirable destination to accommodate these factories. A collective dairy product factory in Cangzhou was moved to W Township in 1993 and Zhao Kai, a production technician and a resident of the city of Cangzhou, followed the enterprise to come to work in W Township. He gradually joined the board of administration of the factory and demonstrated business and social talents. When privatization of the factory was discussed in 1995 for the purpose of efficiency, no “flagship enterprises” in the municipal, state-owned or foreign, came to declare interest. Zhao Kai in the end successfully persuaded local officials and the factory management to let him lease the factory and later on purchased its ownership. He renamed the enterprise as Good-Taste Dairy Product Company and innovatively reformed its technologies of production and creatively expanded its business scope, using his connections with government officials and research institutes in the area. Today, Zhao Kai commutes regularly between the city of Cangzhou and W Township, enjoying his luxurious apartment in the city and keeping his business in the countryside.

Zhao Kai is not alone in departing the city for the distant villages to discover and accumulate personal wealth in the 1990s. Sun Nan, another urban dweller, started his career as a clerk in a small state-owned construction company in the city of Cangzhou, which was closed in mid 90s due to its incompetence in the market when confronted by other real estate developers – larger, bolder, and better patronized by the state. Sun Nan was laid off and came to W Township on a family trip to visit a relative in Lower-Gao Village. He found that many villagers in W Township have craft skills such as erecting brick walls or carpentry that they have acquired as a life skill at an early age and could be employed at a fairly low wage. With his established ties with people of power in the construction industry, he started a business of contracting villagers to work in projects of housing construction and exterior or interior decoration in the city.

“The officials in the township treated private businesses like mine in a hands-off approach, and the city government did not care too much about what was going on in this rural area.” Sun Nan told me in a conversation. “I made friends with local officials and they let me do my business here. When my small company survived and started to grow after the first few years, they listed it in their report to the upper-level as a local star enterprise, which is entitled to state support. So things have been working well for me... Right, since the 90s, it has been often about the scale of enterprise and leadership of foreign investment, etc. But in W Township, it was OK. I wish more urban people had been brave enough to leave the city for business opportunities in the remote countryside, you know, they would have got a much wealthier life (big smile).”

For a lower tax and the advantages of state *lasses faire* in W Township, Sun Nan has kept his contracting business registered in Lower-Gao Village. Although he did not disclose the annual profits of his company, this simple rural business has managed to support Sun Nan’s son to study abroad in Australia and equip the entrepreneur with a Rolex on his wrist.

Less ambitious villagers in W Township maintained or started private family businesses at a much smaller scale in the decade of restructuring, but unlike their counterparts in T Township, their entrepreneurship was not exterminated by attacks and harassments of the local state. With neither a clear direction of resource integration nor the pressure to meet some quotas from the upper-level, the local officials in W Township demonstrated their compliance of central policies through closing inefficient collective TVEs. After a decade of development in the 1980s, the number of small family businesses in the area was fairly large and their owners usually had established good personal relationships with the grassroots cadres. The local state therefore did not have strong incentives to diligently reorganize opportunities, strictly limit their growth, or eagerly terminate their prosperity. When the state recognized the star private enterprises as pillar contributors to local economy, private entrepreneurship also reached legitimacy, which kept the development of small family businesses in W Township largely intact in the 1990s. And as the star private enterprises, in addition to employing laborers in W Township, attracted people (truck drivers, workers, etc.) from other nearby locations, client pool for some of the small family businesses (e.g. restaurants) in fact increased and produced new business opportunities for villager families. The owner of Spring-Flower Bathing Place, Madam Fu, told me when she came back from a trip to Tianjin:

“I was amazed to see those chain bathing palaces in the city, so large and so modernly decorated. I could not afford to go there and I heard sexual services are provided in those places too... It is said that a large company took over the smaller bathing businesses years ago and changed them to fit into that standard. I am glad I can keep my place in W Township, and of course, no big company is interested in it either... We have been serving the drivers passing by and the locals, in very simple ways, just shower and bath, you see. The business has been consistent since we started in the

80s and maybe a bit growth more recently... But no big disruptions, like shut-down or someone would come and take it away.”¹⁷

The Two Townships Today

In the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, observers noticed new changes in central policies in China regarding industrial structure and organization. Huang (2008) argued that the new administration of Hu Jintao – Wen Jiabao have recognized fundamental problems in the approach of resource integration and geared policy towards a revival of local private entrepreneurship. The private businesses in W Township in the new century have kept their stability and steady growth, and the mode of capitalism there builds upon local rural enterprises that employ local rural laborers in the non-agricultural sector. These private enterprises, unlike the modern and fancy urban enterprises in China, are of small to medium size and require little high technology, remain labor intensive, and often pollute heavily. They include truck transportation companies, construction contract companies, a cardboard company, a paper factory, a lumber factory, an iron pipe company, a rubber production company, a brick factory, and a dairy product company. Travelling along the National Route 104, one could hardly miss the neat enterprise buildings and lining factories, the loud machine noises, and the heavy industrial smog. The enterprises have brought employment and opportunities of small business to W Township, which largely keep the rural population in their home villages as small business owners and farmers/factory workers. For T Township, on the other hand, this shift of policy might have come too late because the local infrastructure to develop private businesses has been uprooted and opportunities of rural entrepreneurship have been swept away by the gigantic real estate project. The villagers,

¹⁷ Interview in Fu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, Hebei Province, 6/5/2007.

including village cadres, often refer to their hometown as the most hopeless place on earth and anxiously seek for survival and chances in the outside world.

Two different modes of post-socialist political economy have appeared in W and T Township in the three decades of reforms. Living in the respective grassroots politics, villagers of the two townships facing exploitation, deprivation, and suppression, carry out strategic interpersonal networking practices, in which atomized individual resistance or collective social movement emerges. The mechanisms in the intriguing processes, reshaping the local state-society interactions, will be demonstrated and analyzed in the following chapters, starting with the stories in W Township and followed comparatively by experiences in T Township.

Chapter 4

Village Cadres as Patrons and Neo-Clientelist Tie Practices in W Township

In his new Honda Accord, Chu Wei, the owner of Hua-Wei Rubber Production Company in W Township, drove me down National Route 104 to tour his enterprise, accompanied by two local village Party secretaries and a township official. Chu Wei was wearing a light blue Oxford shirt tucked into dark suit pants, and a pair of shiny shoes made of genuine leather. His hair was combed back leaving the ambition and conceit in his bright eyes visible. With echoes and confirmations from the local officials, he proudly told me during the visit his legend of being a poor villager receiving only three years of formal education yet now one of the wealthiest in the county. He said, “I cannot even speak mandarin Chinese properly, but my products are being used in Turkey and Belgium the farthest.” The officials praised his courage and insights with every nice word possible and the two village Party secretaries, who knew him back in his childhood, claimed that his talents revealed themselves very early on.

Later that month, I attended a gathering of some local truck drivers in a small restaurant on the same national route, not far from Chu Wei’s enterprise. I mentioned his name and his company at the table and the drivers, in their smelly shirts of summer time and plastic slippers, agreed that he was an extremely smart and capable businessman, but as more beer came, they started to talk about the behind-the-curtain stories.

“You know his wife has some relatives working in the city government.”

“I heard that too. His brother-in-law, I think. That piece of land on which he expanded his factory in the 90s belongs to our village, and he contracted it in the 90s at the price of 80 *yuan* per *mu* (about 0.165 acre) a year – I know that because I was at the villager meeting that made the decision. Now the price of land of our county is going up fast, but guess how much rent he pays now to our village... Yeah, still 80 *yuan* per *mu* a year.”

“My younger cousin works there and gets paid at 20 *yuan* a day, so low... She told me the boss even does not allow fans in the workshops during the summer, to save electricity. What a suffering job.”

“No wonder he gets rich...” A lot of them sighed.

Local Rural Entrepreneurship and an Endogenous Class Society

In W Township, leading private enterprises take up the public land of the villages but without encroaching the vast farm and residential land of villagers. The development of capitalism surely changes the rural way of life yet does not completely destroy the peasantry practices or the organization of the local communities. These enterprises, as well as the opportunities of employment and small business that they have brought to the township, keep the rural population in their home villages. The villagers, for many times in our conversations, express appreciation of the star entrepreneurs for fostering income increase, hometown modernization, and life stability (i.e. not having to migrate to the cities to get a job and experience the modern style of life) in the area. The fact that the entrepreneurs seize the public land at an unfairly low rent has not disrupted the basis of their everyday living and therefore their discontent with the land use often remains covert.

The successful private entrepreneurs, with their increasing political, economic, and social influence, have emerged as a new elite group in the township. Rural enterprises in the earlier years of the post-socialist reform usually stayed under the influence and control of the county, township, and village governments, in the “local state corporatism” (Oi, 1999). But in today’s W Township, with their increasingly strong connections with

the higher levels of the state system and the urban market, the leading private enterprises have changed that political and economic structure.

The private ownership of the rural enterprises excludes local rural officials from intervening in the management and the star entrepreneurs no longer need to depend on the grassroots cadres to find buyers for their products. After decades of active participation in the Chinese business world, the entrepreneurs develop “symbiotic clientelism” (Wank, 1995) with officials in the cities and the province. With upper-level favors and protection from them, the entrepreneurs are able to rent public rural land from the township and village governments at a satisfying price, contract the local villager laborers with little respect to the regulations, and sell their products in the still state-influenced market.

The county, township, and village cadres nowadays not only lose their control over the rural enterprises, but also have to depend on these newly rich entrepreneurs for local development. After the tax-for-fee reform and the following abolishment of agricultural taxes, it is no news that county, township, and village level Party-state in rural China is faced with serious fiscal crises (Oi & Zhao, 2007; Chen, 2008). To “attract business investment” (*zhaoshangyinzi*) has been emphasized as a top priority on the agenda of the rural governments. The entrepreneurs are often regarded as doing a favor to the local governments by keeping their factories in the township, as they bring crucial tax revenues and act as major donors to local public projects. They are asked, in W Township, to donate money to pave roads, build public restrooms, renovate kindergartens, provide

desks and chairs in elementary schools, and install water purification systems.¹⁸ As the Party secretary of W Township claimed:

“The true governors of the villages today are no longer the village Party secretaries but the local entrepreneurs because without their money it is impossible to get any jobs done. Some of them do become village cadres themselves, but for most of them, as they are so busy with their own businesses, they stay behind the curtains and act as the true leader.”¹⁹

Politically, the successful entrepreneurs often sit in the People’s Congress or the Committee of Political Consultative Conference (*zhengxie*) at the city or provincial level, and the county officials count on them to receive policy support and fiscal transfers from the upper-level for the local area. Instead of being clients to the rural Party-state system, the entrepreneurs, as political and economic patrons of the local rural society, have gained remarkable independence from the county, township, and village governments, and become a new ruling class.

Social stratification accompanying the development of private rural entrepreneurship has shaped an endogenous class structure in the villages of W Township, in which the villagers can be identified by three classes – social and economic elites, small business owners, and farmers. A synthetic approach (Ortner, 1991; Hanser, 2008) is adopted in my analysis to define class at the same time in the Marxian tradition as position in production, in the Weberian sense of market situation, and in the more subjective Bourdieuan concept of shared lifestyles, cultural boundaries, and perceived otherness. Distinction along the class line is made in the various practices of the everyday living of the villagers.

¹⁸ Water in the area contains excessive fluorine and is harmful to the dental health of human beings even when it is boiled. It needs to be purified before drinking or being used for cooking.

¹⁹ Interview in W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/2/2006.

Social and Economic Elites (*chenggong renshi*)

The successful entrepreneurs open factories and companies in W Township and manage the locally employed cheap laborers. With accumulated wealth and increasing political influence, they have become the social and economic elites in the rural society. With few exceptions, the elites in the villages are male. Their wives mainly are housewives staying at home to take care of the children and the elderly and spending spare time shopping in the county center or the nearby cities and playing cards or *ma-jiang* together. A few of the wives, better educated than the average and who do not want to stay at home, through the networks of their husbands, hold white-collar jobs, such as teachers in the village elementary schools. The families set high goals of academic achievement for the children and push the younger generation to receive college education and “become the urban people.” The parents often ban the children from playing on the village streets after school and “wasting the time” to socialize with the children who are “doomed to be the rural.” I was for many times whole-heartedly invited to tutor the students in the wealthy families with extra homework, as well as help with weekend schools in the county town or the city of Cangzhou, which is usually enforced in the families. The families’ farmland are leased out to the other villagers in the same village or neighboring villages, and they no longer take on any form of agricultural labor.

Small Business Owners (*zuo shengyi de*)

The small business owners in W Township self-employ in their family-run businesses. They started their businesses at different times during the post-socialist reforms, with family shares of collapsed collective rural enterprises, and savings from agricultural income, wages from local factories, or a previous career of migrant workers. Their entire

families, including the wives, the elderly, and the children, have to work hard in the small businesses day and night. When the business is extremely busy, they may hire one or two temporary helpers; when it is not the season for the business or when they have only a few customers, the couples, or sometimes the wives alone, get short-term local employment to ensure enough family income. Most of them lease their farmland to others, but some still keep the land and grow grain products to supplement household income and back up business risks. Families of small business owners are always busy and the parents do not enforce high expectations of their children's school success. They said:

“If they can make to the college, I will support my children; but if they cannot, that is fine too. They can come and help the family business and just like their parents, they can make a good life without a diploma by working hard. If you are the gold, you will shine anyway.”²⁰

Farmers (*zhongtian de*)

The farmer class insists on their traditional agricultural life in the reform and recluses from the market economy. Most of them regard themselves as uncompetitive in the market because of their bad health conditions, poor education, little starting capital, old age, conservative personality, or previous failed attempts; some never think about participating in the market economy disliking the uncertainties of it; and some simply cherish the belief that farmers should never be separated from their lands. W Township is relatively rich in farmland and every legally registered adult can get two *mu* (about 0.33 acre), which is just enough to support oneself for food, if one's family is able to endure the heavy agricultural labor. Farmer villagers work hard on their farmland – their own or leased from the business households. They may raise a few poultry or livestock,

²⁰ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/11/2006.

usually pigs, goats, or hens, mostly for food of the family and sometimes for extra income.

But the simple agricultural life barely brings enough income to support these families, and they seek local employment to earn more money while taking care of the farmland. At least one healthier member of the family, if not all of them, works on the shop floors of the enterprises of the economic elites in the township, usually year around and sometimes only during the agricultural off-season. Despite their diligence, family income of the farmer workers is often below the village average and occasionally below the national poverty line. The children in these families start out to help their parents on the farmland at an early age and usually do not complete the nine-year education mandated by the state. The boys sometimes migrate to the cities looking for jobs, in the hope that they can save enough money and return home to start a small business like their neighbors. When they come back during holiday or unemployment breaks, they are inspired to become helpers to the small business owners and learn some business skills from them. The parents usually forbid the girls from going to work in the cities believing that the city is dangerous enough to turn them into dissolute vamps – in fact, it is hard for a girl returning from the city, stereotyped as unchaste, to find a good marriage in the villages in W Township nowadays. The young girls then get jobs in the local enterprises run by the economic elites and wait to be matched up with the local young men.

Classified Relational Social Capital in a Neo-Clientelist Regime

It is often noticed with great interest that, instead of primarily exercising its control at the local level via coercion, the formal, impersonal and authoritative communist Party-state often relies on personal ties and informal bonds between cadres and societal

members for implementation of policies and regulation of individual behaviors (Rigby, 1979; Nathan, 1973; Willerton, 1979; Baker, 1982; Pye, 1981). The Party clientelist political order (Walder, 1986), in which state officials and cadres (patrons) allocate material goods and career opportunities to societal members (clients) based on their particular interpersonal ties with the patrons, is recognized and emphasized in Chinese studies. In socialist rural China, particularistic and subjective networks of clientelism were a major means for cadres to discipline the villagers and realize the wills of the Party-state at the grassroots level and for the villagers to maneuver around state regulations and affect the effectiveness of local state control (Burns, 1988; Oi, 1985, 1989; Unger, 1989). Clientelism is at the same time the state's apparatus of patronizing the society and governing, and villagers' tactics of survival. Via the hierarchical asymmetric exchange, state cadres and villagers access the relational social capital in their clientelist ties to fulfill their goals and defend their interest. Of course, horizontal personal ties among villagers persistently exist in the countryside, but it is the vertical cadre-villager connections that pervade and organize political, economic, and social lives in the rural communities.

In today's W Township, the three levels of rural state (county, township, and village) maintain the clientelist Party-bureaucratic structure and the well functioning grassroots village government is where the state encounters the rural society and starts the process of patronization (Rosenbaum, 1992; Kipnis, 1997). Tax revenues from the local rural enterprises benefit the village cadres and their salary and bonus ranges from 10,000 *yuan* to 35,000 *yuan* a year, according to the township records. With other income from farming or small business, the lucrative positions of village cadres guarantee them a

comfortable life. They responsibly serve as the channel of communication between the villagers and the upper-level governments and market administrations. At the same time, to secure the investments of the private enterprises in the area, they now have to assist the local elite entrepreneurs to recruit, organize, and regulate local farmer labors. To complete these tasks in an era of reforms of free-marketization and political democratization is never easy and the village cadres in W Township almost have to solely rely on their patronizing personal networks, or *guanxi*, with the villagers in village governance. As one village Party secretary said:

“It is hard to be a village cadre these days. Everything is about market, freedom, and democracy. It is not like before when you could just demand the villagers to do things and they would listen... The above wants things to be done, but without causing any conflicts. You now have to develop networks and good relationships with everyone to fulfill this goal – that is, the tasks from the upper-level on the one hand and the support from the mass on the other – isn’t that hard?”²¹

I sometimes walked with the village cadres on the main roads of their home villages and saw them greeting everybody they met in person, man and woman, old and young. It is amazing that they actually remember all the names and how the villagers are connected through blood, marriage, friendship, or business. “Village politics here are all about *guanxi*,” they repeatedly claimed.

However, revision has to be made to the socialist Party clientelism to catch the dynamic mechanisms of patronizing networking practices in W Township, where the development of capitalism has brought a highly visible class society among the residents. Party clientelism portrays homogeneous contents and criteria of evaluation in the exchange between cadres and their clients, with the former providing patronage of material benefits and career opportunities and the latter demonstrating *biaoxian* with

²¹ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 5/28/2006.

obedience. In a village of W Township today, the families of the economic elites live in two-story houses guarded by heavy metal gates with ornamental engraving while a farmer's family of four could be cramming in a shabby hut with no room separation. It is unreasonable to assume that all the residents of the township should be expressing the same requests and fulfilling homogeneous interest in their clientelist relationships with the village cadres.

My field data demonstrate heterogeneous classified networking practices of clientelism between the village cadres and the villagers – the contents of exchange conveyed by their relational social capital vary with the villager's class positions. Their classified relational social capital of clientelism constitutes a neo-clientelist regime in W Township, which relies on village cadres' everyday patronizing *guanxi* activities and requires their constant efforts to maintain and renew the different patterns of networks with villagers.

Social and Economic Elites: Reversed Personalistic Clientelism

The elites that own the private enterprises in W Township are now the patrons of rural economic development and social activities of the local communities, as well as the village cadres.

“If you ask me the true governor of our village, I would say it is Zhang Zhenshan, the boss of the iron pipe company.” The village Party secretary of Upper-Gao Village said in an interview. “His donation made it possible for us to pave the new village road, install the water purification system, and renovate the village kindergarten. The other villagers do not have to pay a penny. Every year on June 1st, he'd give money to the elementary school to hold a celebration of the International Children's Day and furnish some of the classrooms with new desks and chairs. He is always invited to sit on the chairman's table to watch the performances of the kids during the celebration – the teachers and the students are so grateful... The year before last, he did not give the money because his company was not running so well, and we ended up having

nothing on the Children's Day. The villagers were unsatisfied and what a shame for us cadres."²²

After the fiscal reforms, village governments are often faced with the shortage of revenues and have to raise fund within the community to operate and provide public goods (Tsai, 2002, 2007b). Yet imposing mandatory fund contribution on the villagers, as the cadres are fully aware, would irritate them and harm the ultimate goal of the village Party-state – to maintain social stability. Generous sponsorship of the local successful entrepreneurs, given such circumstances and dilemma, turns out to be a plausible and ideal source of funding on which the village cadres can rely. The social and economic elites take pride in helping the cadres who have watched them grow up and give back to the community where the success of their enterprises originates. However, more crucially, by patronizing the village cadres as their clients, they can count on the village governments to organize and control the labors in their factories.

Like the former collective TVEs, the private enterprises in W Township continue using village units to recruit workers. According to their contracts of land use, when hiring labors, the first priority should be given to the villages from which they rent the land; the second priority goes to the other villages in the same township; and then the outside villages. The village cadres, informed of the employment opportunities, contact the residents of the village who might take interest – often times the healthy local farmers in need of supplementary non-agricultural income. The potential employees trust the village cadres, whom they know, to represent them in the negotiation of wage and benefits with the entrepreneurs, with whom they are unfamiliar. When the conditions are finalized, the cadres accompany the workers to the enterprises, meeting with the owner or

²² Interview in Upper-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/8/2006.

some managers and getting the job started, but the employment contract often remains oral with the cadres serving as double-agents for both sides. The worker's informal contract with the private enterprise is extremely simple containing merely a fixed amount of wage per day, per piece of product, or per trip of transportation driving – health benefits, safety insurance, or social security welfare are largely unheard of. With no unions available, when labor discontent occurs, the village cadres again take the position of a middle-man trying to buffer the anger of the workers and find an acceptable and peaceful solution in collaboration with the elites.

A woman villager of Lai Village, who worked in the cardboard factory in W Township, came to the office of the village Party secretary on the burning hot afternoon of July 3rd, 2007. She anxiously complained that she had not received her payment for the work in June, which was supposed to be in her hands by July 1st. The Party secretary condoled to her situation and immediately made a call to the cell-phone of the owner of the factory, Yang Yi, who resides in Lai Village. Learning that Yang was experiencing some problems in financial circulation, the secretary inquired with concern the entrepreneur's situation and asked him to take good care of his health while working so hard. Then he mentioned the delayed payment to the worker and got the reply that the money would be ready for pick up at the factory by July 5th.

“You will get paid on the 5th,” the Party secretary told the villager after hanging up the phone. “The boss of the factory is having some trouble putting money together – you know, it is very difficult for him, a man from the countryside, to independently run a factory and profit. Having the factory in our village benefits the people here and we should support him, right?”

“You said the 5th – that is the day after tomorrow. Are you sure that I can get the money on the 5th?” The villager repeated the date for several times and had obvious suspicion in her eyes. “I need your word, secretary, as I trust you. I cannot trust the rich like the boss – they are so cunning...”

“You have my word, please, trust me you will get it. The cardboard factory is a good one and will be able to pay you.”

“OK then... Thank you very much, secretary.” The villager seemed assured and left the Party secretary’s office with satisfaction.

Later that month, I met Yang Yi, the owner of the cardboard factory, and talked to him about the incident of payment delay.

“Shortage in cash is absolutely normal for us, peasant entrepreneurs (*nongmin qiyejia*). I am running a fairly small and private factory, not those super large state-owned enterprises, and we borrow and lend money all the time. The workers could never understand the operation and management of the factory and that is why they complain all the time... But if it were not for my factory, who would give them such convenient jobs and extra income?” He explained to me blaming the villager workers for being unable to see the larger picture. “To open a factory in the countryside, nothing is more important than having the village Party secretaries on your side.” He continued. “The rural people can be wild as they do not receive proper education to be civilized and understanding. Sometimes it is unimaginably hard to communicate with the workers, but fortunately, they still listen to the village cadres and trust them... The assistance from the village cadres is critical.”²³

The patron-client relationship between the social and economic elites and the village cadres reverses the socialist Party clientelism that the state officials used to offer.

Moreover, instead of carrying commitments to either the communist ideology or the leader Chairman Mao, the content of their relationship is filled with discourses of mutual respect and intimate friendship, in a personalistic manner. “Personalism” has been used in the sociological literature to describe one kind of two-way yet asymmetric employer-employee relationship, through which the employer recognizes the employee as a particular person and realizes dignity and respect for the employee (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Lan, 2003). The employer strategically develops the intimacy with the employee to have control in the working environment and personalism therefore is instrumental. In the network between the social and economic elites and the village cadres, both sides

²³ Interview in Lai Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/17/2007.

make the efforts to cultivate personalism and intimacy with the other side. In their “mutual personalism,” neither the elite nor the village cadre would talk about the other part as a purposefully approached object, as in the personalism that the labor literature describes; on the contrary, they refer to each other as a respectable individual and an appreciated friend.

Gifts, as researchers discovered (Mauss, 1990; Kipnis, 1997), are indicators of various types of interpersonal relationships. Gift exchange that takes place in everyday life, not necessarily on festivals or special occasions, usually shows a mutual sense of respect and friendship in rural China (Yan, 1996). During his family vacation trip to Australia in 2006, Sun Nan, a city resident who registered his construction contract company in Lower-Gao Village, bought pairs of wool gloves for the Party secretary and the DVC of the village, and the cadres in four neighboring villages where he often contracts temporary workers.

“These are made of authentic Australian wool and can keep you warm in winter no matter how low the temperature is,” he told the cadres when he and his wife delivered the presents to them in person. “You are the valuable parent-official (*fumu guan*) of the village so do take good care of yourself in the cold weather of the north!” The entrepreneur couple sincerely complimented each of the cadres and their gifts were happily and gratefully received.

When the nephew of the Party secretary of Chu Village brought the secretary ten packets of Korean cigarettes that are not available in the Chinese market from his business trip to Seoul, the secretary took eight of them out at once and told her husband, who is a heavy smoker, “We probably should give four each to Chu Wei (the owner of the rubber production company) and Chu Hai (the owner of a large truck transportation company). They always generously share with us when they get something fancy.” Chu

Da, the husband, nodded and agreed that they should pay visits to the entrepreneurs and take the cigarettes to them after dinner.

The intimate friendship of the village cadres and the economic elites is also embedded in their life routines. They are often seen together on a shopping trip to the cities, at family dinner tables, at private banquets celebrating someone's child's enrollment in a good university, and sitting in the front yard on a summer evening to *chengliang*²⁴. On those occasions, they update each other the latest news in their families, gossip about goings-on in the township and the county, and sometimes disclose their own secrets – often taboos or stigmatized issues that they usually would not talk with others.

In the summer of 2006, a major topic between Wang Mei, the Party secretary of Chu Village, and Chu Hai, the owner of Yi-Fan Truck Transportation Company, was the daughter of Wang Mei and Chu Da working in the county center, who was then considering a divorce. Chu Hai, highly regarded in his village as knowledgeable and well-educated with his high-school diploma, comforted the couple, who were very upset, by telling them that in large cities divorce is no longer a stigma and persuaded them to support their daughter's decision if she felt happy that way. Their daughter got divorced in August 2006 and was re-married to another divorcee in January 2007. The new son-in-law, as Wang Mei put it, is a better person than the ex one, and she was grateful for Chu Hai's advice. She gave Chu Hai a photo of the newly-weds that was taken during their honeymoon trip to Beijing on the Chinese New Year. Chu Hai put it on the wall of his living room, together with his own family pictures, just like Wang Mei, who has a photo of Chu Hai's family in her family album.

²⁴ *Chengliang*: Literally means to enjoy the coolness of summer evenings. It is a common social activity in China, during which people chat and play games together.

On the evening of July 1st, 2008, after attending the Q County's annual conference of Party members' representatives, the village cadres and some elite entrepreneurs of Gold-Bull Village, Li Village, and Tan Village went to the city of Cangzhou to have a good dinner. After drinking several bottles of strong and expensive white liquor, Li Shuangshan, the DVC of Li Village, who obviously had more wine than his body could endure, suddenly patted Liu Minwen, the owner of the lumber factory in W Township, on his shoulders and asked in murmuring, "How are you doing with that pretty girlfriend of yours?"

Liu, a married man, who was not completely drunk yet, looked at me with embarrassment. "Li, too much wine for you... Little Dai (*xiao Dai*) is at the table – how can we talk about this in front of a young lady? It is not like when we are alone."

"Liu, relax." Li Shuangshan looked at him and then at me with his eyes half open and said, "Little Dai is from America, you know America, people there are all open-minded and have lots of girlfriends!" He concluded his remarks with exaggerated laughter and smelly burps. "Anyway, remember to tell me about you and your pretty girlfriend next time we drink together..."

To maintain their personalistic intimacy, it is important for both the village cadres and the economic elites to give "face" to one another. The village cadres adore the successful entrepreneurs for their insights, determination, and achievements, and talk about them with great respect. In W Township, on my first visit to a village Party-government, almost always, the cadres mentioned the elites and their profiting enterprises in their short speech summarizing the overall conditions of the village. They presented the entrepreneurs as the "pride of the village" and demonstrated to me through them that the village has enough funding for local development. Following this routine, they then would try to introduce me to the families of the elites in person.

"PhD students in the U.S., en, you are such an honored guest to our village." They said. "We should let X (an entrepreneur) know that you are around and I am sure he would love to know you... He has lots of wonderful stories of starting a business as a pioneer (*chuangye*) in rural China in which you might be interested. And he can tell you about this area more clearly and with more fun than I do... Let's go and visit his house (or sometimes, factory/company)... He is a super smart guy who has seen the world and you two will have so much in common..."

It was very hard to refuse their warm invitations and I often got to meet with the owners of the private enterprises in the village on the same day. I was always received with warm hand-shaking, big smiles, and sometimes banquets with both the cadres and the village economic elites. “You definitely give me ‘face’.” Chen An, the owner of a brick factory, said to Chen Bo, the Party secretary of Gold-Bull Village, when he met me in his factory, “In the countryside, we look up to people like you, Dr. Dai, who have good education and understand cultures. I am so glad to know you.” He looked at me and the Party secretary pleasantly.

On the side of the successful entrepreneurs, they pay their respect to the village cadres and honor them with “face” by maintaining the boundaries of power and avoiding the development of alternative authorities. The connections that the successful entrepreneurs have with the officials and administrations in the county and the cities are no secrets in their villages, and their fellow villagers go to them sometimes seeking help with career development. Instead of establishing leadership independent of the village Party-state, the economic elites offer help to show their respect to the village cadres – their friends.

One afternoon in Chu Village, I was using Chu Hai’s (the boss of a truck transportation company) computer to check my emails when a not-very-close villager, Chu Fa, together with his 18-year-old daughter, visited the house. They brought with them a big basket of fresh fruits and two bottles of quite expensive white wine. Chu Fa’s daughter was about to graduate high school but had no intention to continue her education in college. Neither did she wish to become an agricultural laborer and farm on the family lands. Chu Fa then came to Chu Hai to see if it would be possible for her to

get a job in the county kindergarten, the director of which is a close friend of Chu Hai. After getting to know the girl a little bit, Chu Hai agreed to call the director the following day and make the request. Thanking him for millions of times, the father and the daughter walked to the front door and were about to leave.

“Just a minute,” Chu Hai said. “Don’t forget to tell the Party secretary that you get a job through me. You know, I am doing this looking at her ‘face’.” Seeing that I was quite surprised at his words, Chu Hai explained to me after Chu Fa left, “I do not want *Lao Wang* (Wang Mei, the village Party secretary) to think that I am growing some separate power independent from the village government. She is a good friend and always gives my family a lot of ‘face’, and I need to behave respectfully.”

The reversed personalistic clientelism between the village cadres and the social and economic elites builds the new collaboration of power and dominance in villages in today’s W Township. The successful entrepreneurs have appeared as the new patrons with their accumulated wealth and increasing political influence. On the other hand, the village Party-state, through the personalism of the cadres with the social and economic elites, keeps independence in its political power and authority through the discourses of “face,” respect, and honor.

Small Business Owners: Village Symbiotic Clientelism²⁵

The development of leading private enterprises, while industrializing the life style of W Township, opens up business opportunities to the local residents. With several large truck transportation companies present, the township has established the reputation of being specialized in transportation business. In the villages located directly on Route 104, including Chu Village, Bird-Rest Village, Tan Village, Upper-Gao Village, Spring

²⁵ David Wank (1995) used the term “symbiotic clientelism” to describe the relationship between state officials and private entrepreneurs in coastal Chinese cities, but the contents of that relationship are different from the rural interdependent relationship in W Township described here. “Symbiotic clientelism” is not a mega type that generally applies to the post-socialist Chinese life as its contents and mechanisms need to be investigated and understood in specific social contexts.

Breeze Village, and Liu Village, many families spend their savings buying trucks and earn a living as drivers. Seeing the real estate development in the county center and the city of Cangzhou and inspired by the construction contract companies in the villages, some villager families work as independent carpenters, painters, and plumbers to serve in the housing market. Others open small restaurants, grocery stores, barber shops, and bathing places along Route 104 that attract some local people, but more importantly the drivers and the travelers on the road. Sticking to agricultural production, some villager families increase their income by building poultry farms and fruit orchards and selling their products to the easily connected urban sites.

The small business owners welcome the post-socialist reforms that they see as having brought better income and improved the quality of their life. They often express their content with their economic achievement and take pride in, in their own words, “the honest wealth based on blood and sweat.”

“I am thankful to the national reform policies.” The owner of Spring-Flower Bathing Place that I frequented during the summers to take a shower told me in an interview. “I am from a very poor peasant family and I have no significant connections with the officials. But you see, I have my own business, I don’t have to labor on the farmland any more, I have a nice house, my family have all the electric devices that the urban people enjoy, and I am buying a new car... Back to the pre-reform time, it was unimaginable... Indeed my family work very hard to keep the business, preparing the hot water, decorating the rooms, and all the cleaning. We hardly have a single day off – you know, we are open even during the Chinese New Year – many people are on the road to visit relatives and might bring business...”²⁶

The small business owners now constitute the majority of the population in many of the villages of W Township. “Why not try to earn more money for your family if you have the chance?” They asked me. “In my opinion, everybody in the village should start some business as we are in such a good geographic location.” Yet at the same time, none

²⁶ Interview in Fu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/5/2007.

of them would deny that their small business is vulnerable to market risks, changing regulations, and the despotic sometimes arbitrary local market administrations. Unlike the economic elites who have well-established connections with the officials and administrators at the higher levels, they seek help and protection from the village cadres with whom they are acquainted. “It is the cadres that make the business possible... I alone cannot deal with all those inspections, official procedures, etc... They are truly helpful...”²⁷ I heard the remarks from the small business owners repeatedly during my fieldwork in W Township.

The village cadres, many of whom have a career of Party officials spanning from the socialist to the post-socialist era, have learned to socialize with the local officials, play around the market rules and policies, and negotiate with the market administration to assure the interests of the villagers. The small business owners as common villagers, who obviously do not possess these rare abilities, rely on the connections of the village cadres to survive in the market and in return accept their authority with respect and trust. The village cadres often serve as a buffering belt for the grievances of the small business owners in their participation in the risky market and sooth their anxiety and unrest.

On the other hand, the small business owners are usually people at their prime age, with perspectives, and in relatively good economic conditions. They sit in the Villagers’ Representative Assembly (VRA, a village democratic institution enforced by the recent

²⁷ For some examples: interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/3/2006; interview in Gold-Bull Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/21/2006; interview in Big-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/15/2006; interview in Tan Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/14/2006.

political reforms in rural China²⁸), are current or potential members of the Party, and sometimes serve as assistants to the cadres in the village self-government. The cadres need the support of these active village political figures to secure their positions in the elections and complete the assigned state tasks. A symbiotic network with clientelist relational social capital is established between them in the villages.

The Dependency of Small Business Owners on Cadres

A Bridge to the Market Economy Using their ability to socialize with officials in the township and the county, the village cadres in W Township make the efforts to build strong connections with the market administrations. As members of the People's Congress and the Party members' representatives in the county, they are often invited to conferences and banquets with the local officials. On those occasions, they introduce themselves to the upper-level cadres in various departments, joke with them at dinner tables, and drink and smoke together with them. On important holidays, such as the Spring Festival and the Mid-Autumn Day, and special occasions, such as the weddings of the officials' children and the funerals of their parents, they visit them representing their villages, with cash gifts or expensive presents. Although the village government reimburses them the costs of the gifts, the cadres make these trips in their own time, in heavy storms, under the burning summer sun, and on weekends. The connections with

²⁸ VRA was introduced to Q County in 2002. Every 10 to 15 neighboring households in a village should elect a villagers' representative, who then form the VRA. The VRA is defined as the most powerful organization in the village, which has the right to make decisions for village development and supervise village cadres. The village Party secretary is required to first become a villagers' representative and then win the chair election in the VRA; otherwise, the secretary should be removed from the position and the township Party branch will consider other appropriate candidates in the village. This policy introduces competition to the village Party organization, but on the other hand, reinforces the legitimacy of the village Party secretary via the person's democratic leadership in the VRA.

the upper-level officials enable the cadres to become a safe bridge between the small business owners in their home villages and the outside market economy.

