

Patterns of Social Capital Observed through Land and Water Use in a Farming Village in China's Central Region

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Abstract

Today, there is a rich body of research focusing on social capital. But how should we conceptualize the situation in China's villages? This article will analyze reasons for the lack of development in farming villages in one of China's central regions, Hubei Province, taking into account factors other than those apparent in villages in the western region, for example, where the severe natural environment has an impact; Human factors can be considered to be preponderant. Based on data obtained in the course of fieldwork, individuals are interacting with society as they assert their rights in order to protect their interests in public and private realms and attempt (or not) to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations.

Keywords

Social capital, collective irrigation, guanxi (relations), land use, village governance

Introduction

Economic disparities are continuing to grow in China's cities and villages against the background of the development of a market economy and a binary structure of city and country based on the family register system. In China's west in particular, there are numerous villages facing absolute poverty. The village studied in this paper, located in Hubei Province, boasts an average income level, but due to mistakes made in industrial development and the implementation of water projects, and to mistakes on the part of taxation authorities, debt has accumulated and public works projects have ground to a halt. Social bonds are weak in the village; while it would be more efficient in terms of time and expenses to work on irrigation and similar projects collectively, at present individual farming families conduct them as they wish. Coordination of land rights is also difficult. Town and village officials have become frustrated with these difficult problems and make no active efforts to involve themselves in local issues. The majority of young people are leaving to find work in the cities, and the village is becoming

increasingly hollowed out. This village, then, presents a classic example of an area in which social capital has not been developed, and in which community governance has failed to function effectively.

Today, there is a rich body of research focusing on social capital. How, though, should we understand the situation in China's villages? The reasons for the lack of development in farming villages in China's central region are to be sought in factors other than those applicable to villages in the western region, for example, where the severe natural environment has an impact; here, it is human factors that are preponderant. How are individuals interacting with society as they assert their rights in order to protect their interests in the public and private realms and attempt (or not) to fulfill their responsibilities and obligations? Based on data obtained in the course of fieldwork, this paper will consider the causes of gridlock and instability in a farming village in Hubei Province from the perspective of social capital.

1. Social Capital and Chinese Society

(1) Social Capital

In what context did the concept of "social capital" develop? Miyakawa has pointed out that the discourse on social capital, which developed in the US against the background of socioeconomic changes in the second half of the 20th century, emerged from questions regarding the mistakes of laissez-faire capitalism and socialism, or the binary oppositions expressed in concepts of the market versus the state or the market versus central planning.¹ Governance via market mechanisms and governance via government intervention were each seen as being deficient in numerous ways, and social capital and governance by communities based on social capital therefore attracted considerable attention.

One of the central theorists of the concept, Robert Putnam, defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action," and indicates that norms of generalized reciprocity are produced by frequent mutual interaction between diverse groups.² The feelings of trust engendered by these mutual relationships function as a

¹ Tadao Miyakawa, *Sousharu kyapitaru-ron: Rekishiteki haikai, riron oyobi seisakuteki gan'i* [Social Capital Theory: Historical Background, Logic, and Implications for Policy], in Tadao Miyakawa and Takashi Omori, eds., *Sousharu kyapitaru: Gendai keizai shakai no gabanansu no kiso* [Social Capital: The Foundation of Contemporary Socioeconomic Governance] (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Shinposha, 2004). s

² Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993); *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000).

“lubricant” for social activities.

The farming village in Shayang County, Hubei Province, to be discussed in this paper is a textbook example of an area in which this “lubricant” has not developed sufficiently. The “tragedy of the commons,” frequently referenced in game theory, provides an image of the situation delineated by observations made in the course of fieldwork. That is, while the majority recognizes that mutual cooperation would lead to greater benefits, when cooperation does not succeed, those who cooperated are viewed as having suffered a loss, while those who pulled away from cooperation are seen as having profited. Because relationships of trust have not been developed, opportunities for mutual benefit are overlooked. But why does the situation unfold this way?

Robert Putnam cites time and money pressures, suburbanization, the spread of electronic leisure devices (in particular the privatization of leisure time due to the influence of television), and generational changes as factors in the decline of social capital in US society.³ So, what social changes have affected community formation in a Hubei Province farming village?

