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Gao Village

A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China

香港大學出版社
HONG KONG UNIVERSITY PRESS

Hong Kong University Press
14/F Hing Wai Centre
7 Tin Wan Praya Road
Aberdeen, Hong Kong

ISBN 962 209 488 0

First published in the United Kingdom in 1999 by
C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

This soft cover edition published in 1999 by
Hong Kong University Press is available in
Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan.

Printed in Malaysia

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THE STUDY OF RURAL CHINA AND THE CASE OF GAO VILLAGE

There are many reasons for us to seek a better understanding of rural life in China. Some are historical or academic. One is that rural support of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is recognised as a major factor contributing to the success of the 1949 Communist victory. Another is that the largest social engineering project in human history, that is, the establishment and practice of what was called the People's Commune, occurred in rural China. Other reasons are contemporary and will have implications for years to come. First, even after nearly half a century of Chinese industrialisation, more than 70 per cent of the population remains rural. Second, the dismantling of the commune system in post-Mao China is assumed by many to have promoted the success of China's economic reforms since the 1980s. Thirdly, increasing township enterprises in rural areas have became an important industrial force in China since the 1980s. And finally, with allegedly only 7 per cent of the world's arable land, China has managed to feed more that 20 per cent of the world's population.

Of course, not all of the above are foregone conclusions. For instance, for some scholars at least, it is far from certain that the CCP victory over the Nationalists (KMT) in 1949 was due to rural support.[1] Equally, some people may argue that the rise of township enterprises since the 1980s was not just a post-Mao reform success but had its roots in what happened in Mao's China. However, the issues are important and the continued debate only emphasises their importance.

More important are issues that are not debated, issues that concern our future. Will urbanisation embrace most of China's

[1] For the most recent debate on this issue see Philip Huang, Mark Selden and Joseph Esherick in *Modern China*, vol. 21, no. 1, January 1995.

700 million rural people? If it does, how and at what speed? Will China be able to feed its population? China has already started to be a net importer of grain. If the trend accelerates, the impact on the world grain market will be felt in every corner of the world. Whatever happens to the rural people in China over the next fifty years, the economic and environmental implications are of an enormity beyond imagination.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a formidable literature on Chinese rural life has been built up by China specialists. A number of these are good macro-studies.[2] Some of these rural studies are sociological or anthropological while others focus on rural political economy and development. Studies on Chinese rural politics, economy and development are numerous. There are also excellent micro-studies of individual villages which cross over area disciplines.

So there is a plenty of information, analysis and discussion on rural China. Why is there a need for another study, the case of Gao Village? First, the area where Gao Village is located has never been studied before. Most of the studies of rural life have been on the areas of north or north-east China such as Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, or coastal China such as the Yangzi Delta and the Pearl River Delta, or south-west China such as Sichuan and Yunnan. While no area can be said to be typical, Jiangxi, where Gao Village is located, is neither as developed as the coastal south, nor as underdeveloped as the north-west.

Secondly, as already noted, the approach taken by the present study combines academic discussion with personal experience. While some, such as Unger and Chan, base their approach on interviews, others such as Friedman *et al.* and Potter and Potter base theirs on documentary sources combined with interviews. In both cases, they were neither participants nor direct observers. Only a few, such as Hinton and Greene, were direct observers and, to a certain extent, participants. The present author, however, was born and brought up in the environment under study. The starting points of observation and participation are different. I was an observer and participant before I had any inkling of mainstream "Western" cultural and theoretical assumptions. I knew of these only after I had witnessed the events, whereas writers such as

[2] This is not a comprehensive survey of the literature in the field. A short bibliography of relevant work in English is given in Appendix 1, pp. 265ff.

Hinton and Greene or Unger and Chan had their theoretical assumptions intact before they approached the subject.

Thirdly, while the present study covers a small area, a village of no more than a few hundred people, its time-scale is very large. It covers a period of more than forty years including four important stages: the stage immediately before and after the land reform; the commune system; the dismantling of the commune system and immediately after; and the new development from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s.