Routine procedures of market administration in contemporary China could be very tricky, with the annual county inspection of chicken farms as one example. On the paper, the regulation defines the distance between two neighboring cage units as so far and the usage of antibiotics in each unit as so little that basically no profiting chicken farm can pass the inspection. Officials can easily write a ticket to farm owners and shut down their places, but when a well-connected village cadre is present, this would never happen. On the day of the inspection of his chicken farm in 2006, Li Xuecheng of Chu Village came to the house of the village Party secretary at 6 am and asked Wang Mei, the secretary, to wait for the group of officials at the farm together with his family. Wang Mei walked with him to the farm and comforted his anxieties by telling him that she is acquainted with most of the officials in the group. When the group finally arrived at around 11 am, Wang Mei greeted them warmly and shook hands with every member, as if she were the owner of the farm. The officials quickly walked around the place, filling out the forms in their hands, and asked a few questions, most of which were answered by Wang Mei. Li Xuecheng treated the group in a fine restaurant at noon, as Wang Mei told him beforehand, and thanked the officials for their hard work. A certificate for a clean and safe chicken farm arrived at Li Xuecheng's house only three days later.

In Q County, truck drivers are required to renew their licenses every three years, but the procedures are painfully troublesome as written in the documents. In 2007, every individual driver needed to get a body examination in a hospital 150 kilometers (about 90 miles) away and pay a renewal fee of 300 *yuan*. "It is only on the paper," the owners of

small truck transportation business in W Township believed. In Tan Village, the DVC and the Party secretary called the owners to the village government office when the renewal date was approaching, collected the old licenses, and asked for 180 *yuan* for each. The owners followed their orders exactly, without raising any questions about how the cadres might get the job done at the lower price or when they could get the new licenses. The DVC made a trip to the Department of Traffic Administration of Q County the next day and handed everything to the director, whom he knew well in person. One week later, the truck business owners in the village happily received their renewed licenses.

Conflicts with market administrations occur often, no matter how hard the small business owners try to avoid them, causing them to depend on the help of the village cadres to settle the conflicts with satisfying results. Fu Yunlong of Bird-Rest Village owns a small grocery store on National Route 104 that sells packaged food, simple home products, and locally produced fresh fruit and vegetables. In the summer of 2007, during a trip to Tianjin, he learned that selling foreign cigarettes could bring good money to small businesses like his. He put a few brands, which he tried and liked in Tianjin, onto his goods shelves without knowing that he in fact needs a different trade license to carry foreign cigarettes in his store. The Bureau of Cigarette Trade of Cangzhou started a sudden license raid to the rural shops in August and Fu's store was unfortunately hit. It was around 5 in the afternoon when the cell phone of Zhang Baoqiang, the Party secretary of Bird-Rest Village, rang. Fu Yunlong's wife called him almost crying, and said that the raid team from the city was writing a big fine ticket to their store and asked for his immediate assistance. Zhang invited me that evening to have dinner with his extended family, his two sons and several nephews and nieces who were curious about

the US in particular. We were about to leave for the house of his younger brother, when Zhang decided to rush to Fu's store first. When we arrived, Fu Yunlong, with his head down, was listening to the head of the raid team who was giving him a lesson about cigarette licenses in a scolding tone full of contempt. His wife and daughter hid behind a curtain, scared and in tears.

Zhang Baoqiang quickly approached the official, who had pause upon seeing us, and introduced himself. "I am so sorry that we caused you troubles," he said. "You see it is such a hot day and you must feel tired after a long day of inspection under the sun. Yunlong, bring some icy drinks in the store to the officials!" The atmosphere all of a sudden changed from intense to relaxing. Zhang Baoqiang sat in a chair beside the head of the team and Fu Yunlong, after serving everybody a bottle of soft drink from his fridge, stood beside the Party secretary. Zhang chit-chatted with the officials, mentioning the names of the officials in the county's Office of Cigarette Control, whom they were mutually acquainted. "Yunlong is very young and does not know the rules. Trust me, he did not have any foreign cigarettes in this store before this summer," Zhang Baoqiang said. "He has been obeying all the regulations and is never an offender. He is just a rash kid, too bold, in my opinion. He started selling those cigarettes even without consulting me – so ignorant!" He looked at Fu, and embarrassed and wordless, the latter put his head down again. "I promise you, this will not happen again. He will either get a license from the county or stop having foreign cigarettes in the store."

The head of the team nodded, drinking his Pepsi and starting to put the ticket he had in his hand back into his bag. The number I vaguely saw was above 3,000 *yuan*. "You see, it is dinner time." Zhang stood up and said, "Let's find a good place with air

conditioning and have some nice food and drink.” Fu Yunlong at once echoed his suggestion and drove the Party secretary to a fine restaurant in the county center, followed by the cars of the raid team. Zhang found the time to call his family to cancel our dinner plan only during the banquet when he was excused to use the bathroom.

Later that evening, Fu paid for the dinner and the satisfied raid team drove back to the city of Cangzhou leaving no ticket to the store owner. Zhang Baoqiang, with Fu Yunlong standing silently on his side, shook hands with each official of the team before they got into their cars, and waved till their cars were out of sight. On our way back in Fu’s car, Fu Yunlong repeatedly thanked the secretary while apologizing sincerely for not informing him about his foreign cigarette business. When learning from Zhang that the incident disrupted his family dinner plan, Fu Yunlong almost stopped the car to apologize. “That is OK,” Zhang said. “I am the Party secretary of the village, right? You know those raid teams – they just want money, why did not you offer to treat them upon their arrival?”

“My mind was blank and I was like petrified. Nothing came up and all I knew was to ask my wife to call you. Thank you, really, so much. If there is anything, anything in future that you need me, just let me know.” Fu Yunlong expressed his gratitude again with his promise of loyalty.

It is a common practice for the village cadres in W Township to carry their cell phones everywhere they go so that whenever the small business owners encounter troubles they can reach them. The cadres of the villages specialized in truck transportation business, especially, are on call almost 24-7 for the owners of small transportation business, whose trucks could be pulled over anytime for speeding, having

an over-sized trunk, or carrying over-weight cargo on the highways in the county. They then travel to where the trucks are stopped by the village government's car and communicate to the patrol officers face-to-face. Every time they come out of the car, the officers recognize them as acquaintances and smile to them; every time they say something like "look at my face," the officers reduce the amount of the ticket, or in many instances, let the trucks go free. The village cadres often have to travel to different spots in the county for four or five times a day, and this job constitutes the major part of their daily duties.

"Those officers randomly stop trucks to complete their daily quota of fines," the cadres told me. "So they can let the drivers with connections go and get the un-connected ones. But you know, I can only help the drivers when their trucks are in this county – outside of it, they are the un-connected ones."²⁹

Sometimes, the small business owners are unlawfully harmed by the market administration and could legally claim their rights, but even in those situations, they hesitate to directly confront the state system and prefer relying on the assistance from the village cadres. In June 2007, Chu Shan, a truck owner and driver in Chu Village, argued with a highway toll collector in the county center when he was mistakenly over-charged. The collector, refusing to correct the toll amount, hit him on the face and broke one of his fingers during the fight. In the hospital, instead of dialing 110 (the Chinese 911), Chu Shan called Wang Mei, the Party secretary of Chu Village, on her cell phone and told her in details about the incident. Wang Mei immediately called the county's police department and asked the police officers to meet her at the hospital. They arrived shortly after Wang Mei and I got there, read the doctor's report carefully, documented statements

²⁹ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/3/2006; interview in Liu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/2/2006; interview in Lai Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/19/2006; interview in River-End Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/23/2007.

from Chu Shan, and then took off to get the toll collector. When I asked Chu Shan afterwards why he did not contact the police directly, he gave me a strange look and said:

“I talk to the police alone? That is really scary. I don’t know how to make conversations; also they will not pay attention to a villager like me... The toll collector is a state employee, you know, a part of them. Whose side do you think they will take? ... It is different if the Party secretary talks to them – they are the same people and she can make things right.”

I then asked him if he had tried to directly contact the law enforcement or the legal system before when he had bad experiences, but he shook his head and told me that idea never occurred to him. “There has been little change in the rural society. The officials are the officials and the villagers like me are the villagers.” He said, “It is always appropriate and safe to have the village cadres as representatives and use their *guanxi* to deal with the other officials.”³⁰ For Chu Shan, it was with his “expectation of continuity,” if in Brantly Womack’s term (2006), that he chose to rely on the village Party secretary to settle the problem. Personal connections, or *guanxi*, fill his cultural “tool-kit” (Swidler, 2002) and often are the only choice when he gets into troubles as like one mentioned above.

Conflicts with other interest parties, including contract competition, business accidents, disagreement on contract items, etc., are another part of the market risks. Faced with such problems, the small business owners count on their well-connected village cadres to bring favorable settlement decisions to their side. Gao Xiuquan of Lower-Gao Village runs a family business of carpenter work that serves the residents in the county. In May 2008, one of his clients in the county center complained to him that the newly made book case in his apartment was of terrible quality as the glass doors

³⁰ Interview in Q County, Cangzhou, 6/27/2007.

could not be perfectly closed. The client asked for his money back and threatened to sue Gao Xiuquan. Gao believed the malfunction in the doors of the book case was at least partly due to the careless use of the client and full refund was not reasonable. After having a big argument with the client in his apartment, Gao Xiuquan visited the house of the DVC of Lower-Gao Village and asked for help. A week later, Gao Xiuquan scheduled another meeting with the client in the county center. He was accompanied by the DVC of his village and an official from the Bureau of Business Administration of Q County, with whom the DVC is acquainted in person. Shortly after the meeting started, the official took the role of a mediator asking the two sides to stay calm, while Gao Xiuquan tried to persuade the client to think about having half a refund for the book case. The presence of the official obviously took effects and the client agreed on half refund at the end of the meeting. “We are very lucky here to have the responsible village cadres to help with the business... We villagers finally do not have to always be the weak or the harmed...” Gao Xiuquan told me with great satisfaction later that day when we got back to Lower-Gao Village.³¹

Qian Hua, a fruit orchard owner in Willow-Tree Village, discovered in the summer of 2006 that a competitor was hindering the renewal of his contract with a super-market, located in the city of Cangzhou, for a fruit supply that he had held for quite a few years. To his astonishment, he later learned that the competitor was his sister and brother-in-law living in Gold-Bull Village. Feeling betrayed, he angrily visited the household of his brother-in-law, Fang Jin, and asked for explanation. The two men got into fight and the sister of Qian Hua ran to the home of the DVC of Gold-Bull Village in tears. Fang Ming,

³¹ Interview in Lower-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 5/31/2008.

the DVC, came in his slippers and pulled the two men apart to stop the fight. After hearing about the conflicts from both Fang Jin and Qian Hua, he said, “No more fights, let’s deal with this in a civilized way. I know the Party secretary of Willow-Tree Village well and we should get him involved too.” He took Fang Jin and Qian Hua to the office of the Party secretary of Willow-Tree Village and with the efforts of the two village cadres, the two relatives eventually sat down at the table peacefully. It was agreed that Qian Hua and Fang Jin should collaborate in the new contract, instead of each lowering their prices to benefit the super-market, and the details of the collaboration would be negotiated between the two village cadres after they got to know more about the situation.

I asked Qian Hua the next day why he did not choose to come to an agreement with his brother-in-law as they are actually relatives. “I cannot trust him and my sister any more. They could play tricks to cheat me in an agreement... And it is weird to talk about numbers and portions with them anyways... The mind of our Party secretary is very clear and he knows about business, so I trust him... It is good to have the cadre to talk to another cadre and hopefully I can keep the price I got last year from the super-market and will not have to suffer any loss.” Qian Hua sounded calm.³²

During the next few weeks, I witnessed the meetings between the DVC of Gold-Bull and the Party secretary of Willow-Tree. They negotiated about the contract carefully as if it were about their own businesses, yet in a friendly and delightful tone. In mid-August, they reached the agreement that Qian Hua would take 70% of the fruit supply to the super-market while Fang Jin would take the remaining 30% in 2007.

Market information such as valid prediction of commodity price is precious to the small business owners. Although the village cadres, who usually only have primary school education, know nothing about rules of Economics, from their socialization with the local state officials, they sometimes can get accurate information about the state-

³² Interview in Willow-Tree Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/26/2006.

influenced market. In July 2006, at the dinner banquet following the Q County's annual conference of Party members' representatives, several Party secretaries in W Township were at the same table with the head of Q County's Bureau of Price. After some rounds of drinking, the head started boasting about the power of his position and claimed that he could bet with the Party secretaries that the price of eggs would go up the next year. The chicken farm owners soon learned about this piece of priceless information from their village Party secretaries and made remarkable profits in 2007. In interviews, they all felt grateful to the village cadres for the prediction and adored the Party secretaries as their leaders to wealth.³³

Life Benefits In the economic reform, village cadres lost their socialist control over allocation of material goods among villagers. In the open market of commodities, some wealthy small business owners can buy better products than what the cadres can afford. However, as back in the socialist era, some benefits still cannot be purchased in the open market yet can be obtained through ties with state officials.

Urban Household Registration Children born in W Township should be registered as "rural" or "agricultural" in the household registration system (*hukou*), which prevents them from going to the good schools in the county center.³⁴ In order to get their children a fair education opportunity, parents in the business households are willing to spend a large amount of money to move the household registrations of their children to the county center and make them "urban" or "non-agricultural." Money alone cannot solve the

³³ Interviews in Gold-Bull Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/4/2007; interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/11/2007; interview in Upper-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/19/2007.

³⁴ Residents in the county center are registered as "urban" and the schools there only accept students with "urban" household registrations.

problem – what is more critical is the cadres’ effort to use their connections with the county’s Police Department and its Bureau of Household Registration.

Birth Permit Policy of family planning in rural China forbids villagers to have a second child if the first is a boy; and a third child if the first is a girl. This policy is widely hated in villages because most of the villagers want to have more children on whom they can depend when they get old.³⁵ An un-allowed child is not entitled to share village farmland and costs the family a huge fine unless a birth permit is obtained from the upper-level government. With connections to the Office of Family Planning in the county, it is possible for the village cadres to persuade the officials there to get around the policy with excuses (e.g. made-up physical defects of the elder children in the family) and grant a birth permit to the villager’s family.

Job Opportunity When their small business is off-season (e.g. winter for fruit orchards) or when there are only a few customers, members of the households seek for temporary employment to supplement family income. Non-agricultural and relatively comfortable jobs are ideal – for some examples, the secretary or receptionist in the private enterprises, the cook in the government cafeteria, and the cleaning lady of the state offices, compared with laboring on the farmland or in the sweaty workshops of the factories. Telephone calls or visits of the village cadres, who have established ties with the local state officials and successful entrepreneurs, can get a nice position for them.

Such life benefits are scarce resources in rural China, and even for the village cadres, to obtain them is time and energy consuming and the outcome is never guaranteed. Thus

³⁵ There is no social security or pension system in rural China. The elderly have to depend on their children completely.

the provision of the benefits to the small business owners is less universal than the cadres' assistance with their survival in the market. The priorities are given to the members of the VRA, who are the cadres' closer partners in village administration. Others either do not make the requests knowing they would cause the cadres too much trouble, or are sometimes turned down with the polite words that "it is not a good time – the state is forbidding this right now – let's try it next time."

The Dependency of Cadres on Small Business Owners

Votes and Political Support The VRAs in the villages of W Township consist almost solely of small business owners. The social and economic elites are busily engaged in their business development and civic duty at the higher levels while the farmers are regarded as being not smart and insightful enough to be political representatives. Besides their own votes, these powerful and influential electorates are able to mobilize and organize the votes in the neighborhoods they represent for the village cadres in the direct elections. During the election in 2006 in River-End Village, Shen Angen, a chicken farm owner and a villagers' representative, paid visits to the farming households in his neighborhood holding the red vote box. In May when the election took place, farm work was heavy for the farmers as they needed to harvest the wheat and sow the seeds of the corn or the potato, and they usually forgot the voting time and location. Shen Angen chose either noon or after sunset to knock at their doors to make sure that he could catch them in person and explain to them the importance of their participation in the election. He then handed them the blank vote ticket and introduced the candidates. "Angen, just tell me the persons to select." The farmers, often yawning, could hardly keep their eyes open after laboring in the fields for hours and wanted the

“right” answers from the representative. Shen said with a smile, “Well, it really should be your own choice... But you see, the first three are the current members of the village government and they are doing pretty fine.” The farmers nodded, circling the first three names, and put the vote into the red box before they murmured goodbye to Shen Angen and walked towards the bed. In an interview when we talked about his role in village election, Shen Angen told me:

“I stay close to the DVC and the Party secretary but some of the villagers do not know how devotedly they are working for the village. It is not an easy job to do. As a villagers’ representative, I need to let them know the work and achievements of the cadres, and I am glad to do that because the cadres do work hard for us and we should do them justice...”³⁶

The village Party secretaries in W Township are now required to win the VRA chair election in order to secure the cadre position. The small business owners in the VRA, returning the favors that they receive from the Party secretary, are willing to give their votes to him or her. “It is our fortune to have the Party secretary working for the village. No one could be more qualified for this position...” They would look at the secretary when justifying their votes to the township officials present at the meetings.

The VRA is defined in the reform policy as having the highest authority in the village and the proposals of local development from the village Party-government have to be passed in the VRA before being put into action. The small business owners sitting in the VRA, grateful to the patronage from the village cadres, could make the approving process easy and simple.

In July 2006, the Party secretary of Chu Village suggested a wider road be paved in the village and prepared a detailed proposal, which stated that besides the fund from the

³⁶ Interview in River-End Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 5/31/2006.

township, every household, except the ones below the poverty line, should donate 10 *yuan*, and every adult male should work two hours per week for the project. At the VRA meeting, the villagers' representatives sat there quietly as she talked about the road construction plan, messaging with their cell phones or even taking a short nap. The secretary asked the members if they had questions or suggestions after her presentation, yet nobody had anything to say. "Let's just do it as you said," a representative said, and not surprisingly, the proposal was unanimously passed. That important meeting concerning the money and labor of every villager took only about 20 minutes. I was curious whether the VRA members slightly cared about how much the road would actually cost and how much funding it could get from the township. Chu Xiu, a truck owner, told me on his way back home after the meeting, "It is never wrong to listen to the secretary. She knows how to get things done. She helps us in every way and we need to believe her."

Sometimes, the cadres of the same village could not agree on plans of local development and they would bring their different arguments to the VRA meetings for democratic discussions. But the small business owners, instead of picking the policy ideas that they thought would best serve the interest of the village, defended the plans of the cadre who offered favors to them and with whom they had a closer tie. During a heavy storm in August 2007, a tree fell down and made a hole in the roof of the kindergarten of Gold-Bull Village and a VRA gathering was called to discuss the renovation plan of the building. The Party secretary, Chen Bo, suggested Chen Ping, a carpenter living in the village, take the contract. However, the DVC, Fang Ming, insisted that it would be more appropriate to find a construction team from outside the village to

avoid possible corruption. The small business owners in the VRA from either the Chen or the Fang lineage, the two large lineage groups in the village, made their definitive decisions to take the side of the leader from their own lineage, as they always receive favors and protection from them respectively. That left the votes from the two members with the family name Sun decisive. Sun Yong and Sun Kuan are brothers who run a small restaurant and get kind assistance to their business from both the DVC and the Party secretary. However, in June that year the Party secretary, Chen Bo, offered the family a big favor by introducing the son of Sun Yong to work in the township government as a car driver. The boy, never a good student in school, was pleased with the comfortable and secure job. Sun Yong and Sun Kuan both voted for the plan of Chen Bo at the meeting and Chen Ping finally earned the contract with the village government to renovate the kindergarten.

When asked their rationales to make the vote, Sun Kuan replied to me on his way back home, “To be a good person, one has to appreciate the help from others and repay their kindness when there is a chance (*zhien tubao*)... We are just trying to be respectful to the secretary.” The next day, I met Fang Ming, the DVC, who seemed quite frustrated. He complained, “You think the VRA people really know the differences between our plans? Never. They just vote for whoever offers them favors. A village cadre nowadays has to work on *guanxi* with the villagers’ representatives and buy their approval...”

Recruiting new members to the CCP is an important job for village Party secretaries. Three new members need to be recruited in each village every year to meet the township quota, and at the same time, the solid support from the village Party branch to the secretary needs to be maintained. The villagers in W Township generally focus their

interest on wealth accumulation and business development, and few are really interested in the Party. Often, no one submits the application for Party membership when the secretary is about to report the names of new members to the township Party branch. The Party secretaries then go to talk to the “young and capable” villagers, with whom they have solid connections, and encourage them to write applications. Li Rong, a 42-year-old plumber in Li Village, was recruited to the CCP in 2007. He immediately admitted that he knows nothing about the Party during the interview and claimed his application had nothing to do with his belief in or loyalty to Communism.

“I was showing my respect and support to the Party secretary when submitting the application. He helps me so much to maintain my business. He came and asked me to write one because he thought I was qualified – that was giving me a lot of face, you know, and I should just do as he said.”³⁷

Only with the support and cooperation from the small business owners could the village Party secretaries today complete the task of Party member recruitment and earn the good opinions from the officials in the township and county Party branches.

Implementation of State Policies The upper-level governments and Party branches evaluate the village cadres by their abilities to implement state policies in the villages. In the reform era, enforcing state policies with threat and violence is strictly prohibited for the sake of social stability, which often leaves the village cadres the choice to depend on the support and compliance of the small business owners to accomplish the assigned state tasks.

Collecting fines from the households that disobey the family planning policy by having un-allowed children could be a nightmare for the village cadres. Feeling increasingly confident in their financial resources, the small business owners in W

³⁷ Interview in Li Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/1/2007.

Township would love to have more children to keep the familial prosperity, particularly the households in the business of truck transportation. The boys in these families usually start driving trucks at an early age to help the family business, but driving trucks, although it brings quick cash, is a high-risk job. The often-heard bad news that someone's son is killed in a road accident compels the parents to give birth to more children to be assured that they will have someone around when they get old. But when a birth permit cannot be obtained, they never plan to escape the fines from the village government as they understand the importance not to ruin the ties with the cadres. They often put the money together when the wife is pregnant with the un-allowed child and voluntarily bring it to the village cadres. An apple orchard owner in Lower-Gao Village, whose wife was pregnant with their third child in 2006, told me after he paid the fines to the village government, "I just want to have some more kids, not to cause troubles for the cadres... They are already under a lot of pressure helping us in business, and we need to help them in their jobs in return."

The members of the VRA not only cooperate themselves, but also pass the state policies from the village cadres to the villagers that they represent. In 2005, the central government of China decided to start a campaign of "New Socialist Countryside" in rural China to speed up the pace of urbanization. As defined, in a model new socialist village, all poultry-and-livestock-raising households, meaning households raising more than ten poultry or livestock animals, must move away from the main residential area of the village and form their new neighborhood outside the village center. The policy was introduced to W Township in the summer of 2006 and all the villages called VRA meetings to make plans for the move.

In Spring-Breeze Village, the village government proposed to have the households moved by January 2007 and give them 60 *yuan* per room in their old houses using the village fund for the moving costs, in addition to the state compensation of 150 *yuan* per room. The poultry raising households in the village formed a business association in 2004, the head of which is Cheng Mingshan, a duck farm owner and a member of the VRA. The village Party secretary and the DVC held several private meetings with him before they discussed the proposal in the VRA, persuading him to comfort possible discontents with the resources in his association. Cheng called meetings of the association members and delivered a charismatic speech at one of them,

“Our association is a union and it is established for difficult times like this. This is a national policy that has to be implemented in our village and I ask you to help each other in the moving... The better-off ones should take care of the poorer ones when we divide the compensation from the central government and the village government... I will be the leader – I hereby declare that I myself will not take a penny from the compensation and would leave them to the families that need the money most. And I am also willing to make a donation if necessary to make the move-out smooth for every one of us...”

Touched by the leader’s attitude, a few wealthy members of the association agreed to donate parts of their compensation to the needy, and the poorer households in the association accepted without reluctance or resistance the proposal of moving of the village government once it was endorsed in the VRA. While helping the Cheng family pack up in September as they started moving belongings to the new neighborhood, I casually commented on the troubles and their loss in the implementation of the policy. Cheng Mingshan’s wife responded:

“Of course, it is a lot of trouble and money loss. But we have to do this... It is a national policy and the village cadres are only doing their jobs. Without their help, it

is impossible to keep our duck farms, and when they need Cheng Mingshan's help, we have to do it... It is like an agreed deal and we cannot be the traitors..."³⁸

The project of moving out poultry-and-livestock-raising households went smoothly in many villages of W Township, which amazed the officials in the county. "We depend on the VRA members for this, really," the Party secretaries of the villages reported to the county Party secretary during a meeting. "We all have to count on the democratic system nowadays, right?"

Public and Private

Through the relational social capital in village symbiotic clientelism with the small business owners, the village cadres, while collaborating with them in public village administration and market survival, also enter their private lives as well-respected figures. Unlike the personalistic intimacy between the cadres and the social and economic elites, the patron-client way of interaction is often kept in the private encounters of the cadres and the small business owners. The cadres are always invited to sit at the main table with the family at weddings or funerals as honored guests, and they are often invited to host the activities and give talks as the representatives of the family members.

The cadres care about the small business owners so much that sometimes they poke their noses into the family life of the households as instructors, yet the small business owners do not feel upset or offended. One day, the Party secretary of Chu Village, Wang Mei, and I walked past the house of Chu Lin, a truck businessman in his sixties, and saw her youngest daughter-in-law washing some vegetables in the yard. Instead of putting the vegetables in a basin, she held them under the water tap and rinsed them with the running water. Wang Mei walked into the yard towards her at once, turned off the tap, and said to

³⁸ Interview in Spring-Breeze Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/4/2006.

her, “What a waste of water! You need to get a basin.” The daughter-in-law with a sorry smile apologized for not being thrifty, and fetched a basin. Hearing the conversations, Chu Lin came out of the house and thanked Wang Mei for educating the young. “There is so much you should learn from her,” he said to the daughter-in-law. “She is a master of life.” All of them laughed.

The symbiotic clientelism in the villages, combining instrumental purposes and interpersonal ties, influences both the public and the private lives of the small business owners. Living in this personal network with the village cadres, they contribute to the governance and social stability of the villages undergoing drastic social changes while receiving favors and benefits in their business development and wealth accumulation.

Farmers: Distant Clientelism

In W Township, the local farmers are the agricultural labors and the industrial workers in the factories of the social and economic elites at the same time. On the one hand, they sometimes claim themselves as beneficiaries of the post-socialist reforms as they now earn factory wages in supplement to agricultural income and could live beyond the subsistence level. Gao Shengkai, a farmer in Lower-Gao Village who also works on the shop floor of the iron pipe company, said gratefully in an interview, “My family now does not have to suffer from hunger; we have enough to eat and wear, thanks to the reform policy that brings the factories here.”³⁹ However, on the other hand, living in the dramatic social stratification in the villages and watching their neighbors swiftly get rich in various businesses, the farmers often fill their hearts with self contempt. “I am a loser in the village.” Tan Song of Tan Village, who has a lame leg from a car accident, told me

³⁹ Interview in Lower-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/12/2007.

with a bitter smile, “Because I cannot keep a business like the others and earn more money. It is all about wealth and competition and the world is not for people like me...”⁴⁰ The social and economic elites and the small business owners in the villages as well make fun of the farmers, finding it hard to understand why they are unable to join in some more rewarding businesses and better their lives in the flourishing local market economy. Chu Hai, the big boss of truck transportation in Chu Village, once said to me, “In this new era, in our village that has such a good location for transportation, everyone in the village could participate in the truck business, unless there is something wrong with the people, either with their mind or their body.”⁴¹

Such disrespect and discrimination is hard to miss and the farmers know that they can hardly have a voice in village politics. They are the onlookers during the democratic elections of the DVC and the villagers’ representatives, never dreaming of developing leadership in the villages. The village democratic institutions, as well as the village cadres, are distant to them. After the central government abolished agricultural taxes and fees in 2005, it is now unnecessary for the village cadres to regularly visit these households. During my interviews with the farmers, I was often astounded to find that they only knew the family names of the village cadres, instead of their full names, although they have been living in the same village their whole lives and they were supposed to have checked the names of the cadres on the vote ticket during the village direct elections.

A widow of a war hero during the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), whose only child had passed away and whose grandchildren were migrant workers in Tianjin, lived alone

⁴⁰ Interview in Tan Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/27/2006.

⁴¹ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/7/2006.

in Upper-Gao Village. Her late husband joined the CCP in 1940 and was one of the earliest revolutionary communist soldiers in the area. Almost deaf and having blurring eye sight, she still grows vegetables on her farmland and raises a few hens to support herself. Hardly able to hear others, she is an extremely quiet woman who barely starts conversations and has the habit of murmuring to herself. I tried to help her with housekeeping when I was in the village and sometimes just listened to her self-talking of stories in her scattered memories. The village Party secretary visits her humble hut once a year, on July 1st, the official birthday of the CCP, with the gifts from the county Party branch to the families of elder Party members and welfare cash from the village government to the Party members living under the poverty line.

She called the Party secretary respectfully “Secretary Gao” (*Gao Shuji*), but just after the secretary left, she said to herself, “What is his name? Which secretary is this? Anyway, they all have the last name Gao... It is never wrong.” One day I accompanied her to her farm fields when we passed the beautiful new house of a construction contractor, and she started to comment. “Good-looking house... I am so out-of-date, with my bad fate (*ming ku*)... It is not my time any more... Need to be capable, need to earn money...” She repeated these remarks to herself.

The farmers in W Township seek for two types of patronage from the village cadres: procedural assistance with village agricultural life and help with factory employment. The cadres are contacted when the Agricultural Department of the county has come to distribute seeds, fertilizers, or pesticides; when specialists from the province have arrived to talk about farming techniques; and when it is time to sell crops to the state. They deliver the important information of agricultural production to the farmers usually

through the village radio and seldom pay them home visits. In everyday village life, the cadres approve the requests of land-use for house-building from the farmers as long as the state-defined conditions are precisely met. Like the Party secretary of Upper-Gao Village, they also deliver social welfare money on time to the farming households, in particular the ones living below the poverty line. But beyond the regular duties of village cadres, they do not offer special favors to the farmers. In spite of the fact that some of the farmer families are too poor to gather enough money for the fines of the un-allowed children, the cadres will not offer to get birth permits for them with their connections, as they do for the villagers' representatives.

The village cadres in W Township also serve as labor recruiters and organizers for the factories and companies of the social and economic elites. Since they know the farmers in person, they are supposed to be the guarantors of the employees and mediate the employment relationship. The farmers have to get their jobs in the factories through their village cadres and when disputes over wage or benefits take place, the cadres are their first step in justice seeking, as shown in the episode earlier in this chapter about the woman farmer/worker who tried to get her monthly payment through the Party secretary of Lai Village.

Under such circumstances, the village cadres at least put on a benevolent and sympathetic face in dealing with the farmers while defending the interest of the economic elites who are their patrons. Because the farmers, though excluded from the political institutions of the villages, nowadays are becoming conscious of one weapon they possess – petition and protesting, which scares the village cadres as that could ruin their political careers.

“The villagers are more cunning than they were ever before, especially the poor ones... They know how to destroy things for the cadres if we do not satisfy them. They can make a big story out of a small incident and go to tell the media or the upper-level government, and they know the rural cadres are afraid of that...” The DVC of Big-Forest Village got quite agitated in emotion when we talked about the rural unrest in China in a conversation.⁴²

In interviews with the farmers, they never deliberately mentioned petition and protesting as their weapons that may threaten the village cadres, yet they all admitted hearing about such resistance events before and expressed compassion of the resisters. They said:

“As a farmer living at the bottom in the village, life is hard... In fact, who would want to take the risks and break away from the local cadres? We need their help all the time... There must have been no other ways out and they picked up the only method to settle grievances.”⁴³

In village governance, the distant clientelism between the village cadres and the farmers is mediated by the small business owners, who are the representatives of the farmers in the village government and the partners of the cadres, taking the responsibility to symbolically bring the farmers’ opinions to the VRA and deliver the VRA decisions to them asking for cooperation. The small business owners are neighbors, sometimes friends, relatives, and role models of the farmers, with whom they wish to maintain a good relationship. The farmers put on double restrictions to their behaviors and actions in village life to avoid offending the village cadres and the small business owners.

Implementing the moving policy of the poultry-and-livestock-raising households for the “New Socialist Countryside” campaign, the VRA of Big-Forest Village passed a proposal in July 2006 that the households should move within a year and receive the

⁴² Interview in Big-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/17/2008.

⁴³ Interview in Spring-Breeze Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/6/2007; interview in Tan Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/27/2007; interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/18/2007; interview in Bird-Rest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/11/2008.

compensation of 150 *yuan* per room from the campaign and 50 *yuan* per room from the village government. Deng Yuan, a farmer in the village, who raised 15 hens and roosters to supplement the family's agricultural income and had his new house built just in 2004, was seen as having potential discontents with the plan. Requested by the village Party secretary and the DVC, the VRA member representing his neighborhood, Deng Guang, visited his house on the day the proposal was approved.

“Please understand that the purpose of the policy is to beautify our village and it is for our own good. It is not a random policy of the Party secretary or the DVC. In fact, they really care about your concerns... This is a decision of the VRA, which means it is democratic and it is final...” Deng Guang sat for tea and repeated the words for many times during his one-hour visit to the family.

Deng Yuan and Deng Guang live on the same street and the two families get along fairly well. Deng Yuan listened carefully and politely promised to consider moving at the end of their conversations. In the early fall that year, Deng Yuan and his wife, after the long consideration, decided to give up their hens and roosters in order to keep living in their new house and focus on agricultural farming in future.

Deng Yuan told me on the day he sold all his poultry to a local restaurant, “It is not easy for the villagers' representative to do his job. We are friends, you know, and I want to keep it that way... Also, the VRA decides the policy and I do not want to be an obstacle for the village cadres and an enemy to the majority.”⁴⁴

The contents of the distant clientelism between the village cadres and the farmers essentially include state-defined procedures and lack direct and intimate personal interactions. However, this individual network, particularly the mediation of the small business owners, is powerful in controlling and suppressing the bottom class. The

⁴⁴ Interview in Big-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/6/2006.

farmers' ability to resist and rebel is limited not only by the authority of the cadres, but also the intervention of the small business owners, who are their fellow villagers and supposedly their representatives yet act as the administrative collaborators of the village Party-government.

Relational Social Capital in *Guanxi*, Class Society, and Democracy

In W Township, after three decades of post-socialist reforms, the role of patronizing *guanxi* practices between village cadres and villagers has neither faded out in the emerging direct political channels and institutions nor stayed intact without changes. It constitutes on the one hand the neo-clientelist regime in the township, which relies on the village cadres' everyday direct and personal networking practices to sustain dominance through patronizing the rural society, and on the other hand the major personal ties and social resources of most villagers in their countryside lives. The diversified patterns of relational social capital in *guanxi* have enriched and transformed the socialist dependent Party-clientelism at the grassroots level. The contents of exchange have extended from material benefits, favors, and symbolic political loyalty to include also election votes, democratic participation, political support and negotiation, and personalistic intimacy. The relational social capital in the ties between village cadres and villagers facilitates village administration, state control, and accumulation of economic inequality.

The classified relational social capital grants villagers of the different classes different statuses of power in the new rural political structure. Through the reversed personalistic clientelism, the rural social and economic elites achieve the equal, if not higher, status with the village cadres, sharing their authority and power dominance. The village symbiotic clientelism is the basis of contemporary village governance, as via it, the

cadres keep the growing class of small business owners under control with state patronage and recruit the villagers' representatives as their political collaborators. At the same time, the small business households receive generous favors and benefits to their business development and wealth gains, which underpins their "middle-class" economic positions. Living in the distant clientelism with the village cadres, the farmers, who supply cheap labor to the enterprises of the elite, are largely cut off from the effective local protective umbrella and suppressed in their political voices. They are controlled by the village state through their clientelist dependence on procedural state patronage and their personal ties with small business owners in the same village. The classified clientelism in W Township occurring in the local development of capitalism echoes the social stratification in the market and contributes to the increasing structural social inequality. Inequality under the neo-clientelist regime is not merely numbers of income gap, but mechanisms, practices, and experiences that produce the fundamental concepts of class and status with profound moral connotation and political effects.

A visible class society has emerged in the local economy that permeates and organizes the networking practices of the villagers and the cadres. Social institutions, such as lineage groups and religious organizations, still influence the *guanxi* net in the villages yet remain secondary to class in their prominence. It is true that the cadres would be more willing to take care of the villagers in their own social institutions if the candidate patronage recipients were in the same class; however, they would never jump over the class boundary by establishing close intimacy with a farmer, who does not have the political voices at stake to return the favors, even though the farmer is in the same social institution.

Democratic institutions (e.g. the VRA system) and participation are realized in village governance in W Township, but the participants adopt them as pivotal assets of relational social capital to exchange for the cadre's patronage. The village cadres keep their authority using the institutions as new channels to dismiss discontents and prevent resistance. The political reform, on the one hand, empowers the small business owners by enabling them to urge the village cadres to defend their interest, but on the other hand, their inter-dependency with the cadres limits their potential ability to resist state dominance. The farmer households, voiceless in the new political structure, are double silenced and oppressed by the village cadres and the small business owners. The obstacles restricting the true fulfillment of the ideals of democracy in W Township are not as simple as arbitrary state interventions that put a "cosmetic face" (Kennedy, 2002) onto village politics, but the complex mechanisms of producing relational social capital in *guanxi* practices in the neo-clientelist regime, embedded in the developing market economy and the unequal distribution of political power among villager class groups in the post-socialist villages.

