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China's Household Tradition and Its Rural Development Path: With Reference to Traditional Russian and Indian Village Communities

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能够对现代社会产生长远影响的本源型传统，构成现代社会发展的基础性制度。在东方国家的本源型传统中，不同于俄国和印度的村社制，中国是家户制，并在此基础上形成独特的中国农村发展道路。其中包括：以家户经营为基础的农业经营组织，家户内部农工商结合基础上的农工商互补经济，家户互助合作基础上的农村合作形式，家国共治基础上的农村治理体系。在中国农村发展进程中，尽管家户制一度被抛弃，但仍构成当下及未来农村发展的制度底色。

关键词：本源型传统　家户制　村社制　中国农村

Sources of tradition that produce a lasting influence upon modern society are fundamental to that society's development. Among Eastern sources of tradition, the village systems of Russia and India are very unlike the Chinese household system, a system that served as the foundation for China's unique path of rural development. This system includes the following features: the organization of agricultural operations on the basis of household operations; an economy where agriculture, industry and commerce complement each other on the basis of their integration at the household level; forms of agricultural cooperation based on mutual assistance and cooperation among households; and a system of rural governance based on the joint governance by household and state. In China's rural development process, the household system, though at one time discarded, still constitutes the institutional backdrop for current and future rural development.

Keywords: source of tradition, household system, village system, Chinese rural areas

China is a large country with a long tradition of agrarian civilization, and this provides the fundamental conditions of contemporary China—a large country of small agricultural plots, that is, of hundreds of millions of small farming households. Over China's long history, this has resulted in unique "Chinese characteristics," including the distinctive Chinese household tradition. This tradition differs from both the Western manorial system represented by Western Europe and the Eastern village system represented by Russia and India.

I. Rethinking "Tradition" and "the East"

Since the people's commune system was abolished, household operations have been rural China's basic production and operating system. The concept of "household farm," first put forward in the *No.1 Central Document of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* in 2013, retains the household as the basic production and operating unit. Household operation can be said to be a primary issue for rural Chinese development. So far, however, Chinese scholars have so far done little in-depth research on this issue. Wang Huning's 1991 work, *Contemporary Chinese Family Culture in the Village: An Exploration of the Modernization of Chinese Society*, was relatively early in noting the relationship between traditional Chinese culture and modernization, but Wang did not directly address the question of the ontology or basic substance of rural Chinese society.[1] In the late 1990s, Zhang Letian's *Farewell to an Ideal: A Study of the People's Commune System*, saw the village system as the basic essence of rural Chinese tradition. Qin Hui, however, regarded this as a Japanese scholarly viewpoint that more aptly characterized the essential nature of Japanese rural standard. It was on this account that he put out his "*Great Community Standard" and Traditional Chinese Society*, in which he considers the people's commune as reinforcing the Chinese tradition of "the great community standard."[2] In recent discussion of new socialist traditions, some scholars have argued that the people's commune should today be regarded as a new tradition in contemporary China.[3] How then should we understand historical tradition, and what is this traditional system that dominated rural Chinese development and played such a lasting role?

We study tradition not only to preserve historical civilizations, but more importantly to look at their influence upon current and future social development. Not everything in the past belongs to tradition; much of it is just a moment in the long river of history. A tradition, however, like human genes, can repeat and replicate itself. It cannot be simply eliminated or suffer a total rupture. For this reason, we can define tradition as values, behavior and norms that can influence the present or even the future, as well as related historical conditions. Consequently, traditions can be classified as follows: firstly, original traditions, or traditions that exert a long and deep influence upon the present and future and operate over a long time. These traditions are the original sources of the development of modern society and constitute its fundamental system; they can be regarded as the historical sources of the development of modern society. Secondly, secondary traditions, or those that were generated in history and have a certain influence upon the present but do not play a fundamental role. Thirdly, derivative traditions, namely those that emerged in history but were derived from original

1 Wang Huning, *Contemporary Chinese Family Culture in the Village: An Exploration of the Modernization of Chinese Society*.

2 Qin Hui, *Peasants' China: Reflection on History and Choice in Reality*, pp. 298-309.

3 The *Open Times* journal has held several meetings about new socialist traditions since 2006.

traditions; these influence the present moment.

In discussing the Chinese road of rural development, some people have proposed that the pre-reform people's commune should be counted as a tradition. In fact, the people's commune, though it lasted for more than twenty years, was in certain respect a departure or deviation from the fundamental sources of Chinese tradition or even an anti-tradition. The fact that it was "first, big and second, collective," for example, was a negation of China's long history of a household tradition that was "first, small and second, private." To a considerable extent, the people's commune borrowed from Soviet forms of rural organization and was a product of "learning from our Russian teacher." Therefore, we need to go a step further in discussing Eastern societies.