In a word, the present study covers two contrasting periods in one volume: the period of what is called socialist revolution from 1949 to 1978 and the period of post-Mao reforms from the late 1970s to the mid 1990s. China is now at a crossroads: should it continue the hesitant path towards full-fledged capitalism or retain some socialist elements in a market economy through the so-called "socialism with Chinese characteristics"? To return to a Maoist version of socialism does not seem possible now. However, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is an elusive concept and difficult in practice. Given the international climate and how far China has already moved towards full-fledged capitalism, it is the easiest and therefore most likely road to be taken. Because China is at such a crossroads there has been a lot of debate over what has been achieved and what has gone wrong in both the socialist and post-Mao reform eras. The present study aims to provide evidence and arguments relevant to such debates.

Finally, the present study takes a critical stand with respect to official communist propaganda and the views of the establishment intellectuals in China. It is my belief, as reflected throughout the book, that the political institutions, the economic system, the legal framework and cultural values of the People's Republic of China have discriminated against rural residents who are generically referred to as "peasants". The book attempts to demonstrate that radical policies such as those during the Cultural Revolution brought about visible improvements in areas such as education and health care for the villagers. The establishment intellectuals, however, choose to ignore evidence of this kind. It is because of my sympathy and identification with the villagers that I am critical of blanket condemnation of the Cultural Revolution and of the praises heaped on the post-Mao reforms since the late 1970s.

2

THE SETTING

Gao Village is located on the mid-west border of Boyang County, Jiangxi province. 300 metres to the north-west is its neighbouring village, Lai Village, which is under the administration of Duchang County. 300 metres to the north-east is Wang Village. About one kilometre to the southwest is Jiang Village. About six hundred metres to the south is Xu Village and 400 metres further south is Cao Village. About 100 kilometres away to the north-west is the city of Jiujiang, one of the ports open to foreigners before 1949, not far from the famous Lushan mountain.[1] Less than 100 kilometres away to the east is Jingdezhen, which used to be the porcelain capital of China. About 50 kilometres to the south and west is the largest fresh water lake in China, Poyang Lake.[2] The county centre, Boyang Town, is about a little more than 100 kilometres away. In the 1990s, Boyang County Town had a population of around 65,000, and Boyang County about 1 million.

Currently three villages, Gao Village, Xu Village and Cao Village, form an administrative unit called Guantian *cun weihui* ("village committee"). This committee is the lowest administrative

[1] Lushan was a favourite holiday resort for the rich and foreigners before 1949. After 1949 it became an exclusive area preserved for the high-ranking CCP officials who occupy all the Western-style buildings built before 1949. One of the most important events of PRC history took place in Lushan in 1959 when the outspoken Minister of Defence Peng Dehuai confronted Mao for the Great Leap Forward policies.

[2] The lake is 170 kilometres long from south to north and 74 kilometres wide from east to west. It has an area of 3,841 square kilometres. Its deepest level is 23.7 metres. There are 118 kinds of fish in the lake. There are eight counties bordering the lake, of which Boyang County alone has a population or more than one million. See Liu Hanyan *et al.*, eds., *Boyang xianzhi* (Annuals of Boyang County), Nanchang, 1989, p. 90. The data and statistics on Boyang County in this chapter are all from Liu Hanyan).

unit in rural China and its size is roughly the same as that of a production brigade in the commune system in Mao's China. All village committee officials are local villagers who do not earn a government salary. Their work is paid for by levies on the local villagers. Guantian village committee has a population of about 1,500. Above the village committee is Yinbaohu *xiang*. A *xiang* (a township, or a district), is the lowest rural administration unit where government appointed officials earn salaries from the government. The size of a *xiang* is equivalent to that of a commune in Mao's China. Yinbaohu *xiang* presently has a population of 20,000.

Gao Village is the smallest village of the three in Guantian village committee. In 1997 Gao Village had a population of 351, including those who had left the village as migrant workers.[3] All the villagers are named Gao except the women who have married into the village who usually retain their surnames. In some cases, men from outside Gao Village who become *zhaozhui* (sons-in-law who live in the home of their wives' parents) are required to change their surname to Gao.[4] All children born in Gao Village must invariably be named Gao.