Chapter 5

Zou Guanxi: Network-Based Disorganized Resistance in W Township

In June 2008, an atmosphere of anxiety surrounded the villagers in W Township, when they learned that orders had been sent from the central government to the county government to demolish the old and humble-looking houses along National Route 104. Since the Olympic Games were coming, as the officials in the county told me, this major route of the nation, on which plenty of foreign and domestic visitors would travel to Beijing, needed to present an image of prosperity and development. The residential and commercial units along the route were required to be turned into two-story brick buildings with colorfully painted façade. The compensations, although claimed to be calculated case-by-case, were meager to the villagers. Still worse, the owners of the units that were erected without state permission (*weizhang jianzhu*) would receive nothing.

Sun Yong and Sun Kuan in Gold-Bull Village, for instance, keep a small restaurant along the route that was in a one-story flat structure. In 2007, in response to the rapid development of the business, they built an extension to the kitchen on their own – two small log tents connected to the structure. On June 7th, 2008, the village government officially informed the brothers that they must start re-building the restaurant according to the design of the municipal government by the end of the month, or the place would be demolished, and they would get compensation only for the original structure, excluding the two new tents.

The first wave of demolition in the county started all of a sudden on June 15th, much sooner than the villagers had expected. Accompanied by the police, heavy bulldozers entered the villages, crushing the uncooperative building units into ashes. Slogans were painted in red on the walls along the national route – “Demolish a place, build a place, and beautify a place” (*chai yichu, jian yichu, mei yichu*), but the next day, the wording was revised to read “See a place, demolish a place, and destroy a place” (*jian yichu, chai yichu, mei yichu*) in white paint with decorations of angry graffiti. The Sun brothers closed their restaurant on June 19th and started the re-building and the removal of the two log tents.

At the end of June, several villages in W Township were the targets of the policy implementation. In River-End Village, a woman villager refusing to have her house rebuilt desperately stood at the front door with her arms widely open trying to stop the demolition. She was arrested on the spot yet released that night, only to find that her home had vanished. She was sitting on the ruins petrified when the village Party secretary came to visit.

“How could they do this? We had the house renovated only earlier this year...” The woman sounded crying but her eyes were dry.

“It is useless to challenge the authority, you see. My house is along the road too and needed to be rebuilt... The order was from the central government, from Beijing, and there is nothing we can do locally.” The Party secretary said slowly, in a comforting tone.

The woman sighed heavily and the secretary continued, “Your total compensation is 5000 *yuan*, right?”

“Yeah, far from enough to build a two-story house that they want. My husband has taken our kids to live with his sister now and we really do not know what to do...” Her tears started to drop down the face.

“The village government will see if we can grant your family a new house location away from Route 104, and you could still have a flat home there.”

The woman thanked the Party secretary and they remained silent for a few minutes before the secretary took off. On the cool summer night, the moon in the clear sky shed soft light on the ruins of the housing units and I sat beside the woman breathing the smell of ashes. At that moment, I was bold enough to depart all my good sense of rules of fieldwork and suggested to her that putting the grievances in the township together to organize a petition or protest may be able to bring more compensation.

She looked at me with her empty eyes and slightly shook her head. “Everyone in the county is utilizing the networks (*zou guanxi*) of their families to protect their own properties – that is how you solve problems here... What is the use of protesting? Only *guanxi* works if you want something... People are out of *guanxi* this time, I guess – some quite well-connected villagers had their places torn apart as well...”⁴⁵

By August 2008, when the Beijing Olympic Games welcomed the world with stunning fireworks and splendid celebrating shows, this part of W Township that lies along Route 104 had become a big construction site with emerging modern and pretty brick buildings. Even the factory buildings of the economic elites did not escape the policy implementation, as exterior designers were mandatorily hired from the city to paint the façade. However, no organized petitions or radical protests occurred in the township and the villagers, with their limited state compensation, struggled in their own ways to survive the difficult time.

Failed System Social Capital: The Dissipated “Irony of State Socialism”

Kelliher (1992), in his book *Peasant Power in China*, raised the intriguing question of how the population in rural China exercised power under the totalitarian state socialism. He claimed that the socialist state, making class a salient feature of social existence for

⁴⁵ Interview in River-End Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/28/2008.

the peasants via throwing them all into the same social circumstances, unwittingly created the possibility of mass actions by disorganized, atomized individuals who were placed in the very similar prescribed situations as a vast “rural class.” The individual peasants may indeed have been isolated and helpless, but because so many were reduced to the same status and faced the same conditions, they could unintentionally react to opening for change with overwhelming unity and in overwhelming numbers. The rural class, therefore, took unified actions in the absence of class consciousness. The twisted irony of state socialism is regarded as the root of the resisting power of the peasant class in that era, and through the disorganized collectiveness, they were able to negotiate with the control of the central state and push for changes in national policies.

In W Township, experiencing post-socialism, the neo-clientelist regime succeeds in breaking down the irony by dissipating the latent comradeship of villagers and eliminating the “collectiveness” in its least sense in their resistance. The endogenous class structure replaces the homogeneous peasant class and signifies the disappearance of a cohesive rural community. The clientelist relational social capital that individual villagers have in their personal ties with village cadres reinforces social inequality and dismisses, instead of entailing, the formation of system social capital in the villages. In the endogenous class society, via relational social capital, the economic elites develop their new sources of dominance in their friendship with the village cadres, the small business owners are recruited as the new agents of state power in village symbiotic clientelism, and the farmers are perceived as the obscure other in distant clientelism. The destruction of the wholeness of the rural community further atomizes and isolates the individual villagers when they understand that their relatives, friends, and neighbors no

longer stay in the same *guanxi* with the state representatives. The differentiated relational social capital in personal ties brings the villagers different solutions to their own problems and a collective outlet of common grievances seldom occurs to them.

Meanwhile, the villagers experience the state and local politics in their own classified patterns of clientelism with the village cadres that are undergoing everyday flexible construction and maintenance, and establish their understandings of their class positions in the village during those networking practices. In other words, class identity of the villagers is not formed horizontally amongst fellows in similar socioeconomic circumstances, but in the vertical personal patron-client relationships with the village cadres. Class in the villages remains in-itself, in classified positions in production, networks, and lifestyles, and disconnects with for-itself to produce “cultures of solidarity” (Fantasia, 1988) or collective “insurgent identities” (Somers, 1994). The shared experience of exploitative oppression in the township fails to generate collective rebellions of the underclass, unlike what the doctrine Marxism would predict, because of the classification without class consciousness. The villagers in the township, as a social norm, take their individual and family grievances to the relational social capital in their personal clientelist ties with the village cadres in search for solutions. *Zou guanxi* (using connections and ties), as the woman from River-End Village said, is the local villagers’ way to effectively resist and get justice.

In the neo-clientelist regime in W Township, there is a bifurcation in power domination in the villages: the local rural state imposing policies and regulations on the rural society and the private enterprises exploiting local resources under the patronage from the city and province governments. The latter uses the former to ensure local

cooperation and the former could not afford to offend the interest of the latter. The small business owners and the farmers in their clientelist networks with the village cadres create and develop different strategies of resistance to cope with the two sources of dominance and try to safeguard their interest.

Their resistance remains cellular within the village units because personal networks tie them closely with the cadres at the village level, through whom they express discontents. The resistance methods and actions that the villagers adopt differentiate along their understood class positions, as their major weapon for justice – the relational social capital in the clientelist ties with the village cadres – is classified. Social institutions, as discussed in Chapter 4, may influence the escalation of grievance (e.g. to the entrepreneur in a different lineage group) and the effectiveness of resistance (e.g. the village cadre is more inclined to solve problems for the villagers of the same temple), but they fail to organize collective actions within the institutions, leaving individual and family based discontents to the relational social capital in clientelist cadre-villager networks.

Small Business Owners against the Local Rural State

Small business owners, via village symbiotic clientelism, use the cadres in their home villages as the channel to articulate individual and family grievances and resistance to policies, regulations, and administrations of the local rural state. They trust the village cadres with whom they have solid ties and feel secure and guaranteed that their interest would be properly handled and fulfilled. The political rights and influence in the villages that small business owners gained during the democratization reform exempt them from having to bribe the village cadres with expensive gifts or cash to realize the resistance – a

few packages of common cigarettes or a package of local fruits are often all they send the cadres to show gratitude.

Although the village cadres have the priority to solve problems for the VRA members, they would try their best to extend their patronage to all the members of this class in exchange for maximum political support from them. They work closely with small business owners case by case and search for adequate settlements to their discontents. It is feasible, effective, and fruitful for the small business owners in W Township to resist the local rural state by adopting the village cadres as the negotiation agent for individual and family grievances. On the other hand, organized petition or protesting, which undermines the ultimate goal of social stability, is the deadly poison for the career of the village cadres and they use every means possible to prevent it. To avoid challenging the authority of the respected village cadres and ruining their relational social capital in village symbiotic clientelism, the small business owners reject the idea of organizing and participating in collective resistance.

National Policies

The local rural state is supposed to strictly enforce national policies designed by the central Party government, but when the small business owners make the efforts to resist their implementation, village cadres, with the help of township and county officials they know in person, pick out loopholes in the policies for them and creatively invent legal ways of deviance. The infamous policy of family planning in rural China, for instance, is often the target of violation.

Chu Can, a villager in Chu Village who owns a small restaurant on the national route, already had two girls in his family but was expecting a third child in the summer of 2006.

The Party secretary of Chu Village helped him get a medical report indicating that his second daughter has permanent eye damage from the county hospital, despite the fact that the little girl has perfect eye sight, and handed it in person to the Office of Family Planning in the county. A birth permit for Chu Can's third child was granted in two weeks.

Another popular practice is to fake the residence of the household in the home village of the mother (while the family live in the father's village) and register the un-allowed child there. Through local match-makers, the villagers tend to marry people in the same county, where the cadres of the villages know each other quite well, and this method of getting around the family planning policy is often plausible. Duck farm owner Li Bao of Willow-Tree Village and his wife Shen Chun from River-End Village were expecting an un-allowed second child in the summer of 2007. The village Party secretary of Willow-Tree Village representing the couple warmly invited the village cadres of River-End Village to dinner and requested them to provide paperwork to prove that the family actually lived in River-End with no child registered in that village. After the treat of good wine and nice dishes paid by the couple, the Party secretary of River-End Village signed the written proof with the seal of the village Party branch. The son of Li Bao and Shen Chun was registered in Willow-Tree Village in 2004 and their daughter was successfully registered in River-End Village in 2007, although the family has always been living in Willow-Tree Village.

During the implementation of the national campaign of the "New Socialist Countryside," the move-out of the poultry-and-livestock-raising households irritated the eleven families that own poultry farms in Li Village, as the state compensation of 200

yuan per room (150 *yuan* from the central state and 50 *yuan* from the village government) could not cover the whole costs. Even though the grievances were collective, they separately talked to the village cadres, who case by case, found different solutions to their similar problems. A week after Li Fansheng complained to the DVC, Li Shuangshan, about his situation, the village government secretly informed him that his family could receive 270 *yuan* per room in compensation and the money would come from a recent donation of the lumber factory to the village. Wan Qiu expressed his discontent by paying a visit to the village Party secretary after dinner one day. The secretary contacted the township Party branch and claimed that more funding support was desperately needed to relieve his pressure in implementing the policy. The township Party secretary, with whom the village Party secretary has solid *guanxi*, managed to relocate a small amount of money from the township's Fund for Elementary Education to the fiscal transfers to Li Village. Wan Qiu got his compensation of 270 *yuan* per room and was also orally warned not to disclose the amount to the other poultry farm owners. "I was just saying that, you know." The village Party secretary said to me when we left the house of Wan Qiu, "They will discover how much the others get eventually and I am just asking them not to make a fuss over the amount. That will cause troubles and destroy stability."

Through one way or another, the poultry farm owners in Li Village all got the state compensation of around 270 *yuan* per room, and the village cadre was absolutely right that they did not keep it a secret to each other at all. At one of their social gatherings, when they openly discussed the compensation they got from the village government, I jokingly suggested that they could actually make the requests together to improve efficiency. Wan Qiu turned quite serious and explained to me:

“Complaining to the cadres as a group? That looks like an uprising against them (*zao fan*) and looks bad and disrespectful. We do not do such trouble-making things here... We peacefully discuss very specific problems with them and they are good at settling them for us... You see, they even keep a balance among us, making sure no one is getting too much or too little... I feel comfortable in that way and I trust the village cadres.”⁴⁶

Limitation The village cadres, who have close ties with the officials in the township and the county, are the personal channels of the small business owners to resist the implementation of national policies and solve their individual problems. The small business owners are appreciative of the patronage of the village cadres and disorganize their grievances to avoid being politically offensive. However, at times such as the compulsory demolition described at the beginning of the chapter, when the will of the central government is strong and specific enough to suppress local conspiracy of deviation, the individual based resistance of the small business owners reaches its limit. For the Sun brothers who own the restaurant, for instance, since radically taking their issue to protesting would only result in destroying the village symbiotic clientelism they have established with the village cadres, compliance with the policy was their only option left. In our conversations, they blamed the central governmental officials in Beijing for neglecting the interest of the rural population and imposing often unreasonable demands only to make themselves look good, while they understood that the benevolent village cadres had tried every means available to help but in vain.⁴⁷

Local Regulations and Projects

The county and the township promulgate their own strict regulations to project the impression to their supervisors at the higher level that under their administration

⁴⁶ Interview in Li village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/1/2006.

⁴⁷ Interview in Gold-Bull Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/2/2008.

economic and social development of the area is of high quality. Yet as discussed in the previous chapter, for the small business owners in W Township, with their relational social capital with the village cadres, these regulations usually stay merely on paper. The village cadres often voluntarily offer them help to individually cope with local inspections or license renewal and a satisfying settlement is almost guaranteed.

Some local regulations, such as the ones of highway speed limit and truck cargo weight, apply to not only the villagers residing in the township or the county, but also the others who travel to or happen to pass by the area. While the local small business owners, under the patronage of the village cadres, easily get exempted, the people from the outside without local *guanxi* become the sole targets of fines and fees. Local protectionism is therefore widely and legitimately practiced in W Township.

At the village level, the government, when implementing public projects like road construction or school renovation, often asks the villagers to donate money and/or contribute labor. Grateful to the favors from the village cadres, the small business owners as members of the VRA willingly endorse the project proposals of the cadres and hardly ever doubt the money and labor requested. In addition to complying with this level of the rural state, they responsibly play the role of the villagers' representatives, delivering the decision of the VRA to their neighbors and pushing for cooperation.

Limitation In exchange for the patronage of the village cadres to survive in the local market, the small business owners are obliged to support the village government. Although they could find outlets to get around and play with some national and local policies, this lowest level of the rural state ironically is irresistible.

After a heavy rainstorm flooded Big-Forest Village in May 2006, a VRA meeting was called to discuss the drainage system in the village. Some representatives proposed to widen the current drains yet some others thought new drains should be dug. Considering the financial situation of the village, the Party secretary agreed with the former. Deng Wen, whose home is pretty far from the current drains and suffered loss in the storm, was unhappy about the suggestion and said, “I think we have too few drains in the village. Is it possible to build some new ones?” Although he was eager to direct the discussion to the other option, his tone was still respectful without being rude. “But you have to understand that we do not have that much collective fund, we need to pave some new roads this year,” said the secretary. “I heard the village is going to rent some collective land to a villager to start an orchard, when will we have that rent money?” Deng Wen asked in the same tone sounding a bit desperate. The Party secretary, annoyed by the push, raised his voice a little and said, “Nothing is settled yet, you know that we are still discussing the details, do not start the rumor!” Deng Wen said nothing more and lit a cigarette, and the VRA decided to widen the current drains that day.

After the meeting, Deng Wen talked to me on his way back home. That was my first month in the township and he at the moment, as many other villagers, thought I was a naïve urban university student who came to the area during the summer vacation to tour the countryside. He seriously educated me not to misunderstand the conversations at the meeting or the complexity of village politics.

“The secretary is a very good person and has done lots of good things for our village. You just need to know how to work with him, not to annoy him, and know when to shut up... It is useless to continue arguing with him as most of the other VRA

members will agree with him anyway, and I will look bad to be that rude... I can live with the village drainage system and just wait and see if the widening would work.”⁴⁸

In the villages with divided and competing social institutions, the small business owners have to sacrifice their family interest to support and protect the village cadre who represents the institution and offers patronage to its members. In Gold-Bull Village, during the campaign of “New Socialist Countryside,” the DVC, Fang Ming, led a village project to install a garbage collection system in the residential area. Trash cans were proposed to be built along the main village roads, at the interval distance of 20 meters. One trash can was designed to be right in front of the house of Fang Hui, a truck driver and a VRA member, whose household included his 86-year-old father and a 2-month-old infant girl. Fang Hui was worried that in the brutal summer weather, the trash can would produce hazardous bacteria and smell to the vulnerable family members. The DVC, accompanied by two other members of the Fang lineage, visited his house before he submitted his proposal to the VRA and persuaded him to cooperate.

“You see, Hui, the Chens (the opposite lineage in the village) are waiting for our mistakes and we must make this project a success to ensure our status in the village government... I am glad that it is your house, not a house of a Chen person – they would certainly make a huge fuss over unfairness, as you know... We must unite or nothing good happens to us...”

Fang Hui nodded, unable to present any disagreement or rejection to the cadre who patronizes him. Although he was still concerned with the health of his family, he did not say one word at the VRA meeting later that month and the DVC’s proposal was approved.

Small Business Owners against Economic Elites

The small business owners in W Township regard the elite entrepreneurs as different from themselves, although some of them are in the same business. The entrepreneurs, in

⁴⁸ Interview in Big-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 5/24/2006.

their words, are capable and connected people who “earn the big money” while their business is just to make ends meet in a family (*yangjiahukou*). They withdraw from competing with the enterprises for business opportunities and avoid direct confrontation with the economic elites, knowing the competitiveness of the larger enterprises and the fact that the village cadres, their protective umbrella in the market, tend to be on the side of the economic elites. In September 2007, a luxurious apartment complex called “Victoria Garden” was completed and hot in real estate sale in the city of Cangzhou. In a casual after-dinner chat with a plumber in Lower-Gao Village, I mentioned that might be a nice business opportunity as I assumed the new homes would all need some kitchen and bathroom projects. The plumber slightly shook his head and said:

“Not really for me. The village Party secretary told me that Sun Nan, the big construction boss from the city who often comes here for laborers, has contracted already the plumbing work with the real estate company. It is such a piece of fat meat and he must have been working hard to get the contract... How can I get a share? I do not think the secretary could even open his mouth to ask for me. Sun Nan donated quite a lot of money to our village every year and we all need him, the villagers and the village government alike.”⁴⁹

Sometimes, when the economic elites are too busy to handle their contracts at hand, they are willing to sub-contract some business opportunities to the small business owners in the villages. The deal, however, is never directly negotiated between the two parties. Instead, the village cadres serve as the mediating agent fulfilling the wills of the elites and meanwhile make the price acceptable for the small business owners. Chu Hai’s Yi-Fan Truck Transportation Company in the summer of 2007 held a huge contract to transport coal from a mine in Shanxi Province to Beijing, but he encountered some problems in truck coordination. He asked Wang Mei, the Party secretary of Chu Village,

⁴⁹ Interview in Lower-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/16/2007.

if any truck owners in the village would be interested in taking some transportation trips. Wang Mei later found Chu Cheng, a starter in a family transportation business, and offered him the chance. I talked with Chu Cheng's wife when her husband left for the transportation trip, yet she was not too thrilled about the opportunity.

“According to the contract, we can earn around 500 *yuan* for a truck of coal, after the cost of gas and insurance is subtracted. It is better than nothing of course but it takes such hard and dangerous work! ... I heard from the drivers working for the company that in the original contract that the company has, the boss can profit 1,200 *yuan* for a truck of coal. Anyways, the price was what the secretary could get for us and we appreciate her help...”⁵⁰

In shrewd collaboration with the village cadres, the elite entrepreneurs in W Township largely suppress the grievances of the small business owners in business competition.

One everyday-resistance strategy the small business owners still use is to make efforts to frequent the small businesses in the village whenever possible, instead of presenting the opportunities to the elite enterprises. The poultry farm and orchard owners always pay the local truck owners and drivers to transport their products to the county center or the cities; they always hire the plumbers in the village to fix their water-provision system or irrigation pipes; the truck owners and drivers also always visit the small restaurants and bath places nearby when they come home. Although the mass production of the large truck transportation companies, the construction contract companies, and the chain stores in the urban centers might provide better prices or services, it seldom occurs to the small business owners to check them out. “To keep a family business is not an easy job,”

⁵⁰ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/9/2007.

they often said. “We understand each other’s situations and give support, although only in very small amount. It is also safe, convenient, and reliable in this way.”⁵¹

The anger of the small business owners could escalate and erupt when the production of their family businesses is disrupted or destroyed by the star rural enterprises’ consumption of the local natural resources. After some heavily-polluting factories were moved from the cities to the countryside in the 1990s, serious environmental problems have frequently appeared in W Township. The creeks and rivers, for example, have shifted in color from crystal clear as in the villagers’ memories to muddy yellow and in some parts ink black, and has been transformed from joyful places for fishing and swimming to smelly accommodations of clusters of colossal mosquitoes and weird bugs. In April 2006, Li Fuhua, a pear orchard owner in Small-Forest Village, discovered in dismay that all his fruit trees were dying, with the trunks darkening, the leaves shrinking, and the emerging baby fruits drying and dropping to the ground. His orchard was near to the dairy product company in the township, whose factory drains off dirty black water. He expressed the concern that the waste water would pollute the agricultural irrigation in the village to the village cadres when the company was established yet was guaranteed that the company would clean the water with chemicals before dispatching it. However, Li Fuhua kept his suspicion, and when he noticed the strange substance of dark color sticking to the inside of his watering pipes, he immediately connected the waste water of the dairy factory with the catastrophe in his orchard.

⁵¹ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/6/2006; interview in Gold-Bull Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/24/2006; Interview in Fu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/5/2007; Interview in Tan Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/21/2007; Interview in Bird-Rest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/15/2007.

As usual, he in a hurry contacted the village Party secretary, who suggested he rescue the pear trees first and meanwhile document valid evidence to prove the causes. In mid May, with the help of the village government, some agricultural experts from the county were invited to the village to examine the trees, the land, and the irrigation water. They came to the conclusion that the trees were fatally poisoned with no hope of recovery due to some drastic changes in the ecological system of the orchard. Li Fuhua and his wife burst into tears upon hearing the diagnosis and murmured, “Our money was thrown into the water (*da shui piao*)... No income this year...” The experts later analyzed the black substance in the watering pipes and put down on paper that “it is industrial chemicals that could come from factory waste water.” They also predicted that if the irrigation water was the source of the poisoning, the land in the orchard is completely polluted and would be no longer suitable for fruit trees or any other sort of agricultural production. Li Fuhua’s current lease to use the land for orchard with the village government started in 2002 and the term would not end until 2012.

He held the hands of the village Party secretary after the experts handed them the report and said weakly yet emotionally, “How could I pay the rent to the village if the land is poisoned and useless? Please, secretary, please help us get those who are truly responsible... No one else can help us now. The black-hearted entrepreneurs must compensate my family and our village!”

Huang Jin, the Party secretary of Small-Forest Village, decided to pay a visit to the owner of Good-Taste Dairy Product Company, Zhao Kai, the following week, with all his anxieties.

“I am jammed in a sandwich – both the enterprise and the villager want me to be on their side. How could I satisfy them under such circumstances? The village suffers too as we’ve lost that piece of good land. Someone has to pay for the loss, you know... And we need to settle this peacefully.” He said to me, could not help complaining. “Do I think if the enterprise pollutes? Who in the township does not?”

But if we do not have the enterprises here, the government will go bankruptcy. I guess that is the price for the improvement of life quality and stability...”⁵²

Zhao Kai received us in his large, bright, air-conditioned and modernly decorated office in the company. An urban resident in the city of Cangzhou, Zhao Kai innovatively started his own dairy business in W Township in mid 1990s and has become a repeatedly awarded star entrepreneur in the city and the province. Like most of the economic elites in the township, he certainly showed his pride in his achievements yet remained friendly and approachable in his hand-tailored suit. Huang Jin cautiously told him about the incident in the pear orchard after several rounds of greetings and asked if it would be possible for him to compensate the villager to settle the grievances.

“Huang, I like you and we are friends, as you know.” Zhao Kai said after a few seconds of silence. “But I do not think this request is reasonable. My enterprise has the reputation of being green. We clean the waste water every time before it is dispatched. It cannot be us who poisoned the fruit trees... The villagers cannot pin any loss they have on us, you see – this time an orchard, next time, the wheat field, next time, maybe a chicken farm – who will be able to stand this? Huang, you understand how hard it is to manage the company and the factory, and the villagers, they are just jealous. Am I not right, Dr. Dai?”

He looked at me and asked. Like the Party secretary, I was unable to respond to his speech with proper words and silence fell among us. Huang Jin shifted the topic when he started chatting again with the entrepreneur and gave up further pursuing any compensation.

On our way back to the village, Huang Jin did not say much but I could feel his disappointment and agitation. At the village entrance, we met Li Fuhua under a big tree, talking with some other small business owners in the village.

“Every time I bike past the back gate of that factory, the sick smell of the black waste water hits me! How could it be harmless to our land? Impossible! Think about the

⁵² Interview in Small-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 5/26/2006.

water your ducks are drinking, think about the irrigation you give to your date trees, and even our drinking water!”

His exclamations flew to our ears and Huang Jin agilely stepped forward and held the arm of Li Fuhua. “Stop starting rumors. Now come with me and I need to talk to you.” The annoyed face of the Party secretary shut Li Fuhua up, and after dismissing the crowd, he obediently followed us to the secretary’s office.

“How can you be so thought-less? Will you benefit from starting the panic in the village? If any social unrest begins, the village will be on the black-name-list and I can no longer help you, don’t you understand!” The furious Party secretary raised his voice and scolded the orchard owner. Li Fuhua held his head down and apologized for losing his mind at this difficult time of his family. The secretary warned him, “I know your sufferings, but you talk like this in public once more, you are on your own on this.”

With regret, we informed Li Fuhua that no easy compensation would be coming from the dairy product company. “Damn it!” He cried. The secretary then advised him to use the legal system by taking the case to the county court. “I know some officials working there and can get you in touch with them. They probably will help.” Li Fuhua liked the idea of lawsuit, and before leaving for home, he thanked the Party secretary for all the efforts with the promise that he would never spread horrors again. From that day on, I never saw Li Fuhua discussing the dairy product factory with the other villagers and he took the battle on his own.

Later that evening, Huang Jin paid visits to the small business owners with whom Li Fuhua was discussing the issue in the afternoon. He explained to them how the investigation of the water pollution was far from reaching concrete conclusions, how poultry, apple trees, and date trees are different from pear trees in absorbing water, and

how the water provision in Li Fuhua's orchard differs from the other farms and the residential areas. "It is really not necessary to start to worry now. And in the worst situation, if anything takes place, you know I will be there working for you and your family." He gave his words to every one of them in person. I told him my amazement at his knowledge of fruit trees and poultry farms when we eventually finished all the visits, yet he replied with a smirk, "I don't really know that stuff... But I've got to do something to peace their minds and prevent any organized petitions at the very beginning because those will bring unimaginably serious consequences."

In mid July, the Q County court heard Li Fuhua's statement of the pear orchard case and started their investigation to gather evidence. However, Good-Taste Dairy Product Company refused to open the gate for the officials who requested to examine the cleaning system of the waste water and the rumor was that the upper-level government in the province made the decision to protect the star enterprise. One day towards the end of August, an official in the county court finally telephoned the village Party secretary informing him that the case of Li Fuhua could not be placed on file due to lack of supporting evidence.

"The court has their own dilemmas as they have to cooperate with the upper-level, Fuhua." The Party secretary was trying to give some comfort to Li Fuhua, who in desperate lost his temper, when I arrived at the office.

"But how could there be enough evidence if they even could not get in the factory! This is ridiculous! These dogs only work for their masters, the damn rich entrepreneurs!" Li Fuhua shouted.

"Please, calm down, Fuhua." Huang Jin patted him on the shoulders softly. "You know there is no use to talk like that... If this is the way the situation leads us, we then have only one choice, the media." Huang Jin then handed Li Fuhua the contact information of a reporter in the city of Tianjin, who is interested in rural grievances and has connections with the CCTV (Chinese Central Television) in Beijing. Huang Jin got the reference from a sympathetic court official in the county, whose name he

withheld from us. “But remember, Fuhua, just ask for compensation for your own family and do not say too much, understood?” Li Fuhua nodded.

CCTV at last broadcasted the story of Li Fuhua with the title “The Nightmare of a Pear Farmer” in June 2007.

“The company came to our village, polluted the land, and ruined my orchard. I just want to get the compensation that I deserve. Why is finding the justice so hard? ... The rural government in my home village tried the best to help, but we could not beat the powerful entrepreneur...”

Li Fuhua talked with tears falling down his face on TV and through the whole program, he, as the village Party secretary told him, focused on his own case without mentioning anything negative about the rural state.

I could not read much from the emotionless face and the silence of Huang Jin when we watched the broadcasting together. A few days later, we were both invited to a banquet with people from the dairy product company, during which we met the lawyer Zhao Kai hired for the case. Reputed as the most successful one in environmental cases in the province, Mr. Shen arrogantly told everyone at the table that Li Fuhua would not have a chance to get the compensation because it was impossible to establish a causal relationship between the enterprise and his loss. “I totally agree with you.” Huang Jin commented, which astonished me. “The villager could believe whatever he believes and takes it to the higher authority. But without hard evidence, I cannot see the direct causation and I’d rather believe you.” He looked at Zhao Kai sincerely and continued. The two consumed wine in cheers and laughter as their intimate friendship was reinforced, and the discussion of the pear orchard ceased there. Huang Jin later on refused to talk about the case with me, leaving me the words – “Dr. Dai, smart as you, you must have understood.”

The other villagers, especially the small business owners in the village, closely followed the case and told me that they carefully watched the TV program at home. I noticed changes had taken place in their lives after they came to know the orchard disaster: they purchased bottled purified water for the young children in the families and strictly forbade them to drink the un-boiled water; a chicken farm owner, instead of using the river nearby, transported tap water from his home to the farm to feed the poultry; a date orchard owner stopped using the water in the South River, which Li Fuhua used, in irrigation, and started paving new pipes from the North River. In casual chatting, I heard their compassion and support to Li Fuhua although they at once would stop to request me not to tell the Party secretary. When asked if joining Li Fuhua in lawsuit was on their mind, they answered with a shrewd smile,

“Case-by-case works better in the village... Only with the *guanxi* and the assistance of the Party secretary can we have a voice in the state system, you see, just like Li Fuhua. There is no other plausible way for us, the rural people. We’d never meddle in the politics or complicate the issues to make troubles for the secretary.”⁵³

Under the public pressure, Li Fuhua’s case was accepted in the Q County court in November and the trial was scheduled in January 2008. Li Fuhua sounded euphoric on the phone when he told me that two law professors from Beijing would provide legal-aid without any charges and represent him in court. Although the conceited face and the confident words of Mr. Shen kept haunting me, I wished him the best of luck. It did not strike me by too much surprise when I heard that Li Fuhua lost his case in the first trial, followed by another failure in the second trial in April 2008.

When I visited his house in July 2008, Li Fuhua and his wife had given up the pear orchard and went back to grain farming on their family farmland. They had also taken up

⁵³ Interviews in Small-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/25/2007.

seasonal employment to work on the shop floor of the lumber factory in the township to supplement their family income. Frustrated by the impossibility of justice in the countryside, their son set off to the city of Beijing earlier in 2008 and became a migrant worker. The boy, as he wrote to his father in a letter, is determined to earn big money in the city and come home to build a larger factory than that of Good-Taste Dairy Product Company. In other words, they were in the transition from the class of small business owners to the class of farmers.

“We tried really hard, but the court decided that we did not have enough evidence for the compensation requested.” Li Fuhua told me. “There is no point to continue the orchard because I know nothing would grow in there. It is very nice that the village government did not ask us to keep paying the rent till 2012 – I guess the contract is naturally terminated. What a waste! That used to be one of the best pieces of land in our village... Now I still have to pay for the court fees of the two trials and my family need to work harder... Although there are technical difficulties in proving that the factory was the direct cause of the death of my pear trees, the professors from Beijing still said they would aid me if I want to sue the factory to higher courts. They are such kind people. But I am really hesitant, you know, because the opponents are too strong to shake. Sometimes I wonder if I was messing with the wrong people in the countryside...”

He showed me the court documents stating the reasons why he lost his case. First, over 700 enterprises release waste water to the South River and the plaintiff failed to directly associate the defendant to the loss. And secondly, nothing has happened to the other farms in Small-Forest Village, which are also near to the factory, and the causes behind the fact need to be clarified.

“That is because no one is using the water in the South River now.” Li Fuhua pointed at the second statement and said. “After the incident in my orchard, I know the others have channeled water from the North River or some reservoirs for their crops. I hope things would work for them, but as the environment here deteriorates, who knows when the other water sources would turn bad...”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Interview in Small-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/18/2008.

I later visited the date orchard in the village, whose owner is a close friend of Li Fuhua. He admitted that he had completely switched to the water in the North River and the quality of the water for agricultural use in the village worried him.

“I am very careful and my wife sometimes laughs at me. I examine the water in my pipes several times a day so that I could detect it if something is not going right. You cannot be too careful, right? ... Fuhua is an honest man and the court decision is quite unfair. I heard the factory said that his pear trees died because of the weather here, sour rain or something, not the irrigation water, but should not those enterprises be responsible for that too? We never had sour rain here when I was a kid, anyway... But it is no use to fight with the rich. It is like hitting an egg to a rock – we are doomed to fail. One needs *guanxi* with the high officials to win; otherwise, it is just useless. For us villagers, the best way is to settle for what the village cadres can get for your family, and beyond their *guanxi*, we can go nowhere...”⁵⁵

Limitation Even though the intimate friendship between the village cadres and the economic elites is no secret in W Township, the small business owners adopt the assistance of the village cadres as the only feasible way to resist the entrepreneurs. They trust the cadres would by reasonable means defend their interest and voluntarily follow the steps and rules that the village government designs by elaborating their grievances in individual cases. So as to protect the political career of the respectable cadres and maintain the symbiotic clientelism in the villages, the small business owners do not have the option of organized resistance on their mind or in their action.

Individually “*zou guanxi*” through the village cadres unfortunately bring extremely limited outcomes to the small business owners resisting the dominance of the rural social and economic elites. Depending on the successful entrepreneurs fiscally, the village cadres are unable to reliably safeguard or represent the small business owners in the communication with the elites. The structural constraints deter them from pushing for the best interest of the villagers although they may want to speak for the people. When the

⁵⁵ Interview in Small-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 7/21/2008.

grievances of the small business owners in disorganization are brought into the wider post-socialist Chinese political system, beyond the patronage of the village cadres, their vulnerability is only more apparently exposed to their astute and powerful opponents. The small business owners in W Township, faced with the successful entrepreneurs, have developed their self-protective coping strategies to avoid direct confrontation and hide frustration deep in emotions.

Farmers against the Local Rural State

The farmers in W Township, living in the distant clientelism with the village cadres, do not receive particular favors to legally get around the regulations and are the targets of the local rural state to implement both national and local policies and projects. However, to maintain social stability, the village cadres often tolerate the disorganized and silent individual resistance from this bottom class, taking into account their inability to pay the fines or fees.

When a farmer's family is expecting an un-allowed child, the village government would precisely ticket the family the fine and send the bill to the household. As the family planning policy goes, the child should not get registered in the household registration system until the fine is paid in full amount. The village cadres always tell them, "It is the central government's policy, not my policy. So do not hate me for that." But delay in payment for the fines is a common practice of the farmers in every village of W Township. Children "black" in the household registration system could be found living in a normal childhood without harassment until they reach the age of elementary school education, when they are required to have village registration to get enrolled. However, in quite a few cases, with permissions of the village cadres, the village

elementary school still lets the children attend the classes before the family can clear the fines and register the child in the household system. The school enrollment can take place when the child is already in the fourth or the fifth grade. The real deadline comes when the child goes to the township junior high school outside the home village, where the enrollment process has to be handled in strict official procedures.