(2) China's Unique Networks of “*Guanxi*”

Social capital is a concept that has mainly been developed by European and American theorists, but “*guanxi* (relations)” has attracted attention as a similar concept in China. *Guanxi* can act as both promoter and inhibitor in the organization of community. Fei Xiaotong developed the concept of the “differential mode of association,” much-quoted among Chinese researchers, which attempts to explain the peculiarities of “*guanxi*” in Chinese society as it has developed under the influence of Confucian culture. According to this concept, the domain of *guanxi* which forms with the self at the center expands and contracts like ripples on the surface of water, but commitment declines with increasing distance from the center of this domain of *guanxi*.⁴

Chinese society prioritizes blood ties, and family bonds therefore occupy the central position in the domain of *guanxi*. However, in a situation in which neither market mechanisms nor the rule of law function effectively and fierce competition has developed, individuals can be observed attempting to manage risk and reduce costs, ultimately seeking economic and social gain by means of building *guanxi* in a variety of forms not limited to family bonds. Li Peilin, for example, sees business, blood and regional ties intersecting in human relationships within the township enterprises, and indicates that personal trust operates in such enterprises in a manner akin to a company offering security to a bank.⁵ Li Yiyu studied elderly associations and educational funds

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Xiaotong Fei, *Xiangtu Zhongguo [Rural China]* (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1997).

⁵ Peilin Li, “Xin shiqi jieji jiecheng jiegou he liyi geju de bianhua” [Changes of Interests of Social Classes in the New Era], *Zhongguo shehui kexue [Chinese Social Sciences]*, 3 (1995).

as private organizations in which regional bonds transcended blood ties, and indicated that the development of ethical norms was an important factor in the promotion of such organizations.⁶

In general, when special relationships such as blood ties are adhered to, exclusive networks tend to form within a context of entrenched interests. Eric M. Uslaner's concepts of "particularized trust" and "generalized trust" may be considered here. Particularized trust is trust placed exclusively in a specific individual or group; generalized trust is trust towards any individual based on a shared ethical foundation. Particularized trust is of assistance in resolving only a limited range of problems. Generalized trust is necessary in dealing with public issues.⁷ What type of "guanxi" has developed in the case of Shanyang County? This paper will analyze this question with reference to water and land use.

2. Water and Land Use in Xinhe Village

(1) The Village

Shanyang County, Hubei Province, is an area of farming villages chiefly engaged in wet rice cultivation, approximately 250 km west of Wuhan, the provincial capital. The trip from Wuhan takes approximately four hours by car. The fieldwork referenced in this paper was mainly conducted in a village in Gaoyang Town. In 2002, upon commencing the study, the average annual income in the village was 2,740 yuan. Agriculture was the only industry in the village, and there were no profitable town or village enterprises. Fieldwork was conducted in the village every year since 2002 and on most occasions involved the company of Professor He Xuefeng of the Huazhong University of Science and Technology. Professor He has noted specific characteristics of this village:

- 1) Many of the residents of the village are lacking in respect for the elderly, and the elderly residents of the village do not have places to associate outside the home.
- 2) Family planning functions effectively. (Despite the fact that the firstborn children of some households are female, less than 20% of households have a second child.)
- 3) Awareness of clan is weak, and clan relationships have virtually disappeared in the village.

⁶ Yiyu Li, *Guanxi yu xinren: Zhongguo xiangcun minjian zuzhi shizheng yanjiu* [Network and Trust: Empirical Studies of Chinese Rural Civic Organizations] (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 2004).

⁷ Eric M. Uslaner, "Chishiki shakai ni okeru shinrai" [Trust in the Knowledge Society], in Tadao Miyakawa and Takashi Omori, eds., *Sousharu kyapitaru: Gendai keizai shakai no gabanansu no kiso* [Social Capital: The Foundation of Contemporary Socioeconomic Governance], Chapter 4.

- 4) Few households build new houses within the village; if possible, new residences are built alongside the road or in the town.
- 5) The majority of villagers who leave the village to find work elsewhere do not return to the village.
- 6) The desire to protect family farmland is diminishing (young people in particular display little interest).