Gao Village does not have a long history by Chinese standards. Its genealogy book traces its roots back only about 200 years. Despite China's turbulent and often violent modern history, Gao Village has never experienced any war and nobody has ever died in battle. The old villagers have heard of *Chang Mao* ("The Long Haired", referring to the Taiping Rebels of the mid-nineteenth century, presumably because they grew their hair long), but no one was said to have seen one. The Japanese invasion did not penetrate this area. Nor did the civil war between the Red Army and the KMT in the 1930s and again in the late 1940s affect

[3] Though migrant workers do not live or work in the village any more, they are still considered as belonging to Gao Village because of the *hukou* (household registration) system. Since they are still registered as Gao villagers, those migrant workers do not have permanent residence status in the cities where they work. The subject will be dealt with in later chapters.

[4] *Zhaozhui* happens when a family has no son to continue the genealogy line. *Zhaozhui* has a very bad social stigma, and usually men agree to do this because of their extremely desperate situation such as being too poor to get married or being social outcasts. Men, especially those from the same village may also agree to *zhaozhui* if the woman in question is extremely attractive or if her family is well off.

Gao Village.[5] The only thing they knew about the Communist People's Liberation Army was through a brief encounter with more than 200 soldiers in the early summer of 1949. That summer witnessed the worst flood in anyone's memory. One night when the soldiers passed by the village, one of them drowned in a river nearby. The soldiers stayed in the village for that night only and then went away without leaving a trace.

Gao Village is one of those places idealised in traditional Chinese landscapes: self-sufficient and idyllic. Although the two nearest cities, Jiujiang and Jingdezhen, were once important in their own right, they had little impact on places like Gao Village. One important reason is that Gao Village was not connected with any means of modern transport. Only since the late 1980s has a gravel road, dusty when dry and muddy when wet, passed through Gao Village. Nowadays, there is a regular bus passing Gao village to the county town, and to Jingdezhen.

Even as late as the 1970s, very few people from Gao Village ever travelled more than a few kilometres away from their home. During the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s, industrial and economic development in Jiujiang and Jingdezhen did have a visible impact on Gao Village. That was when six men were enrolled as factory workers, settled down and had families there.

Until the late 1970s the village had been almost completely self-sufficient. It produced enough food for itself, and villagers wove their own clothes. Until 1977, when I left China for the UK, no villager except the village doctor could afford a watch, or a bicycle. Apart from loudspeakers installed at the production team headquarters which broadcasted government news through official wires and radios, there was no other electricity in the village until 1988. The villagers arranged their work and daily life according to natural light.

Boyang County has a subtropical climate, with an average temperature of 21°C. The coldest weather recorded was 8°C below zero and the hottest 40°C. The average annual rainfall is about

[5] The Taiping Rebels took Boyang County Town in July 1853 and killed the head official of the county. In June 1942, Japanese soldiers occupied Boyang County Town and then left after nineteen days. In April 1949, a regiment under General Chen Geng of the Second Field Army of the People's Liberation Army took over Boyang without fighting.

1,600 millimetres. It has four clear-cut seasons: warm and wet in spring, warm and dry in autumn, hot with frequent storms in summer and cold with occasional snow in winter. Because of plentiful rainfall and fertile land it is an ideal place to grow rice. Surrounding Poyang Lake are numerous lakes and tributary rivers. Apart from Poyang Lake itself, there are more than 120 lakes and 225 rivers in Boyang County. Everywhere around the rivers and lakes are paddy fields, green in spring and golden in summer.

The main crops in the area include rice, wheat, barley, sweet potatoes, soya beans, broad beans, peas, cotton, tea, tobacco, peanuts, sesame seeds, rape seeds, sugar cane, gunny and ramie, buckwheat, millet, and a variety of vegetables and melons. Because of the rivers and lakes, the fishing industry is an important part of the economy in Boyang County. In 1985, for instance, the population involved in fishing reached 20,000 and harvested fish were recorded at 10,000 tons.