Thinkers since Aristotle have espoused a dualistic East/West worldview. People call the world represented by Western Europe "the West" and the world represented by Russia, India and China "the East." Such a division, in addition to over-simplifying, has a fatal problem: it overlooks or ignores the differences within Eastern society. In fact, whether we look at the West or the East, we find a profusion of internal differences. In the West, Britain, Germany and France all vary, while in the East, Russia, India and China differ greatly. In some respects, the differences within the East are no fewer than those between the East and the West. For this reason, if we are to understand "Chinese characteristics," we should make a comparison not only with the West but with the East, especially with Russia, a significant influence upon the Chinese road of development, and with our neighbor India.

II. Two Eastern Traditions: The Village System and the Household System

From the point of view of modern social sciences, the West's unique geographic location meant that it had a long history of commercial civilization, whereas most Eastern civilizations were agrarian. However, these agrarian civilizations had a variety of traditions manifested in varying ways. Without understanding these differences, we cannot fully and accurately understand the influence of the Eastern tradition of agrarian civilization upon subsequent rural development paths.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the West, through its revolutions, established a capitalist system based on private ownership and wage labor and strode swiftly towards modernization. With the advent of the 19th century, non-Western countries faced a challenge as they moved towards modernization: should they become "Westernized" or keep to "indigenous" traditions? Russia was the first to encounter this vital question of which road to take. Firstly, this was because, of the big Eastern countries, Russia was the one nearest to the West geographically; secondly, it was the first big Eastern country to undertake the transition to modern civilization; and thirdly, in the course of this transition, Russian intellectuals began to mine their national traditions in order to find a developmental road that differed from the West's. Among these traditions, the most important resource was the village system (*mir*) —

"the Russian soul." This had a long history in Russia but had no equivalent in the West.

The village system had a long history, from its origins in primitive society up to the 20th century. In terms of form, the Russian village system can be divided into three stages and three types: the primitive village type in its natural growth stage; the local village set up by the state in Tsarist Russia; and the national collective farm set up by the state in the Soviet Union. Though varying in nature and content, the three types had similar institutional forms which emphasized integration, unity and conformity. These features lasted until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Without them, it would be hard to understand why the subsequent privatization of land met with such great difficulties. This shows that the village system was the fundamental institution and source of tradition for Russia's development, and that "violation of the village system is violation of the quintessential Russian soul."[4]

As a form of social organization, the village system had the following characteristics: land was collectively owned, with each villager's equal share maintained through regular redistribution; state taxes were incurred by the village as a unit and the burden was evened out by having the rich pay what the poor owed; workers formed teams, with the village encouraging common farming; and joint management was implemented through village meetings, and pride of place was given to the collective.[5] The village was both a productive and a social organization and also the villagers' spiritual community; collectivism and egalitarianism were its creed and its code of conduct. For this very reason, the villages were also called agrarian communes. As in primitive communism, they were characterized by common ownership, common construction, common enjoyment and common management.

The village system was the social foundation of Russian autocratic rule. Concurrent with its development, serfdom came into being. Serfdom in Russia was more extreme than in the manors of Western Europe, because Russian peasants, in addition to personal attachment to their lords, were tied to the village in which they lived and its personal authorities, as well as being subject to strict supervision and control by the state. "The process by which peasants became serfs was the process of integration of the territorial system and the village system. By its nature, peasant serfdom was village serfdom."[6] After brief rural reform and differentiation in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Soviet Union embarked on the large-scale collectivization of agriculture. In the early days of rural collectivization, collective farms had three forms: agricultural communes, cooperatives and agricultural labor teams, but in the later stage of collectivization, labor teams became the basic or even the only form, facilitating the state's acquisition of agricultural products and its control over the peasants.

Another Eastern country that attracted world attention was India, which was also the first large Eastern country to be penetrated by Western colonialism. India had distinctive traditional

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4 Jin Yan and Bian Wu, *Rural Commune, Reform and Revolution: The Tradition of the Village System and the Russian Road to Modernization*, p.103.

5 *Ibid*., pp. 71-119.

6 Luo Ailin, "On the Influence of the Village System upon Russian Society."

institutions which included its indigenous village system. In its original form, the village system was very similar to that of Russia: the land was collectively owned and cultivated land was under the control of the village, and the village was the basic unit for taxation and enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. Serfdom also existed in India, but unlike Russian serfdom it was manifested in the caste system. As a system that "enforced hierarchical submission,"[7] the caste system solidified and perpetuated people's place in the hierarchy according to their descent. From generation to generation, high-caste people inherited high-class occupations and status and low-caste people inherited low-class occupations and status, with an insurmountable gap between them. Barrington Moore states that "Caste served, and still serves, to organize the life of the village community, the basic cell of Indian society and the fundamental unit."[8]

In its early history, China, as an ancient Eastern agrarian civilization, also had primitive communes. But in comparison with Russia and India, China's agrarian tradition had its own characteristics. The free individual household system that existed from the time of Qin Shi Huang (the First Emperor of Qin) had a deep influence on modern China; "For over two thousand years, the Qin system prevailed." The great achievement of Qin Shi Huang was not the building of the Great Wall but the building of a system that ceaselessly reproduced hundreds of millions of free peasant households. Just as Mao Zedong said, "A system of individual economy has prevailed for thousands of years, with each family or household forming a productive unit."[9]

