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**China's Path From Extreme Poverty
to Socialist Modernisation**

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This issue features artwork from Fan Wennan (范文南), a young Chinese conceptual artist who created a series of thirty digital paintings ‘to visualise the socialist ideal through artistic creation’. Created during the Covid-19 pandemic, *China 2098* (2019–2022) draws extensively from the country’s socialist and civilisational history and depicts an imagined future for China and the world in which humanity confronts some of its greatest challenges.

You can follow Fan Wennan on Twitter, [@FWennan](https://twitter.com/FWennan), and view the complete *China 2098* series, here: www.artstation.com/nangesfg.

Cover image: *Comrade Chang'e* (嫦娥同志), 2022. Credit: Fan Wennan.

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Editorial: Socialism Is a Historical Process

‘Today, the concept of socialism is at the centre of fierce ideological battles’, writes the Longway Foundation (修远基金) in the first article in this issue of the international edition of *Wenhua Zongheng* (文化纵横). ‘These debates often remain at the level of ideas [...] while ignoring the reality that socialism is a historical process that has advanced alongside industrialisation’.

In China, the history of industrialisation has been and remains inseparable from the building of socialism, throughout its many stages, advances, trials, and errors. In the final decades of the twentieth century, the global socialist movement waned, highlighted by the dissolution of the Soviet Union; during this time, China’s socialist system underwent a self-transformation through reform and opening up, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping (邓小平). At the time, observers across the political spectrum interpreted this new direction as the death knell of the socialist project in China and as the beginning of the country’s capitalist path. However, these initial assessments, by both those outside and inside the country, lacked the necessary information and the historical distance to evaluate the socialist character of China’s reforms.

Despite the social, economic, and industrial gains of the early socialist period under Mao Zedong (毛泽东), three decades after the revolution China remained a very poor country and most of the Chinese people still lived in extreme poverty. In this situation, Deng declared that, ‘poverty is not socialism, socialism is to eliminate poverty’, and attempted to chart a new course to address the country’s need to modernise and the people’s need for better

lives. The re-introduction of private capital and integration of China into the international economic system was part of the effort to rapidly develop the country's productive forces, strategically prioritising certain regions to 'let those who get rich first bring others along' (先富帶后富, xiānfù dài hòufù). In the West, wittingly or unwittingly, this formulation has often been reduced to 'let some get rich first', omitting the second part of his statement that holds wealthier members of society responsible for 'bring[ing] others along' towards the goal of common prosperity. This reflects the poverty of information about China that exists outside of the country, an essential factor in the ideological battle over the concept of socialism.

At the end of 2020, just over four decades after Deng's experiment began, China announced that it had successfully eradicated extreme poverty among its 1.4 billion people. This historic achievement came in the midst of the global Covid-19 pandemic, during which existing economic and social crises deepened around the world and millions of people, especially in the Global South, slipped back into extreme poverty. The eradication of extreme poverty in China was one of the two centenary goals that the Communist Party of China (CPC) had set, to be completed by the 100 year-anniversary of the party's founding in 1921. During the last phase in this process, from 2013 to 2020, China embarked on a program of targeted poverty alleviation (精準扶貧, jīngzhǔn fúpín) initiated by President Xi Jinping (習近平), to lift the final 100 million Chinese people from extreme poverty. This adds to the over 700 million people who exited poverty in the country since the reform and opening up period began; since 1978, China has accounted for over 70 percent of the global reduction in poverty. How should we understand this remarkable achievement, to which processes and actors should we give due credit, and on what basis should we make our assessment?

Despite China's incredible economic gains in this period, it would be incomplete and incorrect to solely credit economic reform and the re-introduction of market forces for the country's elimination of extreme poverty. This issue, entitled 'China's Path from Extreme Poverty to Socialist Modernisation', features three articles that closely examine China's centenary battle against poverty and situate it within the country's historical experience of socialist construction.

In the first article, 'Socialism 3.0: The Practice and Prospects of Socialism in China', the Longway Foundation contextualises the current era of Chinese socialism and the battle against poverty within the CPC's historical pursuit of modernisation and the twin goals of industrialisation and equality. The authors argue that the party's approach to these interconnected and, at times, contradictory aims has evolved over three distinct phases. From 1949 to 1976, the 'Socialism 1.0' era of Mao Zedong established public ownership of the means of production, maintained social equality, and achieved basic industrialisation, but encountered limitations in economic development. This was followed by the 'Socialism 2.0' era of Deng Xiaoping which began with the introduction of the market economy in 1978 and achieved enormous economic and industrial advances, but led to a sharp increase in inequality, greater separation between workers and the means of production, and 'laid the groundwork for a serious crisis'. Finally, there is the contemporary period, in which China must develop a 'Socialism 3.0' that builds upon the previous eras and addresses their shortcomings, by advancing working-class interests and combating inequality.

Indeed, the eighteenth National Congress of the CPC in 2012 marked a new era in China's socialist path, as the party elevated poverty alleviation efforts to the central task of the party and society. In the second article, 'The Battle Against Poverty: An Alternative Revolutionary Practice in China's Post-Revolutionary Era', Li Xiaoyun (李小云) and Yang Chengxue (杨程雪) examine the party's 'battle against poverty' (扶贫攻坚, fúpín gōngjiān), which they contend represents 'a return of sorts to its historic revolutionary agenda'. The authors trace the poverty alleviation policies of today to the early practices of the communist movement in China, particularly the party's governance in the revolutionary base areas during the 1930s and 1940s. Beyond improving people's livelihoods, the authors argue that the battle against poverty has had a broader political and economic impact, re-establishing the political authority of the CPC and rebuilding social consensus in the country. Ultimately, '[t]his reflects a new stage of the CPC's governance', Li and Yang conclude, characterised by the party 'promoting social justice to fully realise the country's modernisation'. This new stage of governance aims to move the country towards the CPC's second centenary goal of building a modern socialist society by 2049, the 100-year anniversary of the Chinese revolution.

Advancing development and social welfare in rural areas is central to these efforts. To this end, the CPC launched its targeted poverty alleviation program in 2013 to eradicate extreme poverty in China. In the third article, ‘How Targeted Poverty Alleviation Has Changed the Structure of Rural Governance in China’, Wang Xiaoyi (王晓毅) looks at how this program achieved its goal by experimenting with novel practices while borrowing from the historic campaign-style governance of the Mao Zedong era, characterised by the mobilisation of huge amounts of human and material resources to rapidly complete large-scale tasks. During the reform and opening up period, due to the development of the market economy, rural areas were hollowed out with mass migration to the cities, village-level organisations weakened, and the party and the state became detached from the grassroots, resulting in diminished access to public services in impoverished areas. Along with meeting the immediate material needs of the people in the countryside, Wang details how targeted poverty alleviation played an important role in rebuilding village-level organisations, reconnecting the party with the rural base – including sending of over three million party cadres to work in impoverished areas – and strengthening democratic processes and self-governance at the grassroots level. What remains to be seen is whether these significant experiments and innovations of the poverty alleviation campaign can be translated into institutional changes and effect long-term changes in rural governance.

In his report to the twentieth National Congress of the CPC in November 2022, Xi affirmed that ‘Chinese modernisation is socialist modernisation pursued under the leadership of the Communist Party of China’. He highlighted five key characteristics of China’s path to modernisation: the modernisation of a huge population, common prosperity for all, material and cultural-ethical advancement, harmony between humanity and nature, and peaceful development. Xi continued in his report, ‘In pursuing modernisation, China will not tread the old path of war, colonisation, and plunder taken by some countries. That brutal and blood-stained path of enrichment at the expense of others caused great suffering for the people of developing countries. We will stand firmly on the right side of history and on the side of human progress’. As with socialism, the struggle to define modernisation, and to wrest this concept from the hegemony of the West, is a key ideological battle in our time.

There is little doubt that China's path to socialist modernisation, of which the fight against poverty plays a central role, holds global significance. However, it is not a singular model to be replicated by or imposed onto other countries with their own histories and conditions, but it does represent an alternative path to Western capitalist development and the possibility for peoples and countries of the Global South to pursue their own path to modernisation – and perhaps to socialism – that firmly defends human dignity and national sovereignty.

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“不必时时怀念我，也
指望我回来，我离开以
指你们就是我，人民万岁”



桥西交警大队 2022年6月15日

Socialism 3.0: The Practice and Prospects of Socialism in China



'Socialism 3.0: The Practice and Prospect of Socialism in China' (社会主义3.0——中国社会主义的现实与未来) was written collectively by a group of researchers at the Longway Foundation (修远基金), and originally published in Wenhua Zongheng (文化纵横), issue no. 2 (April 2015).

The Beijing Longway Economic and Social Research Foundation (北京修远经济与社会研究基金会, Běijīng xiū yuǎn jīngjì yǔ shèhuì yánjiū jījīn huì) was founded in 2009 with the following purpose: to study the crisis of cultural continuity in modern China and promote cultural confidence and cultural autonomy in Chinese society. The foundation's research explores how changes in China's social structure have shaped the country's cultural development and led to the rise of new social classes with distinct cultural and political orientations.

We Need to Talk About Socialism

Today, the concept of socialism is at the centre of fierce ideological battles, with supporters and opponents arguing vehemently with each other. These debates often remain at the level of ideas, with participants tending to put forward their conceptions of socialism based upon selective historical narratives and theoretical doctrines, while ignoring the reality that socialism is a historical process that has advanced alongside industrialisation. Over the course of several centuries, socialism has emerged as an alternative

path of development to overcome the crisis of capitalist industrialisation, a path characterised by a pursuit of greater political and economic equality, and an exploration of the ideal of a community in ethics and culture. Socialism not only gave rise to states such as the Soviet Union and China, but also had a significant impact on the social democratic policies in Western Europe. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century, the world socialist movement suffered a major setback, and the forms of the socialist state and the socialist mode of production required systematic reflection and revitalisation. Today, as the traditional capitalist welfare states have been dismantled or are facing multiple crises and the forms of material production undergo complex transformations, it is necessary to revisit and reassess the fundamental ideas and practice of socialism to activate its political dynamism.

As the global socialist movement waned, China's socialist system underwent a self-transformation through reform and opening up. However, despite its achievements, it cannot be denied that socialism with Chinese characteristics faces serious challenges today.¹ In China, there are doubts about the meaning of socialism and whether it is still necessary or even possible. This presents a dilemma for China – on the one hand, as a socialist country, we cannot avoid discussing socialism; on the other hand, we cannot get bogged down in conceptual disputes. Instead of becoming consumed by ideological battles, we should view socialism as an ongoing process and continuous effort to create a fairer and more just society in the face of the opportunities and challenges brought about by changes in production since the beginning of industrialisation.

Today's discussions on socialism and the future forms that it may take, must place socialism in the context of existing historical processes, in the context of industrialised mass production, as illuminated by Karl Marx, and analyse the complex interaction between the ideal of equality and the material realities of production. In the case of China, the country's socialist path must be examined in the context of its historical trajectory since the twentieth century – analysing the complex process through which socialism, as a foreign political concept, has been integrated with China's political traditions as

¹ 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' is a term that was first coined by Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) in 1982, in the early stages of reform and opening up, that emphasised that socialism in China had to be tailored to the country's conditions.

well as evaluating the lessons learned from China's experiments in socialist construction – to grasp the reality and necessity of socialism. Furthermore, amid the increasingly complex changes in the forms of material production and the international political-economic structure, it is necessary to explore the changes in patterns of social organisation, factors of production, and the division of labour, that have been brought about by globalisation and the new industrial landscape, to determine the future direction of socialism.

Only on this basis can we effectively face the political and economic conditions in this time of great change, understand the political resources offered by socialism, and contemplate the path for China's future development.

This article will trace the historical evolution and future direction of Chinese socialism. The authors describe the socialist practice during the Mao Zedong (毛泽东) era of 1949 to 1976 as China's 'Socialism 1.0' and the subsequent exploration of the socialist market economy since the beginning of reform and opening up in 1978 as 'Socialism 2.0'. Finally, amid the current period of global political and economic upheaval, the authors argue that China needs to develop a 'Socialism 3.0' to guide its future course that learns from and builds upon Socialism 1.0 and 2.0.