Gao Village is located in this well-endowed area. In front of the village stand two hills, one belonging to Gao Village and the other to Lai Village, under the administration of Duchang County. On the eastern border of Gao Village a river runs southwards into a lake which itself is connected with a larger river, which in turn runs into Poyang Lake. Surrounding Gao Village are small ponds and streams. The hills used to provide firewood for the villagers, and the streams, ponds, the river and the lake used to provide the villagers with an irrigation system as well as fish and water plants. The paddy fields are terraced for rice and some of the hilly land can be used to produce economic crops such as cotton, sesame seeds, gunny and ramie, peanuts as well as sweet potatoes.

Water plants are a good source of food for raising pigs, which are one of the main sources of protein for the villagers. From the river, the lake and numerous streams and ponds the villagers can catch shrimps, prawns, soft-shelled turtle, crabs, carp, trout, grass carp, silver carp, finless eels, field snails, snake-head fish, catfish, loach, mandarin fish, bream and a variety of freshwater mussels. Most of the different kinds of fish are from Poyang Lake, and every spring they migrate upwards to the tributary rivers and further up to thousands of lakes and streams to breed and lay eggs. Then they swim further up to millions of brooks and ponds to seek food. Some of the fish end up in the rice fields where

villagers can catch them very easily. Another good source of food for the villagers are the dozen kinds of frogs which are at the same time natural enemies of insects. These frogs breed and live around ponds and rice fields and keep the harmful insects under control.

All in all, Gao Village can function economically and socially as an independent entity without any connection with the outside world, as it had in fact been doing until the late 1970s. Yet Gao Village is not a remote mountainous place where there are hardly any people. There are numerous surrounding villages, most of them much bigger, and some with more than 1,000 households. In most cases, it is only half a kilometre from one village to another. However, they do not interact economically and one village does not in any sense depend on another. There are no commercial transactions between them, nor is there much cultural or social interaction. The population mass and intensive agricultural activities in the area have not led to any significant commercialisation or qualitative change of lifestyle. Even today, the nearest markets are several kilometres away from Gao Village. The villages remain cellular, to use Viviene Shue's insightful concept,[6] in that each village is a separate entity and the reach of the state is now extremely limited, although the brutality of the local officials is intensely felt.

The concept of "natural village" refers to a group of people living together in one location. They have the same surname, they are housed together and they interact with each other in ways that they do not interact with people from other villagers. Excluding government control and interference, each village is an entity in itself: it has its own governing body and distinct territory.

However, one exception to the generalisation of village independence on the basis of territory is that there could be two villagers of the same surname but from distinct communities who might have a close relationship. About 10 kilometres away from Gao Village there is another Gao Village which has 3,000 households. The villagers of both the big and small Gao villages are from the same ancestral line. When the first generation of Gao villagers

[6] V. Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the China Body Politic*, Stanford, CA, 1988.

migrated from the north to Jiangxi, some went to settle down in one area while the rest moved to settle down in another. From then on they have maintained a genealogical affinity. As later chapters in the book will show, the ways in which the two Gao villages interact demonstrate how lineage tradition and local politics interact in rural life.

The cellular nature of rural life is also reflected linguistically. The whole of Jiangxi Province is supposed to speak a distinctive dialect called Gan, which is one of the ten major dialects in China.[7] However, the Gan dialect itself is not undifferentiated. The people in Boyang County speak Gan with one accent, while those in Duchang County speak with another. The residents in Boyang County Town speak a variety of Gan that Gao villagers find hard to understand. A Gao villager who goes to Boyang County Town is looked down upon as an uneducated peasant simply because he or she cannot speak the town's dialect. In fact, people in the major cities of Jiangxi Province such as Nanchang, Jiujiang and Jingdezhen all speak distinctive varieties of Gan. Wherever you come from, you betray your identity as "outsider" as soon as you start to speak.

[7] The other nine are Mandarin, Jin, Xiang, Wu, Yue (Cantonese), Min, Hakka, Hui and Pinghua. See Li Rong, S.A. Wurm *et al.*, eds, *Language Atlas of China*, Hong Kong, 1987.

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CONCLUSION

The history of Gao Village from 1949 onwards is not a history of the People's Republic of China. It is not the intention in this book to make generalisations about all of rural China. On the contrary, one main aim of this case study is to show that what has happened in one village can be different from the general picture of post-1949 China that has been conventionally presented.