If we divide household, village and state into three organizational levels, the Chinese household and state have the most power while the village is relatively weak. Chinese villages are composed of free peasants in individual households, characterized as a "commonwealth of free people." Barrington Moore has pointed out, "It (a Chinese village) was closer to a residential agglomeration of numerous peasant households than to a live and functioning community."[10] Unlike the traditional village systems of Russia and India, in China free and independent peasant households constituted the core and foundation of village society. A complete family system supported by powerful conventions and a complete household registration system supported by a powerful state administration together constituted the household system, a system that was the foundation or source of tradition in rural Chinese society. Ambrose King Yeo-chi has said, "In traditional China, a family was not only a reproductive unit, but also a social, economic, educational, political, or even religious and recreational unit. It is the basic force that holds together the whole society."[11]

The household system had very different contents and features from the village system. The village system was unitary and holistic, with an emphasis on integration and individual dependence upon and compliance with the whole; the household system had a dual, blended

7 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 169.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 255.
9 Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 3, p. 931.
10 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 165-166.
11 Ambrose King Yeo-chi, *From Traditional to Modernized*, p. 24.

nature, with an emphasis on individuality (in relation to individual households, not to individual natural persons in the Western sense) and the individual's relative independence and difference from the whole. From the point of view of the relations of production and the superstructure, the Russian and Indian village systems typically differ from the Chinese household system in the following respects: firstly, assets in the former belonged to the village while those in the latter belonged to individual households; secondly, the tax-paying unit in the former was the village itself while in the latter it was the household; and thirdly, the village in the former was a local self-governance unit with administrative functions and local authority, while villages in the latter were natural villages that had grown up naturally on the basis of self-governing families.

III. Tradition of Household Operations and Organization of Agricultural Operations

In China, kinship-based households have long been dominant; they constitute the basic organizational unit of the whole society and are the "cells" of traditional Chinese society. It was here that the millennial tradition of Chinese household operation took shape.

The household is the fundamental organizational unit throughout the world. In China, however, it developed into basic economic organization with a core status. This was mainly determined by the following factors. First, natural endowments were the household's organizational basis. China's natural endowments were suitable for farming, and its favorable climate and soil conditions rendered household production possible. The common labor of the *mir* was clearly related to Russia's cold climate; independent production was very hard, rendering dependence on the collective necessary. In fact, the village system originated in the collective hunts of early humans. Second, the system of property inheritance was the mechanism for reproduction of the organizational unit. Bidding farewell to primitive society, China practiced a system of "separation of families and division of assets" in which the household was the unit for property distribution and inheritance. Adult males inherited an evenly divided portion of the family assets, leading to the successive reproduction of small households. In China, not only was the village's common property scant, it was also not supposed to be redistributed or inherited; whereas in Russia, land and property were owned by the village, which was responsible for allocating them, so that individuals depended upon the village instead of the household. The caste system in India left low-caste families almost no property to inherit. However, "In India …the caste system provided a niche for landless laborers…while its sanctions depended for their operation less directly on the existence of property,"[12] so the village system was cohesive. Third, the taxation system was the institutional basis sustaining the organizational unit. China established unified centralized power over 2000 years ago. The foundation of the country's existence was agricultural finance—

12 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 169.

households that had land became the unit of state taxation. In old China, the government had a special ministry of household in charge of households and finance. The "family" (家*jia*) was a social unit while the "household" (户*hu*) was a political unit on the basis of which the state organized the mass of the people; it had political and social significance. Therefore, traditional Chinese government finance was in fact peasant household finance, and the government needed to protect and encourage the household system. In Russia, on the other hand, the village was the unit of state taxation, for individual peasants did not have a direct relationship with the state. "Taxes were imposed upon the villages instead of individual households and what was owed by poor households would be made up by rich households."[13] In India, low-caste families essentially did not have the conditions that would have allowed them to pay taxes. Fourth, mental attitude was the motive force sustaining the organization. Since the clan/family was both an economic community and a political and social community, the Chinese had an especially strong clan consciousness. The patrilineal line of descent was the orthodox family line, and a flourishing clan was deemed to be the highest goal in life. In Russia, however, "enriching one's family" under the village system was all but impossible, for "village opinion condemned the passion for working, making money and distinguishing oneself."[14] In India, "as an organization of labor, caste in the countryside was a cause of poor cultivation."[15] Therefore, if we say that the Russian village system was a collective and the Indian village system intensified the caste system, then what persisted through Chinese history was the ideology of "householdism," in which the household unit represented an enduring tradition.