Socialism 1.0

1. The historical encounter between socialism and China's rising consciousness of national salvation.² China's choice of the socialist path was not accidental. At the end of the nineteenth century, all major non-Western civilisations faced comprehensive challenges from the West. Through the advances of industrialisation, Western modern military forces were able to thoroughly defeat the fragile military backbone that was required to maintain order in these traditional agricultural empires. For the elites in these civilisations, this prompted anxiety and frustration, as they felt that their cultures

² After the first Opium War (1839–1842), China gradually fell into the status of a semi-colonial, semi-feudal state controlled by foreign powers. The period of more than 100 years from the mid-nineteenth century until the establishment of the socialist revolution in 1949 is referred to as China's 'century of humiliation' (百年国耻, bǎinián guóchǐ). The series of revolutionary movements during this period that struggled against imperialist invasion and in pursuit of Chinese national liberation and independence are collectively referred to as the Movement for National Salvation (救国运动 jiùguó yùndòng) due to their significance in 'saving' the Chinese nation when it was on the brink of survival.

had been superseded or destroyed; civilisational states such as China lost their sense of cultural superiority over the ‘barbarians’, or the neighbouring states and minority ethnicities. The West’s ‘hard ships and sharp canons’ (坚船利炮, jiānchuán lìpào) imposed on the world ‘major changes unseen in three thousand years’ (三千年未见之大变局, sānqiānnián wèijiàn zhī dàbiànjú), forcing Chinese politicians and intellectuals to respond.³ Driven by the powerful material force of their industrialisation, the ‘advanced’ countries, led by the United Kingdom, continued to expand outward, shaping a new international order and new ‘rules of the game’. The transformation of the world order rendered all preceding conventions unviable.

Confronted by the Western powers that were armed by industrialisation, China had to determine how it could quickly industrialise to catch up with the West and protect itself. As Chinese politicians and intellectuals painstakingly explored a path for the country’s industrialisation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Western-led expansion of capitalism gradually moved from the phase of free trade to that of imperialism. The harsh logic of capitalism, wherein the weak are preyed upon by the strong, grew increasingly prominent. Within European countries, class conflict between labour and capital intensified, and social resistance movements surged, a dynamic which had a profound impact on China’s intellectual class at the time. The outbreak of the First World War prompted many Chinese scholars to reflect deeply on the inner dilemmas of Western civilisation. For the revolutionaries and thinkers of modern China, there were two aspects to this engagement: on the one hand, they sought to learn from the West to achieve their goals of modernisation and national prosperity; on the other hand, they remained vigilant to the poverty and inequality brought about by capitalist industrialisation. Figures such as the intellectual Yan Fu (严复) and leader of the 1911 revolution Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孙中山, Sūn Zhōngshān),⁴ were able to gain a broader vision for China’s development because they had ‘opened their eyes to see the world’ (开眼看世界, kāiyǎn kàn shìjiè) and they recognised the historical trends of progress and change; however, their intellectual and ideological foundations, laid in their youth, were deeply influenced by tradi-

³ ‘Major changes unseen in three thousand years’ was a phrase used by Lin Hongzhang (李鸿章), a political leader during the late Qing dynasty who advocated for China’s industrial and military modernisation, to describe the global geopolitical shifts taking place in the nineteenth century.

⁴ Translator’s note: the pinyin translation of Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s name has been included here as his English name does not correspond to his Chinese name, unlike, for example, Yan Fu.

tional Chinese culture, including the ancient Confucian ideal of 'Great Unity' (大同, dàtóng).⁵

Thus, while learning from the West, Chinese thinkers also identified flaws in Western industrial civilisation and the possibility of constructing a social system that surpassed it. In particular, the rapid growth achieved by the Soviet Union's socialist industrialisation in a short period of time was viewed as a realistic pathway for China to follow to catch up with the West. After the concept of socialism was introduced into China in the early twentieth century, many Chinese intellectuals found its foundational ideal of equality to be more in line with traditional Chinese ideals than Western liberalism. During this period, socialism had a strong appeal in China because it was not merely a set of lofty communal values, but a concrete example of a system that was capable of achieving industrialisation; both Western European social democracy and the Soviet Union's state socialism had shown that they could develop a modern mode of production and achieve industrialisation.

In the 1920s and 1930s, after the disillusioning failure of the Great Revolution (1924–1927), Chinese intellectuals fervently discussed and debated socialist theory.⁶ Importantly, the evolutionary view of history imported from the Soviet Union – that human society proceeded from 'primitive' society, to slave society, to feudal society, to capitalist society, and finally to socialist and communist society – began to be consciously applied to the historical development of Chinese civilisation. This revolution in the conception of history became the premise of the eventual political revolution.

The task of catching up with the West eventually fell into the hands of the Chinese communists, who were strongly influenced by the October Revolution of 1917; this influence was not limited to Vladimir Lenin's advanced

⁵ 'Great Unity' is a utopian concept in traditional Chinese philosophy related to all of humanity living in a harmonious community. The term dates back several thousand years, first appearing in the ancient Confucian text *Book of Rites* (礼记, Liji), and remains an influential political ideal.

⁶ In the early 1920s, under the manipulation of imperialist powers, China remained in a state of warlordism and fragmentation. Warlords of all sizes plundered and oppressed the people in their ruling areas, leading to an economic depression and widespread suffering. In response to the common aspiration of the Chinese people to overthrow imperialism and bring an end to the rule of the warlords, the Communist Party of China actively promoted cooperation with the Nationalist Party of China, or Kuomintang, to establish a revolutionary united front. After the formation of the first united front between the two parties, the pace of the Chinese revolution accelerated, and a revolutionary movement against imperialism and feudal warlords erupted from 1924 to 1927, commonly known as the 'Great Revolution' or the 'National Revolution'.

organisational model of the vanguard party, but also in the practical example and specific methods that a backward country could utilise to pursue industrialisation. Thus, a profound integration took place in China, between the desire for industrialisation (driven by the growing consciousness of national salvation) and the plan to build a socialist state.

2. Mao Zedong's socialist ideas and practice: the first attempt to adapt socialism to the Chinese context. During the late 1930s, Mao Zedong began to explore how to integrate China's revolutionary and industrial aims with the historical trend of socialism in the world. In his works, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (中国革命与中国共产党, Zhōngguó gémìng yǔ Zhōngguó Gòngchǎndǎng, 1939) and *On New Democracy* (新民主主义论, Xīn mínzhǔ zhǔyì lùn, 1940), Mao argued that China at that time was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and that the Communist Party of China (CPC) was the party to lead the socialist revolution.⁷ In Mao's conception, the plan for China's future development could be divided into two stages: first, the New Democratic stage, followed by the socialist stage, which would be reached only after the full development of New Democracy.⁸ Starting with the theory of historical stages of development developed by Joseph Stalin and others, Mao incorporated Lenin's writings on imperialism and colonialism and ultimately constructed a historical view of the development of modern China: after passing through 'primitive', slave, and feudal societies, the country had entered a semi-feudal and semi-colonial stage, that it needed to transcend through a stage of democratic revolution, which was divided into the Old and New Democratic phases. This view of history served as the benchmark for the CPC to formulate and evaluate its policies: those policies which were deemed ahead of the historical schedule, so to speak, were considered left-leaning, while those lagging behind were deemed right-leaning.

Guided by this view of history, the generation of Chinese communists led by Mao pursued socialist industrialisation and socialist equality, two goals with a complex and even contradictory relationship.

⁷ Mao Zedong, 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 2* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965); Mao Zedong, 'On New Democracy', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 2* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965).

⁸ New Democracy, or the New Democratic Revolution, is a concept developed by Mao Zedong that referred to a phase of China's revolutionary transformation. During this stage, the Communist Party would lead a united front of the working class, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie, and national bourgeoisie, allowing for a limited development of national capitalism to overthrow feudalism and secure national independence.

The CPC now took up the responsibility for the country's industrial development, following the failed efforts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895).⁹ The party's historical and socialist perspective on the question of industrialisation carried a stronger sense of equality, which generally transcended the consciousness of national salvation. After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the CPC's model of industrialisation prioritised the development of heavy industry, which was considered necessary in latecomer countries that sought to catch up the development ladder and had been advocated since the Self-Strengthening Movement. This view was expounded upon in *The Party's General Line for the Transition Period* (过渡时期总路线, Guòdù shíqí zǒnglùxiàn), a directive issued in 1953, in which Mao emphasised the need to concentrate efforts on developing heavy industry to establish the foundation for the nation's industrial and defence modernisation.¹⁰

The developmental strategy of prioritising heavy industry and 'becoming stronger before getting richer' (先强后富, xiānqiáng hòufù), is, in a way, inevitable for latecomer countries to adopt. However, industrialisation entails an extremely high cost, requiring the accumulation of a huge amount of capital; if sources of investment cannot be obtained and resources cannot be plundered externally, investments in heavy industry often need to be extracted from domestic rural areas. In the early years of the PRC, the only way to advance industrialisation was to re-concentrate the distributed land and increase the centralised management and distribution of agricultural surplus through the people's commune movement. In addition to agricultural taxes, an instrument called the 'state monopoly for purchasing and marketing' (统购统销, tǒnggòu tǒngxiāo) redirected agricultural surplus to industry and cities. Industrialisation also required a large number of highly skilled workers, making it necessary to pour massive amounts of resources into building a modern education system – popularising primary and secondary education, developing institutions of higher education, and increasing the educated population from tens or hundreds of thousands to tens of millions. Therefore, facing the urgent need for industrialisation, China quickly ended its New Democratic phase and entered the initial stage of socialism. In 1953,

⁹ The Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895) was a series of institutional reforms launched during the late Qing dynasty period that sought to modernise China's economy and military.

¹⁰ Mao Zedong, 'The Party's General Line for the Transition Period', in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, Vol. 5* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1977).

the CPC adopted the general line of ‘one transformation and three reforms’ (一化三改, yīhuà sāngǎi), through which Socialism 1.0 was gradually established in the country, guided by the following political-economic principles: public ownership of means of production, the planned economy, and distribution according to work.¹¹ Similar to the Soviet model, this was an efficient system of accumulation in the early stages of China’s industrialisation.

As the process of socialist industrialisation advanced, however, a contradiction between industrialisation and the goal of socialist equality became increasingly evident. The state-led industrialisation model that prioritised heavy industry inevitably required a large number of government officials, corporate executives, and professionals, with the numbers required expanding alongside industrialisation. As a result, the means of production became concentrated in the hands of the managers rather than the workers, leading to a tendency toward bureaucratisation. By the late 1950s, Mao realised that, as long as production continued to develop in this manner, it would continuously generate a managerial class within the system, managers with their own self-interests who would amass control of government and enterprise affairs and use their power to undermine public ownership. In other words, this bureaucratic class would use its position to manage the economy, offloading the costs of industrialisation onto ordinary people, especially the peasantry, while enjoying the benefits of industrialisation themselves.

Faced with this dilemma, Mao explored a new model of industrialisation that ‘allowed the people to manage the production processes directly’ through the campaign called ‘grasp revolution, promote production’ (抓革命促生产, zhuā gémìng cù shēngchǎn), which sought to make the otherwise contradicting goals of industrialisation and equality complementary to each other. In his comments on Stalin’s *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1951), Mao pointed out that the socialist transformation of ownership of the means of production would not inevitably result in labour occupying a leading position within production.¹² For Mao, public ownership of the means of production would not guarantee that China developed in a socialist direction, in which the working people ran their country, and so adjustments and experiments

¹¹ ‘One transformation and three reforms’ was the general line adopted by the CPC during the transition to socialism; ‘one transformation’ refers to the country’s socialist industrialisation, while ‘three reforms’ refers to the socialist transformation of agriculture, handicraft industry, and capitalist industry and commerce.

¹² Mao Zedong, *A Critique of Soviet Economics*, trans. Moss Roberts (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).

were needed at the level of cultural and political leadership – namely, it was necessary to break with the bourgeois legal regime. To this end, Mao pushed for a series of initiatives during subsequent decades, strengthening the guidance and supervision over cadres at the political level and conducting various experimental measures aimed at addressing this problem, including criticising the rank-based wage system, sending large numbers of cadres to engage in manual labour in the countryside and factories, commending policies which reorganised the division of labour, launching socialist education campaigns, and so on. Mao also proposed that the economy should ‘walk on two legs’ (两条腿走路, liǎngtiǎotǔ zǒulù), meaning that economic development could not rely solely on a state-led model and it was also necessary to conduct mass mobilisations to counteract the drawbacks that arose from this model’s reliance on technocrats to implement the directives of the centrally planned economy. This was exemplified by the emergence of policies that reorganised and disrupted the division of labour, such as the Angang Constitution (鞍钢宪法, Āngāng xiànfǎ) in 1960 and its practice of ‘two participations and one reform’ (两参一改, liǎngcān yīgǎi), commended by Mao.¹³ These efforts reflect Mao’s ongoing concern with ensuring that the country’s industrialisation proceeded in a socialist direction, his efforts to correct the imbalances brought about by industrialisation, and commitment to the idea of equality.

Overall, between the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the start of reform and opening up in the late 1970s, China gradually transformed into an industrialised country. During this time, China’s social structure remained relatively equal and social divisions were not so pronounced. However, although the development model of ‘becoming stronger before getting richer’ helped the country to achieve industrialisation, the population generally remained in poverty; the contradictions between the state-led model of industrialisation and the objective of equality became increasingly prominent in Mao’s era. On top of this, driven by the country’s century-long wave of radical thinking, Mao attempted to resolve these problems with the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), but both ultimately failed. Subsequent generations have continued to grapple with these twin pursuits of Chinese socialism, industrialisation and equality.