In addition, a conspicuous decline in the status of governance in the village was observed, as evidenced by a number of conditions:

- 1) Infrastructure such as roads, reservoirs, dikes, etc. is being neglected.
- 2) There is little provision for entertainment in the village, and the majority of villagers spend their free time and the agricultural off-season playing mahjong.
- 3) Many of the villages have extensive debts. (Less than 10% of the villages has no debt.)
- 4) Electricity payments are often misappropriated and electricity is often stolen, with the result that fewer residents are paying electricity fees and the electricity supply is frequently disconnected.
- 5) Public order is declining and theft is increasing. (Crops are sometimes stolen prior to harvest, and materials are stolen from building sites.)
- 6) The number of students leaving school prematurely is increasing.⁸

The author worked from 2001-2003 at the Embassy of Japan in China overseeing irrigation projects and the promotion of elderly associations in Gaoyang Town as part of the Japanese government's grass-roots grant aid program. During this period a tent was set up so as to watch over building materials at night and prevent potential theft. During fieldwork in the latter half of June 2003, the head of a village group dug trenches in a public road in an attempt to drain rainwater from his own fields. Upon being confronted, he persisted in digging, and though the police were directly notified about this activity, they failed to take any action in the matter. According to Professor He, this type of self-oriented action is not unusual in the area. Many villagers can be seen playing mahjong during the day, and there are numerous signs of neglect, such as garbage scattered in the streets. The number of farm plots that have run wild because the rightful proprietors have left the village to find work and have not returned is also increasing.

⁸ Xuefeng He, "Zaoyu xuanju de xinagcun shehui: Jingmen shi disijie cunweihui xuanju guan cha" [*Rural Society Encountering Election: Report of the 4th Village Government Election in Jingmen City*] (Xian: Xibei daxue chubanshe, 2002).

(2) The Collapse of the Collective Irrigation System

Between the latter half of the 1990s and early 2000s, the region's farmers became frustrated with excessive taxes and fees and refused to make payments. For this reason, the villages of Gaoyang Town now have extensive debts. The town and village authorities have attempted to fulfill their duties to make payments to higher authorities, but in doing so have had to take out loans at high rates of interest that have caused the debts to swell further. This has intensified the villagers' mistrust of the government, and they make no attempt to cooperate when new public works projects are planned. The majority of the water use facilities built on the principle of "self-reliance" under the leadership of Mao Zedong have been left in disrepair, and the efficiency of irrigation is declining. Some of the watercourses observed by the author were clogged with weeds and were serving as breeding grounds for large numbers of crayfish, refusing to flow even in periods of rain.

Xinhe Village, consisting of 1,186 inhabitants in 307 households and forming eight village groups, has favorable water-use conditions, and declines in the harvest are rare even during periods of drought. A pumping station built in 1976 was designed to irrigate 10,000 *mu* in the surrounding four villages, but maintenance has been neglected and its limit has fallen to 5,000 *mu*. In addition, defaulting on electricity payments and the payment of wages to workers has left the villages approximately 200,000 yuan in debt, and the pumping station is almost entirely out of operation. Debt related to the pumping station accounts for the greater part of Xinhe Village's 1,413,600 yuan debt.

There are a number of factors involved in the debt related to the pumping station. The first of these is an increase in management costs. When the pumping station was in regular operation, the local authorities assigned their children and relatives to positions at the station, resulting in a greater than necessary number of employees and a consequent increase in personnel costs. In addition, in 2003 reform of the farming village taxation system commenced, and the village was no longer able to levy the village retention and township comprehensive fees as a common service charge. The beneficiaries of the pumping station were now required to operate the unit at their own expense. When the farming tax was scrapped in 2005, the village and town authorities were no longer able to levy taxes, and at the same time they lost the ability to exercise their own discretion in financial matters. With the loss of the village retention and township comprehensive fees, it became difficult to pay employees' salaries even at the base rate. In addition, charges for water were established based on the principle that the beneficiary pays, and an increasing number of farmers demonstrated reluctance to pay or withheld payments (Table 1).

FISCAL YEAR	AMOUNT
1999	28280
2000	14818.5
2001	25330
Total	68428.5

Table 1:
Debt held by residents of Xinhe Village for use of pumping station (yuan)
Source: Interviews conducted in Xinhe Village

The beneficiary-pays principle at first appears to be an effective system, but water-use conditions vary in agricultural areas, and the situation is inequitable if fees are calculated based simply on the period of water use and the amount of land irrigated. There is also the problem that when each family begins drawing water for the benefit of their own plot, irrigation can no longer be conducted with consideration of the entire regional water system. In addition, decrepit equipment has not been upgraded and machinery operates with poor energy efficiency; this has generated a vicious cycle in which operating costs have increased, and there has been no option but to increase water costs year by year (Table 2).