Household operations created China's brilliant agrarian civilization. As the famous historian Sun Daren said, "Without the small peasant farmer, we would have had no new era since the Warring States and the Qin and Han Dynasties, nor would we have had a new civilization suited to our times and leading the world."[16] However, while household operation achieved economic gains, it brought with it unbalanced social consequences. Firstly, social differentiation emerged. Different households fared differently because of variations in resources and labor: some would lose some or all of their land and descend into poverty. Secondly, the requisite social security was absent. Under household operations, the household alone was responsible for its own life events and had to deal with natural or manmade disasters on its own. Poor households with little ability to protect themselves might be doomed to tragedy. Relatively speaking, the village system was like a shell which, though it restrained freedom of development, yet kept out rain and wind, thus giving members of the village a certain security and functioning as a safety valve.[17] As a result, people under the

13 Jin Yan and Bian Wu, *Rural Commune, Reform and Revolution: The Tradition of the Village System and Russian Road to Modernization*, p. 76.

14 Luo Ailin, "On the Influence of the Village System upon Russian Society."

15 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 275.

16 Sun Daren, *On Changes of Chinese Peasants: An Exploration of Chinese Historical Development Cycles*, p. 80.

17 Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 309.

household system reaped the benefits of differentiation and the "hard work" derived from lack of security, whereas people under the village system practiced an equal division with no rewards and lived in the "idleness" brought by security.

The poverty of the Chinese peasant did have something to do with the household system, but this system was not its only or even its major cause. With the advent of the 20th century, holders of modern values denounced the traditional household system, which was called into question. Even so, realistic policies had to respect the household tradition. Sun Yat-sen put forward the idea of "land to the tiller," in which the household was the organizational unit representing the "tiller." In the allocation of land to the peasants in the land revolution and land reform carried out by the Chinese Communists (CPC) represented by Mao, the organizational unit remained the household. The rent and interest reduction policy during the democratic revolution were also aimed at mobilizing the peasants' enthusiasm for production.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, land reform turned the members of rural society into farming households with equal shares of land. At the time, the CPC believed that after land reform, the peasant farmers would be keen on two things: they would be keen to make their families strong and rich, and they would have a socialist zeal for achieving common prosperity. But from the point of view of revolutionary discourse, the individual peasant farmer typified private ownership and backwardness, which were anathema to socialism. To this end, the socialist transformation of agriculture (mainly the small peasant economy) was quickly carried out after land reform. As China had never had the tradition of a collective economy, it had to follow the model provided by its "Big Brother," the Soviet Union, that had been the first to practice socialist collectivization. It was believed that only "socialist collective farms are full socialism"[18] and that "joint labor, labor accounting, and centralized operation" were the blueprint for reforming the rural areas. The people's commune system that developed from this blueprint represented a complete rupture from the household tradition formed over China's long history. Within the people's commune system, the means of production, such as land, were owned by the commune, labor was collective, distribution was the same for all, and the commune was the unit of state taxation. This meant that "making one's family strong and rich" was not only impossible, but was subject to denunciation for "taking the capitalist road."

The commune system had a certain success in protecting the weak, but a serious consequence was a fall in the peasants' autonomy which dampened their enthusiasm for production. Assessing the people's commune, the well-known agricultural policy expert, Du Runsheng, said "This system ran counter to the essential features of agrobiology, estranging the peasants from the land and allowing no room for a sense of lasting responsibility and

18 General Office of National Committee on Agriculture of the people's Republic of China, ed., *Proceedings of Significant Documents on Agricultural Collectivism (Part I)*, p. 98.

commitment to labor, which affected their enthusiasm for production."[19] He also saw the design of Soviet collectivization as basing on the Russian village tradition, saying that "Their aspirations had a degree of rationality. But when it was transferred wholesale to China, it encountered a different subject."[20] But unlike Soviet collective farms, which were protected by the state, the peasants in Chinese communes had to fend for themselves. Therefore, once people's communes were set up, traditional forces were obdurately in evidence. The communes had no choice but to retreat to the management system of "three levels of ownership with production teams as the basis." Subsequently, the practice of "fixing output quotas on a household basis" sprang up, though it had to keep within the institutional framework. It was not until the beginning of the 1980s that China implemented household operations, which converged with the traditional household system. It can be seen that the commune system was not a tradition native to China; rather, it ran counter to China's native sources of tradition. The household tradition could not be easily replaced, still less "eliminated"; even if "cut short," it would come to life again.

If we say the commune's "modern" organizational form constituted an attack on the tradition of household operations, a second challenge to this tradition is posed by today's modern agriculture. Obviously, modern agriculture needs modern organizational operating units. As a traditional organizational unit, the most striking feature of household operation is its small scale. For this reason, there have been varied opinions about whether household operation can accommodate itself to modern agricultural production. One proposal is for corporations to replace household operations; another is that we should stick with the traditional form. This paper believes that since household operations have a long tradition in China, the outer form of the household organizational unit fully deserves to be handed down. This is determined by the distinctive features of agricultural production. As yet, agricultural production cannot operate like a factory, nor surmount its dependence upon nature. The natural cycles of agricultural production determine the irregular distribution of its busy and fallow seasons, unlike the continuous production of the factory. Hence the household unit is an economical means of agricultural production in that it can operate flexibly depending on the season. As a distribution unit, it does not need external supervision, with the associated costs. It can be seen that even modern agricultural production needs to learn from traditional household operations. Of course, the latter also need new dynamism. Firstly, we need to create favorable external conditions to attract capable villagers into agricultural production and improve household operating capacity. Secondly, households should no longer be isolated production units, but should become a link in the whole chain of modern agricultural production. In the course of this process, the household tradition will gain new life and be transformed into a modern agricultural production organization.