¹³ ‘Two participations and one reform’ refers to the practices of Angang, or Anshan, Steel (now known as Ansteel Group) in 1960; ‘two participations’ meant that the cadres should participate in labour while the workers should participate in management, while ‘one reform’ meant that unreasonable rules and regulations should be reformed.

3. The internal dilemmas of Socialism 1.0. Since Marx, socialist theory has had the following core aims: to overcome capitalist private ownership and disorderly competition through public ownership and the planned economy, to eliminate exploitation, and to implement distribution according to work. However, for both the state-led socialist path initiated by Lenin and the social democratic path pursued in Western Europe, substantial adjustments to socialist theory were required. The socialism envisioned by Marx was supposed to be achieved in the developed capitalist countries, where the accumulation of social capital had reached a considerable degree, thus providing the conditions for a planned economy and distribution according to work. However, neither the Soviet Union nor China were developed capitalist countries, and so the first step in these countries was to determine how to quickly accumulate capital to lay the foundation for public ownership. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the centre-periphery structure of world capitalism had taken shape, which meant that socialist countries would not be able to rely on the world market to quickly accumulate capital. As a result, socialist countries often had to experiment with and, at times, rapidly overhaul their economic policies; a dynamic that was on display in the Soviet Union. During the civil war, Lenin's 'war communism' – characterised by near total nationalisation of the economy and compulsory requisitioning of food products from the peasantry – was implemented from 1918 to 1921 in response to the state of emergency and the need to maintain political power. After the civil war ended, faced with the urgent need to increase productivity, Lenin had to make a number of radical changes (and, to some extent, compromises), implementing the New Economic Policy (1921–1928) and permitting the development of capitalism and a market economy, under state control. Meanwhile, Stalin took another, more costly approach, replacing the market with an organised bureaucratic system to undertake the heavy responsibility of planning and distribution.

In China, the initial stage of industrialisation was based, to a large degree, on the deprivation of the rural areas; one of the functions of the rural commune movement was to direct agricultural surplus towards industrialisation. Compared with the Soviet Union, however, China did not completely transfer the cost of industrial capital accumulation onto the rural areas. Mao, along with other leaders, called for the whole country to 'tighten their belts', that is, for the whole population to share in the cost of capital accumulation. Objectively

speaking, in both the Soviet Union and China, the planned economy played a positive role precisely in the initial stage of industrialisation. During this stage, the economic and social structures were relatively simple, and thus it was possible for the state to formulate planned arrangements for production, exchange, distribution, and consumption. However, once industrialisation began to move beyond the initial stage, the industrial division of labour became increasingly complex and the production chain extended, leading to a rapid decline in the efficiency of planning, a 'clogging of the pipes' throughout the economic system, and an information crisis where there was insufficient feedback to make appropriate policy adjustments.

Although Mao had hoped that the prioritisation of people's participation in the management of production would further the realisation of Marx's conception of workers' control of the means of production, these efforts met profound difficulties in reality. As industrialisation proceeds, the division of labour intensifies, not only in terms of industrial labour, but also the positions and functions of managers and scientific researchers. In addition, as industrialisation creates increasingly complex production, consumption, and distribution processes, the amount of information generated rapidly increases in comparison to agricultural society, requiring an organised bureaucratic system for information management. This bureaucratic system, as articulated by Max Weber and others, is necessary not only within production units but for the society as a whole. In this sense, in times of peaceful development, one of the collateral consequences of industrialisation is that a vanguard political party can rapidly divide into increasingly sophisticated bureaucratic components and into different political groupings. Mao hoped that this problem could be addressed by replacing the bureaucratic system with the people's self-organisation. His confidence may have come from the CPC's experience of the people's war; through the practice of the mass line, the party was able to realise powerful social mobilisations and dynamic political processes that integrated the vanguard party with the people. Mao wanted to revive the organisational model of the people's war during industrialisation to drive national development forward; however, this organisational model had been successfully implemented during a specific historical context, in which there was a strong popular sense of urgency due to the Chinese civil war (1927–1937; 1945–1949) and the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1937–1945). Following the victory of the revolution and the initiation of na-

tional construction, this sense of urgency gradually faded away. Furthermore, the conditions during the era of Socialism 1.0 were not conducive to help the people deal with the complexities of the country's development, while the party's and government's bureaucratic systems distorted and disintegrated the self-organisation of the masses, whether deliberately or inadvertently. Therefore, Mao's aims were in practice very difficult to realise.

Another problem that could not be solved at the time was to adjust the system of high accumulation during the early days of the PRC. After completing the initial stage of industrial accumulation, the next challenge facing a socialist state is to promote a stable cycle for expanded reproduction. This involves two tasks; first, it is necessary to adjust the proportion of accumulation and consumption reasonably, conduct fiscal and financial policy reforms, and generate sustainable power for economic growth. However, during Socialism 1.0, China's fiscal and financial policies were relatively conservative, leading to insufficient money supply, which suppressed the expansion of consumption and thus resulted in a lack of motivation for industrial upgrading. Second, it is necessary to solve the problem of integrating the national economy into the international economic system. The modern system of mass industrial production depends upon inputs of resources and products that span borders and regions. It is difficult to sustain economic growth when relying solely on domestic investment and consumption; an effective economic cycle must be established through international trade to maintain vitality. As early as the 1930s, the Soviet Union attempted to attract capital and technology from the United States, which was in the midst of an economic crisis at the time and had an objective demand for capital output and industrial output. These conditions were favourable to promoting cooperation and the high-speed development of the Soviet economy. Subsequently, the Soviet Union committed to building the socialist camp, not only for political and security reasons but also to establish an economic cycle between the socialist countries. After the revolution in 1949, China joined the socialist camp and received a significant amount of Soviet capital and technical support, especially after the Korean War (1950–1953) (known in China as the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea [抗美援朝战争, Kàngměi yuáncháo zhànzhēng]). This support enabled China's basic industrialisation to proceed smoothly, however, the Soviet-led economic system also produced its own imbalances between countries. Eventually, Mao and the party's leadership chose to break away

from the Soviet system, as it broke away from the capitalist world economic system in 1949, which resulted in China's economy being relatively closed for a long time.

In general, the vision of Socialism 1.0 can be summarised as follows: under public ownership, workers collectively managed the means of production, producing for their own material and spiritual well-being rather than for profit. In fact, the planned economy and system of public ownership created a system of accumulation in which the costs were shared by the people as a whole and completed basic industrialisation in a relatively short period of time. However, this economic structure also had some inherent limitations, related to the sustainability of internal development and difficulties in connecting with the external economic cycle. In the end, the mode of production and organisational capacity of China during Socialism 1.0 were not sufficient to truly realise the socialist ideals of equality and cooperation. This was the challenge facing Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) and other leaders, who would lead China into its next phase of socialism.

Socialism 2.0

1. The political economy of Socialism 2.0. Having experienced and participated in the construction of Socialism 1.0, Deng Xiaoping had a clear understanding of its problems. In contrast to Mao's emphasis on the idealistic goals of 'fighting selfishness and criticising revisionism' (斗私批修, dòusī pīxiū), 'being just and selfless' (大公无私, dàgōng wúsi) and 'serving the people' (为人民服务, wèi rénmin fúwù), Deng Xiaoping was more inclined to a realistic stance, due to his lengthy involvement in frontline economic work. This orientation was on display during a 1979 meeting with foreign guests, when Deng stated that it was wrong to think that a market economy could only exist under capitalism, contending that socialism could also adopt a market economy and learn things from capitalist countries, such as business management methods.¹⁴ Deng's strategy was to gradually transform the planned economy into a tool for macroeconomic regulation, to install the mechanism of a market economy, and to try to make the market economy compatible

¹⁴ Deng Xiaoping, 'We Can Develop a Market Economy Under Socialism', in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Vol. 2* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994).

with public ownership and distribution according to work. This approach differed significantly from Socialism 1.0, in which the planned economy was an institutional foundation that was interrelated with public ownership and distribution according to work. In 1984, the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Reform of the Economic Structure was passed at the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth CPC Central Committee, the first breakthrough in the impasse between the planned economy and the commodity economy.¹⁵ Deng spoke highly of this decision, saying that it was a political economic framework that combined the basic principles of Marxism with China's socialist practice.

Changes to the country's basic economic system inevitably raised questions regarding the meaning and interpretation of socialism, namely what were its key elements and features? Although it was necessary on a theoretical level to clarify how these reforms were consistent with socialism, Deng proposed that the party should set aside theoretical debates, and instead focus on setting specific goals and mapping out the trajectory for the country's new developmental direction. Therefore, in promoting economic reform, Deng made adjustments to the theory of historical stages of development that was adopted during the period of Socialism 1.0. In 1987, the thirteenth CPC National Congress proposed the idea that China, due to its historical underdevelopment, was in the 'primary stage of socialism' (社会主义初级阶段, *shèhuì zhǔyì chūjí jiēduàn*) in which the principle task was to develop the productive forces and set out a three-step economic development strategy to achieve a relatively good standard of life for the people and realise socialist modernisation by the centenary of the revolution.¹⁶ Subsequently, in 1992, the fourteenth CPC National Congress declared that China's reform aimed to establish a socialist market economic system, which was indeed a change from the classical conception of socialism, by no longer insisting that a fully planned economy was necessary to ensure public ownership and distribution according to work. Corresponding adjustments were made to the theory of historical stages of development, gradually clarifying that it was necessary to build a socialist market economy during the primary stage of socialism.

¹⁵ Twelfth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 'Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Reform of the Economic Structure', *Beijing Review* 27, no. 44 (October 1984).

¹⁶ Deng Xiaoping, 'In Everything We Do We Must Proceed From the Realities of the Primary Stage of Socialism', in *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, Vol. 3* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994).

Together, these theoretical developments formed the basis of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

2. The challenges of Socialism 2.0. During the reform and opening up period, China's industry has grown rapidly, due to the activation of domestic demand and access to foreign investment by joining the global market. With the support of domestic and international economic circulation, industrialisation has embarked on a sustained process of sovereign development and high-speed growth, moving past the phase of industrial accumulation and entering the stage of industrial upgrading.

According to Deng, in the socialist market economy, the market was only a means to realise the socialist vision of building a 'moderately prosperous society' (小康社会, xiǎokāng shèhuì) and attaining the 'common prosperity' (共同富裕, gòngtóng fùyù). However, with the rapid development of the market economy, this vision faced increasing problems.

First, Deng's theoretical framework lacked the support of a compelling historical narrative, namely, it did not identify a clear path by which China's socialist development would proceed, creating a weakness in the party's new ideological paradigm. The socialist theory of Deng's era added a new segment to the historical narrative outlined by Mao in *On New Democracy*, inserting the primary stage of socialism into the proposed transition of socialism to communism. However, this formulation of the primary stage of socialism failed to answer two critical questions: is there an advanced stage of socialism that follows the primary stage? And how will this path ultimately lead to communism? At that time, the party neither had the ability nor the resources to answer these questions and could only postpone the issue by not arguing over it.

Second, Socialism 2.0 also faced severe difficulties in terms of the basic economic system. The central concern with the theory of the socialist market economy was whether the market economy and socialism could be compatible with each other. Socialism, as a form of ownership, is characterised by collective and public ownership, whereas the market, theoretically, allocates resources, with the types of products and scales of production for different enterprises being based on the price signals determined by the forces of

supply and demand. Therefore, in theory, various forms of ownership should be compatible with the market. Proponents of the socialist market economy contended that socialism could develop a market economy in place of the planned economy, while retaining the two basic elements of socialism: public ownership and distribution according to work. However, in practice, the market economy began to dissolve these two socialist principles. During the late 1980s, China's commercial sector gradually privatised and, after 1992, a large amount of foreign investment poured into the country, and private ownership of production began to expand. In 1997, the CPC adopted the policy of 'grasping the large and letting the small go' (抓大放小, *zhuādà fàngxiǎo*), focusing on maintaining state control over the largest and most strategically important state-owned enterprises (SOEs), such as energy and banking, while relaxing control over smaller, non-strategic SOEs, such as light industry; reforms under this policy resulted in the basic privatisation of county-level state-owned enterprises (SOEs), a large loss of state-owned assets, the exposure of the working class to market forces, and the detachment of the party from its class base. At the same time, there was a shift from the principle of distribution according to work to distribution according to other factors, such as capital, land, and technology, that, due to their scarcity, often occupied a more advantageous position in market transactions than labour. The extreme prioritisation of economic efficiency magnified and abused the advantages of these other factors over labour. This would inevitably compress the proportion of surplus distributed among labour, leading to an increasing separation between workers and the means of production as well as a continuous deterioration of living conditions for workers (the latter trend being exacerbated by inadequate public services). If the cost of the first thirty years of industrialisation was evenly distributed among the whole population through the powerful will of the state, then the cost of the market-oriented reform of the following thirty years was borne more by ordinary people.