Post-1949 China provides the non-academic community with some simple but enduring generalisations. When they think of it, some pictures always appear: backyard furnaces making useless iron and steel, and everyone beating a gong to kill sparrows during the Great Leap Forward; Red Guards burning books and beating up their teachers and Party officials during the Cultural Revolution; and everyone shouting with a *Little Red Book* and dancing to show their loyalty to the Great Leader Chairman Mao. Or, more recently, tanks running over students in Tiananmen Square and police beating up Tibetans. However, none of these pictures fits in with what has happened in Gao Village.

Of course, there is a methodological question of what value a case study like Gao Village has in interpreting China. While admitting that a case study of this kind cannot be used to prove any generalisation about China, it aims to provide insights. Any generalisation about China as a whole can be argued to be "scientifically" flawed. This is because China is so vast and there are always regional differences and variations. All we can hope for is to provide insights for understanding.

There are many factors contributing to regional differences in China. One primary factor to be taken into consideration is that there are two Chinas: a rural and an urban China. Rural China is not only different from urban China economically, but also politically. What has happened in urban China can never be taken as the same as in rural China, or vice versa.

Coastal China is different from central China which is in turn

different from the north-west of China. Pre-1949 history may have left social and economic conditions that are different in coastal China. For instance, the fact that Guangdong is near Hong Kong and that many families in Guangdong have overseas Chinese relatives can have a range of social, political and economic implications that are absent in Gao Village. What has happened in Gao Village may in many ways mirror what has happened in rural Hunan, Anhui, Henan, and Sichuan where historical and economic conditions are similar. But they may be very different from what has happened in Guangdong or in Gansu and Xinjiang Provinces.

Even within the same region, differences may arise as a result of policy implementation. Because of the informal, personal, and autocratic style of Communist Party politics, the character and inclination of the number one leader in a province can have great differential policy consequences. For instance, the leadership in Anhui Province was more adventurous than in Jiangxi during the Great Leap Forward. As a result, the famine was far worse in Anhui than that in Jiangxi. In fact, a large number of peasants fled from Anhui to Jiangxi to beg for food during the most difficult years of the Great Leap Forward.

Because China is a so-called Communist country, there is a tendency by the mainstream media in the West to perceive China as an undifferentiated block in which everyone everywhere has to be the same. The fact that there is a world of difference between urban and rural China and that local governments can and do respond to and implement central policies differently tends to be ignored. Because of their eagerness to condemn Communist ideas and practice there is a tendency by the mainstream Western media not to take into consideration how local conditions and traditional influences have interacted in rural development since 1949.

The Gao villagers are mostly illiterate or semi-literate; but they are not, as some Marxists and élite Chinese intelligentsia would like us to believe, a backward-looking or feudalist reactionary mass which is supposed to be an obstacle to the advance of socialist history – "sacks of potatoes". Unlike the Chinese scholar-gentry class, the villagers were not die-hard traditionalists although the burden of tradition still weighs heavily on them. Unlike the urban educated who were once romantic about socialist China, they were not fanatical Maoists. The villagers were rational and prag-

matic, although bullied and manipulated from time to time by the local officials.

The Chinese peasantry have made great contributions to China's industrialisation and to a welfare system that benefits the urban sector. Yet, instead of being sympathetic and grateful for the contributions made by the Chinese peasantry, the urban community in general and the Chinese élite in particular have a contemptuous attitude towards the Chinese peasantry whom they blame for China's backwardness. They claim that the "feudalist residue of the Chinese peasant consciousness" is to blame for the lack of democratic tradition in China and therefore for the personal and authoritarian style of CCP politics.