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19 Du, Runsheng, *An Account by Du Runsheng: A Record of Significant Decisions on the Reform of Chinese Rural Institutions*, p. 98.

20 Shen Zhihua, *The New Economic Policy and Soviet Road to Socialization of Agriculture*.

IV. The Tradition of Combining Agriculture, Industry and Commerce in an Economy Where the Three Are Complementary

Over its long history, China created an agrarian civilization with no equal in the world, but it was accompanied by widespread poverty among the peasants; China thus also had an unequalled peasant problem. There are many reasons for this historical paradox, with the most important being that there were too many people for too little land. People could only scratch a living from a very limited patch of land; therefore a tradition of combining agriculture, industry and commerce took shape on the basis of the household.

The family or household as a self-sufficient unit was the basic mode of agricultural production in China. "Self-sufficiency" means that the members of rural society relied mainly or even totally on themselves for daily necessities. Simply to subsist, they needed to work at crafts as well as farming, whence the phrase "men farming, women weaving." Craft labor was an important means of obtaining daily necessities. In addition to craft work within the household, wage work outside the household was another important means of survival. In particular, families who were lacking in the means of production, such as land, had to make a living by selling their surplus labor. They would first serve as seasonal helpers for rich families nearby, either as short-term casual labor or as long-term labor working for others over years. Such labor, though mainly agricultural, was not on one's account; it was provided to others in return for income. Of course, such labor income was determined by the supply of work. If there was not enough work nearby, the surplus labor force would seek work in cities or elsewhere. Among them were the "wheat reapers" whose job was to reap wheat during the busy season, and those who sought a living far from home by "moving westward," "heading northeast," "going down to Southeast Asia," etc.

In addition to selling their labor, peasants also gained from doing business. To start with, this activity was a simple exchange of products. Many articles of daily use could not be made by the household itself, such as iron tools for production or salt, a daily necessity; as a result, trading at rural markets became a universal economic activity and a necessary condition for the maintenance of rural life. Consequently, some scholars regard rural Chinese society as a society of markets or fairs.[21] On this foundation, an embryonic business sense developed, leading some peasants to forsake the land wholly or partially to work in business, even if it meant leaving their home region. Among those "moving westward," "heading northeast" and "going down to Southeast Asia," quite a few worked in business.

The division of labor and of lines of work among agriculture, industry and commerce is a general rule, but it finds expression in different forms in different countries. Compared with China, Russia had few people and a lot of land. Its vast territory provided more opportunities to make a living. In the course of Russia's rural development, agriculture and handicrafts

21 G. William Skinner, *Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China*.

also operated in tandem. Under the village system, however, their combination was based on the village as a unit. In such circumstances, some were engaged in agriculture, others in handicrafts, in a specialized division of labor. The gains from farming and non-farming activities were not much different. Under the serfdom founded on the village system, the labor service provided by serfs to their masters was unpaid and thus was, of course, coerced. Since they enjoyed a relatively egalitarian life and a degree of protection, Russian peasants were not motivated to seek outside work, "to the extent that they could not imagine surviving without the village."[22] Furthermore, the village system placed limitations on its members' working or doing business outside the village, and Russian rulers imposed strict legal restrictions on their doing so. In reality, "the peasants' serfdom was achieved by depriving them of the right of free movement and tying them to the land holding (the village)."[23] Therefore, the Russian countryside was a relatively calm society, like the quiet Don.

The Indian countryside also had agricultural, industrial and commercial activities. But under the caste system within the village, villagers' occupations depended on their caste. One might have thought the division of labor would facilitate the development of industry and improvement in standard of living. However, the caste-based division of labor handed down from generation to generation determined that the lower castes had no way of changing their wretched lives and little chance to get ahead. Furthermore, the higher castes did not allow the lower castes to work or do business outside the village; indeed, they forbad it. As a result, the latter were unable to change their fates through non-agricultural pursuits, and their lives were as settled and unchanging as the Ganges.

The melding of agriculture, industry and commerce was an important part of the rural Chinese household system and a powerful motive force behind the continuous accretion of Chinese agrarian civilization. But in ancient China, the space for industrial and commercial activities was quite limited, so the combination of agriculture, industry and commerce took place at a low level, with the great majority of the peasants still consigned to poverty. For this very reason, with the advent of the 20th century, the household system was discarded as a backward tradition and China chose the road of collectivization. The means to this end was the commune system, with its strongly Russian features. Unlike the blending of agriculture, industry and commerce under the household system, under the commune system these activities were a division of labor internal to the commune organization, similar to the specialized division of labor in Russian villages. Whether engaged in agricultural or in non-agricultural production, everyone obtained almost equal remuneration in the form of labor points (*gong fen*), and thus people lacked autonomy and enthusiasm for production. The system also made outside work virtually impossible; and since the state had implemented centralized purchase and sale and the main commercial activities were under state control, household commercial activities were severely limited.