Socialism 3.0: Towards the Future

For China, both the practice of Socialism 1.0 in the first three decades following the revolution and that of Socialism 2.0 in the subsequent three decades demonstrate how socialist ideals and beliefs have been integrated with the country's realities. This integration makes it irrational for China to

pursue any radical departure from its socialist path. However, the challenge that China faces lies in the fact that there is no external model to draw upon to adjust Socialism 2.0. As the international political-economic landscape has evolved and the forms of production have undergone transformations, both the Western European path of social democracy and the US path of completely disavowing socialism have descended into crises due to their inherent contradictions. Therefore, the reform of China's socialist path needs to be based on its own practice.

Focusing on China's own practice does not mean separating the country from the external world. On the contrary, the fundamental reality of contemporary China is its profound integration with the external world. As such, discussions of socialism in China must take into account the background of global political and economic changes. Just as Marx made great efforts to analyse and understand the internal logic and operation of modern industrial capitalism in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, today it is necessary to deeply analyse and understand the internal logic and operation of the contemporary form of production and its transformation. Rational action can only be taken in accordance with the direction of this transformation, and at critical moments and junctures, relatively reasonable choices should be made based on the given historical conditions. For China, socialism cannot simply be limited to the governing manifesto of the ruling party, it should also be a concept and practical resource to rethink public participation and reshape a political community. Amidst the new world landscape and the rise of new forms of production, the new direction of socialism should be seriously considered.

The core tenets of Socialism 1.0 – the planned economy, public ownership, and distribution according to work – were built through reflection on and improvement of the mass production model. The basis of mass production is collective labour: workers gather in a common workplace and work with each other to operate the means of production to assemble and manufacture goods. The principles of Socialism 1.0 aimed to enable workers to control the means of production on the basis of collective labour in order to cast off the exploitation of the bourgeoisie, and improve the structure of work and the living conditions of the workers. Socialism 3.0 should explore new approaches to correct the abuses caused by capitalism's dominant position in the global economy, with a focus on improving the living conditions of workers and

increasing their control of the means of production, while acknowledging the necessity of a market economy. In China, it is necessary to limit the abuses of capital and to improve the status of labour in the production process, in line with the dynamics of industrialisation, and, ultimately, to build a more inclusive and fairer model of industrialisation. This goal obviously cannot be achieved by the spontaneous adjustment of the market and requires the state to ensure and maintain its leadership in the economic domain.

Since the beginning of the revolution, the Chinese state has exhibited a certain uniqueness, possessing multiple executive forces that penetrate the country's economy, politics, and society. Even after the administrative reforms during Socialism 2.0, the state has continued to possess a certain economic initiative, not only in terms of its public policies but, importantly, the SOEs and the state-owned land system.

While undertaking such a daunting task, the country must also be vigilant of the further bureaucratisation that may arise from efforts to regulate production. To continue to lead the Chinese people, the CPC must effectively use its power and resources to restructure the relations of production and advance the interests of the working class, thereby winning the support of the people. In the era of Socialism 1.0, the CPC distributed the critical means of production – land – to the peasantry and generated the working class through industrialisation. As a result, the overall interests of the CPC and the people were aligned, and the party's social foundation was solid. However, in the era of Socialism 2.0, the CPC introduced and developed the market economy and made efficiency the core principle to guide resource allocation, encouraging individuals to become rich. This approach catered to the 'ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people' (人民群众日益增长的物质文化需求, *rénmín qúnzhòng rìyì zēngzhǎng de wùzhì wénhuà xūqiú*) but also laid the groundwork for a serious crisis. Today, if the CPC seeks to rebuild its social foundation, it cannot merely make adjustments to its social welfare policies, it must also regenerate its class foundation by broadly improving the living conditions of the working class, achieving a more balanced distribution of income across the country, and raising the position of labour in the industrial system as well as limiting the abuses of capital.

In addition to the economic and social fields, it must also be recognised that the values and ideals inherent in socialism are an important resource for China as a political and cultural community. The reason why socialist ideas were rapidly accepted and spread in modern China is not only because they are closely related to the traditional Chinese ideal of 'Great Unity' (even today, many Chinese people derive their understanding of socialism from this cultural concept), but also due to the successful adaptation of the socialist narrative of historical stages of development to the Chinese context by Mao and others. It is precisely in this narrative that people's acceptance of socialism achieved the unity of cognition and belief.

In a socialist country, the historical materialist narrative of development is both informative and enlightening. It can be said that this historical narrative plays a role in maintaining public faith in the political system and the trajectory of national development in non-religious countries like China, just as the Christian tradition plays a strong political role in the liberal democracies of the United States, Europe, and other Western countries. For a large country such as China, it is necessary to develop a common set of values and ideals that are reflected in real political and economic processes, rather than mere ideological propaganda. Under ever-changing historical conditions, China must mobilise its own cultural traditions and ideals to reshape and revitalise its common values to ensure the survival of the country and guide it in the correct direction.

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中国人民从来是不信邪的！



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The Battle Against Poverty: An Alternative Revolutionary Practice in China's Post- Revolutionary Era



*'The Battle Against Poverty: An Alternative Revolutionary Practice in China's Post-Revolutionary Era' (脱贫攻坚：后革命时代的另类革命实践) was originally published in **Wenhua Zongheng** (文化纵横), issue no. 3 (June 2020).*

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The end of an era of radical revolution does not mean that revolution becomes relegated to memory. As globalisation continues to expand, countries governed by revolutionary parties face the challenge of completing unfinished revolutionary missions. In the current era, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has highlighted the importance of 'remaining true to our original aspiration and founding mission' (不忘初心, 牢记使命, *bùwàng chūxīn, láojì shǐmìng*); this is not merely a rhetorical nod to the past, but rather an ideological basis for the party's concrete action to maintain its revolutionary character in the new po-

litical and economic context.¹ This concrete action has been primarily focused on the issue of poverty alleviation.

Since 2012, poverty alleviation has been elevated to a central task for the whole party and society, with the party's general secretary personally responsible for its completion. The party's poverty alleviation strategy evolved from its conventional techno-bureaucratic approach to the 'battle against poverty' (扶贫攻坚, fúpín gōngjiān), which focused on innovating institutions of governance to promote economic and social transformation. Poverty alleviation has been given a new weight in the country's political and economic environment in the current period. The battle against poverty approach has incorporated revolutionary language and slogans, giving the social issue a sense of importance and sacredness. For example, poverty has been referred to as the 'enemy', poverty alleviation as the 'battlefield', and the struggle against poverty as the 'hard battle'; mobilisation meetings have declared a 'war against poverty' and celebrated the victories in the 'battle'; and a multitude of young cadres have been sent to the 'battlefield', while those who have succumbed in this 'battle' have been hailed as the 'heroes who died on the battlefield'. The 'revolutionising' of poverty alleviation has not simply been a mass movement or social mobilisation in the post-revolutionary era; rather, it was a political and a symbolic response to the growing inequalities that had emerged in China over the course of reform and opening up – inequalities that contradicted the basic philosophy of the CPC. In other words, the CPC made a return of sorts to its historic revolutionary agenda, in the post-revolutionary era, addressing the national and global dilemma of the distribution of social wealth. This reflects a new stage of the CPC's governance that seeks to consolidate and 'remain true to its original aspiration and founding mission' on the road to national modernisation.

The revolutionary discourse of the poverty alleviation campaign is, of course, metaphorical. If class enemies no longer exist, it is time to bid farewell to the revolution; but if the poverty that the revolution vowed to eliminate is still present, an 'enemy' of the revolution persists and an essential task of the revolution remains unfinished. In this battle, the CPC has continuously redistributed socio-economic resources towards poverty alleviation, using the political

¹ Xi Jinping, 'Remain True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission – An Ongoing Campaign', in *The Governance of China, Vol. 3* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2020).

and institutional means at its disposal and transcending the shackles of the existing bureaucracy and social interest groups; this resource mobilisation is arguably the most intensive and powerful in China's history. The CPC's capacity to regulate the pattern of social distribution of resources through the state institutions under its leadership as well as its ability to both initiate market-oriented reform and correct its developmental disparities, demonstrates a fundamental improvement in the institutional strength and capacity of the modern Chinese state compared to the late Qing dynasty (清朝, 1840–1912) and the Republic of China (1912–1949) periods. The practical significance of the battle against poverty extends beyond the domain of economic and social development policy, and has had a broader, profound political and economic impact. However, there has been little discussion and analysis of this extensive campaign to improve the people's livelihood, rarely seen since the beginning of reform and opening up, in terms of the historic relationship between poverty and the political practices of the CPC.

In recent years, Chinese social scientists have gone beyond their traditional focus on revolutionary themes in party history, and have launched an academic initiative to 'bring back the revolution'.² Intellectual communities have started to rethink the grand narrative of traditional Chinese civilisation and begun to analyse how the political and ideological changes that have taken place in modern China have been shaped by the logic of the revolution.³ The battle against poverty, as a 'revolutionary form', provides a vivid case study of the Chinese party-led state system and of how the CPC has shaped a new political tradition. This article, rather than a scholarly discussion of the meanings of revolution and post-revolution, or an evaluation of the battle against poverty, aims to use the concepts of revolution and post-revolution to discuss the importance of this revolutionised movement for the people's wellbeing in the context of modern Chinese politics and society.

² Ying Xing, '“Bringing the Revolution Back”: Expanding New Horizons in Sociology' [‘把革命带回来’: 社会学新视野的拓展], *Chinese Journal of Sociology* [社会] 36, no. 4 (July 2016).

³ Zhou Feizhou, 'Differential Order Patterns and Ethical Priorities' [差序格局和伦理本位], *Chinese Journal of Sociology* [社会] 35, no. 1 (January 2015); Qu Jingdong, 'Returning to the Historical Perspective and Reshaping the Sociological Imagination' [返回历史视野, 重塑社会学的想象力], *Chinese Journal of Sociology* [社会] 35, no. 1 (January 2015).

Poverty: A Thread Connecting the Stages of the Chinese Revolution

Revolution is a process of transformation that produces major political, economic, and technological changes in a society. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese society has been marked by revolution during almost every stage of its history. In contrast to the 'revolutions' in ancient Chinese history, which saw dynastic rule continue under different royal surnames, the series of revolutions that occurred in China after the mid-nineteenth century began to break away from the traditional pattern of dynastic change, becoming linked to Western revolutionary thought and practice based on the theory of social evolution. China entered a new, revolutionary phase in its history mainly because it was no longer possible for the Qing dynasty's ruling system to cope with external pressures and internal strife, which inevitably led to domestic resistance from political forces that were not part of the governing system, namely, a bottom-up movement based upon the collaboration of the lower and middle gentry classes, the national bourgeoisie, civil society including anti-Qing secret societies, new intellectual circles, and the Nationalist Party of China, or Kuomintang (KMT), with the New Army under its control.⁴ It is important to note that the anti-Qing rebel forces that emerged in the late Qing period were completely different in composition, ideology, and practice than those forces that had spurred previous dynastic changes.

Some scholars have argued that the momentous changes that have taken place in China since the late Qing period, were simply a natural continuation of Chinese civilisation and indigenous modernity, through the self-critical and adaptive Confucian system.⁵ However, there was also an external impetus for change. After the opening up of the country in the mid-nineteenth century, the huge civilisational gap in development, technology, and knowledge between China and Western capitalism began to enter the national consciousness; at the same time, Western Enlightenment ideas began to reach China, where the intellectual elite began to embrace these new world views.

⁴ The New Army was a modernised armed force formed under the Qing dynasty following its defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). See Chen Mingming, *Politics and Modernisation in Post-Revolutionary Society* [革命后社会的政治与现代化] (Shanghai: Shanghai Lexicographical Publishing House [上海辞书出版社], 2002).

⁵ Wang Ban, He Xiang, and Zhang Yu, 'Discovering Enlightenment in History: Reading Wang Hui's *The Emergence of Modern Chinese Thought*' [在历史中发现启蒙——读汪晖的《现代中国思想的兴起》], *Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)* [清华大学学报(哲学社会科学版)], no. 5 (2008).

As the centuries-old rule of the Qing dynasty came to an end, the rebels who sought to replace it were not the traditional forces of change, but revolutionaries who, to varying degrees, understood the systemic roots of China's 'backwardness'. As with previous dynastic changes and crises of legitimacy in China, people's suffering was the root cause of the crisis of Qing rule; but unlike the previous rebellions, the demands of the anti-Qing revolutionaries were formulated through dialogue with the West, a study of China's religion and culture, and a systematic, comprehensive, and reflective examination of the country's political, economic, and social history.