YEAR	WATER INTAKE PRICE (YUAN/HOUR)
1977 — 1982	23
1985 — 1990	52.2
1991	58.59
1992	58.3
1993	109
1994 — 1995	124
1996 — 2002	219.8
2003	180

Table 2 : Change of Water Intake Prices for the Xinhe Pump Station.
Source: Interviews conducted in Xinhe Village

The Xinhe pumping station began to operate at a loss in 1998, and the associated debt grew to 200,000 yuan by 2000. In the same year, the provincial Water Bureau transferred the management rights for the station to the town authorities. The authorities operated the station for a year, after which, in 2002, they contracted several former employees to oversee its operation. In 2003, the town authorities partially upgraded the station at a cost of several thousand yuan and sold operating rights for a period of fifteen years to a private company for 200,000 yuan.

However, the privatization of the pumping station did not resolve the associated problems. The system of water use is complex, and water-use conditions differ for different areas of land; because of this, many people feel that the beneficiary-pays principle is unfair. As a result, the number of farming households who choose not rely

on shared water use but rather dig their own wells and draw water using small pumps and plastic hoses is increasing. The pumping station will not operate unless payment is made even in a drought, and this situation is affecting agricultural production.

(3) The Difficulty of Coordinating Land Use Rights

A portion of fieldwork was conducted in Xinhe Village in September 2007. According to statistical records held by the head of the Women's Federation responsible for family planning in the village, as of January 2007 the village's population was 1,168, and the fluid population was 271. Of the latter, 59 individuals traveled within the county, 133 individuals traveled outside the county but within the province, and 79 individuals traveled outside the province. A further count based on information from an informant familiar with the situation of all the families in the village indicated that the working population (aged 18-60; not including individuals who have changed their place of registration due to attending university or joining the army) was 696, and that 352 individuals had left the village to find work, 79 of whom left without notifying the village authorities.

A more detailed study of 55 households in the fourth group in Xinhe Village showed that of a working population of 129 people, 64 had left the village to find work, eight households no longer possessed rights to land, and two households produced virtually no crops. In addition, 25 farming households had moved away from the village. (Some of these also changed their place of registration.) The fourth group was originally resident in three compounds, organized for the He family, the Wu family and the Chen family, but as the population increased and space was no longer available, houses came to be built outside the compounds. There was a strong tendency for these houses to be built in convenient locations, e.g., beside roads.

As indicated above, the number of people leaving Xinhe Village and the surrounding area to find work has increased, and there has been ongoing trouble regarding land that has been rented out while the villagers with rights to it are working away from the village. Before this issue is addressed, a brief look at the land system in Chinese farming villages is in order.

Under the contemporary land system as it relates to China's farming villages, collectives (villages, village groups, economic organizations managed by the villages, etc.; some of the collectives exist at the town level) hold property rights to farm land, and villagers are allocated rights to contract the land for crops. The right to use the land can be transferred when land is rented to a third party, be it an individual or an organization. This transfer can take a variety of forms.⁹(Table 3).

⁹ For more on the land system in Chinese farming villages, see Tomoko Ako, "Chugoku nousei no tochi seido ni kansuru shomondai to kaikaku no doukou" [Problems of the Land System in Chinese Farming Villages and the Direction of Reform], *Kokusai nouringyou kyouryoku* [*Japan Asso-*

A. Zhuanbao (转包)	Contract of land use rights continues after transfer of land use right. The party that has the first land use right keeps rights and obligations related to the land use. Most households that do not want to abandon land use rights take this form of transfer.
B. Zhuanrang (转让)	All or part of land use responsibilities are placed in a third party after receiving permission from the collective that has the land ownership. Rights and obligations related to land use are transferred to the third party and the contractual relationship between the original contractor and the collective is ceased (during the contract period with the third party).
C. Huhuan (互换)	Land is exchanged between households or collectives to avoid fragmentation and inefficiency of land use. Rents are collected if there are renters.
D. Zulin (租赁)	Rents are collected by renting all or a part of lands.
E. Fanzudaobao (反租倒包)	A collective takes up lands on contract from members of the collective and makes a new contract with the third party.
F. Rugu (入股)	Value of land use rights are quantified and exchanged into stocks. Dividend is decided depending on profits earned from land management.