But the tolerance practiced by the village government must be concealed from the upper-level Party-state to preserve the career record and the reputation of loyalty of the village cadres. The village cadres cultivate close ties with the township officials in the branch of family planning and are informed immediately if a raid of un-allowed births is organized at the city or the county level. On one early morning in summer 2007, at around 5 am, I was still fast asleep in the township staff dorm located near Upper-Gao Village when the sharp and loud radio of the village startled me. The DVC shouted at the top of his voice to the microphone:

“Every villager, every villager, this is an urgent notice. A team from the county’s Family Planning Office is going to raid our village this morning. Their estimated arrival time is 8:30 am, again, 8:30 this morning. The other targeted villages in the township are Tan Village, River-End Village, and Small-Forest Village. Again, the targeted villages are our village, Tan Village, River-End Village, and Small-Forest Village. Please get prepared!”

I got up and saw villagers, holding their young children and big luggage bags, rushing out of the village in a highly proficient manner that requires repeated practices. I later learned from the DVC that the raid team was going to randomly visit some households and request to see the household registrations of the children. If the un-registered child is caught, the family would only be allowed 7 days to turn in the fines in the whole amount and the county’s Family Planning Office would closely supervise the fine collection. The farmer villagers, not having the cash put together, carried the illegally born child and

stuff like toys at home indicating the existence of an additional child to hide at the home of a relative or a friend in a village that was not on the target list, with the village cadres as their accomplice.

“What are we supposed to do? Kill their children or burn down their houses to push for the fines? Then they will surely organize a petition to the higher authority and everything is out of control.” The DVC told me. “As long as they do not make troubles like protesting or uprising, I am fine with it.”⁵⁶

Many of the farmer Party members owe the village Party-government membership fees. The township Party branch went to every village once a year to collect Party membership dues and instead of visiting every Party member, they conveniently asked the village Party branch to pay for all the members in the village together in advance and collect the money from the individual members later. In 2008, the annual due for a non-cadre common villager Party member was 36 *yuan*. After using the village collective fund to pay the township branch, the Party secretary of Tan Village took out the villager name roster from a locked drawer and put down the amount of 36 *yuan* in the column of “debts” to the names of Party members. Some of the names had the amount from last year crossed out yet some others had accumulated the fees in debts for several years.

“This is an old and dirt poor Party member.” He pointed at one name and said. “His family hardly has enough money for food. How could we expect him to pay the membership fees? ... We could not force him to pay either, as that will irritate the family and they will start to complain about everything... So we just let them owe us and no one knows when the debts will be cleared.”

The farmers are also usually reluctant to contribute the mandatory amount of cash to the village projects endorsed by the VRA and sometimes life hardship compels them to directly refuse the village cadres collecting the contributions. Seeming offensive and unacceptable in the eyes of the small business owners, such actions are methods of

⁵⁶ Interview in Upper-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/10/2007.

resistance available and feasible to the farmers because the cadres, who avoid cornering the farmers into collective protesting, often compromise with the farmers' rejections.

The Party secretary of Gold-Bull Village, Chen Bo, proposed to install a water-purification system in the village in summer 2007, with a cash contribution of 20 *yuan* from every adult villager living above the poverty line. After the proposal was passed in the VRA, Chen Qing, a truck businessman and a VRA member, went to collect the money from Chen Shanfa, a farmer, yet got rejected. "You know the harvest this year is so bad." The farmer complained and almost cried. "I know my family is not below the poverty line, but with such little income, I can hardly support my children in school..." Chen Qing reminded him that it was the Party secretary from the Chen lineage that was leading the project and persuaded him to cooperate to protect the cadre. Chen Shanfa replied, "I know we are like brothers in a big family. But now I am in trouble, can the lineage give me a special favor?" Chen Qing in the end failed to collect the money and went to see the Party secretary in disappointment. "That is OK. Let's just leave him alone this time and not push him to his limits." Chen Bo comforted the VRA member in their discussion. "We do not really need the 20 *yuan* from him as long as all the business households donate the money. Isn't that right?" Chen Bo then took out the villager roster and added the amount of 20 *yuan* into the debts of Chen Shanfa to the village government.

The village cadres rationalize their behaviors of tolerance as fulfilling their part in the distant clientelism with the farmers and preventing collective petition and protesting via benevolence. But on the side of the farmers, they see them as particularistic favors from

the cadres in a personal network and use the category of “*zou guanxi*” to describe their silent resistance. Gao Chuan, a farmer in Upper-Gao Village, told me in an interview:

“I think the village cadres here have good hearts. They still care about and try to help the poor people like me at the bottom... I guess it is because we live in the same village and have some *guanxi*... They allow me not to pay on time the family planning fines, for example, and help me to get around other things. *Zou guanxi* is so important in rural China, you see, if one ever wants to get anything done... The connection with the village cadres is the only *guanxi* I have and that is why we receive some help in the village. In the outside world, we are very vulnerable, unlike you urban people...”⁵⁷

Limitation While allowing the accumulation of debts of the farmers, the village cadres use various ways to request pay-backs. They ask the farmers to pay by labor when service is needed to renovate the roof of the offices of the village Party-government, to dust the desks of the cadres, or to clean the village streets after rain and storms. The state subsidies to farmers for growing grains and producing scarce agricultural commodities for the market such as pork in 2007 and 2008 do not directly go to the hands of the recipients. Instead, the village governments receive the money from the upper-level and are supposed to deliver it to the farmers. The village cadres in W Township often transfer the money into the cash flow of the village government without asking the farmers, although the farmers’ families could be waiting for the subsidies to make ends meet. In the summer of 2006, when I told Li Qiang, a farmer in Small-Forest Village, that I read on the newspaper the central government was distributing cash subsidies to farmers growing wheat, he did not seem interested in the news or the amount.

“I probably won’t get it in my hands. I owe lots of debts to the village government. The fine for my younger son alone is enough to kill me. The DVC I think will document that money as my payment for some of the debts... No, I don’t feel uncomfortable about that. The cadres have their jobs to do and it is already nice of them to let me owe the money... They do not push me very hard because in the

⁵⁷ Interview in Upper-Gao Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/1/2007.

village we have some *guanxi*, and I will not be demanding for that money to ruin the relationship.”⁵⁸

The farmers’ debts to the village government sometimes are turned into weapons of negotiation of the village cadres, which they could use to coerce the farmers to comply with policy and project implementation. During the move-out of poultry-and-livestock-raising households in Fu Village, two difficult options were laid out in front of Fu Yun, a farmer: either to get rid of his a few hens and ducks or move out of the residential center. He wanted to keep the poultry for food and some income yet found the moving too costly for his family, therefore rejected the request of the villagers’ representative. The village Party secretary paid a visit to his house the next evening to persuade him.

“The village government treats people nicely, as you must know. See how we tolerate it that the villagers do not pay us the fines and fees on time? But we need the support from the villagers too because only with that could we keep the village government running... Fu Yun, you are a clear-minded man and you must know that it has to be a two-way road, right?”

Fu Yun became silent upon hearing the words and it was clear that he would have to pick one out of the two options in order to sustain the possibility to delay the payment for his debts to the village government. The farmers’ quiet resistance to the local rural state then becomes the tools of the cadres to suppress their louder disgruntlement and antagonism. Their *guanxi* with the village cadres, far less intimate than the one of the small business owners, does not bring the local conspiracy to permanently legalize their deviant behaviors, and the mere temporary tolerance is the limit of their disorganized resistance of “*zou guanxi*.”

⁵⁸ Interview in Small-Forest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/13/2006.

Farmers against Economic Elites

The farmers, often times the workers in the rural enterprises, undergo the exploitation of the economic elites, yet their intense and directly confronting relationship in W Township is mediated by the efforts of the village cadres. Being at the same time the recruiting and controlling agent of the successful rural entrepreneurs and the hope of justice of the farmers, the village cadres are in their own words “persons with double faces” (*shuangmian ren*), just like the role they sometimes play between the economic elites and the small business owners. But in their distant clientelism with farmers, they adopt an approach of general and procedural benevolence, unlike the close guidance to the small business owners to negotiate with the elites, to prevent organized protests. The mediation and negotiation process therefore is more oppressing to the farmers, which may generate their anger towards the cadres and violence against the factory bosses, however, the organization of collective action is still dismantled in the grassroots political and economic structure.

In addition to the fact that the rural private enterprises bring the farmers’ families non-agricultural job opportunities and extra income, the unconditional admirations of the elites by village cadres successfully have made it a prevalent understanding in the villages that the farmers should be appreciative of the entrepreneurs despite their meager payment, the unfair contract terms, and the harsh conditions in the sweatshops. Although I often hear the farmers joking about the unfit shape and possible sexual dysfunctions of the economic elites due to their high cholesterol diet, they frequently in their casual conversations express their approval of those outstanding individuals using the words “smart guy,” “courageous,” “insightful,” and “contributing to the hometown.”

Delays in salary and torturing work environments are the two common concerns of the farmers working in the factories. Because there is an absence of unions, the farmers fail to communicate with one another and organize the grievances they share, but instead they articulate their problems and request changes to the cadres of their home villages, through whom they obtain the jobs in the first place. Often, the workers in the same factory are seeking justice from the cadres of different villages, and the cellular unit of village undermines the possibility of collectiveness in the work places. When discussing with the village cadres face-to-face about their disgruntlements with the enterprises, the farmers naturally frame their issues as individual cases that could be settled by using the personal *guanxi* with the cadres.

The weather in W Township was outrageously torrid during the summer months of 2006, but on the shop floors of the lumber factory, the gates were closed to conceal the machine noise and the workers were not allowed to turn on the electric fans in order to cut energy costs. The burning temperature and the stagnant air immersed in the heavy sweat smell produced widespread symptoms of headache, dizziness, and stomach sickness among the workers. Yang Fanli, a farmer worker from River-End Village, found the conditions too harsh to bear and went to see the Party secretary of the village one day after dinner. The secretary sat in a comfortable wooden chair holding a cup of tea while he enjoyed the cool breeze in his backyard. He did not offer Yang Fanli a seat in the yard or tea in his pot. Yang Fanli politely stood beside him and started talking about the working environment in the factory.

“Maybe it is just me, as I have been known as having little tolerance of high temperature since I was a little boy, but it is really hot in the work shop.” Yang Fanli said. “And there is no ventilation system to bring in fresh air. That makes me feel sick, just like a pregnant woman.”

“To have a job and earn more money, you always have to suffer and sacrifice, right? Nothing is free in our society.” The Party secretary replied slowly. “The enterprises in the countryside, you must understand, have to run at very low cost to survive and profit. It is not easy for the owners, our fellow rural people.”

“I surely understand that and I do respect the boss. But would it be possible at all to turn on the fans when it is really hot? Otherwise, I am afraid my body could hardly stand the conditions and might eventually collapse.” Yang Fanli asked in a soft tone.

The secretary thought for a few seconds and nodded his head. “OK. I will talk to the owner of the lumber factory and mention this to him. Fanli, we live in the same village so I am doing this for you as a personal favor. Do not complain too much in the factory with other workers, all right? That is stirring the turbid water (*jiao hunshui*) and making troubles. And if the boss is agitated, it will be hard for me to settle this for you, you know?”

“Yes, of course, secretary.” Yang Fanli promised. “I only talked to you about it as you introduced me to the job. Also in that temperature, I am too tired to say a word anyway... I always come to you for help and what is the point to complain to the other workers? They cannot get things done for me. Only you can!” After thanking the Party secretary, Yang Fanli concluded his short visit and left the house cheerfully.

The village Party secretary made a phone call in his office the next morning to the owner of the lumber factory, Liu Minwen, and after greeting several members in his extended family, the secretary started talking about Yang Fanli. “Liu, I have this person in my village who works in your factory. He is an honest and diligent young man and his late father used to be my neighbor. That is why I introduced him to the factory. But poor guy, he has not been in very good health and could hardly endure environment with very high temperature...”

“I know, I know, this is summer time and it is hot everywhere... Is it possible to have the electric fans on in the shops to help him work? Not for everyday, but only for times that are really hot? ... Yeah, just a favor to him, to keep him working without complaints.”

“No, no, he is not complaining to everyone, he is not a trouble maker at all... You smart guys are always so vigilant.” The secretary said with smirks. “Relax; he is not the material to start protests or anything. He has a timid temper... Above 35 degrees (Centigrade, about 95 degrees Fahrenheit) is good. It is reasonable and it is very merciful of you! I will tell him immediately and he will be so grateful to you.”

“Liu, you really helped me this time, you know. Thank you so much! Sure, we will get together and have wines. My treat, as I owe you.” The secretary produced the sound of laughter and responded warmly to the get-together suggestion of the entrepreneur.

From the next workday on, the electric fans in the work shops of the lumber factory are turned on when the temperature is over 35 degrees Centigrade. Yang Fanli gladly survived the summer months on the shop floor yet never boasted to the other workers about his role in this change. He was extremely grateful to the village Party secretary and told me that “staying in low key (*didiao*) and approaching the village cadres if anything troubles you”⁵⁹ is the wise and efficient way to solve the problems in the factories.

Unfortunately, not every concern of the farmers with the rural enterprises could be settled so smoothly in the local *guanxi* chains. Sometimes the cadres avoided challenging the economic elites by pushing for the requests of the farmers and sometimes the entrepreneurs decided to turn down the cadres to maximize their profits. To safeguard their interest, the farmers under these circumstances would tear off the peaceful veil of their distant clientelism with the cadres and make rude threats to force them to be their representatives in the negotiation with the elites. Although their rebelling plans usually are frustrated, dismissed, and controlled in the mediation of the small business owners on the side of the village cadres, their strategy of threatening to some extent brings solutions and settlements to their grievances.

There used to be a heavily polluted lumber factory near Chu Village that failed to pass the province environmental inspection in 2005 and the rumor in the villages was that the owner accidentally offended an important official in the province at a banquet table. After a long negotiation between the factory owner and the village government under the supervision of the officials from the city of Cangzhou, the factory agreed to stop its production line in 2006 and promised to transfer to cleaner industries. However, the

⁵⁹ Interview in River-End Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/19/2006.

enforcement of the agreement was loose and slow, as the villagers did not see a decisive date of closure or transfer despite a temporary cease in production, and they believed that it was partly due to the friendly relationship between the owner and the village Party secretary.

One afternoon in June 2007, while Li Huang and his wife were working in their wheat fields, black smoke emitted from the factory covered the fields, full of almost-ready-to-be-harvested wheat, with a dirty fog. Their farmland is the closest to the factory in the village and in 2006, the village Party secretary, Wang Mei, repeatedly guaranteed the family that the agreement under negotiation would take care of their concerns with the reported pollution.

Grabbing some wheat in the fields, whose beautiful gold color had been turned into dark grey, the couple feeling cheated angrily smashed into Wang Mei's office. "Look at what the lumber factory has done!" Li Huang put the wheat on her desk and cried loudly. "Is this place still operating?" Wang Mei was chatting with some VRA members and they were all astonished to see the couple in such manners. "According the agreement, they should have stopped last year," Wang Mei explained to them. "What kind of agreement do you have with them?" Li Huang's wife almost shouted. "They are destroying the crops! They must have bribed you, right? How much did you get? If they do not stop today, we are going to the county or even Beijing to get a fair judgment!"

"Don't ever threaten me with appealing to the higher authorities (*shangfang*)!" Wang Mei raised her voice as well.

"All right, all right!" Chu Fu, the DVC, who happened to be in the office, interrupted. "Have a seat, Huang, and have some hot water."

Chu Shan, a truck businessman, immediately poured some hot water into two cups and handed them to the couple. "If the factory breaks the agreement, it is not the fault of the secretary, right?" he said. "But we can definitely talk to them and stop their production line." Li Xuecheng, a chicken farm owner and a distant relative of Li Huang, patted him on his shoulder and joined in, "Brother, looking at my face, please just calm down." Li Huang and his wife looked at the VRA members in their faces and became wordless. They sat in the office, drinking water, and eventually got an oral promise from Wang Mei that she would talk to the factory owner and solve the problem in three days. The couple soon left with the grey wheat in hands. Although

they were still uncertain whether the smog emission would cover their fields once again, they dropped the plan of petition.

“Among the VRA members, some are neighbors, some are friends, and some are relatives. We were suddenly opposing to so many acquainted people, but we were alone...” Li Huang’s wife told me when she was harvesting the wheat in the fields that evening. “We realized that if we insisted on petition, life would be very miserable for us in this village... We then decided to harvest more quickly so that the smog does not harm the crops if it comes again tomorrow.”

The next day, Wang Mei called the owner of the lumber factory on his cell phone and courteously inquired about the heavy smog in the village. The owner informed her that a boss interested in purchasing the factory was trying the production line the day before and he had offered to close the deal. After hearing her description of the anxieties in the village, the owner assured Wang Mei that the new boss would bring in cleaner production lines to transform the factory and the smog would not take place in future. Wang Mei then learned a bit of the background of the new owner and asked for his phone number, which she carefully documented in her address book.

Later that evening, she sent Li Xuecheng to visit Li Huang’s home. “You tell them what actually happened and what is going to happen. Tell them to always have trust and confidence in the village government and learn to control his bad temper. We are going to take care of his family, no worry.” She said to the villagers’ representative. Li Xuecheng faithfully delivered the words, which embarrassed the farmer couple. “I am very sorry.” Li Huang apologized for his attitude and the ungrounded accusations. “Please send our thanks to the Party secretary. We deeply appreciate her help. We will never be that rude again.” After seeing off Li Xuecheng at their yard gate, Li Huang said to his wife with a relief, “Now we can slow down the harvest. Good for us!”

Because of the lack of safety protection and insurance in the work places, devastating physical injuries and life loss of the farmers occur in the factories and companies of the successful entrepreneurs. The elites dealing with the incidents would often offer some cash compensation to the families of the workers because a quick end to the negotiation helps to control negative influence on the reputation of the enterprises and conceal the fact that labor laws are not strictly enforced. Although the village cadres attempt to assist the elites by persuading the farmers to accept the offers, the farmers, sometimes feeling the amount dissatisfying and sometimes finding the suffering too severe to endure, take

on violent and radical actions to retaliate against the bosses in their desperate expression of grievances.

The weather in W Township was finally cooling down in late August 2007 and as I enjoyed sleep in the township dorm, the siren of police cars broke through the night. I rushed to the police station behind the dorm and met a group of armed policemen setting off to Liu Village. With persistent efforts, I got into one of their cars against their warning and rushed to the house of Liu Quan, the owner of a fairly large truck transportation company. When we arrived shortly afterwards, we found the house taken over by a gang of villagers holding knives, wood sticks, and farming tools, who had smashed every piece of the furniture. They decorated the large living room with white cloth and black paper flowers and turned it into a memorial hall. An elderly couple was burning some paper money for the dead at the center of the room and the woman was shrieking madly, “My dear son, how unfairly you were killed! How miserable was your life! Mom can do nothing for you!”

I learned that the 19-year-old son of the couple in Bird-Rest Village, employed as a truck driver in Liu Quan’s company, was recently killed in a highway car crash in Shandong Province. After settling the accident, Liu Quan brought back the boy’s body and offered to compensate the family with 5000 *yuan* in cash. The devastated couple blamed the entrepreneur for not taking good care of their young son and paid a gang from a local secret society to destroy the house of Liu Quan at night to demonstrate their anger.

The head of the police station obviously recognized the members of the secret society and cautiously approached their leader without any imprudent police actions. We were left standing outside the house, listening to the heart-breaking cries of the parents and

breathing the smell of the burning paper. Concerned with the armed gangsters and sympathetic to the loss of the couple, the policemen avoided using violence and quietly waited for a break in their emotional release. Almost an hour later, they succeeded in persuading the couple to cooperate and follow them to the station, together with the members of the secret society who eventually came to an agreement with the police head.

The Party secretary of Bird-Rest Village was waiting when we went back to the police station and he accompanied the couple to the interrogation room. The members of the secret society were requested to sit in a large and comfortable room to talk with the township police head. Liu Quan and his wife, with bleeding cuts on faces and in arms, came in a few minutes later with the Party secretary of Liu Village. The marathon negotiation among the different parties went on for hours till the morning and I was only allowed to wander in the conference room of the police station watching people going in and coming out of the different rooms.

The gangsters were dismissed first as Liu Quan, fearing life-threatening troubles in future, dropped the charge against them. The couple accepted the compensation from Liu Quan in the amount of 5000 *yuan* plus coverage of the funeral of their boy, and in exchange, Liu Quan would not persecute them for harming his body and property. With watery eyes and hoarse voices, the exhausted couple had to rely on the support of each other to walk out of the police station and get into the car of the Bird-Rest Village government that came to pick up the Party secretary.

One month later, after several attempts, I managed to interview the couple at their home. There was a picture of their late son in a black frame on the wall of their living room, lightened by the two burning white candles below. In the picture, he had a happy

and sweet smile. The mother could not help weeping while the father held back the emotions and conversed with me.

“We had no other choices but to accept that offer. The boss was surely going to win if he decided to sue us in the court and we would need to give him money... But why are we suffering this? White-haired elder people seeing off the black-haired young... Where is the justice? We were just so angry.” He said in enormous agony.

“To sue the boss in the court? Yes, we thought about that. We consulted with the village Party secretary and he told us that because we did not have a formal contract with Liu Quan, it would be very difficult to get a better compensation than what the boss offered... We do not have *guanxi* in the legal system and how can we win? ... You know the Zhang family living on the next street? Their boy was killed while driving truck last year. They took the case to the county court but were denied a better compensation than the boss’s offer. They ended up compromising with the boss outside the court after all the troubles. You see, no use.” He took a deep sigh and shook his head.

“I heard about it from the village Party secretary. He took the family to the county court and helped with the paperwork... What is the point to talk to that family directly? They are illiterate and the secretary knows better than them. That is how we proceed things here – we are farmers, we know how to work in the fields but not how to deal with those state branches and departments. We all turn to the village cadres first for help...”⁶⁰

Intimidated by the complicated state and legal procedures, the farmers carry their deep and fierce grievances to the cadres in their different home villages, like what they do with the discontents on the shop floors, and articulate the emotionally devastating incidents into individual cases. Sporadically, similar accidents happen to the farmers in the same village, but in the personal network of distant clientelism between the farmers and the village cadres, the resistance of the victims, maybe violent and radical, remains disorganized under the cadres’ manipulative control.

In the villages where conflicts among social institutions are overt, the furious farmers protesting the exploitation of the economic elites in the opposite institution may adopt the

⁶⁰ Interview in Bird-Rest Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 9/19/2007.

discourses of group hatred in framing, but the framings do not mobilize collectiveness within the social institutions because the other members of the same institution holding different occupations and class statuses never share the grievances. More importantly, the small business owners, usually constituting the powerful majority of the social institution, understand that the last thing the village cadre representing the institution in the village government wants to see is collective movement hurting local social stability and the cadre's political record.

One morning in early August 2007, Chen Datu, a poor farmer in Gold-Bull Village sat on ground in front of the office of the DVC, Fang Ming, with home-made dynamites planted on his body. He lost his whole right arm when stirring cement for a construction project in the county center contracted by Fang Ming's company a few months before. Though Fang Ming delivered him compensation, the permanent physical disability and the life miseries drove Chen Datu into mental instability. His intention of a suicidal blow-up of Fang Ming's office was an individual decision yet the words he shouted loudly on the scene with crazy laughter were: "Fang Ming, damn your Fang lineage. You evil people are suppressing and destroying us, the Chens. I don't want to live together with your lineage under the same sky! Damn you, the Fangs!"

The police were called in and a crowd started to gather around the village government. Chen Bo, the village Party secretary, together with several small business owners of the Chen lineage, stood among the villagers and looked on. None of them approached the protester to prevent a disastrous explosion or joined him to seek for justice for the lineage group. Chen Bo saw me on the spot and explained that the situation was too dangerous for him to intervene in and that leaving it to the police would be a wiser idea, even though I did not ask him anything. After the police arrested Chen Datu, I walked with Chen Hongliang, a chicken farm owner, back to his house and asked how he felt about the incident.

"Well, I heard Fang Ming is a quite mean boss and it is good that he now got a lesson." He said. "True, I do not like the Fangs as they are very greedy... But this

case is none of my business. Chen Datu is an eccentric old bachelor in the village and his mind is not working well. That was why he came up with the crazy idea of bombing. Totally not my style to solve problems... And you know what, if all the Chens participate, it will cause serious troubles for the Party secretary because the upper-level will hold him responsible for the unrest... That will be bad for everyone in the lineage...”⁶¹

Limitation Like the small business owners in W Township, the farmers cling to their village cadres to express grievances against the rural entrepreneurs, although they are aware of the intimacy between the two. They search for betterment in the working environment in their loose ties with the village cadres, manipulate the ties with threats to force the cadres to help, and in the worst cases when they feel extreme hopelessness, turn to desperate and radical violence, in spite of their knowledge of the fruitlessness of these actions. In their personal *guanxi* with the cadres in their home villages, the discontents that the farmers share with co-workers on the shop floors in the same factory are depicted and understood as individual incidents. In W Township, farmers express their requests and search for justice in village cell units instead of the work places, which prevents the formation of common grounds of resistance and shared goals among the bottom class.

In the villages, the distant clientelism is much less protective of the farmers than the symbiotic clientelism of the small business owners. The village cadres, as recruiting and controlling agents of the successful entrepreneurs, place the farmers into unfairly disadvantaged positions in the employment relationship in the first place; and when catastrophic accidents take place, in contrast to their close and patient guidance to the small business owners to walk them through the resistance process, they merely follow regular procedures to take the farmer victims to the court or to the negotiation table. For the weakness of relational social capital in their *guanxi* with the local state, the farmers

⁶¹ Interview in Gold-Bull Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 8/3/2007.

have no confidence in the legal system (Michelson, 2007) and do not see much hope beyond what the distant clientelism may bring them.

The farmers elaborate their severe agonies in disorganized individual cases when resisting the exploitation of the local rural enterprises. They usually target individual capitalists but not the booming capitalism or the unequal distribution of wealth and power. The attacks, although they could be radical and overt, have little impact on the class consciousness of the farmer workers or the structural change in the township.

***Guanxi* and Disorganized Resistance**

The resistance of the small business owners and the farmers in W Township, spanning from the deviant legalization of policy violation to the arduous justice-seeking journey coached by the village cadres, and from the covert tolerated everyday passive resistance to the overt violent expressions of anger, takes place in disorganized and individual forms that build on the *guanxi* ties between the village cadres and the villagers. The personal networking practices in the cellular villages are essential to understanding the rationales behind the disorganization of the behavioral patterns of resistance in the township. The clientelist relational social capital of the client villagers with the patronizing village state may have fulfilled some of the individual interest of the villagers, but destroys the cohesiveness of rural communities by isolating the villagers in their own personal ties. The individualized *guanxi* with the village cadres is the villagers' prioritized and major channel to articulate discontents, request solutions, and relieve grievances. Relying on the mediation of the patron village cadres, the villagers seldom seek support or unity from their fellow villager or workers in the same factory, which undermines the organization of class-based collective actions. Although in W Township

class has become a salient category in understanding a villager's life style, relational social capital, behavioral patterns, and political strategies, class resistance and struggles are extremely rare.

The prevalent disorganized “*zou guanxi*” resistance has its penetration and limitation in the political structure and culture of the local regime (Willis, 1981). Having the cadres in their home villages as an outlet of their grievances, the villagers demonstrate an apparent sense of security, dignity, and empowerment. In many of the events described in this chapter, the villagers actually made the comments on how they felt glad and proud to live in the countryside now because with the generous patronage from the village cadres they no longer are the rural folks who are doomed to be insulted, offended, and harmed. Moreover, in order to receive help and favors from the village cadres, the villagers are aware that they do not have to bribe them with cash or expensive gifts after the series of reforms. The cadres depend on the political support of the small business owners and are conscious of the weapons of petition and protesting of the farmers, and in exchange, as the village cadres in W Township put it, they make their best efforts to solve the problems for the villagers “as a responsibility.” In Chu Village, when Li Xuecheng asked the Party secretary to assist him with the annual chicken farm inspection, all he brought were two packets of inexpensive cigarettes for her husband; in River-End Village, when Yang Fanli requested the use of electric fans in the work shop to the Party secretary, all he had with him were respectful manners.

But on the side of limitation, the direct and personal mode of dominance (Bourdieu, 1977) of the neo-clientelist regime, based on strategic mobilization of clientelist relational social capital in cadre-villager ties, is effective in dissolving system social

capital in villages, dissipating collectiveness in villager resistance, and suppressing organized unrest. The villagers, in their disorganized actions of resistance, look for reasonable solutions to their own specific problems following the local behavioral routine of “*zou guanxi*” and neglect negotiation with the powerful over the more abstract contracts or production of new discourses such as “right” or “rule of law.” The grievances of the villagers, either absorbed in the deviation that the system tolerates or left depressingly unsolvable, unfortunately present little challenge to the local governing structure or the emerging capitalist system, cultivate little system social capital or underclass solidarity in rural communities, and demonstrate few demands to institutionally change the increasing social classification and inequality.

Chapter 6

Village Cadres' Farewell to the State and Horizontal Villager Ties in T Township

I first encountered T Township, which belonged to Z Country in the Shijiazhuang Municipal area of Hebei Province on a gloomy and humid afternoon in September 2007. I was accompanied by Zeng Hui, a 20-year-old villager who took time off from his bartender job in Beijing to visit his mother that recently fell ill. Zeng Hui dropped out of junior high school and migrated to work in Beijing at the age of 16. After trying out several jobs such as dish-washer and shoe-cleaner, he decided to seek for luck in one of the most prosperous bar streets in the city at the age of 18. Tall and handsome enough to please the female white-collar customers hanging out in the bars, he was hired to work together with two other boys from the countryside in a small bar. The three of them share a tiny kitchen attached to the bar where they may cook their food, and sleep in the couches of the bar after it is closed at 2 in the morning until they re-open the place at 11 am. All their personal hygiene takes place in the public restroom of the bar with no shower facilities even during the hottest days of the summer. Zeng Hui works extremely hard to get rid of his Hebei accent to speak Mandarin in the Beijing tone and mimics the youth in the city of hairstyle, dressing, and posture. "To be honest, I know nothing about mixing wines or making cocktails. I just do whatever that is on my mind and sell it at the

crazy price...”⁶² He told me with a funny smile, “To be a bartender is more about flirting with the customers and giving them a good time, you know, and you’ve got to know how to act and how to talk.” He is successful in cutting off every trait of a rural boy and always presents a quite fashionable look with charm and confidence, although the constant late-night life has made him appear older than his real age.

“I feel old in the heart, really old, after working in the city for these years.” He sighed and then lit a cigarette. “But I don’t have a saving due to the shitty payment. I love Beijing but I am not sure if I can always live here, and there is no hope in my home village. Sometimes, I do not see a future...”⁶³

On the train from Beijing to his hometown, Zeng Hui kept telling me his admiration of big cities – Beijing, Shanghai, and New York in his imagination, in addition to his confusion of why I wanted to see his hometown where “even the birds would not lay their eggs.” At the train station of Z County, I called a taxi and asked the driver to take us to Zeng Village in T Township. “T Township? You are going there?” The driver frowned and shook his head. “I will not go unless you pay the price for a round trip. Nobody in that township is coming out, no business at all.” I looked at Zeng Hui and read the message in his eyes that said “you see, I told you before.”

Soon after the taxi exited the highway, earth-shaking noises of construction violently attacked us while the road became narrow and bumpy. The driver stopped the car and refused to send us to the village because the road conditions were damaging the tires. Picking up my fortunately light luggage, Zeng Hui guided me to his home on foot. Taking a fairly long walk in rural China at that time was no longer a fresh experience to me, but the weird combination of desolateness and prosperity that I sensed during the trip

⁶² Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

⁶³ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

still struck me. In short distance to the province capital – the city of Shijiazhuang, Z County obtained good funding to pave public roads in the townships. The one we walked on after getting out of the car was a neat cement road originally wide enough for 4 cars, however, the gigantic construction site right on the side polluted the road with cement ashes, sand, crushed stones, and small rocks that covered almost three quarters of it. Large crane machines were busily operating and I could vaguely hear some commanding orders of the directors in the deafening and ceaseless mechanic noise. What a perfect image of modernity, but only several yards behind the site, I saw a contrasting background of elderly hunchback women slowly hand-watering the crops on the poorly-attended farmland.

“Only the elderly, some mother-age women and the children are still living here now,” Zeng Hui told me. Conveniently connected to the provincial capital by highway, the land of T Township became a lucrative target in the booming real estate market in the late 1990s. In 2003, Happy-Home Real Estate Development Company, a leading business in the province, collaborated with the corrupted former Party secretary of T Township and grabbed the farmland of 6 of the 21 villages in the township to build a colossal high-end apartment complex. The township government secretly signed the contract with the company of the land sale and the villagers were later informed only by two big-character posters, with an empty and never-fulfilled promise that the township would allocate new farmland to the villages.

“Then all the construction machines came and the police, chasing people away from the farmland. It was horrible. People screamed and cried, and got into fights with the authority. Some of my relatives were involved too and one of them was arrested – I remember this because his wife came to borrow money to bail him out...” Zeng Hui told me while walking past the construction site. “That was maybe the most tragic scene I have ever seen. It makes me want to weep every time I walk past here.”

The construction site took up the farmland of the 6 adjacent villages lying along the major country road leading to the highway and blocked the villagers' transportation connection with the outside. The taxi driver was correct that no car could succeed in passing through the messy construction and reaching the villages behind, as for pedestrians like us, detours were necessary to get around the piles of bricks, pipes, and concretes. We arrived in Zeng Village before dark and on our way to Zeng Hui's home walked past an abandoned brick hovel. Zeng Hui pointed at it and said emotionlessly, "It used to be the office of the village Party committee and the village government." The office was guarded by a rusty heavy metal lock on the cracked wooden door, and molds ruthlessly invaded the bottom part of the hovel while weeds freely grew around the place. Apparently nobody had come to use the space for long and I asked Zeng Hui where the villagers may find the village government if they need to. He smiled and directed my sight to a modest house two blocks away. He said,

"The wife and the parents of the village Party secretary live there, with the official seals of the village Party branch and the village government. They will seal any documents and certificates as we ask. They can barely read, you see, and it is really convenient."

Destroyed Local Rural Economy

The central city planning of regional industrialization in the municipal area of Shijiazhuang and the state efforts to integrate rural resources into the development of flagship urban enterprises, as discussed in Chapter 3, deprived the villagers of Township of their farmland and local opportunities of entrepreneurship. The violent process of deprivation was facilitated in the collaboration and conspiracy of governments from the city to the township level, and caused acute tensions between villagers and the

rural state. The current Party secretary of T Township, although completely understood the anger of the villagers, seemed quite sympathetic of the former secretary.

“We are just beside the city of Shijiazhuang, you see, and the city and the counties are supposed to develop together.” He said in an interview⁶⁴. “When Shijiazhuang is having difficulties producing a good GDP, what do the leaders in the city and the province do? They encourage the big companies to come to the country to profit and promise us that it is totally legal and nothing bad would happen. If something really happens, it is the grassroots rural cadres that take the full responsibility... The real-estate project in our township has been contributing to the GDP of the city, for sure, but now no other companies would bother to come as there is no juicy fat (*youshui*) any more...”

The villagers, however, could never agree with the stance. The rural officials to them are the “greedy rats” who fawn on the rich businessmen and the upper-level leaders, embezzle or steal the public resources and assets, and cruelly pay no attention to the common village residents. “The damn township government took away my land even without a notice – so typical of those corrupted cadres!” One villager of Hundred-Flowers Village got extremely agitated when he told me the story.⁶⁵

“Then, they told us that we could get compensation, 5000 *yuan* per *mu* (about 0.165 acre), but I never got it. You know how much will the apartments built on that land sell? I heard it will be around 4000 *yuan* per square meter (about 10.76 square feet) and there will be buildings of 10 floors and higher! What huge profits for the rich and there is no doubt that the township cadres are having a good share... Those greedy bastards!”

The village cadres, who used to be a loyal part of the state system yet lost their farmland together with the villagers, cut their ties with the township baring the hurting feeling of betrayal. In conversations, they cursed the township officials for grabbing the village resources without a notice and putting them into the awkward positions in the communities as suspected accomplices. The village Party secretary of Zeng Village

⁶⁴ Interview in T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/12/2008.

⁶⁵ Interview in Beijing, 7/13/2007.

claimed, “After things got eventually cleared up, who will still want to listen to those officials? The corrupted system is untrustworthy and I need to get out of it! So don’t ever call me Secretary Zeng.”⁶⁶

Faced with persistent villager resistance and state mediation over the land-use dispute, the construction project of Happy-Home Real Estate Company was disturbed, paused, and resumed for several rounds in the past few years, but the machines did not withdraw from the villages. Deprived of their farmland, the frustrated residents of the six villages were compelled to leave their hometown for jobs in the cities. Their distrust in the local rural state and despair to secure a surviving family income spread to the other 15 villages in the same township, the residents of which lived to witness the vanishing of local resources and business opportunities. Li Village, lying behind Zeng Village along the major country road connecting to the highway, used to have a collective paper factory that had gone bankrupt in the 90s, and privatization through sale price biddings of individual villagers was under discussion. Li Yun, a distant cousin of Zeng Hui, once worked in the factory to earn a wage to supplement agricultural income and knew that several villagers were interested in purchasing the enterprise and modernizing the machines.