Poverty was a key thread running through the phases of the anti-Qing revolution. In 1904, the Guangxu Emperor (the tenth emperor of the Qing dynasty, ruling from 1875–1908) had issued an imperial decree stating that, 'The only way to sustain a nation is to protect the people. In recent years, the people's financial resources have been depleted to the extreme, and with all the provinces sharing the burden of war reparations, the people's livelihood has become increasingly precarious'. While the emperor recognised that the people's wealth had dried up and that they had become deeply impoverished, he failed to recognise the inability of the Qing system to cope with the internal concerns and the external threats, making it impossible to ease poverty. In contrast, the revolutionaries almost universally advocated modernisation as a solution to the country's problem of poverty.

One of the leading intellectual figures in China's modernisation movement, Yan Fu (严复), believed that resolving the issue of poverty was critical to China's survival, arguing that 'the first thing to do to save the country today is to eliminate this poverty. Only when poverty can be cured can we talk about making the nation stronger, and then steadily advance the people's wealth, intelligence and morality'.⁶ Yan Fu not only placed poverty at the centre of China's problems, but also put forward a number of ideas on poverty alleviation, including building roads and mines – which can be regarded as a source of the popular saying of 'building roads before getting rich' (要想富先修路, yào xiǎngfù xiān xiūlù) – improving education, supporting the rural smallholder economy, and developing a comprehensive strategy to tackle poverty. Meanwhile, the leader of the 1911 revolution, Dr. Sun Yat-sen

⁶ Yan Fu, 'Reading the New Translation of Henry George's *Social Problems*' [读新译甄克思《社会通论》] in *Collection of Yan Fu, Vol. 1* [严复集, 第1册], ed. Wang Shi (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company [中华书局], 1986), 149.

(孙中山, Sūn Zhōngshān), also centred his thinking on nation-building on the matter of resolving the problem of poverty in China.⁷ In *Plan for National Reconstruction* (建国方略, Jiànguó fānglüè), published in 1918, Sun discussed the reasons for the rise of poverty in China, and in *Principles of People's Livelihood* (民生主义, Mínhēng zhǔyì), published in 1924, he proposed a governing strategy that focused on the 'Three Principles of the People' (三民主义, Sānmín zhǔyì) – nationalism, democracy, and 'the people's livelihood' – and sought to modernise China through bourgeois revolution.⁸

Despite the revolutionaries in this period sharing the aims of eradicating poverty and achieving national prosperity and strength through modernisation, the actual practice of nation-building after the 1911 Xinhai Revolution (辛亥革命, Xīnhài gé mìng) – which overthrew the Qing dynasty and led to the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC) – did not set the country on a trajectory out of poverty. As the modernisation scholar Luo Rongqu (罗荣渠) pointed out, the Xinhai Revolution had failed because a modern state was not established after the collapse of the Qing dynasty; Chinese modernisation required that a strong political force first constructed a state that was capable of the task.⁹ After the Xinhai Revolution, the construction of a modern state was impeded by the existence of a plurality of local centres of power. The KMT attempted to overcome this fragmentation by leading a military campaign to reunify the country, known as the National Revolution or Northern Expedition (1926–1928), and through the centralisation of power, with party rule at its core. However, the KMT-led ROC government remained a complex and fragile arrangement that was swayed by multiple local political and military forces. In addition, the main political forces on which the government relied were in sharp class conflict with the rural population. As a result, the KMT government lacked sufficient political authority to effectively mobilise the social resources necessary for top-down modernisation. During the ROC period, progress was not made in poverty alleviation and industrialisation – the issues that the Xinhai and National Revolutions

⁷ Translator's note: the pinyin translation of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's name has been included here, as his English name does not correspond to his Chinese name, unlike, for example, Yan Fu.

⁸ Sun Yat-sen, 'The First Lecture on Principles of People's Livelihood (3 August 1924)' [民生主义第一讲 (1924年8月3日)], in *The Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen, Vol. 9* (孙中山全集, 第9卷), (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company [中华书局], 1986).

⁹ Chen, *Politics and Modernisation*.

had aimed to address – and so the KMT’s rule was plunged into a crisis of legitimacy.

The organisational composition of the KMT dictated that it could not transform the basic class structure of China. Resolving the issues of poverty and modernisation in China required a political authority that was powered by the majority of society, that is, the peasantry; the establishment of this authority required a radical transformation of China’s superstructure. These factors pushed the struggle to eradicate poverty and modernise China from a reformist path to a revolutionary one. Landlords, capitalists, and feudal forces, along with the forces of imperialism, were increasingly seen as the causes of China’s poverty and backwardness, and consequently were identified as the enemies of the revolution.

In this context, the CPC came onto the political scene in modern China. Since its founding in 1921, the CPC had expressly declared its mission to transform China from a poor country into a prosperous and powerful one. The party’s early alliance with the KMT had been based on the Three Principles of the People with the equal right to land at its core. Under the leadership of the CPC, the revolution not only aimed to fulfill the unfinished tasks of the Xinhai Revolution – namely, anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism – but sought to incorporate them into the Communist Revolution.¹⁰ Although poverty eradication and modernisation were common aspirations shared by the different revolutionary currents in modern China, which connected the Xinhai, National, and Communist Revolutions, the hope for a solution only emerged when the CPC came to power.

The Communist Party of China’s Approach to Poverty

The CPC and social reformists shared the view that China was poor and backward, however, they differed in terms of how to resolve these issues. While many historians and political scientists have studied the CPC’s grassroots mobilisations and the strategies through which it gained power, such as the united front, armed struggle, party building, and the mass line; scholars have often neglected to examine how the party sought to use its power to re-

¹⁰ Chen, *Politics and Modernisation*.

define the meaning of development and pursued a radical form of revolution to achieve modernisation.

During the early twentieth century, Chinese civil society lacked the self-organisation and power to effectively promote industrialisation, so it was necessary for the state to step in and direct the process.¹¹ In the ROC period, the KMT's party-run state was unable to realise industrialisation; the necessary transformation of the Chinese state would finally be achieved through the political mobilisation of a Marxist-Leninist party, the CPC.¹² In fact, the legitimacy of the CPC, in replacing the KMT administration, was determined by its capacity to advance state-building and, consequently, modernisation. In the late 1930s, Mao Zedong (毛泽东) proposed that 'economic construction should be at the centre of the entire work of the party and people's organisations, and at the centre of the work of the party's committees and governments'.¹³ He also pointed out that 'the people support the Communist Party because we represent the demands of the nation and the people. But if we fail to solve the problems, build new forms of industry, and develop productive forces, the people will not necessarily support us'.¹⁴ In this sense, it is not difficult to understand the CPC's consistent prioritisation of national development and pursuit of the eradication of poverty and industrialisation, as well as its motivation to launch reform and opening up.

In its early years, while developing the revolutionary struggle, the CPC carried out a series of poverty alleviation campaigns in the revolutionary base areas. These campaigns foreshadowed the developmental policies in the 'post-revolutionary' period, and reflected the CPC's original intention in building a modernised state. For example, the party's efforts in land reform, education, health care, social security, and social assistance in the Central Revolutionary Base or Jiangxi-Fujian Soviet and in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region during the 1930s and 1940s bear a striking resemblance to the party's battle against poverty today.

¹¹ Chen, *Politics and Modernisation*.

¹² Chen, *Politics and Modernisation*.

¹³ Literature Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China [中共中央文献研究室] *The Chronology of Mao Zedong (1893–1949), Vol. 2* [毛泽东年谱(1893–1949): 中] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press [中央文献出版社], 2013), 209.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong, *Collected Works of Mao Zedong, Vol. 3* [毛泽东文集, 第3卷] (Beijing: People's Publishing House [人民出版社], 1996), 147.

First, the CPC's two-pronged approach to resolving poverty in the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region – focusing on economic backwardness and providing social assistance – shares similarities with the party's contemporary poverty alleviation programs. In the Border Region, the party set agricultural production as the initial priority in economic construction, organising the peasants through cooperatives to improve productivity and boost rural development. Subsequently, the party enacted a progressive tax system where people from all classes – except those in dire poverty – had to pay taxes to the government, while providing rent and interest relief. Finally, the party created an institution devoted to social assistance, granting special funds for disaster relief and the resettlement of refugees from China's civil war and the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937–1945).¹⁵ In some ways, the experience in the Border Region represented the prototype for the party's contemporary development-oriented poverty alleviation programs, focused on improving living conditions in the long term by promoting economic development in poorer areas, and welfare-oriented poverty alleviation programs, focused on providing immediate relief and support to those living in poverty.

Second, the CPC's development of education in the Central Revolutionary Base shares similarities with the party's contemporary poverty alleviation efforts. After establishing the base area in 1931, the party had built primary schools in all of its townships by January 1934, providing free education to all children. Along with developing a system of compulsory education for children and youth, the CPC also carried out a large-scale adult learning campaign in the base area to eradicate illiteracy. For example, in Xingguo County, the party set up 1,900 night schools, open to all those who were illiterate under the age of 35 – women accounted for 69 percent of students.¹⁶ During the founding of the Central Revolutionary Base, Mao had declared that everyone had an equal right to education regardless of gender, status, or identity; in addition, the constitution which governed the base area guaranteed the right of the working, peasant, and toiling masses to receive education and the implementation of a system of free, universal education.¹⁷ China now has a

¹⁵ Ouyang Dejun, 'The Anti-Poverty Practices of the Communist Party of China in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region' [中国共产党在陕甘宁边区的反贫困实践], *Journal of Yan'an University (Social Science Edition)* [延安大学学报 (社会科学版)] 41, no. 4 (2019).

¹⁶ Yu Boliu and Ling Buji, *Mao Zedong and Ruijin* [毛泽东与瑞金] (Nanchang: Jiangxi People's Publishing House [江西人民出版社], 2003), 317.

¹⁷ Yu and Ling, *Mao Zedong and Ruijin*, 317.

nation-wide free and compulsory nine-year education system and the party continues to pursue poverty alleviation through education, focused on increasing access to education and educational resources in rural areas to block the intergenerational transmission of poverty as well as providing vocational education and skills training.

In addition, the CPC's social assistance practices in the Central Revolutionary Base also resemble the aforementioned welfare-oriented poverty alleviation programs of today. In the base area, the party established a working people's committee that enforced labour rights, supported unemployed workers, and provided social security, as well as various mutual aid societies. The party also set up corresponding offices that primarily worked to rescue and aid victims of war and natural disasters. This tradition, which dates back to the party's earliest experiences in governance, continues to this day.

Regarding the campaigns to improve people's livelihood in the Central Revolutionary Base, Mao emphasised that no one should be left behind or neglected, and that all people should be treated equally and with respect, especially the marginalised sections of the groups such as women, the elderly, and people with disabilities.¹⁸ The battle against poverty today carries on this principle of 'leaving no one behind'.

Despite the CPC's view that the root causes of poverty were the exploitation of the peasantry by the feudal landlord class, the economic aggression of imperialism, and the oppression of the bureaucrat-capitalist class, following the victory of the revolution and the completion of the land reform, the party came to the sobering realisation that the fundamental conditions of poverty in the rural areas had not changed. Immediately after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the CPC embarked on a process of systematic social transformation with the aim of eradicating poverty, implementing a nationwide land reform that completely destroyed the feudal land system. At the same time, recognising the importance of transforming the individual economy of smallholders, the CPC mobilised a mutual aid and cooperative movement in rural areas. Yet, in 1956, in his notes for *The High Tide of Socialism in Rural China* (中国农村社会主义高潮, Zhōngguó nóngcūn shèhuì zhǔyì gāocháo), Mao would write that China was still very

¹⁸ Yu and Ling, *Mao Zedong and Ruijin*, 317.

poor and that it would take decades for China to become rich; two decades later, when Mao met Kukrit Pramoj, Prime Minister of Thailand, in 1975, he would state that ‘the Communist Party is not fearful, but what is really fearful is poverty’.¹⁹ These examples reflect the longstanding emphasis on poverty alleviation in the political agenda of the CPC.