Several specific points can be made about developments in Gao Village since 1949. Gao villagers made great strides in production output as a result of the introduction of new crops and new technology as well as the more intensive exploitation of land. However, increases in output did not lead to visible improvements in material living standards for the Gao villagers. This was due to two main factors. One was the demand placed on the peasantry to contribute to China's industrialisation. The government had, until the early 1980s, always prescribed how much grain consumption *per capita* was allowed for the rural population. Any "surplus" grain had to be sold to the state at the state controlled price. The second main factor was that the population in Gao Village doubled in forty years. Like farmers anywhere in the world, the livelihood of the Gao villagers depended on their land. Twice as many people living on the same amount of land meant a 100 per cent reduction of income if the output remained the same. A one-fold increase in production output meant that only the same level of income could be maintained.

Therefore, an improvement in living standards for villagers in Gao Village depends on many interacting factors. If everything remains unchanged, the population has to be checked. In order to enable the villagers to check the birth rate voluntarily there needs to be a social security system and the population needs to be educated. In order to have sound social security and an educated population a breakthrough in the village's economy has to be brought about. In order to bring about an economic breakthrough, commercialisation and external capital are required. For all kinds of reasons, some of which are hinted at and some discussed, while

others such as international factors are not discussed, commercialisation did not take place and external capital was not available. On the contrary, Gao villagers had no cash to spend because the pricing system was discriminatory and the government needed funds for other priorities. Thus, having to be dependent entirely on the limited amount of land with shrinking resources, Gao villagers were kept in a poverty trap from which they could not escape.

The rapid increase in population in Gao Village was the result of improvements in health care and a dramatic reduction of child mortality. One of the most visible benefits brought about by the Communist revolution in 1949 was the introduction of elementary health care technology such as immunisation and the control of plagues such as "snail fever". Another area of visible improvement in Gao Village since 1949 was education. There was a great increase in literacy in Gao Village in Mao's time. It has to be emphasised that it was during the period of the Cultural Revolution that these strides were made in improving health care and education in Gao Village. Both health care and education in Gao Village deteriorated since the 1980s, largely due to the detrimental rural policies since the late 1970s. Education only began to improve again since the early 1990s as a consequence of remittances from migrant workers and the demand for literate migrant workers.

Another important point to be made about Gao Village since 1949 were the environmental and ecological consequences. The increasing demand for grain to feed the ever increasing population has led to two developments. One was the decrease of production of cash crops so that more and more land had been turned into rice paddy. As a result, the necessity for filling the stomachs of the population had to be accomplished through the loss of cash income. The suppression of cash crops and the increasing focus on grain production in Gao Village had nothing to do with agricultural radicalism as conventionally interpreted. According to this interpretation, the ideologically motivated Maoist agricultural radicalism intended to suppress cash crops because cash crops were supposed to breed commercialism which in turn would breed capitalism. In the case of Gao Village, the villagers turned most of the cash crop land into rice paddy driven by the necessity of feeding the population, not as a result of an ideological push.

The disappearance of cash crops not only meant shortage of

cash for Gao villagers but also had a more far reaching consequence: the destruction of rural self-sufficiency. Until the early 1970s, the commodity items Gao villagers spent most of their cash on were salt, soap and matches. They made most of the daily necessities themselves. By the late 1980s, Gao villagers had to buy most of these necessity items from shops. And by the 1990s, helped by remittances from their migrant workers, Gao Village families purchased most things except grain and a few vegetables, either from shops or specialised households in nearby villages.

The other development was ecological destruction. Because of the increasing application of chemicals for the sake of increased grain production, aquatic life has been destroyed in the area. Rice growing is closely bound up with a water system that connects paddy with ponds, streams and creeks with lakes and rivers. Fish, shrimps, crabs, and so on used to be a very low cost source of protein in the villagers' diet. Water weeds used to be natural food sources for pigs and other domestic animals. Chemical applications have destroyed almost all of them. The villagers can no longer hear the soothing noise made by frogs during summer nights. Fish is now available only from fish farms.

Because of the increasing exploitation of land, erosion has become more and more serious. As a result, river beds like those of the Yellow and the Yangtze rivers have kept on rising. Because of reclamation of land from Poyang Lake and its surrounding rivers, the size of Poyang Lake and that of rivers have been shrinking. The combined result is the reduction in the capacity of the land to hold water, reduction in water catchment by the rivers and lakes, and a slowing in the speed of water flowing from Poyang Lake into the Yangtze river. As a consequence we have been witnessing more and more frequent floods occurring in the areas surrounding Poyang Lake. By the 1990s, there was a flood almost every year.