“But then, all of a sudden, the land along the road was taken by the real estate company and their construction sites basically blocked the traffic. How may we transport the paper products to the outside? And it is said that the land of our village will be taken away soon as well. Who would want to own an enterprise there? ... If the whole land sale had not taken place, I think I probably would have stayed in the village, maybe working in the factory after it is privatized or starting some small business. But that is only an ‘if’; I need to get the job here to support my family now.” Li Yun, a father of two children and now delivering drinking water in Hangzhou, said in a sad tone⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

⁶⁷ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/8/2009.

The diminishment of rural enterprises and businesses are detrimental to the salary of the cadres in all the villages, which largely relies on local tax revenues. Although Happy-Home real estate set off the enormous construction project in T Township, its registration is in the city of Shijiazhuang and the taxes it pays do not benefit the fiscal situation of the local rural state, let alone the village cadres. Meanwhile, the actions that the former township Party secretary took in the land sale ruined the trust of the village cadres in their upper-level counterparts and the general operation of the rural state system, even though many of them still remain entitled to their land.

“After seeing the six villages lose their land, it felt horrible. No one knew what was going to happen to our village – maybe they were going to come and grab the land just on another day. The county and township governments will never be on our side as all they want is to make the city happy. If they cannot take care of me, then why should I be working for them? When you still can work, it is important to earn more money for the family and just stay away from those dirty politics... The living cost is increasing so fast but the cadre salary stays meager and it takes a lot of time to socialize with the officials. Plus, there is no opportunity to get richer. I can earn more here and keep the time to myself, at least.” The Party secretary of Wu Village, one of the 15 that keep their farmland, works as a taxi driver in Hangzhou and never hesitates to share his criticism of the rural state with me⁶⁸.

The development of capitalism in T Township destroys the rural community and the local lifestyle by taking away the means of production from the residents, driving them to become laborers in the cities, and breaking down the grassroots level of state representation. The villagers, including the village cadres, may in essence resemble the English peasants during the enclosure movement that Marx described in his analysis of the emergence of capitalism, but the rural-urban distinction in the Chinese household registration system maintains their ties with the countryside and renders their

⁶⁸ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/10/2009.

awkwardness in the cities, hence their community and resistance organization present twisting stories embedded in Chinese post-socialism.

Paralyzed Grassroots Governance

Ruining the political loyalty of the village cadres and driving them to the cities, the state-supported urban flagship enterprise in T Township disrupts the village level of government in the countryside and sunders the rural Party-state. As Bourdieu at many places (1993, 1999, 2004) argued, the state could be theorized as a semi-autonomous field with its own specific capital and stakes, or in other words, as a microcosm with its own law and the principle and the rule of its own functioning. Particularistic clientelist ties with upper-level officials have widely been regarded as shaping the political careers of state employees in China (Walder, 1986; Solinger, 1992; Oi, 1985) and may be viewed as the specific capital in the field of Chinese state. Village cadres at the bottom of the rural bureaucratic ladder shoulder the daunting task of communicating between the state officials at the higher level and the villagers in the local communities and it gets difficult to determine whether they belong to the state field. Yet in the case of T Township, the village cadres, withdrawing from interaction with the township and relinquishing their trust and anticipation in their supervisors, exclude themselves from the state field and reject being the pervasive channel between state and society. Losing the grassroots mediating bridge, the state field in the local context is isolated and paralyzed in performance ironically due to its own connivance of the destructive development of rural capitalism.

I paid my first visit to the township government on a Monday morning, when in routine governmental offices should be holding weekly meetings to plan out working

schedules. The office building was unusually silent at 9:20 am when I arrived and the only person I could find was an elderly door keeper who let me in. The township Party secretary came in a little before 10, looking sleepy, but my request for research and an interview eventually woke him up. After a short background check during which I made every effort to convince him that I was merely a curious university student trying to complete my dissertation, he repeatedly warned me that the township was a sensitive place and that I should find a safer fieldwork site. I somehow thought demonstrating a bit of naivety might be persuasive and ruthlessly questioned why the regular Monday meetings were not taking place.

“That’s exactly why I told you this is not a good research place. We don’t run the township in the regular way because the governments in the villages are very different.” He replied patiently. “The cadres are all gone and we have no one to work with. The job of the township officials is all about going to the villages and getting things done there – in our case, we don’t really need planning because no one is expecting us below!”

The township government gradually became more comfortable with my presence as my friends and colleagues helped me make personal contacts with the county and assured everybody of my intentions. In later conversations, the officials in the township, in a more relaxed mood, complained how it was an impossible mission to fulfill their responsibilities of guiding and supervising the governance in the villages. One member of the township Party committee once attempted to deliver a recent Party document to the branch in Big-Hill Village and assist the village Party committee to organize group studies of Party members. The Party secretary and the DVC of the village were working in the cities and the township official phoned the door keeper of the village government to fetch the elder village accountant, the third member of the village Party committee, to wait for his arrival. When he arrived at the village, the government office was closed and

even the door keeper left without a notice. He then visited the home of the accountant and was informed by the neighbors that the old man was at his daughter's home in another village.

“There is no government or Party in the villages and we, the township government, have nobody to talk with. I ended up leaving the document and a short message in a plastic bag and hanging it on the door knob of the village government!” He said with some bitter humor. “You know what, it started to rain later that day and maybe the whole thing was just washed away... Even if the door keeper did get it, he could not make sense of my message as he is illiterate and may as well have thrown the bag into the trash.”

“That is still not the worst scenario.” A female official in charge of family planning walked in and continued. “Two years ago, the city's raid of un-allowed children unfortunately picked this township and I had to accompany the officials from the city and the county to the villages and knocked on the doors of the villagers. They entirely ignored us, pretending not hearing the knock at all. Some really old people did open their doors yet were unable to understand a word that we were saying – real or fake, who knows? In the villages, only the village cadres can communicate between the people and us because they are the locals and know everybody around... We've never been picked for raids or inspections again since then and I think the county leaders must have used their ties with the city and the province to save their faces.”

The township level of Party-state, for the people who work there, is in fact a “hollow trunk” with no substantial work contents, and the only purpose to keep them there is to “have a complete governmental structure.” The city and county levels do not have much expectation of them and they accordingly have no idea of what is happening in the villages. The member of the township Party committee recalled:

“The very few occasions that the upper-level took us seriously in the past few years were when the villagers went to petition and protest and the leaders called us in to mediate. But we still did not have much to do as the upper-level controlled the dialogues and was in charge. We were the decorations following the organizational format.”

Their state salary is low and without profiting local enterprises and businesses, a bonus is out of the picture. The Party secretary, the township head, and some committee

directors all expressed their hope to be transferred to other townships at the end of the term; the lower level officials, who always come in late and leave early, moonlight for their other jobs in the businesses of their families, relatives, or friends. During the work time in the township government, it is a norm for them to take naps, knit, read popular magazines, chat about their other jobs, and discuss means of money-earning (e.g. stocks, saving interest, and housing renting in the county).

Anarchist Village Communities and Horizontal Relational Social Capital

When the adult and able-bodied men and women have departed for the cities, the young, the elderly, and the weak are left behind to map out the new *guanxi* nets in their home villages. The elder generation performs backward farming techniques on the lands and the agricultural income of the families can hardly provide enough food. They count on the money that the family members who migrate to work in the cities send home to make ends meet, build houses, and pay for the children's education. In contrast to the classification, competition, and domination among villagers in W Township, the families in T Township view one another as equal counterparts or "people in the same boat," although the migrant laborers from the township do have differentiated jobs and incomes in the cities. Without a functioning village Party-government, anarchism is hailed in the various aspects of village governance, and the villagers in the same cellular village community seek assistance and care from one another. The relational social capital embedded in their perceived equal and horizontal networks constitutes a buffering belt, which might seem weak and disorganized but better than none. Due to the failure of village state, village communities are organized through loose but trustworthy personal bonding ties, rather than through systematic governmental apparatuses.

Rejecting Policy Implementation

The grassroots chain of policy implementation and supervision breaks down in Township when the seals of the village Party-government are kept by the family members of the village cadres for careless abuse with absolutely no protocol procedures. The next day after he arrived home, Zeng Hui decided to visit the house of the village Party secretary with a gift of two packets of snacks and generously agreed to take me. The mother of the secretary, in her 80s and half blind, was at home alone, while her husband and daughter-in-law had gone to work in the fields. She gladly received us, treating us with some home made sweets and inquiring with curiosity of Zeng Hui's life in Beijing. "I miss my son so much and he telephones us only irregularly," she said slowly. "You see, I am always trying to hear the news from the ones who return from the cities and connect the pieces with my son's life there." Zeng Hui thanked her family for taking care of his parents living in the village and offering all the necessary assistance when he handed his gift to the old woman. "That's just we ought to do – to keep an eye on each other and give mutual help. We live in the same village, and if we do not care about one another, who will?" The woman said and pointed at the drawer of a table in the living room near to the house entrance.

"The village seals are there and I always ask people to help themselves when they need anything. I cannot read and never understand what is going on, but if someone in the village needs the seals, he surely gets to use them. Just some convenient help and there is no need to frustrate people."

On our way back, Zeng Hui joked that his village was fully liberated because everyone had simple and equal access to the symbols of authority and power. He told me with delight, "It is now a routine that people bring some gifts from the cities to the

cadre's family to show gratitude for the open use. But they are easy people and something cheap would do.”

The implementation of the national policy of family planning in the countryside, where advanced computerized system is hardly introduced, depends on the village cadres to check if a conceived child is legally allowed and certify with the village governmental seal if a birth permit should be granted. When the grassroots supervision collapses and every birth can be self certified, the goal of the policy is disregarded. Wu Caihua and her husband, both villagers of Colorful-Stone Village, live and work in the southern city of Guangzhou with their 5-year-old son. Wu Caihua was pregnant again in 2009 and the couple decided to keep the un-allowed child by maneuvering the anarchist village state. She went back to the village alone with a visible belly and smoothly got the village seal on her certification that her husband had hand written. The next step was to visit the township office of family planning and get the birth permit needed to register the child in the household. I asked her whether the township office would give her a hard time because of the illegitimate procedure of getting the village seal on our way to the township government, yet she shook her head slightly with peace. “What do they know about us? So many villagers live here and how can they know the family of everybody? They said we need a village certificate to get the permit and now I have one. They designed the rules that they have to follow.”

A woman official in the township office, whom I briefly acquainted, was assigned on the case. She took a look at the village certificate and gave Wu Caihua a suspicious look. “You did not give birth to kids before?” She asked with an authoritative voice.

“No.” Wu Caihua replied firmly.

“How come, you are already 26?”

“I got married late and you can go to the village to check – I do not have children at home and everyone knows it.” The lie sounded calmly honest and stunningly real. The official hesitated for a second squint-eyed and then started to prepare the birth permit.

I was invited to dinner in the township later that day and met the woman official again at the table. She, together with several other township state employees, complained with anger how the villagers in the township were deceptive, immoral, and determined to fool them.

“That woman, she’s got to have other children – come on, she is 26! But she could just coldly deny, amazing. People often think the rural people are honest and simple, what a joke.” She said. “And what are we supposed to do? We don’t have the time and resources to check on everyone of them in their villages – that is the job of the village cadres, not the township government. Now a village has even learned to unite and cover up for each other, so as to make us clueless of the truth... It is all because that they are certain we would never know that they lie so recklessly!” Another official echoed her statement.

Township officials are not just frustrated by the family planning policy. During the recent campaign of “New Socialist Countryside,” many prioritized policies from the central government such as moving the poultry-and-livestock-raising households out of the village residential areas largely stay on the paper. Without the partnership of the village cadres, the efforts of the township officials to get in touch with the villagers, keep track of their behaviors, and regulate their lives are in vain, leaving their authority brutally mocked or fully ignored. The officials sometimes claim in agitation that the power of the seals of the village governments should be revoked and the township needs to step in and take charge of village governance. However, as the township governmental head explained to me one day, it is not an option.

“Village self governance is defined and protected by the law and no one dares to threaten the village autonomy. Otherwise, the villagers can press charges on us and we will be thrown into jail! To re-establish the village Party-government might be the only choice but capable people would never want to remain in the villages and run for

the positions. In addition, they'd all tell you that they are satisfied with the current cadres and no change is necessary... The cadres almost have no stable salary and there is no local opportunity to gain wealth. Of course, they all go to the cities, and we are stuck here in this weird situation. No policy will ever get implemented..."

Surviving Life Hardship

The policy failures do not, however, make T Township the liberal paradise for the villagers living there, as on the one hand local development and provision of public goods that the central policies, particularly the "New Socialist Countryside" campaign, promote are never fulfilled, and on the other hand the public projects that the village governments initiated bottom-up have been halted due to the flee of the village cadres to the cities. In several villages of the township, half-paved roads – partly bitumen or cement covered and partly mud surfaced – often attracted my attention. Those road projects were carried out by the still-functioning village Party-governments. Yet later, without the village cadres mobilizing state funding, collecting villager donation, and supervising the progress, the road pavement stopped. There is hardly any provision of decent public goods and the ideas that are prevalent in many of the villages in W Township such as clean drinking water, activity room for the elderly, and public computers, are not imagined or heard of.

Public education concerns the parents and the grandparents. When some of them thought a researcher like me was an equivalent of an investigator from Beijing, they desperately begged me to "report the situation to the above" and help the local children. When the parents decide to migrate to work in the cities, it is always a tough choice whether to leave the children with the grandparents or take them to the urban sites. The barrier of household registration for rural children to enroll in urban schools and the unmanageable costs often force the parents to be separated from their children in home

villages, which has caused serious social problems regarding their safety, psychological development, and behavioral delinquency (Zhong & Yu, 2008; Xiong & Shi, 2008). To make things worse for the children in T Township, the meager local education fund – usually a combination of state investment and business donations, neither of which the villages have – provides run-down schools near home that may barely meet their needs. The nice public schools furnished with advanced technology in the county town of Z County and the city of Shijiazhuang, although are within less than an hour of driving, close the doors to the children because of their rural household registrations.

The elementary school of the township is located in Lower-He Village, one of the 15 that have not yet been turned into construction sites. The old brick classrooms have walls of fading color and the doors and windows cannot be completely closed, which made it hard for me to imagine having class in the rooms during the cold winter of north China. The students use papers, plastic pads, and stones to help the four legs of the chairs and desks stand on the same surface, and the chalk boards for the teachers are usually full of rips and mended holes. The only regular staff in the school is a woman resident of the village in her 40s, holding an elementary school diploma and calling herself the “assistant” to the two teachers there. The township could not afford the whole salary of the teachers that were standardized by the central state in the late 1990s and decided to share the teachers with an elementary school in the neighboring B Township. The teachers come to Lower-He Village every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and assign chapters and homework for the students to study on their own later in the week to keep up with the pace of progress. The assistant is around all week, listening to the lessons of the teachers, supervising the students, and trying her best to answer their questions.

“I always tell the parents to send the kids to the other elementary schools in B Township or take them to the cities to receive education, especially beyond the third grade. Honestly, what can they learn here? I admit to them that I have difficulties understanding the contents of the textbooks and know almost nothing of the mathematics of the fifth and sixth grade... It is better to pay more money and provide for the children.” The assistant said during an interview⁶⁹. I then asked if that would affect her income as a staff in this elementary school. She gave a weak smile and said, “The township government pays me 40 RMB per month now, and how may that get worse? It is not the money that keeps me here – someone has to take care of the children. Among the women in the village, I am sort of educated so I took the position. The parents are grateful, you know, when they come back from the cities, they send gifts to my family. I have asthma and cannot work for too long in the fields and the women and some of the elderly in the village sometimes help with the farming... That is rural life and I want to think for the best of their children too...”

Her advice is well taken as quite a few of the elementary school pupils in the villages I encountered go to the schools in B Township. It takes on average a bit more than an hour, and almost two hours for the children in the more distant villages, to reach the nearest school on foot. Near that elementary school is the junior high school that T Township shares with B Township. T Township used to have an independent middle school, but due to the lack of funding and the decreasing enrollment,⁷⁰ it merged with the one in B Township. A large number of school-aged children in the township spend hours a day commuting between school and home, sunny or rainy, freezing or hot. Safety of the children on the road immediately worried me when I met a ten-year-old girl in Zeng Village arriving home after dark during my first week of fieldwork in the township, and not surprisingly, the parents talked about the issue as one of their greatest concerns.

Two rape cases of under-aged girls on their way to school were reported in 2005 in the township and one of the mothers that I talked to mentioned that she suspected that her

⁶⁹ Interview in Lower-He Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/13/2008.

⁷⁰ Drop-out is common in the township with the poor supervision of the mandatory 9-year basic education; the parents who have better-off incomes in the cities do manage to send the children to the middle schools in the county town or the cities.

little daughter was “taken advantage of.”⁷¹ The members of a local underground gang were the major suspects but no arrests or trials ever took place, and some of the villagers believed that the gang had connections with the local law enforcement while others said that the parents stopped the investigation to protect the girl’s reputation. The panic about the danger on the road is visible in the villages as the elderly grandparents, sometimes the mothers, spend hours walking or biking to accompany the children to and from school. Informal organization of mutual help exists among neighbors in the villages to produce time efficiency. Four neighboring mothers in Zeng Village take turns to ride a tricycle to send their children to school in the morning and go to pick them up again in the afternoon. Each round trip takes about one hour and a half, but as they said, every one of them needs to do it only about once a week. A widowed old man in Tong Village, whose son owns a small barber shop in Hangzhou, has a three-wheeled auto cart that can take on eight passengers the maximum, but he drives it everyday to provide transportation to the 12 children in his village to B Township. He explained his unlawful behavior by stating⁷², “We are in the same village and I cannot help one but not the other... Their parents are all nice to me – taking care of my lands, bringing food, cleaning my house... It will be a shame if I turn them down.” When there are no vehicles available, walking with the children becomes the sole way to protect their safety. Some grandparents and mothers in Phoenix Village switch turns to take the long walk, and when they arrive in the morning, they stay there to wait till the school day ends. They may visit some relatives in the villages near the schools, watch the kids in their classes, or simply take a nap under a big

⁷¹ Interview in Hundred-Flowers Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/22/2009.

⁷² Interview in Tong Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/9/2008.

tree, while still feeling relieved that in this semi-organized system they do not have to keep their children's company on this road every day.

When the father is absent, the mother and the grandparents, many of whom are barely literate, find it hard to help with or supervise the academic progress of the children. Homework groups for school children are held in many of the villages, either at the home of a mother relatively better educated or the smartest student in the village. A proud grandma in Pine-Tree Village told me in an interview:⁷³

“My granddaughter always gets 100 in the school exams and the other kids admire her. They all come and do their homework in the evening and ask my granddaughter when they have any questions... You see the noodle and buns in the kitchen – gifts from their parents and grandparents. How capable is my little granddaughter. She has started to earn for the family at such a young age!”

When the parents or grandparents come to pick up the children at the end of the group, they openly share and discuss information regarding educational opportunities in the cities. One evening after the homework group in Li Village, a mother came in looking quite excited and expressed the good news that she just learned from her husband who was working in Beijing on the phone that the school for the children of migrant workers near his construction site had increased the enrollment cap and lowered the tuition and fees. The adults present were immediately drawn to the topic and could not wait to find out the eligibility of their own children. The woman did not know too much detail but promised to ask her husband to inquire information from the school and explore whether the other migrant children schools were in the process of implementing similar policies.

“It is nice to work in Beijing, as the capital always has better policies.” A grandpa whose son and daughter-in-law were working in Guangzhou sadly commented.

⁷³ Interview in Pine-Tree Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/18/2009.

“Maybe this is some change nationally.” The woman brought in the news replied encouragingly. “Your son should ask the schools in Guangzhou too!”

The grandpa nodded and smiled to her gratefully. Although the local provision of basic education is intolerably poor, hope was real and almost palpable in that small room.

Managing Conflicts

The mutual care and voluntary assistance is apparent among the members of the same village in T Township, however, the village communities should not be idealized as conflict free. The police department, a part of the township bureaucracy, belongs to the category of corrupted and untrustworthy in the eyes of the villagers and is seldom called in to settle the conflicts in the villages. Severe gang-related crimes, such as assault and rape, have been reported to the law enforcement but the villagers do not anticipate the deceitful township branch to solve any of them and protect their interest.

When conflicts with other residents of the same village occur, the villagers unable to have the village cadres as the mediators, usually sit down with the other party and negotiate for settlements by themselves under the principle of “*yiheweigui*” (the essence is to keep peace). Since a family’s hope often centers on the children – the future generation, physical fights between children can cause disgruntlements and antagonism between the adults in the two families. While playing together in the village streets, two elementary-school-aged boys in Little-Hill Village, Li Fuqiang and Tan Yong, got into a fight and Li Fuqiang, the elder and stronger, punched Tan Yong in head with his fist which left a bleeding scar. Tan Yong ran back home crying and his grandma at once took him to the township medical clinic to get first-aid. Worrying about complications from the head injury, the grandparents got furious of the violent demeanors of the kid of the Li family. In a later interview, the grandpa of Tan Yong told me, “At such an early age, he

is able to hurt people so bad. How could he hit another kid so hard face-to-face? His behaviors definitely need to be disciplined otherwise huge troubles would only come later...”⁷⁴ The grandparents then decided to pay a visit to Li Fuqiang’s home with their grandson as a demonstration of anger and a warning to his parents and grandparents.

The Li family was in fact expecting them when they arrived and the young boy hid behind his mother looking frightened. They were treated with hot tea and snacks and the grandfather of Li Fuqiang told them that his grandson had confessed to them about the incident.

“So sorry that Tan Yong got hurt, but you know, such things happen when kids play together...”

“But it was not a slight hit.” Tan Yong’s grandpa interrupted and pulled Tan Yong to his front. “You see the gauze on his head? The doctor in the township clinic put it on because it was heavily bleeding! The head is such a crucial part that you are not supposed to hit someone there.”

“Right, right. We are very sorry. Li Fuqiang has a rush temper but we all know he is a nice kid deep in the heart.” The grandma of Li Fuqiang joined the conversation in an apologizing tone. “Please forgive him, will you? We are in the same village and the kids are still going to be play mates in the future.”

“Exactly because we are in the same village, we will not report it to any authority to avoid all the troubles. But you need to teach Li Fuqiang that he should not do this.” The other grandma said.

The grandparents and the mother of Li Fuqiang appreciated the generosity and offered to take Tan Yong to the county hospital the next day to have further examinations on the injury. Li Fuqiang was instructed to apologize to Tan Yong and his grandparents in polite and mature manners, and the two boys shook hands to become friends again. When they set off to Li Fuqiang’s room to play some games, the adults of the two families stayed in the living room talking about how hard it is to raise and educate the children without the father being present. “At least the people in the village still understand such family difficulties and understand each other.” They concluded.

Sometimes the conflict settlements need to be institutionalized and certified, yet without the village government, the villagers search for alternative ways. When Yan

⁷⁴ Interview in Little-Hill Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/19/2009.

Fang, a fifth grader, came to me after school asking how to write a contract for land use, my curiosity was immediately drawn to his story. Yan Fang's family and the household of Yan Wentu have neighboring farm fields and the narrow path between them, after years of poor maintenance, is almost invisible. During the harvest season that year, Yan Wentu suspected that Yan Fang's family mistakenly took crops from his field. Without hard evidence, he only requested that the borderline should be re-measured and re-defined. If there had been a functioning village Party-government, the incident would have been reported and the village cadres should have used the collective fund to pave the bordering path. In Yan Village, the two villager families of illiterate elderly adults tried to come to an agreement with the handwriting of an elementary-school student. I accompanied Yan Fang home that evening and witnessed the negotiation meeting between the two families.

Yan Wentu, 68, and his wife did not seem very upset although they claimed that some of their crops in the field were missing. The old man said, "I know it is difficult to know the borderline with that blurring path. It is OK. We live in the same village and it is different from someone from the outside came and took things away... But we need to know the line so that no mistakes will be repeated." Yan Fang's grandparents told the other couple that they did not realize the problem at all and appreciated their kind attitude. They treated them a warm dinner with good wine and at the table both sides stated that life is not easy in the countryside and it is crucial for the dwellers of the same village to "keep peace" and watch out for each other. They eventually agreed to use two pine trees as the borderline between their farm fields and asked Yan Fang to write as they said and made two copies of the document. The four elderly adults used red ink to press their fingerprints on the "contract" and wanted my signature and fingerprint on both copies as the witness approval. I reminded them that I would leave the township shortly and they might want to get someone who could be present if any disagreement should occur in future. Yan Wentu smiled and shook his head, "But you are a doctor and that is official enough. Don't worry. We are going to follow the rule and there will be no arguments in future." Yan Fang's grandparents echoed his point and affirmed that the villagers trust one another and the written document is merely a form to make things reliably remembered.

In the absence of a state authority, villagers wish that every conflict could be solved peacefully and harmoniously in the self organization of the villagers, but in reality, some interest contradictions cannot. To back up their arguments, the villagers seek support from the local figures that enjoy some cultural and symbolic authority in the village and bring them to the discussion table to “judge the reasons” (*pingli*) – sometimes it is the elderly parents of the village cadres but more often it is the leaders of lineage groups. Researchers have noticed that lineage organizations in north China are much weaker and play less significant roles in village politics than those in south China (Huang, 1990; Zhang, 2006). Cohen (1990) and Duara (1988) noted that lineage groups in north China, instead of holding a large amount of collective property and facilitating prosperous business collaboration as in the south, function more symbolically in creating cultural identification, inter-personal trust and solidarity in villages. In T Township, the village lineage institutions are particularly hollow when many of the members stay away in the cities and no cultural celebration is ever organized. As the elderly leader of Zeng lineage in Zeng Village told me, the lineage group has become an “empty skeleton” just like the village government; nonetheless the villagers turn to the leaders for their relic symbolic authority when no other sources exist.

Two villagers in Wind-Cloud Village, Liu Jun and Zhao Zihua, had a serious argument in the early summer of 2009. Coming home to take a nap after working in the farmland in the morning, Liu Jun loosely tied his buffalo to a tree near the gate of his backyard. The smart animal escaped from the rope knot and leisurely roamed to the farm fields of Zhao Zihua, tramping and eating the ripe wheat. Zhao Zihua’s daughter-in-law discovered the catastrophe after lunch and angrily caught the buffalo and took it to her

home. Hearing that Liu Jun was looking for his lost buffalo, the Zhao family informed him that the animal was in their custody and demanded cash compensation of 200 *yuan* for the crops that the buffalo had destroyed. Liu Jun, an old man who treats his buffalo as a close friend, lost his temper when he heard the news and shouted at the closed door of Zhao Zihua's house accusing the family of kidnapping. Zhao Zihua, on the other side of the door, furiously threatened to kill the buffalo and sell the beef if the amount of compensation was not precisely met. In frustration and dismay, Liu Jun went back home without his buffalo and decided to beg help from the leader of Liu lineage in the village, Liu Haosheng. I was among the many villagers who were drawn to Zhao Zihua's house to watch the drama when Liu Haosheng, accompanied by Liu Jun, arrived. They found that Zhao Fu, the leader of the Zhao lineage in the village, was called in as well.

“You both are well respected in the village and please make a judgment for us!” Zhao Zihua's daughter-in-law said in her high pitch voice. She then welcomed the two lineage leaders to sit down at the table. The later discussion, as Liu Haosheng and Zhao Fu put it, essentially followed the principle that each side should take a step back to keep peace and friendship. They educated the members of their lineage not to make a huge scene for this not-so-large amount of money and maintain the harmony in the village community. In less than two hours, Liu Jun apologized for the property loss of the Zhao family and the compensation was negotiated down to 80 *yuan*. Liu Jun and Zhao Zihua both claimed that they agreed to the settlement only looking at the face of the lineage leader and the buffalo finally was released to go home.

The lineage leaders in T Township often found their negotiator role in the villages quite unanticipated, as the leader of Yan lineage in Yan Village said in an interview:⁷⁵

“I thought that the lineage thing would just die when all the young people moved to the cities. You can see, we do not have anything in the lineage organization, no gatherings and no rituals. The traditional parents may want me to host the wedding of their children but more and more young couples want to have their own modern ways... Perhaps because I do not have anything at stake, I am trustworthy to the villagers and they ask me to judge incidents for them... My rules? Always find something in the middle (with laughter)... Last year, a family in the village wanted to extend their house and offended the neighbor. They then could not agree on the distance between the two houses – one side said 10 meters would be enough and the other said 20 meters should be the minimum. You may guess what I suggested and was accepted – 15 meters, of course. Just figure out something in the middle, show favor to neither side, and give the option to people to consider. They usually will follow. As we are living in the same village and we need to see one another every day, it is wise to have peace with the others.”

In the state-less villages, anarchist communities of self organization and mutual help are developed, although income differentiation and stratification does exist. Some of the villagers hold white-collar jobs in the cities and have earned urban household registrations through wealth or educational achievement. Apparently they send back more money to their families than their blue-collar and low-income counterparts, resulting in their better designed and decorated houses and more extravagant life styles. However, direct relationship of dominance and exploitation is not established in the villages and the left-behind villagers practice *guanxi* with one another and accumulate relational social capital in a sense of equality. What Weber defined as “status” may be visible but the Marxian “class” is not in T Township.

The village communities still bear the cellular characteristic as the villagers rely on everyday interaction with the members of the same village to fulfill family and traditional agricultural duties. Encounters with the villagers in the other villages take place but

⁷⁵ Interview in Yan Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 9/12/2007.

actions of seeking assistance and keeping peace within a village community do not extend to a cross-village coalition. The only conflict involving villagers from different villages that I observed was a traffic accident during which a driver from Big-Hill Village hit a pedestrian from Upper-He Village. Instead of being solved in the villager networks, the case was brought to the township police department and the county court to get a settlement on compensation. The boundary of village units is maintained in the countryside, however, in the cities among the migrant workers from the same T Township it is no longer a significant demarcation.

Localistic Communitas and Expanded Horizontal Relational Social Capital

Victor Turner (1969) famously made the distinction of two kinds of societies: structure and communitas. The former is a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of more or less. The latter is describes a society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated community. Communitas can be grasped only in some relation to the structure as it breaks in through the interstices of structure, at the edges of structure, in marginality, and from beneath structure, in inferiority. The weak and inferior are often released from structure into communitas as an escape from the suppression and only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas.

For the villagers of T Township that work in big cities, the structured worker life is challenging, daunting, and oppressing, subjecting them to dominance and discrimination. Much ink has been spilt to discuss the prejudice that urban dwellers project on migrant workers from the countryside seeing them as lower in quality and hazardous to the cities

(Zhang, 2001; Lee, 1999). More recently, under the political spirit of constructing a harmonious society, many cities have adopted benevolent policies deinstitutionalizing discrimination against this marginalized group. The city government of Hangzhou where many of the villagers of T Township work, for instance, distributed 200 *yuan* in shopping vouchers to every migrant worker when the Chinese New Year of 2009 was approaching. The villagers appreciated the generosity yet their sense of inferiority and exclusiveness was not uprooted via the policy approaches. Urban discrimination, very similar to racism in the United States, is often internalized for the villagers. Just as Zeng Hui, the bartender in Beijing who has been making every effort to get rid of his countryside traits, a male villager in his early 20s working in a construction site in Hangzhou told me that he could “always see the difference between him and the city residents.”⁷⁶

“I cannot talk in the local dialect and I feel that we, the people from the north and the villages, appear somewhat differently too... The Hangzhou people are rich but I earn very little... And a Hangzhou girl would never go out on a date with me (with a wry smile)...”

Quite a few middle-aged male villagers from T Township work as taxi drivers in Hangzhou and they described to me how certain districts of the city shut doors to their business. The families in those areas have been living in the city for generations and many of them can hardly manage the pronunciation of Mandarin, which was developed based on northern dialects. The drivers have troubles understanding where the passengers want to go and the frustration is demonstrated in the facial expressions and impatient gestures of the customers. How can people without the ability to talk in the Hangzhou dialect and presumably unfamiliar with the streets of the city be taxi drivers? The villagers sense the sharp complaint and criticism in their own ways.

⁷⁶ Interview in Hangzhou, 10/2/2007.

The networks among locals (*laoxiang*) from the same township form a *communitas* for the villagers in this rigidly hierarchical structure in the cities. The relational social capital in the horizontal ties among locals provides not only materially a bed to sleep upon arrival in the city, job reference, emergency contacts, and cash lenders (e.g. Lee, 1998; Bian, 1994), but also psychologically a sense of attachment and security in the new environment. Not surprisingly, the villagers of T Township cluster in a few cities, majorly Beijing and Hangzhou, to earn a non-agricultural wage and stay in close contact with their locals. Besides mutual assistance to survive in the job market, the localistic *communitas* facilitates community-building activities too: get-togethers to celebrate traditional holidays such as the Lantern's Day and the Mid-Autumn Day, birthday parties of the young, and awkward yet warm set-up dating. The villagers are grateful for the existence of the *communitas*, as a young girl said during an interview,⁷⁷

“I feel very lucky to have this group of locals. I cannot imagine being all alone in the city – life would be so miserable... I think sometimes I just need to know that there are familiar and reliable people around– someone I can talk to. During my days off, I always seek chances to get together with some locals. We may just sit there and chat in our hometown dialects. That makes me forget about all the hardship and the unhappy incidents in the work place, and then I go back to work kind of re-energized...” She gave a smile of sincere satisfaction.

From Village Cadres to *Communitas* Organizers

The localistic *communitas* in the cities is organized mainly by the village cadres through their personal ties with the villagers of their home villages. Despite their intense working schedules, the village cadres from T Township invest a lot of their time in facilitation and organization, in order to maintain the cohesive localistic *communitas* of the villagers. The village cadres used to be the bridge between the upper-level Party-state

⁷⁷ Interview in Beijing, 7/11/2007.

and the grassroots rural communities, as their counterparts in W Township, and developed intimate ties with the residents in their home villages through daily interactions. But the recent land deprivation ruined their faith in the rural governmental system, disconnected them from the bureaucratic hierarchy, and reinforced their identification with the other villagers.

“All the families lost their farmland in our village and we all have to come out to work. Even though we are in the city now, the villagers continue to contact me for help, just like at home before.” The Party secretary of Zeng Village, now a tricycle tour guide in Beijing, talked to me about his intentions of building the *communitas* in the city⁷⁸. “I do not work with the state officials now and cannot really help the villagers, but I know people from the township here and can introduce them to each other. Life is difficult and since there are so many of us here, why not get people together and help each other? We have the commonality of suffering enough and we need to take care of one another, don’t we?” The DVC of Phoenix Village was present as well and added, “Back home in the village, families care and solve problems for one another too. The ties among us are transported to Beijing and we are used to relying on one another to survive.”

The violent process of capitalist expansion patronized by the rural Party-state either victimized or threatened the villagers in T Township and the shared concerns of land property further unite them in the localistic *communitas*. Land and opportunities of small entrepreneurship in home villages are the last hope and means of labor reproduction of migrant workers (Lee, 2007) and the cruel deprivation has raised the villagers’ consciousness of the necessity to stand together. The village cadres are aware that the unsettled case of land compensation would be a perennial tug of war with the township and it is pivotal to cultivate collectivity of the villagers to gain advantage in the negotiation.

“If we individually deal with the township about the land, they of course will beat every one of us – they are the powerful officials. We need to keep in touch, whether in the villages or in the city, and come up with strategies that might help. The worst

⁷⁸ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

thing is to be dispersed to the cities like a plate of loose sand and no longer know where everyone is – all will be hurt in the end.” The Party secretary of Zeng Village disclosed the plan and emphasized the collective grievance as a critical reason to carefully build the *communitas*.

The village cadres of T Township no longer function as the grassroots state representatives, but their authority and leadership are kept in the cities. The villagers still refer to them respectfully as “secretary” and “village head,” pay visits to them with gifts on holidays, and seek their advice and suggestions when encountering troubles. The personal villager-cadre network is transplanted from the countryside to the urban environment and the villagers keep counting on it as their major relational social capital for survival. However, the once vertical clientelist ties for social control are flattened into a more horizontal net of relationships in the urban context where both the cadres and the villagers are migrant laborers.

The cadres, cut off from the state system, are unable to hierarchically patronize the villagers as their clients in the cities, yet their prominent status among the villagers is often recognized due to their contribution to the *communitas* (Willer, 2009). They in their networks with locals, like the common villagers, seek for resources in the relational social capital. When they encounter troubles in the cities, the localistic *communitas* of mutual assistance usually tries to meet their needs to the greatest extent. The DVC of Little-Hill Village, who drives a taxi in Hangzhou, fell sick and was hospitalized for a week in the summer of 2008. Villagers and village cadres from various villages of T Township visited him in the hospital bringing home-made meals, fruits, and flowers. Three other taxi drivers from the township took turns to cover his shifts so as to keep his

taxi profiting during the peak business season,⁷⁹ but would only accept very little compensation for their work. The DVC said gratefully during an interview, “Some villagers from my village even secretly asked me if I needed any cash to send home and they were willing to lend it to me with no interest. What nice locals!”⁸⁰

The relational social capital in the horizontal individual networks among the villagers, organized by the village cadres, facilitates the construction of collective cohesiveness and community capital. With the organization skills of the veteran cadres, several noteworthy expansions of villagers’ relational social capital and new characteristics of rural communities emerge in the localistic *communitas* of the villagers from T Township in the cities.