Throughout the Mao era, the party continued to pursue social transformation across the country and on all fronts, developing basic infrastructure in agriculture, water conservancy, transportation, education, and health care, and achieving basic industrialisation. In this sense, the period of socialist construction between the founding of the PRC and 1978, can broadly be placed within the history of, what the party now calls, development-oriented poverty alleviation.²⁰

In 1978, China entered a period of market economic reform. Despite the profound changes in the CPC’s economic strategy, poverty remained central in the party’s political agenda, as Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) stated, ‘Our decades-long struggle has always had the purpose of eliminating poverty’.²¹ To attain this goal, Deng argued that it was necessary to take a different approach from the previous era: ‘Our twenty years of experience from 1958 to 1976 have told us: poverty is not socialism, socialism is to eliminate poverty’.²² Deng attempted to clarify the relationship between modernisation and poverty, putting forward creative formulations such as ‘those who get rich first bring others along’ (先富带后富, xiānfù dài hòufù),²³ introducing the concept of building a ‘moderately prosperous society’ (小康社会, xiǎokāng shèhuì) as the goal of modernisation, proposing the Three-Step Development Strategy to achieve modernisation, and setting the CPC’s rul-

¹⁹ Zhao Xingsheng, ‘Poverty and Anti-Poverty: The CPC’s Expression and Practice on Rural Issues in the Age of Collectivisation’ [贫困与反贫困——集体化时代中共对乡村问题的表达与实践], *Anhui Historiography* [安徽史学], no. 6 (2016).

²⁰ Li Xiaoyun, Yu Lerong, and Tang Lixia, ‘The Anti-Poverty Journey and Poverty Reduction Mechanisms in the 70 Years After the Founding of New China’ [新中国成立后 70 年的反贫困历程及减贫机制], *Chinese Rural Economy* [中国农村经济] 9, no. 10 (2019).

²¹ Aban Maolitian, ‘The Anti-Poverty Theory and Practice of the Communist Party of China’ [中国共产党反贫困理论与实践], *Studies on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theories* [毛泽东邓小平理论研究], no. 11 (2006).

²² Deng Xiaoping, *Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* [建设有中国特色的社会主义] (Beijing: People’s Publishing House [人民出版社], 1987), 103–4.

²³ In the West, Deng Xiaoping is often miscited as only saying ‘let some get rich first’, while omitting the second part of his statement, indicating that the wealthier members of society have a responsibility to ‘bring others along’ towards the goal of common prosperity.

ing objective as leading the Chinese people to achieve ‘common prosperity’ (共同富裕, gòngtóng fùyù).

Although subsequent CPC leaders have continued to emphasise the party’s adherence to the goal of common prosperity, as reform and opening up has proceeded polarisation and social inequality have become increasingly serious issues amid the country’s rapid economic development. Although the CPC identified the problem of poverty at the beginning of reform and opening up and has undertaken a series of initiatives to address the issue during this period – including the development-oriented poverty alleviation campaign in the ‘three areas’ (三西地区, sānxī dìqū) in the early 1980s and the Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program to lift 80 million people out of absolute poverty between 1994 and 2000 – it has become increasingly difficult for poor populations to escape from poverty as the inequality has soared.²⁴ While China has made significant achievements in modernisation, it is clear that the CPC now faces the major challenge of managing the relationship between efficiency and equity.

Prior to the revolution, China’s economy and society suffered from a long-term period of underdevelopment due to, on the one hand, the weakness of grassroots and civil society forces to drive economic development and, on the other hand, the state’s inability to advance modernisation at the national level. When the CPC came to power in 1949, it provided a new force to drive the country’s modernisation process forward and became equipped with the political, institutional, and administrative capacity to transform Chinese society, breaking the cycle of dynastic change and putting China’s national development on secure footing. However, in the post-revolutionary era, the CPC has faced challenges in regulating and distributing wealth in a society with diverse interests.

An Alternative Revolutionary Practice to Eradicate Poverty

The eighteenth CPC National Congress in 2012 marked a shift in the party’s approach, as it placed a greater weight on using its institutional strength to

²⁴ Translator’s note: the ‘three areas’ refer to Hexi and Dingxi of Gansu province, and Xihaigu of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region.

guide the modernisation process. As General Secretary Xi Jinping (习近平) stated at the time, ‘Eliminating poverty, improving people’s livelihood and achieving common prosperity are the essential requirements of socialism. Today, the majority of the population have seen a great improvement in their living standards, with the emergence of middle-income and high-income groups, but there are still a large number of low-income people, and it is them who really need our help’.²⁵ In a series of discussions on poverty alleviation work, Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasised the fundamental concept that ‘shared development is focused on addressing issues of social justice’.²⁶ Among CPC leaders in recent decades, Xi has raised the issue of poverty most frequently, representing the party’s increased concern for social justice issues in this new stage of development. Whereas the initial challenge that the CPC faced, in transforming from a revolutionary party to a ruling party, concerned the advancement of China’s modernisation, with an emphasis on economic development; now, having made great economic achievements, the party faces the challenge of promoting social justice to fully realise the country’s modernisation.

During the post-revolutionary era, changes in party-government relations, state-society relations, and sociocultural factors have limited the CPC’s use of revolutionary means to the distribution of social wealth. Furthermore, because the problem of poverty is structural, the normative mechanisms of techno-bureaucratic governance have been incapable of regulating the distribution. As a result, to change the pattern of distribution, the party has had to use its institutional resources and make institutional interventions, while also going beyond existing institutions through ‘revolutionary’ initiatives. This has included a self-revolution within the CPC itself, reshaping the interests of the party and the personal interests of its members. The evolution of the party’s approach, from its techno-bureaucratic strategy to the large-scale poverty eradication campaign, was not an irrational mass movement akin to the Great Leap Forward (1958–1962), but a rational movement of consensus building and mass mobilisation, an experiment to revitalise revolutionary practice and symbolism in the post-revolutionary era.

²⁵ Xi Jinping, *Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourse on Poverty Alleviation* [习近平扶贫论述摘编], ed. The Institute of Party History and Literature of the CPC Central Committee [中国共产党中央委员会党史和文献研究院] (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press [中央文献出版社], 2018), 3.

²⁶ Xi, *Excerpts*, 9.

The battle against poverty has re-established the political authority of the CPC, closing the gap between the party and government that emerged amid the prioritisation of economic growth; party secretaries at all five levels of government – village, town, county, city, and province – are responsible for ensuring the success of poverty alleviation efforts assuming overall responsibility, under the direct leadership of the general secretary. The return of centralised party leadership has helped the CPC to rebuild social consensus, avoid social disorder, and manage the complex internal and external environment. In this way, the battle against poverty has had a political significance that goes far beyond the improvement of people's livelihoods.

This impact has been particularly visible in rural areas, which is not surprising given that resolving the issue of rural poverty in China is essential to realising modernisation, building a moderately prosperous society, and advancing social justice in the country. The CPC has implemented a wide range of measures in rural areas that have broken with the techno-bureaucratic logic and the constraints of existing administrative and technical norms, allowing social justice goals to transcend the administrative process. Examples include concentrating resources on poverty-stricken areas, such as the 'three regions and three prefectures'²⁷ (三区三州, sānqū sānzhōu); sending officials to poor villages to take on lead responsibilities for local poverty alleviation efforts as first party secretaries; and implementing a system of oversight to address problems in poverty-stricken counties and villages, which in some cases requires relocating people who lived in very difficult or dangerous conditions. The government has also introduced many initiatives that have simultaneously been market-oriented and also run counter to market interests, such as poverty alleviation through consumption, focused on promoting the purchase of rural goods and services to promote development; poverty alleviation workshops; and the '10,000 enterprises helping 10,000 villages' (万企帮万村, wànqǐ bāng wàncūn) program, which mobilises private firms to contribute to rural poverty alleviation efforts. The CPC has been able to reset the balance between equity and efficiency by using 'victory' in the battle against poverty and the 'quality of the victory' as the standards to monitor and evaluate party and governmental work.

²⁷ Translator's note: the 'three regions' are Tibet, the Tibetan ethnic areas of Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu and Qinghai province, and the four prefectures in southern Xinjiang (Hotan, Aksu, Kashgar, and the Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture). The 'three prefectures' are Liangshan in Sichuan, Nujiang in Yunnan, and Linxia in Gansu.

To complete the unfinished tasks of the revolution in the post-revolutionary era, the CPC has needed to overcome the existing normative framework of governance and the influence of interest groups that have emerged during reform and opening up. At the same time, from past experiences, such as the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the party is keenly aware of the need to ensure institutional stability. Altogether, the battle against poverty can be understood as an alternative type of revolutionary practice.

Concluding Remarks

The use of the term ‘post-revolutionary era’ in this paper is not an argument to abandon revolutionary concepts or practices in the age of globalisation, nor is it an argument for returning to the revolutionary practices of previous eras. The CPC identifies the current historical stage of China as the ‘primary stage of socialism’ (社会主义初级阶段, *shèhuì zhǔyì chūjí jiēduàn*), in which relations of production that are incompatible with the basic principles of socialism will continue to exist. Accordingly, radical revolutionary practices have lost legitimacy. However, the realisation of the revolutionary goals remains of great importance, both in the party’s theory and practice, as it manages the tension between equity and efficiency in China’s modernisation process. With the eradication of absolute poverty in 2021, China achieved its first centenary goal of building a moderately prosperous society; however, to achieve its second centenary goal of building a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful, the CPC must continue this battle and confront relative poverty and inequality.²⁸ It remains to be seen whether the alternative revolutionary practices of the battle against poverty will fade to memory or become established as a new political tradition.

²⁸ At the eighteenth CPC National Congress in 2012, the party announced a set of developmental goals – known as the ‘two centenary goals’ – to be achieved by two significant 100-year anniversaries. The first centenary goal was to eradicate absolute poverty and build a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2021, the centenary of the CPC’s founding in 1921; the second centenary goal is to build a ‘modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful’ by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the PRC in 1949.

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颗红心向太阳 一双铁手换河山 在本世纪末建成高度发达公有制社会的总目标一定要实现

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How Targeted Poverty Alleviation Has Changed the Structure of Rural Governance in China



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Unlike the Chinese government's conventional poverty alleviation efforts, the targeted poverty alleviation (精准扶贫, jīngzhǔn fúpín) program, launched in 2013, has exhibited the distinct characteristics of campaign-style governance. This program set the eradication of extreme poverty as the central objective around which socio-economic policy was coordinated in poor, rural areas. At the end of 2020, after eight years of arduous work, this goal was achieved.

To fulfil the designated aims of targeted poverty alleviation within the established deadlines, local governments vigorously mobilised human

and material resources and implemented exceptional measures.¹ In many localities, governments employed quasi-military methods to advance targeted poverty alleviation efforts, disrupting many existing conventions. Although campaign-style governance often features extraordinary measures and can yield extraordinary results, some research suggests that this style of governance is difficult to sustain into regular periods of governance. Regardless, campaign-style governance can still have an important impact on conventional governance structures.

This article will examine the impact that targeted poverty alleviation's campaign-style governance has had and will have on rural governance. First, the article provides an overview of the existing problems in rural governance. Second, the article analyses the extent to which the campaign has changed the existing structure of rural governance. Finally, the article assesses whether the mechanisms of governance adopted under targeted poverty alleviation will be able to adapt to normal conditions after the campaign ends and have a lasting impact on rural governance. This article argues that, due to the success of targeted poverty alleviation in addressing weaknesses in rural governance and achieving its objectives, the campaign has the potential to effect long-term changes through institutionalisation of its practices and methodologies.

The Dilemmas of Rural Governance

Before the implementation of the targeted poverty alleviation strategy, both rural governance and poverty alleviation policies faced serious dilemmas. The repeal of agricultural taxes in 2006 led to the disintegration of rural society, numerous difficulties in the traditional systems of rural governance, and the detachment between the power and resources of community-level governments and their social responsibility.² The distribution of poverty alleviation resources targeted primarily at counties and villages that were designated as

¹ Wei Chenglin and Zhao Xiaofeng, 'Regular Governance, Campaign-styled Governance, and the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Program' [常规治理、运动式治理与中国扶贫实践], *Journal of China Agricultural University (Social Sciences Edition)* [中国农业大学学报(社会科学版)] 35, no. 5 (2018).

² China had long levied an agricultural tax, dating back to the Zhou dynasty (周朝, 1046–256 BCE), roughly 2,600 years ago. For many centuries, this was the country's most important source of fiscal revenue. As China developed its industry and commerce, it relied less on the agricultural tax for revenue and, in 2006, it was eliminated completely and created a vacuum in government presence in the countryside.

poverty-stricken or poor produced awkward dynamics where local governments and village organisations vied for such designations to gain access to resources as well as imbalances in resource allocation, where poor households in undesignated villages were overlooked. As a result, tensions have existed to varying degrees between rural villages and between rural villages and the state.

Rural villages are often thought of as living communities, where rural residents maintain the village through practices based on shared values and reciprocity as well as strong local institutions. In the Chinese sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong's (费孝通) conception of rural China and US political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott's depiction of the moral economy of the peasant, rural life is represented as largely distanced from the state. However, in reality, China's villages have not been so distant from the state. While villages have featured characteristics of living communities, they have also existed under the rule of the state. Moreover, as the state's governance capabilities have improved, it has tended to increasingly govern villages directly. The strength of the state's rural governance has largely been determined by its ability to administer its rules and authority on the villages.