Table 3 : Forms of Transfer of Land Use Right

In the case of Xinhe Village, almost no transfers are of the type shown as E and F in Table 3. This is because the villagers are not engaged in the production of commercial crops from which high profits would be generated from large-scale production achieved via the formation of companies or the establishment of shares. Aggregation of land that has been broken up under the family contract system using method C is also rarely observed. One factor behind this is presumably the difficulty of readjusting boundaries in an area in which there are considerable differences in elevation and numerous swampy areas; it would also involve increased costs for irrigation. The vast majority of transfers in Village Y are transfers of rights to work land between siblings, parents and children, or acquaintances using method A.

In Shayang County, the contract period for land was extended by 30 years in 1997. This was done in an extremely unsatisfactory manner, and 4,932 claims emerged when the provincial government instructed local authorities to confirm land rights in November 2004.¹⁰ Farmers who had abandoned cultivation under a heavy burden of taxes

ciation for International Collaboration of Agriculture and Forestry] (Feb/Mar 2003).

¹⁰ Author's interview with Professor He Xuefeng in the summer of 2005.

and fees began to demand that their land be returned. Meanwhile, there was a significant increase in the profitability of the land as a result of the reforms of the tax system that commenced in 2002. Prior to the reforms, the town administration had levied the township comprehensive fee for compulsory education, family planning, compensation for demobilized soldiers, training of the citizen militia and road construction, and the village had levied the village retention fee for public works, social security and management expenses (payment of administrative salaries and management expenses). Following the reforms, these levies were all abolished. In addition, in 2006 the farm tax on the output of land possessed by farming families was abolished, and direct aid for food production was introduced.

In the latter half of the 1990s, a succession of farmers abandoned cultivation, and in an attempt to find a solution for the tax burden, the village administration organized meetings, reduced taxes and tried to allocate abandoned land to the families remaining in the village. Numerous farming families refused these offers, but the village administration made efforts to convince them to accept, and the majority of the abandoned land was allocated. Shayang County is an area of low hills, and fields located on top of these hills are distant from water sources and difficult to irrigate. Fields located on lower ground close to canals and lakes are prone to flooding. The majority of fields that were abandoned were of these types. Farmers who accepted the hilltop fields planted them with willows, while the purchasers of the low-lying fields dug ponds and raised fish. Some farmers also accepted hilltop land under a scheme to return fields to forests, which was being actively promoted at the time, and were able to have the fields certified as forested land so as to receive benefits under the scheme.

As noted above, when it became possible to expect profits from cultivating crops, numerous farming families sought to return to the land. Families who had undertaken the cultivation of abandoned fields could not accept that these other families, who had abandoned their tax responsibilities, now wished to return to farming. They refused to return the land unless they were compensated for costs incurred purchasing seedlings, leveling the ground, purchasing machinery and digging ponds, and for losses incurred by terminating their contracts before their expiry. The village was already in debt and had no financial leeway for the payment of compensation for damages. In some cases, the farmers recognized as holding rights to the land in the second extension of contract periods in 1997 were different from those who had been granted contracting rights in 1983, and conflicts arose over which should be granted priority.¹¹

The 30-year contract period remains valid in the farm land contract system, and as a basic principle the system does not allow reallocation of contract rights or resurveying

¹¹ Baifeng Chen, "Dui wo guo nongcin chengbaoquan wuquanhua de fansi" [Reflection on Our Country's Property Right of Contracted Farm Land], *Qinghua falu pinglun* [*Tsinghua Law Review*], 1 (2007).

of land. However, it does allow “minor adjustments” for the sake of maintaining the stability of the system, and also allows fair, open, equitable and democratic cooperation. However, an emergency notification regarding appropriate measures to deal with conflict over rights to contract land issued by the General Office of the State Council in 2004 stipulated that land should be returned to the families who held the contract rights to the land at the time of the extension of the contract period, and that they should be allowed to continue to cultivate the land in the event that they returned to the village after seeking work elsewhere. This vague rule made it difficult even for the courts to respond to trouble arising over land claims. In many cases, it was difficult to achieve reconciliation, and legal expenses could not be recovered.