Transcending Village Units

In addition to their close ties with the villagers under their administration, the cadres in their previous political career also frequently networked with the other cadres in the same township. Their acquaintance and friendship continues in the cities where they now work and through their networks, villagers from different villages of T Township are referred to each other to seek help. The honeycomb structure of the Chinese rural government and the cellular village unit as the dominant organization of villagers’ mundane life are often noted in the discussion of rural politics in China (Shue, 1988; Ku, 2003), but in the localistic *communitas*, the villagers transcend the village boundary to offer mutual assistance through the referrals and communications of the cadres.

⁷⁹ A taxi driver holds a lease with the company management and pays the company monthly fees to operate the car. If the driver fails to generate enough income, he or she has to lose money to the company.

⁸⁰ Interview in Hangzhou, 7/27/2008.

Zeng Hui often told the Party secretary of Zeng Village that he would always remember and thank him for getting him his first job in Beijing. As instructed by his parents, Zeng Hui went to see the secretary the day he arrived in the city and slept on the floor of the secretary's bedroom for a few nights. Having neither a college diploma nor any particular skills, it was difficult for Zeng Hui to get a suitable job and at the age of 16 he found the idea of attending job fairs quite intimidating. He came to the city with expectations, hope, and 300 *yuan* in his pocket, which were quickly running out, and despair started to fill his heart. On his fifth night at the secretary's place, the DVC of Tong Village came to cook dinner and have some drinks together. At the dinner table, the Party secretary of Zeng Village introduced Zeng Hui to the DVC and inquired if he happened to know of any job openings.

The DVC thought for a while and mentioned a young boy named Tong Qing, who came to Beijing from Tong Village about a month before and recently began a job as a dish washer in a small restaurant. "I know Tong Qing back in his childhood. That little boy, so naughty but very bright. He might know from his boss and peers if there are similar openings in his restaurant or some other places." The DVC was fond of talking about the villagers in his home village. He continued, "Dish washer might be a good match for you too, Hui. It is a starting job and has no requirements. And the boss usually does not ask for a contract so you can leave flexibly."

Zeng Hui said that at that moment he was desperate enough to accept any job as long as it was legal and would pay some money. Before leaving, the DVC of Tong Village gave Zeng Hui the phone number of Tong Qing and told him to mention his name when asking for information. It turned out that Tong Qing's restaurant was in fact looking for

another dish washer and Zeng Hui fortunately was hired in that position. Shortly after taking the job, Zeng Hui moved to the tiny dorm-like room attached to the restaurant and shared a bunk bed with Tong Qing. The two also served as security guards of the restaurant property at night and quickly developed a friendship of brotherhood. Although they now work in two distant places – Zeng Hui as a bartender and Tong Qing as a waiter, they still manage to keep in close touch and share their young men’s secrets.

Crossing the village boundary in the localistic *communitas* is usually facilitated by the connections among the village cadres – a way that is sometimes regarded as more effective than relative ties among villagers in different villages. He Jianmin, a taxi driver in Hangzhou, hit a biker in an accident in the spring of 2007 and was mandated to pay fines and compensation in the amount of 60,000 *yuan*. Having no means to put the cash together, He Jianmin contacted the Party secretary of Lower-He Village, a food vender in the city, for aid. The secretary calmed him down and promised to call and visit the other village cadres working in Hangzhou to seek possible lenders. The plan was well executed and He Jianmin borrowed from his locals of T Township the money he needed to settle the accident in two months. One of his lenders was Dong Gang, a small restaurant owner whose wife is He Jianmin’s cousin. I was fairly surprised when He Jianmin told me the story as I assumed that directly reaching his cousin for financial help would be a common practice in such situations, but he explained,⁸¹

“It is always difficult to open the mouth wanting to borrow money, even to the closest relatives. My cousin and I are not that close and I know her husband controls the money in their family. I simply do not want to create troubles for her... Also, 60,000 is a large number and I don’t think Dong Gang alone can lend me the whole amount, so I need to bother the secretary anyway... I did mention to the Party secretary that

⁸¹ Interview in Hangzhou, 7/25/2008.

Dong Gang and I are relatives and he said he could contact the DVC of Wind-Cloud Village who knows Dong Gang well. The strategy worked out, as you see.”

I later met with Dong Gang and admired his generosity to his fellow locals like He Jianmin. He smiled shyly and claimed that the gratitude should in fact all go to the DVC of his home village.⁸²

“I talked to He Jianmin only for a few times. He seemed a nice person but I knew nothing about his economic ability and life habits – I would really have hesitated if he had asked me directly... But when the village head came to ask, it was different. When I first attempted to open my own restaurant in the city, the DVC helped me to loan cash from the locals – he himself lent me some of his savings without interest. How may I say no to him? I trust him too when he assured me that He Jianmin would pay me back. With him serving as a guarantor of the transaction, I felt more secured to lend the money to He Jianmin... He Jianmin has returned the money I lent him in full, as I anticipated.”

When I was leaving the field in the summer of 2009, the village cadres in Hangzhou warmly threw a farewell party for me. I first had dinner with the cadres in a restaurant and then we went to the small rented apartment that six of them shared. About 35 villagers from nine different villages came with inexpensive beverages and snacks and they heard about the gathering from different individual contacts after the cadres made some phone calls to spread the word. I chatted with some of them while observing them having a great time among themselves with poker games, TV shows, and some close small-group discussions. I could hardly tell who were from the same villages and the honeycomb structure (Shue, 1988) of the rural Chinese society seemed to have been replaced by a large caring bird’s nest.

Transcending Class

Classification of the villagers of T Township working in cities is apparent, although the urban residents might refer to them all as in a lower class of migrant laborers. Unlike

⁸² Interview in Hangzhou, 6/11/2009.

in W Township, opportunities of entrepreneurship hardly exist in the villages of T Township. Meanwhile, the villagers in the cities lack sufficient wealth and connections, and are unable to open their own companies or factories. The most esteemed members of the communitas are the still rare cases of college graduates in a relatively young generation, who managed to leave the countryside for white-collar jobs in the cities and obtain urban household registrations via academic achievement. They grew up in the villages acquainted with the cadres, and their parents, who have established close ties with the village cadres, either still live in the villages or stay with the children in cities. The salary they earn in cities is much higher and more stable than the income of the other villagers, which results in the larger and more modernly decorated houses that their families possess in home villages.

Some villager couples run their own small restaurants, food courts, clothing counters, barber shops, and bathing places in the cities, and become small business owners. A few “helpers” are sometimes hired yet in general the family members work in the businesses all year around, with the fewest days off among all the villagers. A barber shop owner told me in an interview, “I have a 12-month rental lease of the shop space. When I took a break during the Chinese New Year at home, my heart was bleeding – think about that, I was still paying the rent but the shop was closed!”⁸³ These families have modestly decent homes in the villages and are willing to invest most of their income on the education of their children. They search for good-quality schools in the cities for their children, often regardless of the dreadful expenses, hoping that the next generation may enroll in colleges and lead a different life.

⁸³ Interview in Beijing, 7/5/2008.

The majority of the villagers are the typical migrant manual laborers – taxi drivers, construction workers, factory laborers, servers, and so on. Due to the inadequate implementation of the Labor Law, their job security and income is generally at the mercy of the employers and it is often a struggle for the families to make ends meet. Still, they attempt to save for an unsure future and send money back to the countryside to provide for the children.

The village cadres scatter in all the three different classes, although given their low levels of education and their fairly old age they are more likely to be manual migrant workers. The Party secretary of Pine-Tree Village is an exception, who moved to Beijing to live with his son, a college graduate and now a clerk in a foreign company. A few of the village cadres, with some financial resources in their families, open small businesses in the cities. The cadres by no means are the wealthiest or the most prestigious, but through their contribution to the localistic communitas, they receive trust and recognition of authority from the villagers in all class groups and the transcendence of class boundaries in the communitas is again facilitated by them.

Cao Guangrong was working in a garment factory in Hangzhou that supplied for Wal-Mart when I first met him in 2007. However, due to the global economic recession, the factory was closed in early 2009 and Cao, 38 years old and unemployed, turned to the DVC of Cao Village in desperation. To his relief and joy, the DVC called him merely one week later and informed him of a job interview for a security guard position in a large apartment complex. It turned out that his true patron was a resident in the complex named Cao Xue, who was originally from Cao Village and had been holding an accountant job in the city government since college graduation. Upon discovering that

the complex where she resides was hiring a new security guard, she phoned the DVC as her parents back in the village, who remained very close with the DVC, often instructed her. “One should remember where it comes from when one drinks water (*yinshuisiyuan*)” is the slogan often cited in her family conversations and she apparently followed the rule well. After learning from the DVC that Cao Guangrong was searching for a position, she paid a visit to the administrative office of the complex, requested an application, and recommended Cao Guangrong whom she had actually never met. Cao Xue accompanied Cao Guangrong to the scheduled interview, which went smoothly, and she agreed to put her name on the employment paperwork as the reference and the emergency contact. Cao Guangrong in his new job greets Cao Xue on a daily basis in the apartment complex and often runs errands for her at his convenience.

Li Yishan, the Party secretary of Li Village, and his wife, Zhang Feng from Big-Hill Village, run a small neighborhood restaurant in Beijing specialized in noodle and dumpling. The villagers from T Township working in Beijing frequent the place when they want a home-style treat and usually get a discount in the bills. While dining at the restaurant, the villagers chat with the owner couple, making the place a convenient station of information exchange where the cadres can timely update their resources to facilitate mutual help. Since the prime business hours of the restaurant are breakfast and lunch, the couple sometimes use the place at night to organize social activities for the members of the localistic communitas, their favorite of which is speed matching of young singles.

“Look at those young people working in the cities. They work like dogs and have no time to meet suitable people. The kids from the township have to leave home in teens and then drift in the city during the best time of their lives. Their parents and grandparents have got to be very concerned about their marriage.” Zhang Feng, the

wife, who in her simple Buddhist-like belief system cherishes matching good marriages as a blessing for the next life, was enthusiastic of the activity during an interview.⁸⁴

They called the village cadres to spread invitations to singles available and generously provided food for the mingling gatherings. Sometimes one-to-one chatting was carried out in the speed-dating style; and sometimes provocative questions such as “what you are looking for in your partner” were thrown to the crowd to stimulate intimate discussions. It was interesting to observe that college graduates and city residents originally from the township came to such gatherings as well. Zhang Jianhua, a paternal cousin of Zhang Feng and an assistant manager in a company in Beijing, often showed up.

“Although I have a decent job, it is difficult to find a wife in this materialist city. You know what I am often called? ‘Phoenix Man’ (*fenghuang nan*, meaning urban men originally from the countryside with lots of family burdens and low-class life habits)! It would be nice to find a girl from the same township who understands life hardship and my situation.”⁸⁵

He certainly received the appreciation he was looking for in the mingling and was fairly popular among the young ladies present, who held various jobs in the city.

Transcending Lineage Groups

In the process of labor displacement during the land deprivation in T Township, lineage identity that literature often describes as quite significant in the countryside fades out in the localistic *communitas* in the cities, although the villagers living back at home may still symbolically invite the elderly lineage leaders to negotiations over conflict settlement when state authority is absent. Lineage competition seems unnecessary when urban survival, buffering discrimination, and resisting the exploitation of the rural governments become the common goals of the members of the *communitas*. As the

⁸⁴ Interview in Beijing, 7/4/2008.

⁸⁵ Interview in Beijing, 7/4/2008.

village cadres from different lineage groups actively organize the community in collaboration and cherish collectivity as a tool of empowerment, lineage separation and factionalism is disposed as immoral.

Liu and Zhao are two large lineage groups in Wind-Cloud Village that used to have an intense relationship because of resource competition. For a while in the 1980s when the ownership share of a collective brick factory was under discussion, the two lineages adopted a default approach similar to racial apartheid forbidding the members from different groups to socialize with one another. Before a fierce open election of the DVC in the early 1990s, two groups of youngsters from the two lineages got into an armed fight, the violence of which drew the immediate attention of the county law enforcement, and ten men were arrested. However, in the city of Hangzhou today, Liu Han and Zhao Shun from the village co-drive a taxi and switch turns to take the day or the night shift. One day, I accompanied Liu Han to start his day shift and noticed that Zhao Shun left the money he earned during the night shift in the cashbox instead of taking it with him home. Liu Han counted the amount, put the cash aside, and told me it happened often that after a long period of driving they forgot to take the money. They kept track for each other and reminded the brother-like partner later or delivered the cash to his place during their taxi trips. I was curious how they, from the two competing lineage groups in the same village, were able to establish a partnership with such trust and intimacy. Liu Han's career of a taxi driver started when he disclosed his thoughts to the village Party secretary from his lineage, who then informed him that according to the DVC of the village from the Zhao lineage Zhao Shun was interested in the job as well. They got in touch with each other and their first meeting was scheduled and facilitated by the village cadres. "There is

nothing to compete for between the lineages any more. Collaboration works better. We have to rely on the locals to survive because they are the ones to trust.” Liu Han answered me briefly as he started his shift.

Later that day, Liu Han gave a ride to the DVC of Wind-Cloud Village, Zhao Yuanmin, and I repeated my earlier question to the village cadre.

“How can we afford to fight with each other? We were so hurt by the township government and we need to unite to be strong. They would laugh to see that we still stick to the lineage thing!” The secretary said emotionally. “And lineage is something so out of date, so backward, and so countryside. We are in the city now and, as I always tell the villagers, that sort of ideology should be abandoned. Otherwise we will never be able to fit in...”

Between Beijing and Hangzhou

The two localistic communities of villagers from T Township in Beijing and Hangzhou carry out their mundane functions independently, serving the members working in the two different cities. However, cross-geographic contact for mutual help between the two locations, although infrequent, is not out of the picture. The migrant workers, particularly the younger generation, have high mobility and are willing to relocate for better opportunities or fresh lives. Job referrals through the acquainted village cadres in the two cities constitute the majority part of the cross-geographic contacts.

Wu Hao started his career as a migrant laborer in Beijing selling pirate DVD copies and the constant police harassment made him tired of the job and the city. He telephoned the Party secretary of his village who drives a taxi in Hangzhou asking for information about job opportunities in the distant city. After learning that Hangzhou is relatively friendly to migrant workers and a taxi driver could maintain a fair income, he almost immediately decided to leave for Hangzhou and join in the business with the help of the

secretary. His girlfriend from Colorful-Stone Village, whom he met at a gathering of locals in Hangzhou, worked in a garment factory. She started in Beijing as a restaurant waitress and after saving some money she felt ready to come to the south where she had always dreamed of visiting. Hangzhou, famous for beautiful scenery, female fashion, and pretty ladies, was one of her top choices. She talked to the village Party secretary working in Beijing and was referred to a girl from Phoenix Village who was working in the garment factory in Hangzhou, from whom she received generous guidance to find the job.

Although cross-city contacts are rare and problem-based with no intention to merge the different communities, they broaden the horizon of the villagers and expand their perception of community members. The locals to them not only include the people from the same place in the city where they are working, but also the villagers of the same township in other locations.

A Sundered Grassroots Regime: Rural Community, Personal Ties, and Village Cadre

For the villager families of T Township undergoing the violent capitalist expansion, their community life is divided into two parts: the anarchist home villages for those who stay and the localistic communities in the cities for those who migrate to work. Back in the countryside, villagers, faced with deprivation of local economic opportunities and family separation, self organize community resources to offer mutual help. Their relational social capital, when the village state disappears, lies in the direct everyday personal interaction with the other residents, often neighbors, in the same village. Their community therefore is cellular, and the boundaries of class and lineage groups are often vague.

Their localistic *communitas* in the cities functions as a tender buffering zone for the migrants living in the discriminative and suppressing urban-rural structure and transcends their differences in village origins, class positions, lineage groups, and even geographic locations. However, the *communitas* is not institutionalized and community system social capital is cultivated via personal ties and often times indirectly through diligent facilitation of the village cadres. As the village communities back in T Township, the localistic *communitas* may seem merely loosely bonded, but the horizontal relational social capital embedded in the networks among the migrant villagers succeeds in producing cohesive collectivity. The presence of the village cadres as organizers assures the stability and effectiveness of the resources in the networks and reinforces trust among the villagers.

The village cadres, after withdrawing from the sundered village state, use their legacy of *guanxi* and traditional authority to play as the critical knots in the net of localistic ties in the *communitas*, in order to keep the members together to survive and mobilize resistance to the exploitative rural governments. Unlike their counterparts in W Township, who make every effort to prevent villager collectivity that may tarnish their political records, the village cadres of T Township encourage the solidarity of villagers through the similarly intimate cadre-villager ties. But the relational social capital in their personal ties, instead of being hierarchical and administrative, reaches some horizontal equality. The anarchist village communities and the localistic *communitas*, as well as the leadership of the village cadres, enable organization and mobilization of collective action of the villagers to express their grievances towards their losses in the development of capitalism in their hometown.

Chapter 7

To Become the Urban: Community-Based Organized Resistance in T Township

It was one of the hottest days in the summer of 2008, and at around 9 in the morning the sun was already burning like a fire ball as the air temperature reached above 100F. In the prosperous commercial district of the city of Shijiazhuang, two rural women in their late 60s and early 70s were lying on the hot ground of a busy street. Their bodies crossed the four lanes in the middle of the street, where there was no shade, and their aging skin bore an unhealthy red color from sun exposure. Each of them held a large piece of cardboard, on which a simple slogan was written in dark ink. One read “Villagers Deserve Citizen Rights Too (*Cunmin ye xiangyou gongmin quanli*)” and the other said “Give Us: Land Compensation and Urban Household Registration (*Gei Women: Tudi peichang he chengzhen hukou*).” Drivers halted at the sight of human bodies causing a messy traffic jam.

The police was called in, who immediately circled the area around the two women with yellow police line and put up a flashing sign to remind the drivers to slow down. A small group of traffic policemen began evacuating the traffic by giving directions of detour to the drivers in the long queue. Two policemen and a policewoman approached the women on the ground trying to help them stand up, but they rejected the offer and burst into tears. Behind the police line, I could vaguely hear them mention how life was

miserable in the villages with no land and no opportunities. They cried, “There is no other way, no other way... We do not like doing this either but we have to...”

The policewoman seemed to be comforting the two women with an understanding smile and persuading them not to make her job difficult, when one of the policemen brought two bottles of water to them. The women thankfully accepted the water but refused to leave. The other policeman was reporting to some upper-level officials on his phone and meanwhile observing his colleagues in frustration. The tug of war between the police and the two protesters lasted for about two hours when an official-like middle-aged man eventually arrived in a speeding car.

Wearing a neat polo shirt and a pair of dark formal pants, he apparently had come directly from an air-conditioned environment. In a hurry, he walked to the two protesting women and introduced himself as an official from the Department of Civil Affairs of the city. “You see, the weather is so terribly hot and it is harmful to your health to lie here. We can always talk in a civilized way, right?” He said to them and tried to pull them up from the ground. The two villagers rose up only to sit on the road and started crying and murmuring their grievances: how their land was robbed by the township government, how their compensation was never fulfilled, how they had no means of living, and how the young were discriminated in the cities. The official crouched beside them and repeatedly nodded his head.

A group of policemen at the same time came to the crowd that had been observing the incident by standing on the sidewalk of the road and I was pressured to leave the scene. A young man holding his cell phone with a built-in camera had all his photos checked and the relevant ones deleted before he left. I went to that road that day because the DVC

of Tong Village, who was taking a break of unemployment at home then, informed me of the time and location of the protest that he was organizing. As the details of the plan unfolded on the spot, I recognized one of the women as a resident in Zeng Village and decided to pay her a visit the next day.

A-Tai (Great-Grandma), as she is usually referred to in the village, was lying in her bed when I arrived, exhausted and pale. Her daughter-in-law said it was due to the over exposure to heat and she was hardly able to stand still when she came back the day before. A-Tai went to protest with a petition letter prepared by some younger villagers in the township, which the DVC of Tong Village delivered to her, and gave it to the city official after talking with him. The official promised to pass the letter to the higher authority and update the villagers with good news in a month or two, before he eventually succeeded in getting the two protesters into his car and sending them home. “I told him, if he fails to keep his words, I am going to do it again! He looked quite frightened. You see, with my old pieces of bones, I am still useful to the villagers.” A-Tai told the story with some amusement.

Several bags or baskets of assorted fresh fruits, as well as a few large water melons, were placed on the floor of her bedroom. A-Tai pointed at them and said like a proud heroine that those were expressions of gratitude from her fellow villagers.

“A lot of them were here yesterday. The water melons are from a neighbor who grows them in her field. She picked the best ones for my family. They also brought chicken broth and some Chinese medicine to help me recover... They all wanted to thank me for going to the city to protest for all the villagers... And the DVC of Tong Village came too bringing those gift packets of nutritional supplements. He told me that the people in his village bought them together to thank me.”

“For the Villagers”

The shared grievances of land loss, deprivation of hometown business opportunities, and hopeless future of migrant workers establish a sense of comradeship among the villagers of T Township, both in their anarchist home villages and the localistic *communitas* in the cities. Deeply harmed by the violent process of capitalist expansion patronized by the local rural state, they began to seek for social justice through resistance in 2004, shortly after the township government grabbed the farmland of the six villages. The villagers began with the goals of dismissal of the former township Party secretary, land compensation, and guaranteed protection of land in the other 15 villages; yet over the past few years, new contents of urban household registration, social security, and housing benefits were added to their claims. The resistance in T Township is consistently collective with plans, organization, and mobilization. Although sometimes the protesters are single individuals like the two old women in the episode at the beginning of the chapter, they declare their representativeness of “the villagers,” make collective requests, and are supported both materially and psychologically by the other members of the township.

The interpersonal dynamics in the anarchist home villages and the localistic *communitas* enable the organized resistance of the villagers, particularly the intimate personal ties among villagers in cellular villages and between village cadres and common villagers. The relational social capital in their now horizontal individual relationships has managed to transform into system social capital and capacity of collective action. Although land deprivation has forced the rural laborers to the urban sites, collective grievances in the countryside and marginalization in the cities hold them tight. Cadre-

villager tie and village cadre networks, which once were the basis of the penetrating state control in the villages, now ironically serve as the key in maintaining the cohesiveness of the disgruntled villagers and transcending various boundaries in resistance organization. Planning of protests usually starts in the localistic *communitas* in the cities among the village cadres and migrant workers. But the plan is executed back at home and often involves the remaining residents in the villages. The capacity and process of movement organization in T Township intriguingly bridges community resources between the urban and the rural space through personal networks.

Loss and deprivation in hometown, compelling villagers to become migrant workers, has exposed them collectively to the urban lifestyle. Encountering the discriminative urban-rural hierarchy in their everyday routines, the villagers widely internalize urban superiority and are determined to abandon their backward rural way of thinking. Law and citizen rights are among the “urban” discourses that the villagers have eagerly learned and adopted as a farewell to their old methods to solve problems via cadre patronage or nepotistic *guanxi*. They not only use the new urban-style identity of “citizen” to frame their resistance, but also set “to become urban residents” as the ultimate goal of their organized petitions and protests.

Evolution of movement claims and goals, capacity of mobilization, and subjectivity of the villagers are the three analytical perspectives of this chapter discussing the organized resistance in T Township. One popular discourse that shrouds all the three aspects of their resistance is their collective acceptance of the urban-rural hierarchy, which hails the ideas that the urban is civilized and advanced yet the rural is inferior and backward. Through their personal ties and in the construction of system social capital in

their communities, the villagers reinforce each other's belief in urban superiority and collectively imagine the ideal "urban culture" as their goals, means, and identity in resistance. They on the one hand are organized as savvy and self-empowering resisters to deprivation and suppression, but on the other hand submit entirely to the existing cultural hierarchies and conform to the Chinese modernity.

The Imagined Urban and the Fulminated Rural: The Contrast

The land grabbing of the township government did not mark the start of labor displacement in T Township. Since the 80s, when the emerging market economy began to offer rural laborers employment opportunities in the cities, some of the youngsters in the villages longing for fresh life experiences and financial independence have departed for the urban sites. However, the cadres in the villages and the elder generation in general viewed them as speculative, unrealistic, and drifting. A villager from Li Village, now 46 years old and a factory worker in Beijing, recalled:⁸⁶

"Our village was doing fine with farming and the collective factory back then and I never thought I would come to Beijing. A teenager boy next door made the plan to go to Guangzhou one year and his parents were extremely annoyed. He did not have any goals, you know, and just wanted to travel to the south and see what he could do – that was bad... You could get into college and leave for cities. That would be great. Or if the family was very poor and desperately needed money, you may go to the city and sell your labor because you had to. Otherwise, just tour around? That would be irresponsible... Normally, we stayed in the village taking care of the fields and working in the factories. Then with some savings, we started some small businesses like a grocery store or something. Just keep your feet on the ground and be realistic. Some kids dreamed too big and insisted on going to the cities, and ended up learning all the bad habits and getting disappointed. No parents really liked it at that time and sometimes the teenager kids had to sneak onto a bus to Beijing..."

During the abrupt expansion of urban capitalism, villagers in various age groups now have to migrate to cities and encounter the urban world. Although the city dwellers

⁸⁶ Interview in Beijing, 7/11/2008.

welcome them only with prejudice and discrimination, the villagers identify in them a “modern” and “advanced” culture contrasting to the rural norms that have devastatingly hurt them. Independence and individual autonomy are among the first elements of the urban culture that they have recognized and admired.

The villager of Li Village continued in the interview, “I used to think what is so good about cities? People do not have land here... But after working in Beijing for these years, I gradually began to understand. It is the choice that one could have. In the villages, you have to take care of the fields and everyone has to do it. Factory jobs are very limited with only a few factories available. I heard that some college graduates in the cities switch jobs every year and try different careers and lives – that must be quite exciting for the young people... And urban people use their own abilities to get jobs and earn money, and that’s why they are independent. In the villages, the agricultural income is based on farmland, which the government can take away if the officials want to – that sucks! ... Also the urban people can really make plans, like the manager of our factory. Intensively work for some months to complete the orders and then take a few weeks off to have a family vacation. It is impossible in the countryside because farmers need to be around to look after the crops... It must be nice for the city people to live free of all those constraints and lead the life in a way they really want.”

Politics of Patronage vs. Direct Confrontation

One characteristic of the urban people that the villagers see as in accordance with independence and self autonomy is the ability to solve problems via direct confrontation, and they always discuss it in sharp contrast to the patronage system in the countryside where they used to live. They hold twisted understandings of *guanxi* practices – while they still embrace and appreciate the close individual connections with their locals in the communitas and at home, as discussed in the last chapter, they openly mock and critique with contempt the patronage politics in the countryside, allocating favors based on nepotistic ties. The villagers make some vague distinctions between the two types of networking practices in their articulations, and they often envy how an urban resident as a

full citizen can achieve complete independency and autonomy, disregarding the patronage system of *guanxi*.

Zeng Hui, the bartender, enjoys listening to the conversations among the customers in the bar, most of whom are white-collar employees in urban companies. It never failed to excite him that a seemingly shy and elegant office lady said she openly asked her manager for a raise in salary or a young employee frankly told his boss that he was not responsible for a charge that was mistakenly pressed on him.

“Isn’t it great that people of different age and status can communicate with one another so directly and honestly?” He often asked me. “When I was in elementary school, a teacher blamed me for breaking one of the windows in the classroom. I did not do it and it was absolutely unfair. But my father had to take me to the village Party secretary, who then found some official in the township. They accompanied us to the school to explain the incident and my father even had to apologize to the principal for me often being naughty... Totally shit! Why could not my father, or even I, directly tell the teacher that I did not do it? The rural way of doing things is pretty ridiculous, and whenever something happens, the first thing people look for is some sort of *guanxi*!” Zeng Hui in our casual conversations often brought up his rural memories and ruthlessly condemned the village lifestyle. Sometimes he talked about how he wished that he had grown up in a city with such enthusiasm that I simply remained silent when he asked about my childhood, which would prove his illusions untrue.

Similar appreciation of the urban way of settling problems on one’s own is cherished by the small business owners of T Township as well. Keeping a family business is never an easy job, particularly for a villager in a city away from home. While the small business owners in W Township take pride in gaining wealth and providing for the family with hard work, the ones of T Township in the cities emphasize the glory of independently maintaining the business in an unfamiliar environment. Tong Zhiquan owns a small barber shop in Hangzhou, where he started as an apprentice and eventually took the ownership from his former boss when the boss’s family moved to another city. He respects that boss, who was born in a village in Zhejiang yet obtained urban

household registration through wealth after years of hard work in the city, not only as a teacher of hairstyling techniques and business skills but also a mentor of life attitudes and philosophy. The boss encouraged Tong Zhiquan to take over the business when he was planning to leave, but Tong Zhiquan found running one's own business in Hangzhou intimidating.

“Back at home, I once talked to my father that I wanted to open a grocery store in the village. I was probably in middle school then and had little interest in school. My father said we would need to talk to the village head and the village Party secretary, because running a business would be too complicated for us to handle alone. I was bold enough to go to the village head by myself. He listed about 10 governmental departments in the county that he needed to accompany me to visit and plenty of banquets that I needed to host to treat the related officials.” Tong Zhiquan said jokingly in an interview⁸⁷. “Then the boss wanted me to keep a barber shop in the city. I thought it must be impossible as I do not even have the connected village head here. But the boss told me that as I am in the city now, I must stop thinking still in the rural way. He said to me, ‘This is Hangzhou, not a small village any more. You have to live on your own, not on the *guanxi* of the village cadres. You need a business license and you go to the Bureau of Industry and Commerce to get one by formal procedures. Someone comes to do an inspection and you just greet them nicely. You may want to treat them with a meal to show hospitality but if they have any unreasonable demands, you can always petition to the bureau. Just follow the rules and you can figure out all the things by yourself.’ Those words pushed me into some deep thinking and I realized that a switch in attitudes was so crucial... Here I am now and I do settle all the issues on my own, in the urban way. Although I have experienced lots of difficulties and troubles, I love the thoughts of directness and independency, and the rural people really need to catch up with the urban pace and stop looking for those *guanxi* detours.” He smiled confidently, looking assured and proud.

Law and Citizen Rights: The New Coping Strategies

As for why the urban dwellers, unlike their rural counterparts, are able to independently and directly deal with the problems in their lives, the villagers are in the consensus that it is because “rule of law” grants the city people full citizenship. Discourses of law and citizen rights are becoming increasingly popular in recent years

⁸⁷ Interview in Hangzhou, 9/29/2007.

among the protesters in China (Lee, 2007; O'Brien & Li, 2006), however, the mass of the villagers of T Township came to realize the possibility and feasibility to fulfill interest through law and citizen rights only after they migrated to the cities. In the countryside, where they believe personal ties or *guanxi* dominate every sphere of life, they heard about the central state's promotion of "rule of law" in the media but cynically regarded it as a political decoration of the rural governments.

"Sure, I read about that ('rule of law') in the newspapers when I was still in the village." The village accountant – a fairly educated figure – of Yan Village, now a janitor in Beijing, said.⁸⁸ "But how could you believe that? In the villages, it is always 'rule by man', by the local officials in the county and the township, that's why they are the local emperors! The ones with solid ties with the officials would have a good life as everything will be settled quite smoothly for them... The central government has good intentions and nice slogans, but when it comes to the rural areas, they are never realized. The rural officials, they talk in a way and act in absolutely another... I remember one VRA meeting in our village, in 2000 or maybe 1999, when the township was building the road that connects to the highway. The township head demanded our village to paint the walls of the houses of villagers along that road. He wanted the side facing the road to be painted into the warm yellow that he thought was pretty, just to earn himself some face in the county. But the village had to pay for the paint and ask the villagers to do the job. At the VRA meeting, one representative, who was a recently dispatched soldier, questioned this township request. He said something like it was out of date to follow the orders of the township officials because it is in the law that the villages could make their own decisions, etc. etc. He repeated the term 'rule of law' for several times. All of us stared at him silently but no one echoed him at all, and the village Party secretary just told him not to simply think that everything in the newspapers or in TV is true... That guy was out of the village context for a while and forgot about the importance of *guanxi*. The village cadres had to maintain the ties with the township to get things done for the village and the villagers: funding, land use, birth permits for the villagers, business permits. The request of yellow walls was not killing us so we just followed... You know, after that day, we all called that guy 'rule of law' behind his back as a joke. Apparently none of us thought that those terms could be taken seriously in the villages."

The massive forced migration into cities, to the villagers of the township, has opened a new window to experience and understand law and citizenship. The accountant of Yan

⁸⁸ Interview in Beijing, 7/4/2008.

Village regarded signing a contract with his employer as his starting point to understand a system different from the rural world.

“Back to the days in Yan Village, I used to work in a small local brick factory. The village Party secretary introduced me to the position and I started that job after briefly meeting with the factory owner. He simply confirmed the wage that the secretary told me. No paperwork at all... But when I got the janitor job in this office building, someone from the building management brought a contract of 5 pages. I felt blessed to be able to read (laugh) and sign my name... I did not exactly understand every item and the person was pushing me to save time, but still I felt the procedure was very formal. And he told me that if there was going to be any dispute over payment or benefits, we would always go back to the contract and find the solution. In the village, if I was unhappy with the job, the village Party secretary would step in with his *guanxi*. It’s just so different...”

Aware that they have left the familiar rural net of *guanxi* patronage for a more institutionalized urban system, the villagers eagerly explore strategies to cope with life situations in this new context. Mass media, ranging from print media to cyberspace, is their major source of information and guidance. The literate villagers spend time everyday reading national and local newspapers, particularly the coverage of “social news” on how wage laborers, a lot of times migrant laborers, negotiate with employers over payments and benefits. When they have some off time in the evening, they watch TV news programs together in their shared apartments. The program that they regularly follow is “Focus” on CCTV, which often probes the events of citizen resistance via petition and protesting. The younger generation who has learned to surf on the Internet also accesses the online news resources and actively participates in discussion about controversial political and social issues on various bulletin boards. Cases that involve seemingly powerless citizens unfairly treated by employers or local officials successfully getting justice and compensation through rightful petition or law suits always excite the villagers, because they can easily connect them with their own struggles in the land

dispute. Law and citizen rights are the discourses repeatedly adopted and promoted in the news coverage of those cases. Although quite a few of the cases are about rural population, the villagers perceive citizenship as an urban luxury, because the disputes are usually settled only when they are brought to the attention of the courts and governments in the cities, sometimes in Beijing. The Party secretary of Zeng Village commented when we watched the program “Focus” together, “Only the urban bureaucratic departments will play by legal rules and treat the villagers as citizens. That is the only possibility of justices. Nothing in this sort will ever take place in the countryside!”

Some of the villagers have had more intimate encounters with the “urban model” of fulfilling citizen rights by participating in fruitful collective resistance led by urban residents. The villager taxi drivers in Hangzhou proudly recalled signing a petition to the city government in the summer of 2004 asking for a raise in taxi price when gas cost was skyrocketing. The city government of Hangzhou requires taxi drivers to turn on air conditions during summer time and generally forbids transportation prices to fluctuate in order to maintain social stability. When the taxi drivers found it difficult to profit and talked to the management of their companies, they were informed that changes in governmental regulation was necessary for them to raise price. Two drivers from the city started a written petition to the city government, threatening a mass strike, and circulated the document in several taxi companies. Zhao Shun from Wind-Cloud Village signed the petition almost immediately after his colleague handed it to him. “I felt so excited to read the words: right of survival, freedom, legal protection, and citizen. You can never imagine those phrases in villages. I felt I was an urban person and it felt great to be part

of that petition under the name of citizenship.”⁸⁹ His taxi partner, Liu Han, was more hesitant and considered the possible negative consequences of participation. But Zhao Shun soon convinced him that since so many drivers had signed, including many urban residents, it would probably be safe and effective. He was right because the city government of Hangzhou ended up allowing taxi drivers to charge one extra *yuan* for every trip as a gas fee that summer. The villager drivers in interviews and casual conversations often boasted about the heroic experience as their milestone of becoming citizens, who can claim and fight for their “rights” via direct confrontation with the authority.

In their localistic *communitas*, the villagers share their knowledge and experience of surviving and safeguarding interest in the cities through using law and claiming citizen rights. In their horizontal networks, they educate one another the necessity to replace rural *guanxi* politics of hierarchical patronage with the new discourses and reinforce their collective belief in urban superiority. Upon their arrivals in the cities, the villagers routinely visit the cadres of their home villages for advice of adaptation and career development. On such occasions, the cadres would introduce independence as the essence of city life and encourage the villagers to learn to protect themselves with the weapon of law.

“I can help you start a job in Hangzhou. But after that, you will have to learn to live independently in the city. Negotiate the wage, get to know your colleagues, and fit into the environment. It is not like in the village where I could help all the way through and in every aspect. I don’t have that kind of ties with city people. Do pay attention to the regulations and the contents of your contract. If you have any questions, you should bravely raise your issues to the boss. That is the city way.” The Party secretary of Wu Village talked sincerely with a young man from the village who had just arrived in Hangzhou.