One enduring feature of rural China is that many villages are clan villages: every male has the same surname and every child born in the village has the same surname. Moreover, every male of the same generation born in the village has the same second name. Until very recently when migrant work started to take place, every villager identified him or herself with a clan village. The clan village was their society and anything else was either unreal or beyond their reach. Every clan village has its own territory

which has more or less remained unchanged since 1949. The Communist revolution in 1949 had neither changed the village based economy, nor clan identity in Gao Village.

Politically and socially, a clan village like Gao Village was an independent entity by and in itself. Apart from a brief period during the Great Leap Forward, the People's Commune, which was established throughout rural China, did not create much community life beyond the clan village. A small clan village used to form a production team, a bigger clan village two or three production teams and an even bigger clan village used to be a production brigade. Whether a clan village could do well economically depended on its leadership. Land resources had not been re-allocated among villages by the commune system. Only human resources had been re-allocated during the most radical period such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, but mainly for irrigation projects. Those clan villages which performed poorly either because of poor management or because of poor resources were not supported by the villages which were doing better.

In a word, both in terms of community identity and economic well being, the Communist revolution had not gone beyond the framework of a clan village. Not surprisingly, clan and genealogical characteristics overlapped, interfered and interacted with CCP policies and politics throughout Gao Village's and its neighbouring villages' history since 1949. Be it in the selection of local Party officials, re-allocation of human resources for infrastructure projects such as irrigation or territorial dispute resolution, clan and genealogical relations had played their role in influencing the final outcome. The most unambiguous example in the present account is how clan and genealogical relations affected and influenced political development during the Cultural Revolution.

While clan power has been strong in protecting a village's interest when in conflict with other clan villages, it is in many ways weak in its resistance against the state. For example, during the commune period no village clan had even tried to resist the state's imposition of taxes and state controlled price system. This was the case because until recently the tax system had been transparent and stable. It is only since the late 1980s that the imposition of local levies has become arbitrary and abusive. Because of this there has been resistance. However, there have been only isolated

cases, and organised resistance by clan power has yet to appear in the Gao Village area.

Even so, some villagers in some of the powerful clan villages can get away with refusing to pay some of the local levies while Gao villagers cannot. As for the state controlled price system, there simply was no avenue for resistance since the villagers either had nothing to sell or had nowhere else to sell anything. Nor has a clan tried to resist the state's policy of family planning, though it is fair to say that state policy in this respect had not had any serious effect in rural areas until recent years. Even during the late 1980s and 1990s when the family policy had become more effective, implementation measures had been inconsistent. At times it was tight and forceful, at others loose and relaxed. Therefore, even if a clan wanted to resist, it was at loss as to how to respond to an uncertain policy.

Aspects of Chinese tradition were also at work in rural villages, interacting with the Communist political economy. For instance, in the commune system households with better labour resources were clearly subsidising households with poor resources. This is often interpreted as a result of Mao's policy of egalitarianism. In fact, it was an openly declared policy that in a commune system, distribution was "to each according to work performed" and that those who had contributed more should get more reward. However, for years on end, those who had contributed more did not get rewarded because the households in debt had not paid the households in credit. Therefore, the principle of "to each according to work performed" had remained on paper, but was not carried out in practice. This had been the case partly because those who were in debt very often had no means to repay their debts. Another important reason was the complicated clan relationship. Because in a clan village all households were somehow related to each other, they were obliged by their sense of genealogical duty not to be too forceful in settling the accounts.

It is often argued in the post-Mao Chinese literature that rural residents remained poor because "the big pot" economy in a commune system discouraged the villagers to work hard. Gao Village does not seem to bear this argument out. There was an elaborate monitoring and evaluation system in the commune system, and production output did increase steadily since 1949 in Gao Village. What had kept rural income low was not a lack of motivation

to work but the exploitative nature of the pricing system. What boosted rural income in the early 1980s was more a result of price reform than the dismantling of the collective system. Had the pricing system and compulsory purchases remained unchanged during the 1980s rural income might have been kept low in spite of household farming in Gao Village.