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22 Boris. N. Mironov, *Historian and Sociology*, p. 64.

23 Luo Ailin, "On the Influence of the Village System upon Russian Society."

The force of tradition is unbounded and it is constantly opening up new ways ahead. In the southeastern coastal areas, where living space is limited and there is a long-established tradition of leaving home for work or business, household-based industrial and commercial activities never ceased. Many families had someone who had left home to seek work or carry on small-scale commercial activities to supplement the family finances. Given the fight for survival, grassroots cadres tolerated such activities. This historical tradition of combining agriculture, industry and commerce revived with the abolition of the commune system and rise of household operations. This is precisely the "sudden emergence of town and township enterprises" to which Deng Xiaoping referred.

Since reform and opening up, the tradition of integrated agriculture, industry and commerce has not only regained its historical vigor but has also scaled new heights, forming a rural development path characterized by an economy in which agriculture, industry and commerce complement each other. None of the "rich villages" that emerged in China after reform and opening up got rich through agriculture, and the population of such villages accounted for only a very small fraction of the rural total. For this reason, leaving home to seek work was the option chosen by most farm households and became a significant source of income for them. Since the 1990s, non-agricultural income has gradually become the major source of income, especially cash income, for farm households. The tradition of integrated agriculture, industry and commerce not only consolidated the household operation system and revitalized and strengthened the household economy, but also enriched the farmers and promoted rural development. The fundamental motive that drove tens of millions of Chinese farmers to leave home for work, undergoing a myriad hardships, was to improve the economic situation of their families. They went to the cities and also journeyed abroad. Many households moved from being purely agricultural to pursuing industrial and commercial activities. Some rose rapidly as "peasant entrepreneurs," while the coastal areas, with their dynamic industrial and commercial activity, showed villages the way by achieving modest prosperity.

According to Marxist theory, the fragility of the small peasant economy dooms it to bankruptcy in the market economy, because the market economy is a money economy and money is what peasant households lack. They face smaller risks in a natural economy largely comprised of tangible objects, but in a money economy their risks are greater and the rich-poor divide yawns wider. It was precisely for this reason that the classical Marxist writers wanted to transform the small peasant economy. Since reform and opening up, many households have successfully avoided financial problems or even bankruptcy by leaving home to work or do business elsewhere, creating their own version of "industry complements agriculture." The subsequent development of Chinese agriculture has been supported precisely by household after household that did not go bankrupt.

In comparison, Russia lacked a household-based tradition of integrating agriculture, industry and commerce. Today, though Russia has implemented a fairly thorough land privatization policy and gives farmers higher subsidies than China does, its agricultural

production and rural development fall short of the ideal and are out of kilter with its abundant natural endowments. This is because Russian farmers' lack of the tradition and the results of having industry support agriculture and enrich the farmers. In India, though large numbers of peasants have left the land, when they move to the cities they generally take low paid menial jobs and congregate with other poor people in slums.

V. The Household Tradition of Mutual Aid and Cooperation vs the Rural Cooperative Path

China has a long tradition of a household system in which each household was a basic unit of production and daily life. But households were not completely isolated, for even a single household that lived away from others would have connections with the outside world. It was not really possible to have the situation envisaged by the philosopher in which "The next place might be so near at hand that one could hear the cocks crowing in it, the dogs barking; but the people would grow old and die without ever having been there." Quite the opposite: without mutual aid and cooperation, a single peasant household would have had a hard time surviving. It was just that in China, such cooperation and mutual assistance occurred mainly at the family or clan level with the household as a unit.

The participants in household cooperation are mainly neighboring clan and family members. Agricultural production is based on land and people live where their land is; as a result, they are characteristically dispersed, whence the popular country saying "Near neighbors are better than distant kin, but the neighbor next door is the closest." Over the long history of Chinese agrarian civilization, most Chinese villages came into being on the basis of kinship, with many villagers sharing the same family name and having common ancestry. Even the village itself often was often called by the family surname. Consequently, rural society was actually kinship society. Those who lived near each other were mostly from the same family or connected in some way.

The basis of household cooperation and mutual assistance is trust. Cooperation means different households acting together, so mutual trust is the basis of cooperation. Those with whom one engages in social intercourse can be divided into strangers, acquaintances and family or clan members. Out of these, it is trust among family members that has the firmest foundation. What is important is not just their propinquity but their blood relationship. A clan society involves emotional factors in addition to common interests. In terms of cooperation and mutual assistance, a household will give first preference to those relatives who are connected to them by ties of blood and nearby residence, as in the saying "Kin help kin, neighbors help neighbors." This kind of cooperation or mutual assistance based on family trust has a very low cost.