⁸⁹ Interview in Hangzhou, 10/2/2007.

The young villager acquired a shop floor job in an electric product factory via the networks in the localistic communitas, yet caught a bad fever two weeks later. Unfamiliar with the provision of health service in the city, he went to look for the village Party secretary in the taxi company. The secretary was out driving and Wu Hao, a villager from the same village, met with him after finishing his shift. The young man asked Wu Hao if he could direct him to a hospital with which the village cadres had cultivated *guanxi*. Wu Hao, who had been working in cities for a few years, found his request quite out-of-date.

“The Party secretary must have told you this when you arrived, but you really need to stop counting on ties and favors via *guanxi*... We don’t have them here. We, locals, of course help each other but you need to learn to cope with the city people in the urban way. Paying a visit to a hospital is no big deal. It is simple. Go to one nearby, take a number, and wait to see a doctor. Just tell the doctor what is wrong and follow his/her suggestions. That is it. Your rights as a patient are protected by the law and the hospital regulations so there is really nothing to worry about. I will go with you this time and show you how simple it is. I know it might seem scary at the beginning but you’ve got to get adjusted.”

Wu Hao, the veteran, patted the rookie on his shoulder and escorted him to the hospital nearby. The grateful young man apologized for his “old way of thinking” and promised to get accustomed to the city mode of independency.

Frustrated Secondary Citizens in the Process of Learning

Although the collective embrace of the new urban-style coping strategies, cultivated in the networks in the localistic communitas, unconditionally encourages the villagers to seek justice in the cities via direct confrontation with the weapon of law and citizen rights, many of the migrant laborers have had frustrating experiences in city courts and in their petitions to the urban labor bureaus. In the global financial crisis, a lot of export-oriented factories went out of business, including a small garment factory in Hangzhou where

three of the villagers worked. They lost their jobs in a very short notice and received neither job referrals nor wages for extra months to bridge the period of unemployment. The three workers decided to file a petition to the Bureau of Labor regarding the unlawful treatment after reading about the city government's regulations to protect migrant workers in local newspapers. They believed that they made a strong case and were determined to get just compensation from the owner of the factory. A middle-aged woman official received them warmly and carefully documented the case with the promise to contact them in two weeks. One month passed and they did not hear from the bureau. On their second visit, they were referred to another office because the factory had investments from other provinces. After waiting for updates from the office for two more months, they angrily knocked at the door of the office, but were informed that the city law enforcement was unable to locate the owners of the factory as they might have fled to a foreign country. The official at the office begged for their patience yet this time he refused to give them a timeline of settlement of their case. The three workers went back to T Township for an unemployment break and later went to different cities to hunt for jobs. One of them became employed again in Hangzhou but had lost contact with the Bureau of Labor.

“We have given up the case. It costs too much time and energy to follow up with the referrals and delays. It is more important to keep the new job and make money... The bureaucrats know that we migrant workers cannot afford spending that much time on the case. That's why they will not take our case seriously. The longer they detain it, the more likely that we will drop it. We are from the countryside and they are just going to take advantage of that... We are the secondary citizens in the city and what can we do about that?” The worker asked sharply⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/7/2009.

A construction worker from the township made exactly the same “secondary citizen” comment when he told me about the voracious contractor for whom he worked in 2006. When the project was completed, the contractor owed him payments for the last three months yet vanished. The Chinese New Year was approaching and his family in the village was expecting him back with cash. Inspired by the spirit of “rule of law,” he went to a district court in Beijing to file the case against the contractor demanding for his payments. The hearing was delayed several times because the law enforcement failed to track down the contractor and bring him to the court. When I met him in 2007, his case was still on file but he had lost hope in getting his payments back. He managed to maintain intermittent contact with the court as he switched around jobs in the city yet believed that the court would never devote full attention to his case because of his rural status.

In spite of the frustrating experiences in fulfilling their citizen rights, the villagers neither doubted nor challenged the legitimacy and efficiency of the urban-style system. Instead, they attributed the frustrations to their own inadequacies as the inferior part in the urban-rural hierarchy. When asked about his feelings towards the current legal system, the construction worker in Beijing answered affirmatively:

“It is a social progress to use law and citizen rights to directly get what we deserve. It is much better than using *guanxi* and nepotistic ties, as in the villages. I guess because it was established in cities, the system works better for the urban residents. I read on the newspapers that a lot of urban people did win what they wanted in the legal system. But we are from the countryside and are new to this way of settling problems. Often I am still confused about the terms and procedures. We still need to better prepare ourselves to get into this game – you know, really abandon the old ideas and embrace the new ways... Also, the legal system is still developing and in future it might better serve our needs... Or, if we can get urban household registrations as some of the truly capable villagers did, we then are no longer the

secondary citizens and can wholly enjoy the benefits of the rule of law. That would be perfect!”⁹¹

The Party secretary of Zeng Village, an active organizer in the localistic communitas, when addressing the same question, echoed the postulations and emphasized the need to “learn from the urban people” or at the best “become the urban” to be entitled to full citizenship.

“The countryside compared with cities is always backward, particularly in people’s thoughts. You can see that the villagers are still wishing for favors in *guanxi* with the powerful, which is so out of date in the modern world. I am sure you do not have to depend on nepotistic ties to work things out in the US, do you? ... The urban people know better about the rules to use law and citizen rights and the governments take them more seriously too. We have so much to learn from them if we want justice for our land... We need to learn how to communicate with the authorities, what to say in strategic ways, how to attract the attention of the public and the governments, and how to push the officials to compensate us fairly... Since we do not have farmland any more, it would be ideal if the governments could grant us urban household registration, maybe in Shijiazhuang. And we will be urban people, how great is that! Then the governments will have to treat us according to the laws.”⁹²

To Become the Urban: The Evolution of Resistance Goals

During the five years (2004-2009) of resistance of the villagers in T Township, they have kept adding new claims to the goals of their petitions and protests. They discover new ideas and framings in their own drastic life changes from the countryside to cities, particularly in the encounters with the urban, “modern” and “civilized” culture. Under the active organization and facilitation of the village cadres, their localistic communitas serves as a forum for them to share ideas and invent discourses and claims, which direct the evolution of their collective action.

The villagers of T Township blame the corrupted former township Party secretary for their loss of farmland, local business opportunities, and life stability. Intuitively, they

⁹¹ Interview in Beijing, 7/14/2007.

⁹² Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

started a collective petition to the city government of Shijiazhuang as their retaliation against the official in 2004. They requested the removal and imprisonment of the former township Party secretary and the confiscation of his family wealth that were accumulated through illegal channels. The villagers purposively chose to petition to the city instead of the county – the direct supervisor of the township government, believing the rural officials were too closely tied to each other. And at the time, they predicted that if the corrupted official lost his power, his contract with the real estate company would automatically be invalidated and the farmland would be returned to the villagers. The Party secretary of Zeng Village showed me a copy of the petition letter that he kept, on which signatures in different styles and vague fingerprints were crammed. 146 participants from the six villages that were deprived of farmland participated in the petition. With simple and specific demands, the letter was filled with the sincere hope of the villagers that social justice could be realized in the power of the city government through punishing the vicious rural official and returning properties to the villagers.

The Party secretary of Zeng Village and the DVC of Phoenix Village, the two relatively better educated cadres in the six villages, drafted the petition letter after the suspicion in the villages that they were accomplices in the land trade was cleared. Feeling furious of the township government, the cadres in the six villages who remained at home had a secret gathering to discuss resistance tactics. When the letter was completed, the cadres contacted the villagers in their villages and asked for their participation. Shortly afterwards, the Party secretary of Zeng Village migrated to Beijing to work and took the petition letter with him. He contacted the cadres from the six villages who were already working in Beijing and requested for their help to collect

signatures. The villagers, having re-established their trust in village cadres, responded enthusiastically and were excited to defend their farmland by signing the petition.

The Party secretary of Zeng Village sent the letter to the city government of Shijiazhuang in the spring of 2004 in a small post office in Beijing. Coping with rural unrest and maintaining social stability had become a national priority in 2004 and the central government repeatedly instructed local officials to treat villager petitions with caution. Good news came to the villages in May that the township Party secretary was removed from his position and would be tried for the crimes he committed. However, in the “letter to the public” from the city government, nothing pertinent to the farmland and the real estate company was mentioned. The villagers, whose hope in the city government was reinforced by the letter, waited patiently for the construction teams to leave, but only found the plants in the fields uprooted and the huge construction site set up.

The aggressive expansion of the real estate development project agitated the villagers in the other 15 villages of the township, who had experienced loss of local business opportunities and started to worry that the blueprint of the apartment complex may eventually include their land. Village cadres in their established personal ties exchanged the concerns and joined in the discussion of strategies to expel the construction teams. The consensus that their last petition letter failed to make the explicit request regarding farmland emerged during their conversations and meetings in the villages and the cities. In the summer of 2004, the Party secretary of Hundred-Flowers Village, who went back home from Beijing on an unemployment break, and the secretary of Lower-He Village, who was staying in the village, decided to appeal to the Office of Letter-And-Visit

(*Xinfang*) of the city government of Shijiazhuang, after receiving encouragement, advice, and instructions from the other cadres. The Party secretary of Zeng Village sent them a letter of 11 pages filled with proper words and quotes that he thought they might use to communicate with the officials in the city. This time, the villagers wanted to terminate the real estate development project, drive the construction teams out of the villages, and be assured that abrupt deprivation of property would never take place again in any of the 21 villages. The city government not only kindly received the two cadres visiting, with some nice tea and expensive snacks as the Party secretary of Lower-He Village recalled, but also responded to them promptly as promised.

The newly installed township Party secretary called the two village cadres to his office in less than a month and had a long and private talk with them. He conveyed the decision of the city government that the real estate project may not be disrupted, because it was highly relevant to the shape of the economy of the province and several province leaders were waiting to see its success. However, the villagers in the six villages absolutely should get compensation for the land at the rate of 5,000 *yuan* per *mu*. The township Party secretary convinced the two cadres that the rate was above the average in the nation and it was a kind favor from the city officials. Part of the money would come from the confiscated properties of the former township Party secretary and the other part would be obtained from the real estate company. According to the township Party secretary, the court had started documenting the illegal wealth of the former township official and the city government would deliver the decision to the company soon. Regarding the farmland of the other 15 villages, he promised that if any “business opportunities” as such appear in future, the villagers would be directly informed and

brought to the negotiation table as defined by the law. He persuaded the two village cadres to be patient with progress in the complicated compensation process and warned them that protesting and petition only would embarrass the city officials who were determined to help them.

“We were extremely disappointed and unsettled after that meeting.” The Party secretary of Hundred-Flowers Village said⁹³. “The new township secretary made everything vague: when we would get money, who would send us the money, and how the other villages would be protected... Nothing was quite clear. And then we all had to leave for the cities to get jobs because the construction project would continue. But not being at home, how could we know if there is any progress? What if the promises were unreal and just a strategic response to our petition? ... Honestly, at least I was lost. But I still needed to earn money so I left for a job in Beijing shortly after that.”

Although feeling bewildered by the news that the two village cadres spread, the villagers waited in the cities and at home to hear from the township again about the compensation. To their dismay, no updates of the allocation of the compensation fund have reached them ever since. The village cadres periodically called the new township Party secretary and the Office of Letter-And-Visit of the Shijiazhuang city government from the cities where they worked, yet received the same answer that the city government was working on the case and needed more time for negotiation and calculation. On one autumn morning in 2005, the Party secretary of Pine-Tree Village, who had moved into his son's apartment in Beijing, was taking his routine stroll when he noticed that the district government was surrounded by a fairly large group of retired workers. The workers were sitting silently in front of the gate of the government building and holding banners made of cardboards and cloths. One slogan that impressed the Party secretary went “Equal Rights, Equal Pension Increase!” (*Quanli pingdeng, jiaqian pingdeng!*) He

⁹³ Interview in Beijing, 7/11/2008.

stood in the crowd that was looking on and learned that the workers retired at an early age when their state-owned factory went bankrupt a couple of years before. Now that the government had significantly increased the pension of former state employees and army officials, the workers were left behind with their already meager income. One seemingly well-educated man in the crowd commented, “It is unfair as they did work for so many years for the country. And they should let the government know, otherwise the officials would just pretend not seeing the problem.” The village Party secretary was surprised that the police came to block the protesters from the looks-on, but the officers were merely observing and the violent crack-down that he assumed did not take place.

The Party secretary of Pine-Tree Village shared his exciting observation with other village cadres from the township and foresaw collective protesting using similar framing of legal rights as an option to pressure the city government of Shijiazhuang to settle the land dispute for them. Although he retreated from direct participation in protests to protect his son’s starting career in Beijing, his encouraging tone revealed realistic hope to the other cadres. The cadres secretly organized planning meetings in Beijing and Hangzhou in 2005 and villagers from all the 21 villages were included in the discussions. During their break back at home for the Chinese New Year in 2006, over 300 villagers representing the voice of the whole township protested in front of the city government of Shijiazhuang. They painted slogans on white cloths to express their goals this time – “Return Land Compensation to Us (*Huan wo tudi peichang*),” “Protect Villagers’ Land Rights (*Baohu nongmin tudi quan*),” “Black-Hearted Real Estate Developers Will Be Punished By the Heaven (*Heixin fazhan shang bi zao tianqian*).” As in the episode that the Party secretary of Pine-Tree Village observed in Beijing, the police came in yet only

stood by to prevent chaos. Two officials from the Letter-And-Visit Office approached the villagers and again explained that they were making slow but steady progress on this case. The villagers sat in front of the governmental building till sun set, two hours after the two officials left the scene, and then quietly disbanded. The township officials visited every village the next day distributing gifts of cooking oil and bags of flour to the villagers to comfort them. However, many of the participants of the protest stated to the officials if the dispute was not going to be settled properly soon events as such would be repeated.

Since then, collective protesting during the Chinese New Year has been a routine for the villagers in T Township due to the endless delay in land compensation.

“They made up all sorts of excuses. They could not retrieve the money from the former township secretary, or the real estate company is not running too well, etc. etc. Who believes them? We are going to continue protesting to show our rage and look for justice.” The Party secretary of Zeng Village, a major organizer, said.⁹⁴

The protesters over the years incorporated new routines to their collective action, to express their disgruntlements not only to the city government but also the construction project of the real estate company. They would stop in the construction site on their way back to the villages from the city. During the Chinese New Year, the construction teams took their break and left behind unfinished structures, temporary dorms of workers, and sometimes a few bulldozers. The villagers threw trash and defecation of humans and animals at the targets they could find in the construction site. Sometimes, they used paint of dreadful colors to draw graffiti and write threats, such as “Pay before Construct (*Xian fuqian zai kaigong*),” on the building structures. I asked the organizers if they ever

⁹⁴ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

sensed fear when confronting the powerful and the authorities, and the DVC of Tong Village boldly rejected my presumption.

“We are fulfilling our citizen rights and the law should protect us – the good people!” He said⁹⁵. “You see we have such legitimate causes and solidarity among all the villagers in the township. I would not be afraid even if we were going to do this in Beijing. To solve our problems and obtain justice, this is the modern and good way.”

More recently, as the villagers firmly continued their protests, the claim of urban household registration was added to their goals. The inspiration came from the experience of resistance of the residents of Harvest Village that used to be in the suburb of the city of Hangzhou. Back in 2002, in order to compete for hosting the National Games in the city, the government of Hangzhou decided to build an immense stadium and expropriated both farm and residential land of the village. The village was moved further into the countryside and the villagers were compensated for their land at the state-defined rate for land use for public facilities. A few years later, when the stadium was finally completed, businesses such as restaurants, night clubs, karaoke bars, and sports shops mushroomed in the area. In the emergence of a new entertainment center in the city, land prices rose swiftly and the city government sold some of the land that used to belong to Harvest Village to a real estate developer to build high-end apartments. The villagers saw the advertisements for the luxurious apartments and got furious of the tricks of the city government, who bought their land at a low price for “public facilities” but sold it high to the developer for commercial use. They protested to the city government but instead of requesting for more compensation they smartly framed their resistance as defending the right to live in the city. They claimed that it is against social justice to make the villagers give up their living space to the rich and powerful. The sit-in

⁹⁵ Interview in Beijing, 7/3/2008.

protesting had threatening impacts on the government of Hangzhou, who has been constructing an extremely harmonious image of the touristy city. The real estate developer eventually built a modest yet tall apartment building in the prosperous area for the villagers and the government granted them urban household registrations in 2007.

The taxi company where the Party secretary of Wu Village worked is close to the apartments of the former villagers of Harvest Village and he befriended with some residents through taxi business.

“I feel very envious of them after listening to their stories. They were villagers like us but now they are urban citizens. Their strategies were so smart... Then I started to think maybe we could learn from them and do the same thing too. The local government treated us unfairly and destroyed our hometown and we should make it pay for what it has done.”⁹⁶

Secretary Wu convinced other cadres and fellow members of the localistic communitas of the alluring strategy of resistance during their gatherings and meetings. Through phone correspondence, he also discussed the possibility with his local friends in Beijing, some of whom happened to read in the newspapers about similar cases that villagers traded their deprived land for urban housing and household registration. “This is a life chance to become the urban and we need to grasp it!” To Secretary Wu, as well as many of the villagers, the idea of permanently leaving the backward rural for the civilized urban alone was exciting enough. However, they later discovered that this claim of becoming urban could in fact bring them more benefits than they initially anticipated.

The goal of urban household registration was included in their protest to the city government of Shijiazhuang during the Chinese New Year break in 2008. When the

⁹⁶ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/10/2009.

township Party secretary came to soothe the unrest in the villages the next day as usual, he told the villagers that the city would consider urban household registration as an option, as it appeared very difficult to gather funds for land compensation and it might be easier for the real estate company to supply housing rather than cash. However, the process would be complex because the city government would have to prepare money to provide the villagers with social security and health benefits, to which urban residents are entitled. The township Party secretary concluded persuading the villagers to be patient.

“We were actually astounded when learning that we will be able to have all that if we succeed in getting urban household registrations. I originally thought being an urban citizen would be super, and that may help us get more stable jobs in the cities. If we are lucky, we may move into some urban apartments. But I never thought we would have all that at one time... So we will never give up this goal, never. The government must compensate us in the form of urban household registration.” Secretary Wu said firmly⁹⁷.

Following urban examples, the goals of collective resistance in T Township have evolved solely based on the decisions of the village cadres and villagers working in the cities. Women and the elderly in the villages financially depend on the migrant workers and often submit to ideas and stances of the breadwinners in their families. Lack of urban life experiences underpins their assumed ignorance of political strategies in resistance, which has entirely excluded them from decision-making processes and made them purely followers in the petitions and protests. A-Tai and her daughter-in-law in Zeng Village, for instance, fully support the idea of getting justice from the local government but barely understand the changes in the goals over the years. They depict their roles in resistance as following the instructions from village cadres and family

⁹⁷ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/10/2009.

members in the cities and assisting the realization of their plans. A-Tai's daughter-in-law told me:

“I often heard them (her husband and children) discussing stuff with the village cadres and using terms I don't know. I guess they learned them in the cities and they sounded quite modern... Anyways, I don't care either, because they know better and have better insights of our future. Last time, my husband told me that we were going to have urban household registrations if we succeed. That sounds good to me because urban residents could have a more comfortable life. So we should cooperate with the plans and do what we can...”⁹⁸

From City to the Countryside: Capacity of Mobilization

Localistic *communitas* in the cities is the headquarter of collective resistance of villagers in T Township, which not only directs the evolution of movement goals but also makes specific plans for each step, micro-manages the execution via resource mobilization, and supervises achievements. Meetings to initiate and plan for collective actions in the township take place in the cities under the voluntary leadership of the village cadres. Through equalized cadre-villager ties, they contact the villagers deemed prudent, capable, and reliable and invite them to the meetings. Villagers also use their cultivated horizontal networks with one another to bring along friends to the discussions, transcending village origins, class, and lineage institutions. Village cadres in Beijing and Hangzhou, the two major destinations for migrant workers from the township, exchange ideas and update each other about resistance plans via phone calls. Execution of the finalized plans usually involves the villagers remaining in the villages, and family ties between migrant workers and villagers at home, as well as cadre-villager networks, enable their participation. Village cadres take leadership in every step of the collective action of villagers, joining the petitions and protests, observing the mediation efforts of

⁹⁸ Interview in Zeng Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/14/2008.

the officials in the city, county, and township, spreading the outcomes in localistic *communitas* in the cities again through personal networks, and then beginning preparation for the next cycle of resistance.

During the drastic process of labor displacement in T Township, clientelist connections between village cadres and villagers have transformed into equalized and horizontal networks among villagers. In both the cities and the countryside, the villagers continue to rely on relational social capital in their personal ties for everyday survival, yet meanwhile, with the efforts of the village cadres, individual relational social capital has transformed into system social capital that keeps their community cohesive for collective action. Trust and reciprocity embedded in personal ties obliges the villagers to unite under defined goals and follow the community norm of participation.

Just like how they have adjusted and re-framed the claims of their resistance, the villagers mimic strategies that urban citizens had adopted in detail and justify their effectiveness by the enshrined urban superiority. Members of localistic *communitas* in the cities collectively recognize the necessity to learn from the urban and educate the villagers back in the countryside through family interactions. “The urban people tried the method before” is a useful discourse to facilitate mobilization in the community of collective resistance.

Initiation and Planning

Village cadres from T Township, as well as some active and close villagers, have regular social gatherings in the cities where they work. When the Chinese New Year break approaches, they routinely discuss plans of protesting during their meetings. The villager participants often include village VRA members who have political experiences

and connections with other villagers, small business owners in the cities who have frequent interactions with villagers and are regarded as smart and capable, and some young people familiar with Internet technology who may bring fresh ideas. The planning group is formed through individual contacts and informal personal referrals. The village cadres would telephone each other to confirm the date and place, and then inform the participants in their own villages. Every participant could bring interested villagers that they reckon appropriate to the meetings and the others would trust his judgment and recommendation. The Party secretary of Zeng Village in Beijing and the Party secretary of Wu Village in Hangzhou are in charge of communication between the two locations on phone, to combine ideas and reach the agreement on dates of protesting.

The initiation and planning meetings are held in the cities because the villagers believe the urban environment is safer and more efficient for resisters. T Township, Z County, the city of Shijiazhuang, and the state officials there to whom the villagers would protest are all far away from the cities where the villagers work; meanwhile, the villagers think that citizen rights, which foster their resistance, originate and are better protected in large cities.

“In the countryside, the law does not work and local officials act like emperors. They can simply order the police to enter villages and crack down meetings as such. I don’t see that happen in cities because people talk of rule of law and citizenship all the time.” The DVC of Phoenix Village said⁹⁹.

Meeting in the cities before their short break during the Chinese New Year is also considered a strategy to save time for “real actions” to take place at home. “We always had meetings beforehand. When we got home, we could immediately start mobilization

⁹⁹ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

and tell the villagers that we had a good plan. Efficiency is important to our resistance.”
The Party secretary of Lower-He Village wholly supported the meeting arrangements.¹⁰⁰

The exclusive planning meetings that only the volunteer leaders of the petitions and protests attend evince the fact localistic communitas and villager communities of Township are not at all free of hierarchies. Distinction between leaders and participating followers is based on knowledge of politics, recognized individual abilities, and connections. I once asked the Party secretary of Zeng Village whether the villagers back at home ever contributed to the planning of resistance, and he firmly shook his head.

“The elderly and women in the villages are very useful in our protests because they look miserable and can attract public attention. But they are country people and are completely ignorant of what we are fighting for... How could you expect a rural and illiterate woman to understand rule of law or citizen rights? They just need to follow the plan that we have made in the cities and play their roles... They trust our judgments too and are willing to do that. You see, we need the division of labor in the process. Those who have seen the world and understand things better come up with ideas and the others participate in actions.”¹⁰¹ When I pointed out to He Jianmin, a taxi driver in Hangzhou who frequently participates in planning, that many of his co-workers from the same township had never showed up at those meetings, he attributed the difference to personalities. “I am quite outgoing and love talking to people. That’s why I have good relations with a lot of the villagers in the township. The village Party secretary asked me to go (to the planning meetings) because my personality and networks could contribute to the organization of the events. Many of the taxi drivers are very nice persons and good at their work, but they are shy and are more interested in taking care of their own business than connecting with others. So it fits them better to be the followers of the plans, instead of attending these meetings... I have so far brought two of my friends to the meetings. Because they also have the outgoing characteristic, I thought they could take up the role of planners.”¹⁰²

Since protesting around the Chinese New Year to the city government of Shijiazhuang has become a routine for the villagers, the planning is usually simple. The participants need to pick a date for the incoming protest. It usually falls between the 8th

¹⁰⁰ Interview in Hangzhou, 7/26/2008.

¹⁰¹ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

¹⁰² Interview in Hangzhou, 7/25/2008.

and the 12th day of the Chinese New Year, when the officials of the city government have come back to work and the villagers are concluding their celebrations before they go back to work in cities. The planners have changed the date from year to year to surprise the city officials and make troubles for their prevention. The village cadres would repeat what they did the year before to mobilize participation, and the banners that villagers hide at home would be demonstrated again. If a new slogan or claim emerges in the discussion, cadres and planners present would volunteer to make a new banner and bring it to the protest. As the years of resistance experiences have well prepared the veteran planners, those meetings produce little complications and never last long.

In contrast, when new opportunities and fresh ideas of resistance occur in the communitas, the planners would have to devote more time and energy to making initiations. The first half of the year 2008 presented the villagers of T Township chances to permanently settle the dispute over land and urban household registration, when social stability and harmony was prioritized nationally to maintain a safe environment for the Beijing Olympic Games. Media coverage was replete with documents from the central government demanding local governments to palliate social unrest with any means possible.

“It is a perfect time to talk about rights and law before the Olympics. Chinese officials care so much about international images, and this time, all the foreign countries are looking at us. Even the rural governments will have to abide those international standards to settle our problems!” The Party secretary of Zeng Village told me with full confidence¹⁰³.

At the same time, large numbers of migrant laborers working in Beijing were requested to leave the city for their hometowns in July 2008, to enable strict social

¹⁰³ Interview in Beijing, 7/3/2008.

control and make room for athletes and guests from all over the world. Since their employers foresaw that they would not be able to attend their jobs for at least a month, many of the villagers from T Township were fired from their positions in early July although with the vague promise that they could re-apply when they came back. The DVC of Tong Village was among the frustrated unemployed yet soon came up with the idea to organize a protest at home during the unemployment break of the villagers. He and his close friend, the Party secretary of Zeng Village, decided to call an emergency planning meeting on July 4th, 2008.

The protesting strategies discussed at the meeting were an imitation of an incident that took place in Haikou, the capital city of Hainan Province, in 2007. Wu Hao, a young taxi driver in Hangzhou, discovered the story online when he was surfing on the Internet. Two women in their 70s lied on a major street in the city on an extremely hot summer day to express their anger towards the city police, who had chased them out of their homes because the land was purchased by a real estate developer from the government. The agreement on the amount of compensation was never reached but the developer could not wait to grab the land and start the lucrative project. It was reported on the Internet that the incident aroused wide compassion among citizens in the city and public attention from the media. Many Internet users angrily accused the city government of ignoring human rights and basic moralities to maximize profits. Eventually the city government of Haikou responded by pushing the developer to appropriately compensate the families of the protesters' for their properties. Wu Hao, finding the event highly resembling the on-going resistance in his own township, printed out the reports and photos online and handed them over to the Party secretary of Wu Village. After hearing

that the villagers in Beijing were planning a protest in the summer of 2008, Secretary Wu mailed the materials to the Party secretary of Zeng Village in Beijing as a reference of tactics.

The participants of the Beijing planning meeting liked the innovative and plausible strategy, as the DVC of Tong Village claimed, “We may lack everything in our township, but we definitely have old rural women and a story that will make people feel bad for us. Also it was tried in the city before, so it probably will work.” Villagers present started to nominate protester candidates in their home villages, who should look weak yet possess good health to endure the summer heat. The DVC of Tong Village put down the names of the candidates and the cadres promised to contact the ones in their villages and report back to the DVC of Tong Village. The list would be narrowed down to two persons and a final date would be settled with the participants. The villagers then brainstormed locations in the city of Shijiazhuang for the protest and agreed upon a busy street in the commercial district. When the meeting was approaching the end, a villager who came with the Party secretary of Li Village raised the issue of making new banners for the protest to attract public attention. He recommended two friends of his with outstanding handcrafting skills and volunteered to complete the task with them. The DVC of Tong Village nodded to him with satisfaction and wrote down his name and phone number in his notebook. In the personal ties among villagers, planning was completed and tasks of preparation were divided and assigned.

Plan Execution

In addition to cadre-villager networks, family ties play a significant role in mobilizing the participation of villagers in the collective action in T Township. The villagers who

remain in home villages, regarded as ignorant of politics, usually obey the requests of the migrant workers in their families to take part in the protests and use their age, gender, and disability to present a persuasive image of suffering. A-Tai from Zeng Village, one of the two participants in the street protest in the summer of 2008, initially received the assignment during a phone call from his son working in Beijing. He briefly described to her about the event and asked her to “help the villagers in the township” by following the order of the DVC of Tong Village who would visit her later.

“I surely want to help to solve the problem in our township but I genuinely do not see how I could. You see, I am illiterate and did not understand the words on the cardboard I was holding... But my son said I just needed to listen to that village cadre. He also said this thing would work out because some urban people had tried it before. He is my son and of course I said yes to him, as always.” A-Tai with delight explained to me how she came to the decision to go to the street to protest.¹⁰⁴

The DVC of Tong Village, the major facilitator of the event, accepted my interview only after the protest¹⁰⁵. After the cadres reported back to him about their contacts with potential protesters in their villages, they discussed the appropriateness of the candidates over the phone. They were searching for elder villagers available who would be willing to participate, and hold the courage and skills to confront governmental officials. A-Tai from Zeng Village and another old woman villager from Pine-Tree Village were chosen. Cadres of the two villages contacted the family members of the two protesters in Beijing and asked them to discuss the resistance plan with the two elder women. Once the DVC of Tong Village got home for his unemployment break, he paid a visit to the two protesters with the new banners he had collected, making sure that they knew the date and the location and understood the actions to take. He offered his full encouragement

¹⁰⁴ Interview in Zeng Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/14/2008.

¹⁰⁵ Interview in Tong Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/15/2008.

and support and thanked them for their participation representing all the villagers in the township.

Transportation was arranged in the families of the protesters on that day. A-Tai's grandson accompanied her to the city in the morning and had planned to pick her up with a friend of his in the evening, but the city official drove her home in the end. In the home villages of the two protesters, some villagers spontaneously sent gifts and comforts to them for their actions of bravery and honor. Some received such requests from their village cadres directly or indirectly from their family members in the cities. The DVC of Tong Village as well spread the news in his village and mobilized thankful gifts to the heroic resisters and their families. Warm reception was obviously a reward deeply appreciated by the families of the protesters and ensured their future participation in collective resistance. A-Tai's daughter-in-law said when I asked her willingness to join in protests, "Of course, I will if I am asked to. In the countryside, we help each other and people give 'face' to the ones who contribute. You see how my mother-in-law is treated with respect because she participated..."¹⁰⁶

The village cadres need to mobilize participation at a larger scale for the routine protests to the city government of Shijiazhuang during the Chinese New Year, but the mobilization is achieved similarly through personal networks and family ties in the villages. The cadres use the most direct method – home visit – to inform the villagers of the time of the protests and request for their participation. They often spend the evening before the protest walking around the village and knocking at the doors to remind people of the incoming event. This simple strategy often turns out to be fairly effective in

¹⁰⁶ Interview in Zeng Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/14/2008.

mobilization, and the cadres estimate that around 200 villagers show up every year, more from the six villages that have lost farmland than the other 15 villages. Over 300 villagers participated in the 2006 protest, as the Party secretary of Zeng Village recalled, and the scene impressed him as a human flood in the small square in front of the city government of Shijiazhuang. “You know what the township Party secretary told me later? You could go protesting and do not bring so many people in future please... It was like an uprising and looked bad for the city...” Secretary Zeng sneered at the fear of the rural officials when proudly telling me the story.¹⁰⁷

“At least they then knew what we could do... People always have other things going on during the Chinese New Year, so we don’t have to have everybody there. A bunch from each village is quite enough. And visiting villagers’ homes directly certainly can bring us enough participants.”

To show respect to the voluntary efforts of the village cadres is a major reason for the villagers to go protesting and they often manage to coordinate representation in their extended families.

“Our village cadres come to my home not for tax, not for fines, but for our participation in protests that actually are for our own good. So I feel that we need to at least try to go.” A villager in Phoenix Village said in an interview¹⁰⁸. “And because the Party secretary is organizing this, others would go too so we will not be alone and will be quite safe. My elder brother’s family lives in this village as well and at least one person from the family should participate. My brother and I usually take turns each year and sometimes our wives and children go to the protest with us... You know, I just feel that someone in the family should go as a representative, otherwise it does not look so good to the village cadres and also the other villagers...”

Peer pressure is apparently another significant reason for the participation of the villagers. Their horizontal relational social capital in the anarchist village communities and localistic *communitas* not only produces system social capital of community norms

¹⁰⁷ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

¹⁰⁸ Interview in Phoenix Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 9/3/2007.

of participation, but also enhances these norms by providing internal supervision to prevent free riders. A mother in Pine-Tree Village, whose son is a member of the after-school homework group in the village, feels it necessary for a representative in her family to participate in the protests to maintain decency for her child.

“The kids actually know everything. One day, my son came back and told me about their discussion during the homework group. They teased a girl in the village because her family never participated in those protests. The son of the DVC accused her of being as selfish as her parents and she cried badly... Living in the same village, people basically know everything about you and you have to think about family reputation for the children. I always say to my husband that at least one person from his extended family needs to go, because our son is growing up in this village and needs a friendly environment... Also, I think protesting is likely going to solve our problem too. My husband said that the urban people do it quite often to get what they want. It is probably an effective way...”¹⁰⁹

In our conversations, Zeng Hui and his friends in Beijing often made fun of a young man from Hundred-Flowers Village, who is reputed as stingy and self-centered. He often comes to the gatherings of locals without bringing any food but always eats a lot. They once went to a movie together but he discovered that he did not take his wallet with him at the entrance of the cinema. Zeng Hui paid for his ticket and not surprisingly he never paid back the money. Moreover, when the locals search for assistance in the community, he always avoids contact and sometimes even pretends that his phone is broken. Zeng Hui said¹¹⁰:

“That piece of work and his similarly selfish parents are never really interested in protesting for all the villagers. But my friends and I can push him in our own ways.” He added, “We sometimes paid him a visit before the day of the protest, just some sort of informal visit to a friend. Then we would hang out for a bit and we would start talking about the incoming protest. We always tried to make it subtle as we would still meet each other often in Beijing. I’d start saying, ‘There is going to be a protest again in a few days. I think people should really take part in it because it is for all the villagers in the township. And if one never shows up, he should be blamed

¹⁰⁹ Interview in Pine-Tree Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/19/2009.

¹¹⁰ Interview in Beijing, 7/6/2007.

by his own conscience for being so selfish. Letting others take the risk and merely waiting for the results is pretty bad huh, isn't it?' I'd glimpse at him while talking and my friends would echo the points... That did work. He participates in the protests now and then. When he showed up, he'd say hi to us to make sure that we saw him (smile)... We are trying to achieve something together and I believe that we should have some channels to check that everyone is contributing. In our case, I think it is the closeness of us in the villages and in the cities. No one wants to offend people that he has to meet often."

When joining the protests is for various reasons not an option, the villagers make their efforts to contribute to the collective action in alternative ways, in order to demonstrate appreciation to their village cadres and other participants. Some would help making banners and writing slogans; some (often times parents of the college graduates who reside in cities) would purchase food and drinks, which they'd ask the village cadres to take to the protesting spot; some would use their own vehicles to drive the villagers to the city government; some would buy bus tickets for the participants in their villages who use public transportation; and some would visit the participants in their villages after the protests with grateful gifts. Village cadres in T Township can keep track of the behaviors because the villagers never fail to report their contributions to the cadres indicating that they are in fact meeting their requests for participation. The cadres on the other hand inform the protesters of the contributions whenever they have the opportunity.

"When I distributed the food and drinks to people on the scene, I always mentioned the names of the villagers who bought them. And I often greeted villagers by asking who drove them to the city in front of the crowd. So the villagers protesting would know that they were widely supported. Also, the villagers who were unable to show up but actually participated were honored too. It was good for both sides." The Party secretary of Wu Village felt content with his strategies of creating solidarity¹¹¹ in an interview.

¹¹¹ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/10/2009.

Monitoring Outcomes

Village cadres in T Township, through their personal ties with villagers, serve as the major mobilizing agents in the organization of the petitions and protests. In the same non-institutionalized channels, outcomes of the collective action are shared and monitored in the community of resistance. Officials in the township, particularly the Party secretary, are in charge of delivering responses from the city government to the villager protesters; however, without the partnership of the village cadres, it is beyond their reach to call a meeting with every participant. Although they may symbolically talk to some villager participants, their major method is to individually visit the village cadres active in the resistance events to convey the decisions of the city government and negotiate with the cadres over their future plans of actions (e.g. having fewer villagers to sit in front of the city government).