On the other hand, there is clear evidence of a breakdown of collective health care in the village. At the same time agricultural input costs kept on rising and incomes stagnated. Rural residents became discontented and restless, and as a consequence the crime rate in the rural areas started to rise rapidly. Further deterioration was only checked since the early 1990s because of the job opportunities provided by the rapid industrial development in south China.

Migrant workers from Gao Village have done many things to improve their family situation back home. First, because discontented young villagers have left the village to become migrant workers rural crimes have been checked. Second, as fewer people need to be fed on the village's limited stretch of land, the ecological and economic burden on the land resources has been reduced. Third, remittances from migrant workers have helped Gao Village families with their payments for local levies, for health care and for education costs. By the mid 1990s around 30 per cent of Gao villagers had left the village as migrant workers. These migrant workers not only have to endure harsh working conditions but also suffer emotional trauma and are often abused by the factory owners. Still, the young Gao villagers are more than happy to be employed in the industrial sector and their earnings continue to subsidise rural life back home.

Apart from improvement in health care and education from which Gao villagers have clearly benefited through the 1949 Communist revolution, rural development in Gao Village had been, until the 1990s, involutionary; increases in output were partly taken away by the state's discriminatory pricing system and partly offset by the rapid increase in population. China's industrial development since the late 1980s has offered Gao villagers opportunities to leave as migrant workers and thus the possibility of breaking the involution for the first time in Gao Village's history.

However, by 1996 this still remained only a possibility, and we cannot claim that involutionary development has been broken.

First, it is not clear whether China's industrial development will continue at a rate that is able to absorb China's surplus rural labour. Second, it is not clear what these migrant workers' destiny will be. The phenomenon of migrant workers from rural China on such a scale has developed only in recent years and these migrant workers are still young. What will they do when they get married? Where will they settle down eventually, in urban areas or back in the villages? Government policies are crucial in determining the final outcome. There are no clear signs yet of what the government policies are.

There are these scenarios about which we may speculate. First, let us suppose that China's industrial development continues at a rate that is able to absorb the young villagers who move to the urban sector as migrant workers, and further suppose that the government takes measures to allow migrant workers to marry and settle down where they work. According to this scenario, China's process of urbanisation and modernisation will be fast. In this process more and more Gao villagers will leave and few will return. As a result, the tradition of clan culture and customs will gradually die out. In the process, problems of urban infrastructure will be serious.

The second scenario is that young villagers will go back home after some years working as migrant workers. Having made enough to build a house and to get married, they will eventually settle down in the village. This is reported to have been taking place in some areas where there are opportunities for migrant workers to develop commercial and business activities in their home areas. Or alternatively, either because of the halt in industrial development as a result of which no employment can be found in the urban sector or because of government impositions, migrant workers are forced to go back to their villages. Rural to urban migration will come to a halt if no employment can be found in the urban sector. Migrant workers will be forced to return home if the government refuses to provide education, health and housing facilities for them when they start having families. Currently no systematic provision of such facilities is on the government's agenda, although the absence of such policies cannot be continued for much longer.

A third scenario is also possible, according to which China's industrialisation will continue, although not at a rate which is able to absorb all the surplus labour from the rural areas. Some

migrant workers will return to the rural areas and some will settle down where they work as urban residents. China's urban sector will expand gradually, but not so radically as to create urban ghettos. Those who return to their home villages will, with their newly-acquired capital and expertise, set up local industries or enterprises which will benefit the local economy. Places like Gao Village will not disappear but will maintain a more sustainable ecological environment as a result of a less serious population pressure.

If and when migrant workers do go back, whether Gao villagers will tolerate the traditional ways of life is a big question. They have absorbed new ideas and they have seen alternative ways of life. Migrant work has broadened their horizons, and their expectations may not be the same as their predecessors. Rural residents like Gao villagers may demand their share of China's modernisation. It seems that whichever scenario is to prevail, profound social changes are on the horizon for rural residents. If the international environment is conducive and if government policies are beneficial, the change may be for the better. However, the opposite is not out of the question.

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