Small and large communities are often thought of as being in a zero-sum relationship, where state intervention reduces the autonomy of small communities and the autonomy of small communities minimises the state's influence on villages. However, thus far in the twenty-first century, the relationship has not been so clear in China, as both small and large communities have struggled in rural governance.

As living communities, China's villages weakened and even disintegrated in the decades following the rural reform initiated in the 1980s. The rural reform had two key elements: the implementation of the household responsibility system (包产到户, bāochǎn dào hù) in agricultural production and the establishment of village committees (村民委员会, cūnmín wēiyuánhùi). The first measure replaced the collective farming system implemented during the land reform process of the 1950s and allowed individual households to contract land and have greater autonomy over their agricultural production, laying the foundation for the market economy in rural areas. Meanwhile, the second measure aimed to rebuild the village community through villag-

ers' self-governance. However, the success of these two measures diverged significantly. On the one hand, land contracting and household production advanced continuously, with farmers' individualisation being driven by the market economy and the greater autonomy and social mobility of village members; on the other hand, numerous difficulties were encountered with the village communities. The village committees were supposed to protect villagers, but amid the disintegration of village communities, village leaders in most areas either stopped serving as village organisers or took advantage of their positions to secure private benefits. The number of village organisations capable of providing leadership decreased significantly and villagers were often unable to hold village officials accountable; meanwhile, village officials also struggled to serve villagers and to effectively implement government policies intended to benefit farmers at the community level.

At the same time that small communities grew weaker, the state's effectiveness in rural governance also decreased during the three decades following the rural reform, reaching a low point in the early twenty-first century. The repeal of agricultural tax collection in 2006 marked the beginning of the policy of 'industry nurturing agriculture, cities supporting rural areas' (工业反哺农业、城市反哺农村, *gōngyè fǎnbǔ nóngyè, chéngshì fǎnbǔ nóngcūn*), intended to direct more resources from the urban centres into rural areas to both advance their development and infrastructure as well as improve social welfare, through the implementation of various protections, subsidies, and grants for rural communities and individuals. In practice, however, the state struggled to realise these aims. Although transfer payments from the central government to poverty-stricken areas greatly increased and the state improved its provision of social welfare, the state struggled to define clear policy goals and to develop effective mechanisms to allocate resources to target populations.³ For example, subsidies aimed at encouraging grain production had a limited impact on farmers' enthusiasm as the central government struggled to define grain-producing farmers and only granted subsidies according to the size of farmers' contracted land. Similarly, the rural subsistence allowance system, intended to meet the basic living needs of low-income households, encountered several obstacles, including difficulties in collecting data on

³ Ji Shao and Li Xiaoliang, 'A Study on the Changes in Rural People's Income in China during the past 70 Years: An Institutional Reform and Institutional Innovation Perspective' [建国70年来我国农村居民收入变化研究——体制改革、制度创新视角], *Inquiry into Economic Issues* [经济问题探索], no. 11 (2019).

household income and identifying eligible households, along with corruption, with rural officials providing preferential treatment towards family members and friends and even using the allowance as a bargaining tool against farmers. As a result, the rural subsistence allowance was not efficient in being directed to those most in need. To put it simply, it was difficult for the state to realise its rural development and welfare goals through the existing administrative system.

The allocation of poverty alleviation resources should have been guided by precision and fairness, however, in practice, the allocation was influenced by many other factors. The central government focused on providing support to poverty-stricken areas, issuing special poverty alleviation funding to adjacent poor areas and those counties, villages, and households designated as key poverty-stricken targets. Following the Seven-Year Priority Poverty Alleviation Program, which aimed to lift 80 million people out of absolute poverty from 1994 to 2000, poverty alleviation resources were mainly channelled to the designated key poverty-stricken counties. This produced an adverse consequence, where rural counties competed against each other to be designated as poverty-stricken, a phenomenon referred to in China as ‘fighting to wear the “poverty hat”’ (争戴贫困帽子, zhēng dài pínkùn màozi); a few county governments even celebrated their entry into the list of poverty-stricken counties. Unfortunately, it was often the case that the identification of poverty-stricken counties or villages was not only a matter of low income or lagging development, but was also influenced by pressures from various and, at times, rival interest groups. With various interest groups and parties vying for resources, it was difficult to effectively realise poverty alleviation goals.

After completing its first ten-year plan for poverty alleviation from 2001 to 2010, the approach of the central government shifted, as it raised the poverty line significantly, first in 2010 and then again in 2013, and set a clear timetable to eradicate absolute poverty and complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020.⁴ Under the new standard, the scope of poverty alleviation expanded greatly as the population considered impoverished increased more than five-fold, from less than 30 million people to 160 million people; the incidence of rural poverty similarly increased from

⁴ In 2010, China nearly doubled its national poverty line from 1,196 yuan per year (in 2008 prices) to 2,300 yuan per year (in 2010 prices). In 2013, with the initiation of targeted poverty alleviation, China raised its poverty line to 4,000 yuan per year (in 2013 prices).

less than 3 percent to over 17 percent; and the number of poverty-stricken counties increased to 832. In addition, the qualitative standard for poverty alleviation was also raised, now aiming for ‘two assurances and three guarantees’ (两不愁三保障, liǎng bù chóu sān bǎozhàng), meaning that, by 2020, the rural poor would be assured adequate food and clothing, and guaranteed access to the public education system, basic medical services, and safe housing, including running water and electricity (some localities also developed specific guarantees based on local conditions, such as a guaranteed supply of safe drinking water in arid areas). To lift such a large number of poor people out of poverty in a short amount of time, the state had to greatly increase the amount of resources that it allocated to the task. From 2015 to 2020, poverty alleviation funding from the central government increased on average by 20 billion yuan (approximately \$2.8 billion) per year. More importantly, the types of poverty alleviation funding were diversified, including integrated funds, social funds, and various financial instruments. The total amount of resources invested by the state in poverty alleviation was unprecedented, although it generated new challenges for rural governance. However, realising the poverty alleviation goals was more complex and difficult than simply increasing incomes, and required fundamental changes to the system of rural governance in poor areas.

Rural Governance under Targeted Poverty Alleviation

In 2013, Communist Party of China (CPC) General Secretary Xi Jinping proposed the concept of targeted poverty alleviation. Shortly thereafter, in 2015, he specified that this policy required precision in the following six areas: first, in the identification of the poor, ensuring that the recipients of support were, in fact, those in need; second, in the alignment of projects and aid to the needs of the poor; third, in the provision and use of funding; fourth, in the implementation of measures appropriate for each household; fifth, in the dispatching of party officials to carry out poverty alleviation measures in individual villages; and, sixth, in the evaluations of whether poverty alleviation had met expectations. To ensure that targeted poverty alleviation was successful, a number of fundamental changes had to be made to the existing system of rural governance, including the creation of new system for information collection and analysis that was more transparent for villages and

farmers; the establishment of a mechanism for direct governance by the state in villages, with a large number of officials assigned to be directly involved in the daily governance of villages; and the institutionalisation of mechanisms for villagers' participation in public affairs. These changes have improved the state's governance and provision of social welfare in rural areas.

The strategy of targeted poverty alleviation depended upon high-quality data collection. Beginning in 2014, detailed investigations were conducted to identify each poor household, their specific causes of poverty, and the specific poverty alleviated measures to implement; the information gathered was used to generate an electronic database with files on each poor household, village, county, and region across the country. Poor households were individually registered in the database and provided with a poverty alleviation handbook, containing a summary of their basic conditions and causes of poverty, their poverty alleviation plan, and the contact information for the official responsible for their household. The central government had previously tried to develop a poverty alleviation registration system, including a trial program in eight provinces in 2005, however, due to limitations in human and material resources as well as the state's investigative capacity, these efforts were not successful. The large-scale administrative mobilisation under targeted poverty alleviation allowed this task to finally be completed.

The electronic registration system improved China's poverty alleviation efforts in two ways. First, the more accurate identification of poor households and villages allowed resources to be better directed to the appropriate recipients and measures to be specifically targeted to recipients' needs. Second, the data collected provided the central government with a more up-to-date picture of conditions at the community-level and, consequently, a better understanding of rural areas, helping its decision-making, formulation of specific policies, and evaluation of poverty alleviation efforts.

Some critics have argued that the digitisation of poverty alleviation governance has detached the process from village life and community-level governance, while others have pointed out that digitisation and technological mechanisms cannot address issues of community-level governance.⁵ In ad-

⁵ Wang Yulei, 'Going Digital to the Countryside: Technology-Based Governance in Rural Targeted Poverty Alleviation' [数字下乡: 农村精准扶贫中的技术治理], *Sociological Studies* [社会学研究], no. 6 (2016).

dition, due to the central government's strong reliance on data in their decision-making, community-level poverty alleviation workers spent a significant amount of time engaged in administrative tasks related to data collection, such as filling in forms, which took away from their actual anti-poverty work and, in some areas, resulted in excessive formalism; this eventually prompted the central government to issue directives to reduce unnecessary data collection.

As targeted poverty alleviation progressed, however, the process of data collection, quality of the data obtained, and implementation of the data into governance all improved. First, by implementing procedural reviews to verify data after its initial collection, the data gradually became more accurate and objective. Second, the dynamic updating of data has also improved information quality. The goal of the registration system was to verify the general statistical estimates of the number of poor households, by conducting investigations on the ground. As targeted poverty alleviation advanced and the number of poor households decreased, the statistical estimates became less reliable, and the importance of precise household-to-household data increased. Since 2017, the poverty registration database has no longer been limited by the general statistical estimates and has been dynamically adjusted based on the findings of on-the-ground investigations. Third, the poverty alleviation registration system laid the foundation for information-based rural governance; going forward, as community-level governments gain further experience in data collection and are able to integrate data from different governmental departments and levels, information will play an increasingly important role in rural governance.

Information-based governance increased public transparency in rural areas, but was not able to improve the effectiveness of targeted poverty alleviation on its own; it was supported by a shift in the priorities of local governments and a greater distribution of resources to the community level. Following the rural reform of the 1980s that spurred China's rapid economic development, local governments prioritised economic efficiency and focused their resources on rapidly developing sectors; meanwhile, the central government prioritised the development of urban areas and generally focused on the maximisation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The targeted poverty alleviation campaign sought to reorient governmental priorities, at both central and local levels,

placing the eradication of poverty in poor areas at the top of the agenda. From the top down, local government and CPC leaders were directed to regard poverty alleviation as their principal task, which led to a shift in the aims, resource allocation, and work of local governments and party committees. With poverty alleviation being made the first priority in poor areas, economic development had to serve this end, rather than narrowly pursue growth.

Along with this reprioritisation, the central government increased its distribution of resources to lower levels of government. These resources have not only included funds and supplies, but more importantly, human resources. Greater numbers of personnel have been required to address the weak administrative organisation of poor villages and advance targeted poverty alleviation, as traditional local institutions lacked the capacity both to distribute large amounts of resources to households and villages and to implement the new methods of governance associated with the campaign. Village organisations in poor areas were severely understaffed, often with three officials at most, and thus, were incapable of managing large amounts of resources or administering complex procedures. Related to this, these organisations had a very deficient knowledge base, and were overwhelmed by the influx of new poverty alleviation concepts, methods, and technological processes, such as the large-scale data collection about poor households and the selection of industries and markets to invest in. In addition, most village officials were enmeshed in their community's social relationships, resulting in biases which undermined objective decision-making; to fairly distribute the large amounts of poverty alleviation resources that poor villages received from the central government, external support was necessary.

To address the shortage of human resources in rural areas, increase the administrative capacity in lower levels, and strengthen rural governance, the CPC dispatched resident work teams (驻村工作队, zhù cūn gōngzuò duì) and first party secretaries (the lead party official in an area) to live in and assist poor villages. Since 2013, more than three million officials from higher levels of government, state-owned enterprises, and other public institutions, have been dispatched as part of 255,000 resident work teams to live in vil-

lages for at least two years and work on targeted poverty alleviation.⁶ Some researchers have questioned the impact of resident work teams, contending that they have lacked sufficient understanding of local situations and experience in agricultural production, and also faced resistance from local authorities; however, on the whole, the research indicates that resident work teams have brought more poverty alleviation resources into rural areas and gradually played a steering role in targeted poverty alleviation efforts.⁷

The dispatching of resident work teams to poor villages under targeted poverty alleviation was a continuation of the existing policy of pairing assistance (对口帮扶, *duìkǒu bang fú*), under which lower levels of governments support each other. Rather than being tasked with merely providing assistance, the resident work teams were given the responsibility of realising poverty alleviation in their villages, including managing poverty alleviation resources, visiting poor households, carrying out registration and data collection, and implementing anti-poverty measures. Resident work teams were generally required to stay in their assigned village for more than twenty days each month, and therefore, participated in the entire process of poverty alleviation. To address initial difficulties that resident work teams faced in carrying out poverty alleviation governance, in 2015, the CPC began to assign first party secretaries in most poor villages to concurrently serve as the heads of their village's resident work team. This measure ironed out the institutional difficulty of integrating resident work teams into village decision-making. Improving the social governance of villages became a critical responsibility of first party secretaries, perhaps even more important than their duty to promote the economic development of villages.⁸

⁶ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2021), 35.