The village cadres, when returning to the cities after the protests, update each other about what they have learned from the township officials and attempt to tease out the true progress in their resistance from the different wordings. They sometimes call a meeting of village cadres and villager activists, like the ones for planning and initiation, to discuss the actual outcomes of their actions and draft an outline for the next cycle of protesting. The consensus reached among the cadres is spread to the villagers in the cities through personal ties in the localistic communitas, and via them to their family members remaining in the villages.

As the villagers expected, the protesting of the two elderly women in the summer of 2008 agitated the city government of Shijiazhuang, which was struggling to maintain social harmony to welcome the Beijing Olympics. The officials promised to the DVC of

Tong Village that they would speed up the process of getting the villagers their compensation once the Olympics was over, yet meanwhile warned the villagers not to challenge their authority at this very sensitive period because otherwise the officials who were diligently working to help them would be dismissed and the city government may have to put the protesting villagers in jail. After talking with the DVC of Tong Village on the phone, the Party secretary of Wu Village organized a meeting in Hangzhou with village cadres and active villagers. Secretary Wu brought the encouraging news to the table and the discussion at the meeting carried a mood of optimism. In conclusion, they agreed to wait and observe what the city would do after the Olympic Games while not to press the city officials too hard so as to avoid the situation of *jifeidanda* (literally meaning “hen flies and eggs are broken,” to completely ruin everything).

Fang Jinsheng, a villager from Colorful-Stone Village, told me after the meeting that his next step was to share the news with his father and wife in village and ask them to observe the follow-up actions of the city government.

“The villagers staying back at home are our best assistants to monitor progress. We have to earn money in the cities but we still know that the former township Party secretary was removed, a new one was installed, or the construction of the apartment complex was interrupted, all because they informed us. The outcomes are tied with their family interest so they are willing to do that. And we in the city can respond to those changes timely by having meetings and planning for the next round of protesting. It has been working out quite well.”¹¹²

Fang Jinsheng was correct that the villagers in the countryside were faithful and efficient monitors of the outcomes of their resistance. An old grandpa in Upper-He Village told me that he not only tried his best to report the changes in the township to his son in the city, but also educated others in the village to pay attention to local politics.

¹¹² Interview in Hangzhou, 7/26/2008.

“I think it is extremely important that we all feel the responsibility. The villagers in the city carry out planning and organizing and we ought to do our part too. If we can get the compensation, and as they said, urban household registration, it will benefit everybody... And I believe we eventually will get them because my son told me that protesting had worked pretty well in cities and it is a smart thing to do...”¹¹³

System social capital of community solidarity and cohesion gives rise to the organized resistance in T Township, and at the same time, via the collaboration in monitoring movement progress and outcomes, collective action of the villagers in return enhances system social capital and prepares them for the next cycle of protesting.

The Subjectivity of Villager Resisters

The last section of this chapter seeks to understand collective claims and organized resistance of the villagers in T Township by inquiring how the participants cognitively and emotionally make sense of themselves and their social world (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Through system social capital in their cohesive community of resistance, the villagers share a constructed insurgent identity of “rural citizens.” Their subjectivity as “rural citizens” has directed the evolution and organization of their petitions and protests, but is embedded in the overarching dichotomies of urban-rural and central-local state. Although it is repeatedly noted that popular protests in China have been adopting the discourses of law and citizenship (O’Brien, 2008), contextualized meaning of citizenship and its influences on the rationales of grassroots social movements are often under-examined. I here intend to unfold the complex package of subjectivities of the villagers of T Township behind their self-claim of rural citizens in collective actions.

¹¹³ Interview in Upper-He Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/16/2009.

Individual Autonomy as Ultimate Citizenship

The ultimate fulfillment of citizenship, for the villagers of T Township, is to become individuals like the urban residents, who they believe can independently manage life situations via protected citizen rights and law. The opposite of citizenship is reliance on maneuvers of *guanxi* and the popular countryside worship of personal ties. They sometimes express such extreme admiration of urban citizenship of autonomy that they criticize not only the nepotistic ties in the countryside but also the interdependence among villagers. When the good news came to the villages that the city government of Shijiazhuang was considering to grant the villagers urban household registrations in 2009, an excited villager in Wind-Cloud Village told me that she was “looking forward to leading a simple life as an urban resident,” when she would no longer have to worry if others, including the cadres and villagers, “have good impressions” of her family.¹¹⁴

I often found these remarks perplexing because the villagers seem to cherish localistic networks in their communities, and the traditional and “backward” personal ties in the township are indeed the basis of their organized resistance aimed at citizen rights. The villagers, in their explanations, depict their utilization of *guanxi* in survival and resistance as a process of learning and adjusting to the advanced urban culture of citizenship.

“We are from the countryside and are not like you city people. We have been very ignorant of law and citizen rights, and we are only starting to learn to use them.” The Party secretary of Zeng Village told me.¹¹⁵ “That is why we should stand together like comrades and help each other learn about the new tools and get used to solving problems in this way. It is a process, but the final goal is that we could live independently as full citizens.”

¹¹⁴ Interview in Wind-Cloud Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/21/2009.

¹¹⁵ Interview in Beijing, 6/27/2009.

Wu Hao, a taxi driver in Hangzhou, apparently agreed with Secretary Zeng, as he said in an interview,¹¹⁶ “The urban residents fight for their rights alone because they are well equipped with the tools. They understand the rules and know how to use them. But we are new to the system and we need to fight together... We copy strategies from them and then mobilize everybody in the township because we need the solidarity to be powerful. Once we become citizens as the urban people, we can manage our problems individually too.” The woman villager in Wind-Cloud Village continued to tell me about her imagination of urban life, “In the city, people could do what they want, strive for their own good, and solve their own problems alone. That is so nice... Yeah, it is true that we have been collaborating well in the protests, but the goal is to have free and independent lives as urban residents, isn’t it?”¹¹⁷

The villagers mobilize resources for collective actions through personal ties and have successfully built community solidarity and norms of participation; however, such system social capital is not appreciated as part of their goal of achieving citizen rights. Instead, they equal citizenship with an urban mode of self sufficiency and wish to eventually get rid of their rural-style reliance on personal networks. Although the villagers organize social movements claiming collectivity, equality and justice, with their ironic determination to become just like the urban, they often entirely submit to the urban-rural structural hierarchy, and echo the increasingly popular neo-liberal emphasis of individual merits and autonomy in China. As the villagers approach closer to urban household registration, it is doubtful whether their community social capital would sustain during that transition of their lives.

The Party secretary of Wu Village once took me to a casual gathering with some of his friends from the former Harvest Village in Hangzhou. They obtained urban housing and household registration via collective protesting and Secretary Wu regard them as role models. When I asked them if they still stay in close touch with their fellow villagers after moving to the city, they shook their heads and replied:

¹¹⁶ Interview in Hangzhou, 9/29/2007.

¹¹⁷ Interview in Wind-Cloud Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 6/21/2009.

“No, not any more. Everybody is busy doing different things and we don’t have time to get together... Also, we want to be real urban people. If we socialize so intensely only with people from the same village, we would not fit in a metropolitan like Hangzhou...”

After the gathering, I could not help wondering about the future of system social capital among the villagers of T Township. If they were going to be fortunate enough to finally become urban residents, would they have to abandon the community solidarity that in fact enables their success in resistance?

Citizenship as a Central Policy

Unlike in theories premised on liberal capitalism, citizenship to the villagers of T Township is understood as granted through national policies designed by the central government. The policy with benevolent intentions as always reaches the urban residents first and equips them with powerful tools to defend their interest independently. Local governments in rural China, they believe, are unwilling to implement the policy of citizenship because it legally prevents them from exploiting villagers. The strategy of rural citizens is then to learn from urban residents and organize their communities to press for the rights that the central government has promised. The legitimacy of their collective action lies in the discrepancy between policy goals of the central state and policy implementation of the local rural state. They perceive space to struggle for citizenship via “rightful resistance” (O’Brien & Li, 2006) because of presumed protection and support from Beijing. In contrast to their counterparts in W Township, the villagers of T Township share appreciation, faith, and expectation in the central government of China in their anarchist village communities and localistic communitas.

Although the villagers sometimes claim that they are not afraid to bring the disputes in the township to Beijing, it has never occurred to them as an actually plausible plan to

confront the central government when responses from the city government have been repeatedly delayed.

“Protesting in Beijing? That is not realistic. We’ll need to all go to Beijing from different places at the same time and pay for our trips... Also, the central government is a good government that cares about the citizens. There is no reason to organize uprisings to shame its honor. It is the central officials that protect our rights and why do we want to make troubles and threaten them by protesting?” The Party secretary of Wu Village challenged me when I raised the why-not question.¹¹⁸

In some chatting about the differences among different levels of government in China, a woman in Tong Village told me that she participated in the protests because they were targeted at the local governments. “The local officials, they are evil, always thinking about grabbing more money from the villagers. It is good to show them what we can do against them and teach them a lesson... Officials in Beijing are good, as we often see on TV. They are thinking about the common people and want to make life easier for villagers... It is wrong to challenge the authority of the benevolent officials in Beijing. It will be like an uprising – that is bad and unappreciative. I will not do that.”¹¹⁹

Towards the coming of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, the villagers therefore had an extremely mixed and sometimes contradictory attitude. On the one hand, they considered it as an opportunity of resistance, to push for “international standards” of citizen rights and rule of law. They organized the protesting of the two elderly women villagers and grabbed with the sensitive politics in the nation to push for land compensation and urban household registration. But on the other hand, they took pride in the event and believed every Chinese person should cooperate with the central government for the sake of national glory. The workers in Beijing followed the order to leave the city before the Games, although with some frustration. When the city government of Shijiazhuang warned them not to repeat the protest to maintain social harmony during the Olympics, the villagers in consensus accepted the advice with patience and perceived it as morally

¹¹⁸ Interview in Hangzhou, 6/10/2009.

¹¹⁹ Interview in Tong Village, T Township, Z County, Shijiazhuang, 7/9/2008.

correct not to disgrace the central government, which had been protecting their citizen rights.

While claiming to be “rural citizens” in their social movements, the villagers of T Township understand citizenship as granted by the central state and learned from the urban residents. The ultimate fulfillment of citizenship for them is to be able to lead a life of independence and autonomy. In consequences, they demonstrate little interest in institutional building to sustain system social capital of solidarity in their communities or promoting democratic values of equal participation of all community members including cadres, capable villagers, common villagers, and marginalized villagers in the countryside. Citizenship in their resistance is more a successful tool of framing in resource mobilization than a cherished institution that they would pass on to future generations.

Solidarity, Organized Resistance, and Citizenship

Development of capitalism in T Township paralyzes governance and state control at the village level, and hierarchical clientelist ties between village cadres and villagers are now submerged in horizontal interpersonal networks among all villagers. Solidarity and norm of participation, or system social capital in the township, on which villagers organize their resistance, stems from their relational social capital of personal ties in anarchist villages and localist communitas in cities. They adopt the discourses of law and citizen rights, which they have acquired while working in cities, in their claims of collective action, resource mobilization, and shared insurgent identity. Confronting a governmental system that prioritizes social stability and harmony, their organized resistance is fairly powerful in pressing local officials to meet their requests. It is likely

that in a few years, villagers of the township will obtain urban household registrations and say farewell to their roots in the countryside.

The ideology of urban superiority, however, is deeply embedded in the organized petitions and protests of the villagers. They imitate social movement designs and strategies of urban residents to warrant fulfillment of citizenship and treat individual autonomy in the urban style, free from reliance on personal ties, as their ultimate goal. They ironically disregard relational and system social capital in rural communities that in fact has empowered them in collective actions. Meanwhile, they target their public demonstrations only at local governments, believing that the central state is benevolently on their side. Citizenship, to them, is a central policy with kind intention and there is no legitimate reason to disgrace the central government through organized resistance.

Organized resistance and collective demand for legal protection of citizen rights of the villagers in T Township evinces emerging space for a civil society in rural China. However, the villagers show no interest in institutional change for social equity, democracy, or solidarity of marginalized groups, and are completely submissive to the structural and cultural hierarchy of urban vs. rural in contemporary China. To become the urban is their understanding of modernity and ultimate pursuit via resistance, while citizenship is merely a discourse in the realization of the goal. The sustainability of their collectivity and solidarity therefore is questionable and it is still too early to predict the impacts of villagers' organized resistance as such on the future of the Chinese political system.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

This dissertation is a comparative tale of two townships in Hebei Province in north China. Villagers in W Township express their disgruntlements in individual cases and carry out disorganized resistance; yet villagers in T Township transcend group boundaries and organize their discontents in the community. To understand the different patterns of resistance in the two townships, I direct my attention to the different modes of local political economies that have emerged from the three decades of post-socialist reforms in the two locations, and the contents of exchange in everyday practices of personal ties in the two rural communities in the distinct grassroots contexts. Production of local rural entrepreneurship produces a highly visible endogenous class society in W Township, but in the “neo-clientelist local regime,” villagers perceive and understand their class positions through clientelist networking practices with the village cadres, instead of horizontal identification with their fellow villagers in similar life circumstances. They individually consult their grievances with the village cadres and in resistance adopt the cadres as their negotiation agents with the powerful. In T Township, on the other hand, the conspiracy of urban capital and rural governments to grab rural resources paralyzes village governance by victimizing the village cadres and driving them to work in the cities together with the villagers. In the “sundered local regime,” the similar close ties between village cadres and villagers, now carrying the discourses of citizen rights

that they absorb in the urban sites, powerfully mobilize the villagers to commit to organized resistance.

Local Contexts and Strategic Agencies in Personal Ties

The organization and disorganization of collective resistance in the two townships are both significantly associated with the practices of personal ties of villagers and village cadres, which reinforces the view that individual networks, or relational social capital, do not necessarily lead to solidarity in collective action, or system social capital. So as to clarify the connection between personal ties and social movement, the contents of exchange in the social networks, as shaped by local political and economic contexts, must be carefully interrogated. Personal ties, instead of being understood as providing simple and linear psychological promotion, structural positions, or automatic mechanisms to participation in collective action, need to be scrutinized as theoretically richer and more fluid strategic agencies emerging in institutional changes in political economies. The perspective on personal ties as interest-based and dynamic practices contextualized in grassroots politics, rather than a structural invariant, is crucial to demystify the effects of individual networks on social movement. Local actors adapt their networking behaviors in response to institutional changes to guard personal interests and their actions of tie utilization connect macro structures to dialogue with agency's attempts to generate social change through resistance.

The popular measure of personal ties on a spectrum from “weak” to “strong” (Lin, 2001; Glaeser, Laibson, & Sacerdote, 2002), from the perspective of strategic agencies, is then too vaguely abstract and problematic. The strength and significance of a personal network is usually not a measure of stability, but a changing practice of individuals in

different local contexts. To make sense of the role of personal ties in facilitating collective action, analyses might need to pay more attention to the complicated contents of exchange in ties and the evolution of them in local history and socioeconomic structures.

State and Cadre Representation in Rural China

In both locations of my dissertation fieldwork, state officials and cadres at different levels in rural governments have played crucial roles in constructing local political economies and influencing the organization or disorganization of villager resistance. In their coping strategies to respond to central policies while securing their local interests, the officials sponsor and constrain the development of different forms of capitalist productions in the areas and have given rise to distinct modes of political economies in the two townships. Village cadres, as the most grassroots representatives of the state, shift their roles into new patrons/mediators or movement organizers in the different contexts and serve as critical actors in the mobilization or suppression of collective action. After decades of post-socialist reforms, in the vibrant local market economy and the loosening organizational power of the Party, the state in rural China has become a more disaggregated concept than ever.

In the discussion of state control in China's countryside, it is hence necessary to stop assuming the state as integrated interests and avoid simplifying officials all as loyal agents of the government. Cadres may have shared goals in the bureaucratic system to implement central policies, appeal to the upper-level for promotion, and maintain social stability, but their contrasting local interests at different levels must be carefully

elucidated so as to understand the complex variety in economic development and political changes in post-socialist rural China.

The analytical differentiation of “central state” and “local state” is widely adopted in Chinese studies and it is popularly perceived that social unrest in China today is often targeted at local officials while the central government is believed to be benevolent and pro social justice (e.g. O’Brien, 2008). My data suggest some anomalies to this general observation. In T Township, where village cadres and villagers mobilize community resources to fight against the land deprivation sponsored by local rural governments, the resisters do cherish the belief that local rural officials are corrupted and the central government in Beijing is caring enough to allow them to use “citizen rights” to search for compensation. However, in W Township’s local capitalist production, village cadres seek for collaboration with township and county officials to play as patrons and conflict mediators for the villagers lower on the socioeconomic ladder. Villagers in their clientelist networks with the cadres, perceive local cadres as benevolently on their side and offering maximum help, while deeming central policies (e.g. to demolish their houses for the Beijing Olympic Games) as disruptive, intrusive, and annoying. They see the central government as being so out of local contexts that its demands in policies can be quite unreasonable. The categories of “local state” and “central state” are useful concepts, but villagers’ perceptions and attitudes towards them need to be examined in the tie practices of villagers and cadres embedded in the different local political economies in the countryside.

Social Inequality, Class, and Resistance

The thirty years of post-socialist reforms have transformed China from one of the most egalitarian nations to an extreme showcase of social inequity. The classic Marxian theories of class-based inequality, class analysis, and class struggles have been re-discovered and invoked in the country as highly relevant, not in the official discourse this time but in the popular Internet media and intellectual discussions (e.g. Hsu, 2007; Hanser, 2008). How we can make sense of class stratification in contemporary China and its impacts on political resistance and social change often locates at the center of inquiries in many research projects.

In this dissertation, I suggest that although the rural-urban divide is one of the most apparent social stratification in China, there is not a “rural class” coherent in interests and action strategies in today’s countryside. Economic stratification among villagers and endogenous class inequality emerging in rural capitalist production are worth careful examination in order to grasp the organization and disorganization of villager resistance. Class, as in the cities, is an extremely salient social category in rural China that sculptures the villagers’ different living conditions, political capacities, social behaviors, and personal ambitions in the two townships. However, in neither of the two townships does “class-in-itself” leap into “class-for-itself” and produce class-based collectivity and purposive mobilization.

The subjectivities of the villagers are never predetermined as rooted solely and always in class terms, and their protruding insurgent identities in disorganized or organized resistance are contextualized in the political economies of the local regimes – “individual clients of the home village cadres” under the neo-clientelist local regime of

W Township and exploited “rural citizens” under the sundered local regime of T Township. Resistance planned and carried out on these identities, as unfolded in the chapters, while helping the villagers to solve some of their problems and soothe part of their disgruntlements, limit the scopes of the settlements of their issues and the impacts of their actions on political structures.

My field data complicate the optimistic future of political governance in rural China that sometimes research on democratic reforms (e.g. Horseley, 2001; Levy, 2007) and villager activism (e.g. O’Brien & Li, 2006) may predict, and suggest that there might not be a simple linear connection between villager resistance and fulfillment of democracy, citizenship, and the “rule of law.” The interesting local mechanisms of understanding class status and mobilizing insurgent identities should shed light on the growing scholarship of social inequality in contemporary China, which on the one hand appreciates the class perspective to examine the structural stratification, and on the other hand needs to recognize the fluidity and complexity in the meaning and effects of class positions.

Community Organizing in China

Economic and political reforms in rural China are social experiments that have aroused the world’s attention. NGOs and NPOs interested in rural development in developing countries are excited to see the occurring opportunities to promote democracy and the civil society there and have started several programs in the villages. In our conversations, villagers in W Township recalled a program of evening classes that a NGO organized, during which they were lectured about values of democracy and

responsible citizenship. Unfortunately, the villagers found those speeches and the ideas advocated quite irrelevant and to some extent amusing.

“This is a Chinese village and I don’t see the point to come and discuss those big terms, citizen, democracy, open society, who cares about them here?” Even Chu Yue, who was attending an elite college in Beijing, showed little appreciation of the futile efforts.¹²⁰ “When elections take place, everybody is thinking about the networks in the village, to avoid offending people important to the families. We live in a close community and villagers calculate about the ‘face’ of their families. Nobody really votes for ‘democracy’...”

As discussed earlier in this dissertation, political participation in rural China is often far beyond an individual issue of embracing the values of democracy and citizenship. In the grassroots rural communities, villagers’ social life is embedded in nested personal ties and the interdependency between villagers and their cadres changes and constrains the effectiveness of the newly established political institutions in villages. It is therefore of critical importance to understand the community lives in rural China, shaped by the complex local political economies, in order to promote democratic participation and the growth of an open and civil society. Instead of reinforcing the pre-set abstract beliefs and values, the real challenge for social services in rural China might be how villagers can be truly empowered in the local contexts via culturally sensitive methods.

I observed during the dissertation fieldwork that increasing social inequality, arbitrary and despotic market administration, and lack of social welfare and security (including health care, unemployment insurance, poverty relief, retirement plans) are among the structural obstacles to the full realization of democratic ideals in rural China. Without such issues being addressed at the policy level, educational programs helping individuals to recognize the values of participation can easily fail. Community social work, which

¹²⁰ Interview in Chu Village, W Township, Q County, Cangzhou, 6/9/2006.

organizes grassroots individual interests and bridges individual concerns with social and policy changes, may offer an alternative of practices in the Chinese countryside. Villages in China are still resourceful communities with rich relational social capital in personal ties, a remaining sense of collectivity, and a degree of trust usually higher than average. When these resources are mobilized and unions are established, as in T Township, mutual help among villagers can shield them from life difficulties and their collective voice in resistance becomes the leverage to negotiate with the government and fulfill social justice. Political reforms in China to date have been adopting a top-down approach with the central government designing all the policies on how new institutions should be built in the countryside and how elections should be implemented, and community power in villages may be able to bring in grassroots leadership and add some bottom-up elements to the social changes. Community social work focusing on organizing solidarity, resource mobilization, and grassroots empowerment needs to be a more recognized and emphasized approach in social services in today's rural China.

Community social work requires organizers to be sensitive to local cultural and social contexts and one strategy I would suggest is to work with local partners, particularly village cadres in rural China. Instead of controlling state representatives that must be worked against in the construction of a civil society, village cadres, as I argue in this dissertation, are important and resourceful community members communicating in the relationship between state and society. And they usually have rich knowledge of local history and culture and enjoy legitimacy in their community leadership.

In T Township, when village cadres lose faith in the state system and commit to work with villager communities, they amazingly achieve what macro social work literature

would call “multicultural community organizing” (Checkoway, 2006). Community social work in recent years are thrilled by the promising practices of multi-cultural community organizing, through which members and resources of different groups could be mobilized under a unified goal promoting social justice and social change (Gutierrez et al., 1996; Gutierrez & Alvarez, 2000) . Social work intervention at the community level raising consciousness of cross-group commonalities and making outreach efforts to facilitate group-boundary transcendence is often encouraged as a future direction of community development. In T Township, village cadres, as endogenous community leaders and organizers, manage to lead villagers to transcend persisting boundaries in rural society – village units, class, and lineage groups in their resistance to the rural governments and fight for social justice. Their success could offer vivid and important lessons to social work researchers and practitioners, and working with them in partnership will be extremely useful for workers organizing communities in rural China. In W Township, on the other hand, village cadres use their personal ties to prevent villagers from organizing collective action, but meanwhile they represent villagers to negotiate with the governments and market administrations and relieve their grievances. They are respectable community leaders in the villages, and working together with them, who probably have the best first-hand knowledge of the rural communities, will allow social workers to better assess the needs of villagers, design context sensitive social services, and carry out relevant and plausible community programs.

Through the stories of cadres and villagers in the two Chinese townships, I hope to demonstrate the utter importance to investigate the community organizing efforts initiated and executed by in-community leaders whose authority is rooted in the local histories,

and work with them in partnership in social services. The implied training and practices for the social work profession is then to pay attention to the currently existing leadership structure of communities, as well as the elements inherited from the recent history, and cultivate empowerment and mobilization aimed at social justice from within. In the particular contexts of post-socialist Chinese villages, it is the role of the village cadres that needs to be taken into consideration in the strength-based evaluation of the dynamics of the rural communities.

In rural China during the dissertation fieldwork, the beginning paragraph of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* often came to my mind:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.”

China today is experiencing incredible changes at an incredible speed, when socialism clashes with global capitalism, free market clashes with arbitrary state interventions, and violent deprivation and despotic exploitation clashes with emerging consciousness of citizenship and human rights. At the end of this project, I am unable as ever to predict the future of this massive nation, but as ever I am deeply hoping that out of the great changes a more livable society would occur for the villagers in the two townships and Chinese citizens in general.

Appendices

Appendix I
Guide for Unstructured Interviews

1. **Demographic Data:** Age, Occupation, Education, Family Structure, Party Membership
2. **Questions specific to the event that recently took place (THE FOCUS):**
 - Experiences during the event (asking for more details). Were you treated fairly? Who helped you? What harmed you?
 - How did you come up with the strategies to cope with the event?
 - How did you make the decision of resistance/withdrawal?
3. **Questions of general attitudes towards (always ask for examples):**
 - Governments at different levels
 - Democratic reforms in the countryside
 - Social environment in home village
 - Current life in villages/cities
4. **Village governance in home township**
 - Comments on village cadres and other villagers with specific examples.
 - Are your anticipations met in the village community?
 - Do you feel your voice could be heard in the community?
 - How do you usually solve your problems in the village?

5. **Resistance**

- Walk me through your (other, besides the current event) experiences of opposing the village government and confronting the state system.
- Walk me through your (other, besides the current event) experiences of opposing your boss.
- Are you satisfied with the outcomes? Things that you regretted doing (would have done differently)?
- Why did you choose/not choose to work together with the others?

6. **Family and Local History (Particularly for Older Interviewees):**

- How has your family life changed over the past three decades of reforms?

(Examples)

- What was it like in the 80s when the reform started?
- Changes in the 90s?
- More recently?
- How has village governance in your village changed? (Examples)
 - What was it like in the 80s when the reform started?
 - Changes in the 90s?
 - More recently?
- How have local enterprises changed? (Examples)
 - What was it like in the 80s when the reform started?
 - Changes in the 90s?
 - More recently?

Appendix II

Interviewees in the Study

W Township

Interviewee	Location	Date	Gender	Age	Education	Party Member
Party secretary of Q County	Q county	5/21/2006	Male	47	College	P
County Official Wang	Q County	5/22/2006	Male	51	College	P
Deng Wen, VRA Member	Big-Forest Village	5/24/2006	Male	41	High School	P
Huang Jin, village Party secretary	Small-Forest Village	5/26/2006	Male	45	Middle School	P
Wang Mei, village Party secretary	Chu Village	5/28/2006	Female	53	Elementary	P
Shen Angen, chicken farm Owner	River-End Village	5/31/2006	Male	41	High School	p
Township Party secretary	W Township	6/2/2006	Male	42	High School	P

Chen						
Owner of a grocery store	Chu Village	6/3/2006	Male	37	High School	non P
Chu Hai, truck company owner	Chu Village	6/7/2006	Male	45	High School	non P
Chu Yue, Chu Hai's daughter	Chu Village	6/9/2006	Female	18	College	non P
Yang Fanli, worker/farmer	River-End Village	6/19/2006	Male	37	Middle School	non P
Restaurant owner	Gold-Bull Village	6/21/2006	Male	43	Middle School	P
Fang Ming, DVC	Gold-Bull Village	7/1/2006	Male	40	High School	non P
Chu Da, DVC	Chu Village	7/3/2006	Male	60	Middle School	P
Village Party secretary Gao	Upper-Gao Village	7/8/2006	Male	49	Middle School	P
Chu Ma, chicken farm owner	Chu Village	7/11/2006	Female	34	Middle School	non P
Truck owner	Big-Forest Village	7/15/2006	Female	51	Elementary	non P
Qian Hua, fruit orchard owner	Willow-Tree Village	7/26/2006	Male	41	Middle School	non P
Village Party secretary Chen	Gold-Bull Village	8/1/2006	Male	57	Elementary	P
Village Party	Liu	8/2/2006	Male	48	Middle	p

secretary Liu	Village				School	
Truck owner/driver	Chu Village	8/6/2006	Male	55	Elementary	non P
Li Qiang, farmer	Small-Forest Village	8/13/2006	Male	38	Middle School	non P
Truck owner	Tan Village	8/14/2006	Male	46	Middle School	P
DVC Lai	Lai village	8/19/2006	Male	54	Elementary	p
Carpenter	Gold-Bull Village	8/24/2006	Female	38	High School	non P
Tan Song, farmer	Tan village	8/27/2006	Male	46	Elementary	non P
Qian Zhuang, owner of a brick factory	Willow-Tree Village	8/30/2006	Male	56	Middle School	non P
Wan Qiu, goat raiser	Li Village	9/1/2006	Male	39	Middle School	non P
Cheng Mingshan's wife, duck farm owner	Spring-Breeze Village	9/4/2006	Female	34	Middle School	non P
Deng Yuan, farmer	Big-Forest Village	9/6/2006	Male	41	Elementary	non P
Gao Chuan, farmer	Upper-Gao Village	6/1/2007	Male	49	Elementary	non P
Chen Kun, chicken farm owner	Gold-Bull Village	6/4/2007	Male	45	Middle School	P
Madam Fu, owner of Spring-	Fu Village	6/5/2007	Female	36	Middle School	P

Flower Bathing						
Fu Zhou, migrant worker in Beijing	Fu Village	6/8/2007	Male	21	Middle School	non P
Chu Cheng's wife, truck owner	Chu Village	6/9/2007	Female	35	Middle School	non P
DVC Gao	Upper- Gao Village	6/10/2007	Male	43	High School	P
Chu Feng, chicken farm owner	Chu Village	6/11/2007	Female	38	Elementary	non P
Gao Shengkai, farmer	Lower- Gao Village	6/12/2007	Male	44	Elementary	non P
Owner of apple orchard	Tan Village	6/21/2007	Male	39	Middle School	non P
Village Party secretary Huang	River-End Village	6/23/2007	Male	58	Middle School	P
Chu Shan, truck owner	Q County	6/27/2007	Male	39	Middle School	non P
Li Rong, plumber	Li Village	7/1/2007	Male	42	High School	P
Owner of a tailor shop	Bird-Rest Village	7/15/2007	Male	47	Elementary	non P
Yang Yi, owner of a card- board factory	Lai Village	7/17/2007	Male	38	High School	P
Liu Ming, farmer	Liu Village	7/18/2007	Male	54	Illiterate	non P
Gao Xing,	Upper-	7/19/2007	Female	39	Middle	P

chicken farm owner	Gao Village				School	
Chen Hongliang, chicken farm owner	Gold-Bull Village	8/3/2007	Male	46	High School	P
Farmer	Spring-Breeze Village	8/6/2007	Female	55	Illiterate	non P
Farmer	Tan Village	8/27/2007	Male	36	Middle School	non P
Plumber Gao	Lower-Gao Village	9/16/2007	Male	48	Middle School	non P
Farmer	Chu Village	9/18/2007	Female	47	Elementary	non P
Father of a truck driver	Bird-Rest Village	9/19/2007	Male	50	Illiterate	non P
Gao Xiuquan, carpenter	Lower-Gao Village	5/31/2008	Male	35	Middle School	non P
Farmer	Bird-Rest Village	6/11/2008	Female	65	Illiterate	non P
DVC Lin	Big-Forest Village	6/17/2008	Male	39	High School	P
Farmer	River-End Village	6/28/2008	Female	43	Elementary	non P
Chen Hua, owner of a grocery store	Gold-Bull Village	7/2/2008	Male	33	Middle School	non P
Li Fuhua,	Small-	7/18/2008	Male	43	Middle	non P

former orchard owner	Forest Village				School	
Owner of a date orchard	Small-Forest Village	6/25/2007 & 7/21/2008	Male	56	Middle School	non P

T Township

Interviewee	Location	Date	Gender	Age	Education	Party Member
Zeng Hui, bartender in Beijing	Beijing	7/6/2007	Male	20	Middle School	non P
DVC of Pheonix Village	Beijing	7/6/2007	Male	47	Middle School	p
Villager Cao	Beijing	7/9/2007	Male	42	Middle School	non P
Female worker in Beijing	Beijing	7/11/2007	Female	20	Elementary	non P
Worker	Beijing	7/13/2007	Male	36	Elementary	non P
Worker	Beijing	7/14/2007	Male	25	Elementary	non P
Villager Chen	Phoenix Village	9/3/2007	Male	67	Illiterate	non P
Leader of Yan Lineage	Yan Village	9/12/2007	Male	72	Elementary	P
Tong Zhiquan, owner of a barber shop	Hangzhou	9/29/2007	Male	35	High School	non P
Wu Hao, taxi	Hangzhou	9/29/2007	Male	24	Middle	non P

driver					School	
Worker	Hangzhou	10/2/2007	Male	22	Middle School	non P
Zhao Shun, taxi driver	Hangzhou	10/2/2007	Male	41	Middle School	non P
Zhang Jianhua, white-collar	Beijing	7/4/2008	Male	32	College	P
Zhang Feng, restaurant owner	Beijing	7/4/2008	Female	47	Middle School	P
Accountant of Yan Village	Beijing	7/4/2008	Male	54	Middle School	P
Owner of a barber shop	Beijing	7/5/2008	Male	34	Middle School	P
Waitress	Beijing	7/6/2008	Female	27	Middle School	non P
Villager	Tong Village	7/9/2008	Female	40	Elementary	P
Father, son in Hangzhou	Tong Village	7/9/2008	Male	61	Illiterate	non P
Worker Li	Beijing	7/11/2008	Male	46	Middle School	non P
Party secretary of Hundred-Flowers Village	Beijing	7/11/2008	Male	48	Middle School	P
Township Party secretary	T Township	7/12/2008	Male	42	College	P
Township official	T Township	7/13/2008	Female	36	College	P

Teacher Assistant	Lower-He Village	7/13/2008	Female	41	Elementary	P
A-Tai's daughter-in-law	Zeng Village	7/14/2008	Female	53	Elementary	non P
A-Tai	Zeng Village	7/14/2008	Female	72	Illiterate	non P
He Jianmin, taxi driver	Hangzhou	7/25/2008	Male	37	Middle School	non P
Fang Jinsheng, worker	Hangzhou	7/26/2008	Male	38	High School	P
Party secretary of Lower-He Village	Hangzhou	7/26/2008	Male	51	Middle School	p
DVC of Little-Hill Village	Hangzhou	7/27/2008	Male	43	Middle School	P
Massager Li	Hangzhou	6/5/2009	Female	21	Middle School	non P
Worker in a clothing factory	Hangzhou	6/7/2009	Female	23	Middle School	non P
Li Yun, delivery guy	Hangzhou	6/8/2009	Male	28	Elementary	non P
Party secretary of Wu Village	Hangzhou	6/10/2009	Male	46	Middle School	P
Dong Gang, restaurant owner	Hangzhou	6/11/2009	Male	39	High School	P
Grandpa villager	Upper-He Village	6/16/2009	Male	79	Illiterate	non P

Grandma villager	Pine-Tree Village	6/18/2009	Female	70	Illiterate	non P
Tan Yong's grandpa, villager	Little-Hill Village	6/19/2009	Male	65	Almost Illiterate	non P
Mother villager	Pine-Tree Village	6/19/2009	Female	34	Middle School	non p
Villager	Wind-Cloud Village	6/21/2009	Female	31	Middle School	non P
Villager	Hundred-Flowers Village	6/22/2009	Female	36	Elementary	non P
DVC of Tong Village, worker	Beijing & Tong Village	7/3/2008 & 7/15/2008	Male	45	Middle School	P
Party secretary of Zeng Village	Beijing	7/6/2007 & 7/3/2008 & 6/27/2009	Male	45	Middle School	P

Appendix III

A Sample Meeting Minutes

03年11月4日村民代表，党员代表

书记讲退耕还林，河堤种树，干渠种树。具体方法和措施，XX木业每亩第一年补40元，大堤水利局暂定协议树木收入九一分，村民种树得9，水利局得1。村委会出地，村民种树，村委会不要任何代价。代表一致同意。

Date: Nov. 4th, 2003

Attendees: Villagers' Representatives & Party Members' Representatives

The village Party secretary talked about the policy of “turning farmland back into forests”¹²¹ and assigned tasks of planting trees on river banks and along major irrigation water paths. Here are the specific methods: XX Lumber Factory would provide match fund of 40 *yuan* per *mu* in the first year of the trees; Bureau of Water Conservancy proposed 9-1 divide of profits from trees on the river banks – villagers who plant trees would get 90% and the bureau gets 10%. For the land along irrigation water paths, the village government would give villagers the land at no cost, and villagers who plant trees there can get the whole profits. All representatives at the meeting unanimously agreed.

¹²¹ This is a policy designed by the central government and has been widely implemented in rural China since 2000. The major purpose of the policy is to protect the natural environment in the countryside. Since a lot of forests were cut down to create farmland in the past, the government is determined to reverse the process by funding villages to plant trees on farmland and re-create forests.

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