During the period of fieldwork in Xinhe Village, the heads of two neighboring households spoke separately about their conflict over rights to a small reservoir. According to one of these men, he had been threatened by thugs hired locally by the other farmer, and he had a wound where they had cut his leg. As this indicates, opportunities for the involvement of criminal organizations have increased where the police and the courts have proven ineffective.

While the number of farmers returning to Xinhe Village is increasing, as indicated above, approximately half of the village's labor force was still missing as of September 2007. If the land could be farmed intensively, irrigation would become more convenient and productivity would increase. The government has therefore attempted in several areas to aggregate land via exchange of plots, but this act has seen limited success.

(4) Entertainment / Congratulatory Gifts / Family Relations

As has been made clear above, coordination of water and land use in farming villages in Shayang County faces numerous difficulties. To conclude this study, we will consider the characteristics of personal relations in the area by looking at the status of entertainment and the offering of congratulatory gifts.

The chief form of entertainment in the district is mahjong, but a lottery called Mark 6 has also recently become popular. While the lottery is conducted legally in Hong Kong, it is not legal on the Chinese mainland. During fieldwork, many people were seen enthusiastically discussing the lottery while perusing publications containing number-buying hints. “What number did you buy?” seemed to have become a standard greeting among them. Numbers can be purchased at low cost and payment of stake money deferred, making the lottery extremely popular.

Farmers are said to make up more than 90% of the purchasers of Mark 6 in China. A survey conducted by a Guangdong farming village socioeconomic survey unit in December 2003 indicated that the economic scale of the Mark 6 lottery was 3,320 million

yuan (approximately 52.124 billion yen) across the entire province.¹² The popularity of Mark 6 shows that an increasing number of farmers are developing a spirit of risk-taking, but criminal organizations are operating below the surface, and there is a hidden danger of the lottery becoming more than a mere diversion, with increasing numbers of suicides and family breakups due to lottery-related debt being reported.

An event held during the period of fieldwork to celebrate the university entrance of one of the daughters of a family who served as a personal host on occasion was also of considerable interest. The girl qualified for entrance to the Wuhan University of Science and Technology, and a special event was held in celebration of the fact. A large number of tables were set up in the family's inner courtyard, and the local women, along with a specially-hired cook, prepared a wide variety of dishes such as dumplings made of pork and sticky rice. While an event following the pattern of traditional village celebrations was expected, it actually involved a performance on a special stage by a group of performers hired for the day at 1,800 yuan. Guests offered a congratulatory gift of money at the entrance, and depending on the amount were then able to request songs from the performers. The main families in the village are said to be able to collect considerable sums in congratulatory gifts by holding this type of event due to the large number of visitors. The performances were very enjoyable, with comedy skits and short sketches in the local dialect, but at one stage a performer commenced a sexually suggestive "Indian-style" dance that embarrassed the audience. The dancer successively removed items of clothing onstage as the surrounding noise grew to echo throughout the village; meanwhile, the girl who should have been the center of attention tried to make herself inconspicuous.

As this suggests, originally modest celebrations that unite families and neighbors are becoming increasingly extravagant and taking on a more commercial cast every year. It is also no doubt the case that the nature of festivities and leisure activities are changing among younger populations who have grown accustomed to city life through their experiences working away from the village.

These differences in ways of thinking between different generations are also affecting family relationships. In the fourth group of Xinhe Village, 60-70% of elderly residents live alone, and the number of children who choose not to care for their aging parents is said to be increasing. One elderly resident who was not provided with sufficient food by his son and daughter-in-law was forced to perform hard labor such as tending cattle and harvesting wheat, and was severely rebuked if he became tired and could not perform his tasks. He was later discovered dead close to the pumping station. A former

¹² Huiru Liang, "Guandong liuhecai yinian juanzou nongmin shisanyi" [Mark Six Took 1.3 Billion Yuan of Peasants' Earnings a Year in Guangdong], *Xinxi shibao* [Information Times] (27 August, 2004).

party secretary stated that while there was a possibility of suicide, the old man had collapsed in a shallow area of water and may have been unable to save himself due to exhaustion brought upon by overwork without sufficient nourishment.