⁷ For a more critical assessment on resident work teams, see Xu Hanze and Li Xiaoyun, 'On the Practical Plight of the Residency Support System and Its Consequences in the Context of Targeted Poverty Alleviation' [精准扶贫背景下驻村机制的实践困境及其后果], *Journal of Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics* [江西财经大学学报], no. 3 (2017). On the integration and leadership of resident work teams in rural areas, see Xie Yumei, Yang Yang and Liu Zhen, 'Targeted Integration: Selection, Operation, and Practice of the First Secretaries for Resident Work Teams in Poor Villages' [精准嵌入: "第一书记"驻村帮扶选派、运行与实践], *Journal of Jiangnan University (Humanities and Social Sciences)* [江南大学学报(人文社会科学版)], no. 2 (2019).

⁸ First party secretaries played an important role in village governance under targeted poverty alleviation, although their specific roles varied regionally. In Shandong province, for instance, first party secretaries had three main responsibilities: poverty alleviation, public outreach, and rural party-building. Meanwhile, in Guizhou province, the responsibilities of first party secretaries were divided into six categories: helping community-level organisations build infrastructure, training local talent, cultivating local industries, strengthening collective economies, improving management mechanisms, and resolving disputes.

The large-scale movement of personnel to poverty-stricken villages exemplified the campaign-style governance of targeted poverty alleviation. While resident work teams differed in terms of their work, methods, and involvement in village affairs, from a broader, institutional perspective, through this mechanism the state was able to directly influence village-level governance. As such, targeted poverty alleviation did not merely consist of the central government channelling resources to rural areas, but rather was an extension of state power to the village level. From the identification of poor households to the setting of poverty alleviation standards, numerous measures formulated by the state were implemented at the village level.

Alongside greater state involvement in village administration, greater emphasis was also placed on villager participation. In theory, villagers' self-governance was supposed to be the foundation of rural communities, from the establishment of village committees, elected and supervised by villagers, in the 1980s, to the central government's promotion of community participation in poverty alleviation in the 1990s. In practice, however, many obstacles impeded the realisation of self-governance. For example, although village governance is based on a system of one person, one vote, political decisions were often intertwined with and influenced by the interests of families, factions, and other powers. Furthermore, due to the deterioration of rural communities as well as the lack of resources and supportive social environment, it was difficult to promote and safeguard democracy within villages. As a result, public participation in poverty alleviation was little more than a formality.

Targeted poverty alleviation strengthened the voices to villagers, especially those from poor households. First, enhanced public transparency and openness improved villagers' participation, mainly through the identification of poverty-stricken households and the evaluation of poverty alleviation efforts. Designated poor households were given more poverty alleviation resources; although this has provoked disputes among villagers, especially when income differences were not evident, public transparency proved to be an effective remedy to these conflicts. Under targeted poverty alleviation, the confirmation of poor households required a public announcement and was subject to villagers' approval. Villagers' satisfaction was also an important factor in the evaluation of poverty alleviation efforts; here, villager participation was not abstract, but had a precise scope and form, encouraging high levels of par-

participation. Second, and more importantly, the strict top-down inspections of poverty alleviation efforts created a channel for villagers' opinions to reach upper levels of government, promoting accountability through the application of pressure from upper-level officials on lower-level officials (a mechanism of villager participation that differed from traditional models and conceptions). In the period of targeted poverty alleviation, villager participation and centralised authority were mutually reinforcing; the centralised authority strengthened the voice and participation of villagers through the application of pressure on local officials, while villager participation allowed the central government to evaluate local officials and ensure their aims were pursued at the community level.

Ultimately, targeted poverty alleviation established a new mechanism of rural governance in poverty-stricken rural areas, bridging the gap between official policy makers and the subjects of poverty alleviation policies. This mechanism led to the central government being better informed on conditions at the community level and, through top-down pressure, to greater participation for villagers, resulting in governmental policies being more thoroughly translated into grassroots actions and results.

The Potential for Lasting Changes in Rural Governance

The new mechanism of rural governance developed in the process of targeted poverty alleviation, played a crucial role in achieving the eradication of extreme poverty at the end of 2020 and effectively addressed long-standing rural political issues. However, whether these changes can be carried over from the targeted poverty alleviation campaign to conventional periods of governance and have a lasting impact on rural areas, depends on whether this mechanism can adapt to changing circumstances. There are three important factors that indicate that the structural changes in rural governance will endure.

First, the distribution of national administrative resources to lower levels of government is a major trend that will continue after the end of the targeted poverty alleviation. Prior to the campaign, the local talent pool and institutional structure in most villages were insufficient to support long-term development, and poor villages lacked the capacity to manage the influx

of resources for poverty alleviation. In recent years, the state's provision of administrative resources to rural areas has strengthened community-level institutions, supported the return of rural talents to their communities from urban areas, encouraged prominent villagers to participate in rural governance, and developed rural collective economies to help villages retain their developing talent and attract talent to return from cities. However, China is still in the process of rapid urbanisation; the rural population will continue to flow outwards, and the return of talents to rural areas has just begun. In this context, the distribution of administrative resources to lower levels is indispensable for maintaining rural social order and realising effective rural governance.

Second, the state will play an increasingly important role in rural areas, in terms of infrastructure construction and the provision of public goods. During the period of targeted poverty alleviation, the state has mainly focused its support on poverty-stricken rural areas, however, as part of the broader rural revitalisation strategy, more rural areas will benefit from the state's resources. In this process, public transparency regarding recipient households and villages will remain important to avoid disputes and to prevent the distribution of resources from becoming influenced by local power struggles. As a result, it will be necessary for the state to build upon the poverty alleviation registration database and develop an general rural information system; for example, to identify the population living in relative poverty, information on both poor and non-poor households is needed because relative poverty can only be defined through a wide-ranging comparison across the rural population. In summary, as the state invests more resources in rural areas, it will increasingly need and rely upon information systems.

Third, rural development gravitates towards the areas where there are high levels of villagers' participation in public affairs. In the context of a large outflow of young talent and an aging population, rural communities have been hollowed out; as such, strong institutional guarantees are required to secure villagers' participation. The mechanism for villagers' participation under targeted poverty alleviation was based on greater public transparency in rural affairs, the creation of an effective channel for feedback from the grassroots to top-level officials, and strict evaluation of and accountability for rural administrators. In this way, bottom-up participation was guaranteed by top-down

support, although the process differed from traditional modes of villagers' self-governance. Today, the objective is not to recreate traditional systems of village governance, but to develop mechanisms for participation that facilitate the effective distribution of state resources to rural areas. Therefore, participation must not be limited to the granting of superficial rights to villagers; more importantly, there must be concrete institutional guarantees that ensure villagers can and do participate.

The mechanisms of governance under targeted poverty alleviation have promoted important changes in rural governance, but they cannot simply be replicated going forward, in ordinary periods of governance. After successfully completing the tasks of targeted poverty, some formerly poverty-stricken counties have attempted to adapt the governance mechanisms of the campaign – in particular, the program of resident work teams – into their conventional system of governance. However, these efforts have encountered two main difficulties.

The first difficulty is the high cost of campaign-style governance measures. For instance, to complete the poverty alleviation registration system and ensure its high quality, more than two million staff were mobilised to work for eight months to just review the data. Meanwhile, the program of resident work teams required the redeployment of more than three million public servants to work full-time in villages, which not only incurred high costs in terms of subsidies, training, supervision, and the construction of accommodations, but also in terms of causing significant disruptions to the other governmental institutions, which had to undertake additional poverty alleviation responsibilities. In addition, the rotation of resident work teams between different villages made it difficult to ensure continuity in work and for officials to accumulate localised experience and knowledge. From both a financial and human resources perspective, the governance mechanisms of targeted poverty alleviation incurred a high cost and cannot easily be carried over in conventional periods of rural governance.

The second difficulty lies in the low level of institutionalisation of targeted poverty alleviation governance mechanisms and the challenges of balancing different governmental responsibilities. Campaign-style governance focuses on a single goal, adopting various and, at times, extraordinary methods to

achieve this goal, some of which can be unsustainable and can even result in imbalances or unfairness. During the period of targeted poverty alleviation, the central task in poor areas was poverty alleviation, with a significant amount of human and material resources invested into meeting targets and shoring up weaknesses. This inevitably resulted in those tasks that fell outside of this objective, being overlooked. For example, following poverty alleviation registration, resources were often concentrated on registered poor households and, at times, the needs of other farmers were neglected. In some cases, poor households were relocated to situations where they would have a stable income and were not only provided with housing, but also with real estate to set up small businesses, giving them far more assets than the average farmer. The temporary and short-term measures employed in campaign-style governance are difficult to replicate in ordinary periods due to their lack of institutionalisation.

The governance mechanisms and extraordinary measures of targeted poverty alleviation need to be appropriately adapted to conventional governance, to continue promoting living standards and balanced development as part of rural revitalisation. In this process of adaptation, it is necessary to institutionalise the rural information system, the distribution of administrative resources to rural areas, and the participation of villagers, in a manner that reduces operational costs, while maintaining their advantageous features.

First, it is necessary to regularise and institutionalise data collection and analysis in rural areas. In the 1950s, the central government established an agricultural economic management system that collected and aggregated rural data for a number of decades, however, this data lacked objectivity and was eventually replaced by statistical sampling surveys. However, while statistical sampling can assist macro-governmental decision-making, it is not suited to micro-governance. Within the new framework of poverty alleviation registration, information systems from various governmental departments, such as civil affairs, public security, and finance, can and should be integrated to establish a unified rural information network, thereby systematising information-based rural governance.

Second, it is necessary to institutionalise the distribution of administrative resources to lower levels. The state must continue to provide financial and

human resources to support rural governance, including incorporating rural service into the responsibilities of national civil servants. Currently, the central government distributes administrative resources to lower levels in various ways, the most common of which are the *baocun* (包村, bāo cūn) system of designating township officials as responsible for assisting the economic and social development of specific villages, as well as the dispatching of first party secretaries and resident work teams to poor villages under targeted poverty alleviation. The combination of these two measures, the *baocun* and resident work teams, could establish a sustainable village-level administrative system and promote long-term changes in the structure of rural governance. The village-level administrative system should not merely be considered to consist of the existing village officials and village organisations, but more broadly envisioned as the extension of the national administrative system to rural villages. Therefore, rotations in village governance should be systematically incorporated into the responsibilities of higher-level officials and civil servants, but in a manner that is sustainable and does not overburden institutions.

Third, it is necessary to institutionalise villager participation. Village committees should be strengthened as institutions for self-governance and as vehicles for villagers to participate in public affairs and democratic decision-making. On the one hand, the bureaucratisation of village committees must be reversed so that they can be more closely connected with the people and not simply function as extensions of the central government; on the other hand, the supervisory role of village committees and their coordination with village-level administrative authorities must be strengthened, so that they can become people's organisations.

As a significant social mobilisation, campaign, and experiment, targeted poverty alleviation has innovated China's rural governance model. The lasting impact of targeted poverty alleviation will depend not only on the changes that have already taken place but also on how these changes can be adapted and institutionalised into rural governance going forward.

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WENHUA ZONHENG (文化纵横) is a leading journal of contemporary political and cultural thought in China. Founded in 2008, the journal publishes issues every two months, featuring articles by a wide array of intellectuals across the country and building a platform for discussion of different ideological positions and values in China's intellectual community. The publication is an important reference for debates and developments in Chinese thought, on matters ranging from China's ancient history and traditional culture to its current socialist practices and innovations, from the important cultural trends in contemporary Chinese social life to Chinese views and analyses of the world today. Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Dongsheng News have partnered with *Wenhua Zongheng* to publish an international edition of the journal, releasing four issues per year featuring a selection of articles that hold particular relevance for the Global South.

In Chinese, the word 'Wenhua' (文化) means 'culture' as well as 'civilization', while 'Zongheng' (纵横) literally means 'verticals and horizontals', but also alludes to the strategists who helped to first unify of China, roughly 2,000 years ago through diplomacy and alliances. It is impossible to translate the journal's title into English while retaining its historical meaning and significance, therefore, we have chosen to keep the pinyin romanisation of the title to remind our readers: China has a complex history and culture that is challenging to translate and navigate, and this project seeks to bridge this understanding.

文化纵横



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