The scope of such cooperation could be very broad. The exchange of labor in productive activities meant that peasants helped each other during busy seasons. Everyday life entailed

even greater mutual assistance, for members of rural society would ask for help, especially help from kinsfolk, whenever there was a big event in their lives, such as weddings, marriage and funerals. They would also seek help whenever they were visited by natural or man-made disasters. This assistance was calculated not on the basis of naked self-interest but on the basis of emotional ties built up by years of mutual assistance. Even landlords were also clan members with corresponding obligations; moreover, they could only gain social prestige if they fulfilled their obligations to local people. Exchanges made on the basis of pure self-interest occurred only between peasants and those landlords who lived in urban centers.

The outcome of household cooperation was mutual gain, based on each household's having things it could not do or could not do well. It was household-based and aimed at a gain for each household, thus constituting a kind of voluntary mutual aid between two sides undertaken with no external intervention or pressure. Because things were so, Chinese peasants had a historical tradition of active cooperation. It could be said that China's household system would never have lasted without mutual aid and cooperation in which the household was the unit. Of course, traditional rural cooperation was mainly limited to simple, intermittent assistance designed to compensate for the shortcomings of the household system. It was only needed when households encountered difficulties in production or daily life or when they were facing shared problems that could not be solved by one household alone. In general, households would endeavor to solve their problems on its own. Therefore, the effect of such cooperation was quite limited.

With the advent of the 20th century, China implemented land reform and the peasants were all given their own piece of land; they thus had a base for survival. But quite a few lacked the capacity for independent production, and as time went by, this meant that some lost the land they had been allotted, leaving them once again trapped in poverty. Therefore, some places began to practice cooperation or mutual assistance in production. Party leaders thought highly of such mutual assistance, terming it "semi-socialism," and felt that it represented the future of rural development and should be promoted throughout the nation. In the course of this process, however, the tradition of household cooperation was abandoned as China embraced first cooperatives and then the people's communes. There were three reasons for this.

Firstly, Chinese land reform started from the northern "old revolutionary base areas," which were relatively poor. Due to constant war and poor natural conditions, agricultural productivity was generally low, so the peasants were motivated to cooperate in a way that went beyond mutual assistance among households. Conversely, in the relatively developed south, households were usually quite productive, so they were not keen on overstepping the bounds of traditional mutual assistance. Zhejiang in the southeast, for one, was a significant locus of resistance to the cooperative movement.

Secondly, the cooperatives and the subsequent people's communes were characterized by labor cooperation among different households and collective ownership of the land, practices that had no institutional foundation in Chinese history. To some extent, the collectivization

process embodied in cooperatives and people's communes drew on the contemporary Soviet collective farm system. This system could itself be said to be a Russian historical legacy, resembling the common labor based on shared village land that went further than the household unit. Consequently, this common labor led quite naturally to the collective farm. This was why, in the 19th century, Marx thought that Russia might be able to leap over the Caudine Forks of capitalism Caudine Forks and make a direct transition to socialism. Stalin regarded village labor teams as the basis of agricultural collectivization and thought they could make collectivization "develop more easily and rapidly."[24] But in China, the historical tradition of the village system was precisely what was lacking; the peasants were only familiar with individual households' "going it alone."

Thirdly, the traditional household system was suppressed as being fundamentally antagonistic to socialism. When the People's Republic of China was first set up, its leaders believed if China were to develop agricultural production and avoid a rich-poor divide, only collectivization would serve. And the process of collectivization, from mutual aid teams to elementary cooperatives, advanced cooperatives and finally to people's communes, was precisely a process of weakening the household system one step at a time; only thus could collective labor and collective distribution be implemented. As a result of the weakening of the household system, the tradition of mutual aid based on that system also disappeared.

As a product of the cooperative movement, the people's commune system practiced collective labor and distribution. In theory, this was better than household-based mutual aid. In the era of collective cooperation, public works and public welfare projects beyond the capacity of individual households were indeed completed. The practice of collective cooperation, however, did not entirely live up to expectations. Firstly, the effectiveness of common labor had been based on its voluntary nature. A major feature of the household system was voluntary labor, and household-based mutual aid involved voluntary conduct. With collectivization, on the other hand, mutual aid was driven by an external force so that the peasants were passively "cooperatized." Secondly, the effectiveness of common labor had depended upon a rational common distribution. However, the complexity of agricultural labor meant that distribution was also complex, so true distribution "to each according to his labor" was hard to put into practice. As a result, commune income had to be distributed roughly evenly. This affected workers' morale, which in turn weakened their enthusiasm for collective cooperation. As stated above, there were no such problems with distribution under the household system. Thirdly, the effectiveness of collective cooperation came not only from common labor, but also, more importantly, from the addition of new factors of production. The collective cooperation of the commune system simply added one unit of labor to another without adding new factors of production. On the contrary, as a closed system with evenly distributed rewards, the commune system actually blocked the entry of new factors of production. In the absence of the incentives provided by continuing rewards, the

24 I.V. Stalin, *Collected Works of I.V. Stalin*, vol. 12, p. 136.

peasants had little interest in collective cooperation. It can be seen that although the collective cooperation of the commune system dwarfed that of the household system in form and scale, it actually deviated from the essence of household-based mutual aid and cooperation, which was voluntary and was carried out in expectation of rewards. This was a major reason the collective cooperation of the commune system had no future.