3. Conclusion

Trouble related to water use and rights to land is not specifically isolated to Shayang County. These problems are particularly conspicuous in farming villages in China's central region, where geographical conditions are complex, and there is a great deal of human movement due to the necessity to find work outside the villages. However, there exist areas that suffer under the same conditions, but in which problems are resolved by mutual assistance between family members and neighbors. In Ji'an in Jiangxi Province, for example, fields for which use rights are held by people who leave to find work outside the village are managed by siblings, relatives or acquaintances to ensure that they are not abandoned. There is an awareness among the residents that a tended field should not be left to run wild.¹³ If an individual returns to the village after having worked elsewhere, their fields will be returned and farm work is able to continue as it had previously. If it is necessary to pay any fees, the problem can be resolved through discussion. Unlike the situation in Shayang County, there is no failure to compromise due to reluctance to relinquish personal profit.

Villages, in particular natural villages, are the most fundamental units for the organization of public services. The government cannot resolve issues by directly involving itself in people's lives and agricultural production. However, in the present situation in which many residents leave villages with their names still in family registers, there is an absolute shortage of manpower to reinvigorate local economies and undertake public works. In addition, an increasing number of residents who remain in the villages lack the sense of being a member of a collective.

Yan has pointed out that "uncivil individuals," extremely self-oriented individuals who strongly assert their own rights and lack respect for others and a sense of social responsibility, are becoming increasingly conspicuous in contemporary Chinese farming villages.¹⁴ Yan indicates that as the state reduces its level of involvement in the lives of citizens and China's population rapidly adapts to free market principles under a global economy—and there has also been an effect from family planning policies and labor

¹³ Baifeng Chen, "Dui wo guo nongcin chengbaoquan wuquanhua de fansi" [Reflection on Our Country's Property Right of Contracted Farm Land], *Qinghua falu pinglun* [*Tsinghua Law Review*], 1 (2007).

¹⁴ Yunxiang Yan, *Private Life Under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2003).

migration—marital relationships, management of family finances, the raising of the next generation, and the sense of respect for the elderly are undergoing considerable changes, public-spiritedness is becoming attenuated, and social order is declining.

The contemporary nuclear family, with its emphasis on private life, is generally considered to have evolved as a result of industrialization, urbanization, population movements, and the development of the market economy. Yan, however, points out that the process displays different characteristics in China, where state policy has intervened in family life, and the government has strictly enforced participation in public activities. There has been a strong tendency for public involvement to occur not by personal choice but by institutionalization; an example of this trend is the introduction of the New Marriage Law, which abolished traditional patriarchal authority in the collectivization of farming, and in a large number of political movements. This dependence on systematic organization is undergoing changes with the development of a market economy. Against this background, patriarchal authority has not been recovered and the social function of the family is being lost while moral and ideological vacuums are forming, leading to conditions likely to produce individuals with no sense of public morality.

Such individuals seek to develop relationships of “particularized trust,” as defined by Uslaner, in order to maximize their personal economic profit in a situation of fierce market competition. In the past, while it was imposed from the top down, a certain type of “generalized trust” was maintained by collective structures, chiefly the family and citizens’ collectives. Under the present circumstances, however, where individuals are living separately and are losing their sense of regional identity, their sense of morality, and their sense of the mission of socialism, it is difficult to halt regional decline.

Tsai points out that informal accountability has played an important role in the promotion of public works projects in China’s farming villages. In the village in which Tsai conducted her fieldwork, groups, families and clans connected with the local temple shared a public spirit and a sense of moral responsibility, giving them a greater feeling of solidarity. Even the village authorities participated in some capacity in these “solidarity groups.” If such solidarity groups could form in Shayang County, it would no doubt increase the number of people who take an active role in the resolution of the region’s problems.

China remains a developing country, and administrative system-building has lagged behind. If it is possible, however, to build public order and foster culture in the country’s regions by, for example, nurturing the traditional family culture, and promoting the development of citizens’ organizations able to work together towards common goals, the cohesiveness of regional society would be enhanced, and public works would also benefit. What is needed is for more intense efforts to be made towards the development of social capital.

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