In the early 1980s, the state advocated a two-tier system of rural operations that combined unification and separation and was based on the household contract responsibility system. Thereafter the latter took the place of the commune and the commune type of collective cooperation disappeared. The "separation" referred to household labor and household operations and the "unification" referred to collective labor and collective operations. However, except for non-agricultural villages, agricultural areas across the country practiced individual household operations. Collective cooperation based on unified operations basically ceased to exist, while the peasants' specialized cooperatives saw a rapid growth. In terms of their targets and scope, the latter far surpassed the commune's collective cooperation. On the basis of the household system, they carried on the tradition of voluntary cooperation and, more importantly, introduced new production factors for greater rewards.

VI. The Tradition of Household and State Co-governance and the Rural Governance System

Villages are the basic organizational unit of peasant life, but whether or not they constitute a basic unit of governance varies with different countries. In the Russian and Indian village systems, villages were both the basic unit of social organization and the basic unit of governance. Russia is so vast that the ruler's writ did not run everywhere in the country, so the village system was used in governing. "From the point of view of the administrative police, governing through the villages was more convenient in the same way as it is easier to herd a flock of animals than to pasture them one by one."[25] India had long been a loosely run empire, with great diversity of religions and languages and frequent changes of rulers; only the village system remained unchanged. Therefore, in Russia and India, villages were self-governing units with a high degree of autonomy; however, this autonomy was not a self-governance of equals but was dominated by those in positions of authority. Village governance included not only ordinary civil matters but also administrative matters handled on behalf of upper levels. The village was the basic unit of governance for those within the village system and was at the same time the basic political unit under the state, to which it was accountable.

Unlike Russia and India, imperial China had been ruled by a bureaucracy since the Qin Dynasty. The imperial power, representing the nation, reached as far down as the county via different levels of bureaucracy. A system of prefectures and counties was implemented, leading to the saying "imperial power does not reach the village." A key reason for this,

25 Luo Ailin, "The Influence of the Village System upon Russian Society."

apart from the transport and governance costs that would have been incurred, was that the household system was there to provide support. "Each family household has been both a social unit and an economic unit,"[26] and also "a unit of political responsibility." The national government directly faced households that paid tax and provided corvée labor. If any members of society contravened the country's laws or the intentions of the government, collective punishment would be meted out to the family unit under "guilt by association." Correspondingly, state commendations and awards that could bring honor to one's ancestors and blessings to one's descendants also took the household as a unit. The household integration of society, economy and politics in a single unit thus had powerful self-organizing and self-governing functions. As the household's system of self-organization was handed down from generation to generation, the family was vertically organized in a time sequence that determined the authority of the elders and the order of seniority inside the family, that is, the institutional norms under which "men and women are apart, older and younger have fixed places" and "the father is the cardinal guide for the son and the husband is the cardinal guide for the wife." Such authority and order were endogenous and internalized in the souls of family members, so they were strongly autonomous. So long as it kept the household stable, the state would obtain not only revenue and military service, but also order and loyalty. The saying went "The foundation of the state lies in the household," and "When the household is well ordered, the state will be well governed."[27] It was precisely because the household was an economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous unit that state power had no need to reach down to the village; and the system of prefectures and counties was itself founded on the household system.

Relative to the state and the family, the villages in China's system of rural governance did not have the status and functions of those in Russia and India. Since the Qin Dynasty, the system of grassroots organization in rural China had changed frequently, but the overall trend was for its official character to lessen while its popular character grew. The main reason for this was that household organization had matured and developed. In old China, the boundaries and even the names of villages changed all the time. Villages were usually natural villages formed by the expansion of a household and bearing in most cases that family's surname. Such natural villages did not have administrative functions, nor were they strictly autonomous units. Village leaders were simultaneously family or clan authorities, but the gentry were the main vehicles for political communication between high and low, or the officials and the people. "Official" business could only be managed by officials, and administrative and judicial power was controlled from the government offices. Even landlords had no power over local administration or justice or the physical body of the peasant. At the same time, the government did not directly interfere in local civil matters, which were mainly administered by the household and the village community that had grown from it. From this arose a system

26 John King Fairbank, *The United States and China*, p. 25.
27 Zeng Shen, *The Classic of Rites: The Great Learning.*

of rural government characterized by the co-governance of household and state, in which official business was managed by officials and civil matters were managed by the community. The household was not only the foundation of national governance but also a socially autonomous unit.

The fact that the household was a vertically self-organized unit made the authority and order established within it all the more secure. Unlike the household, the village's horizontal organization did not have natural historical authority; rather, it required the coercive imposition of outside authority. Russian and Indian villages were both built upon serfdom, with its personal dependence. Without such dependence, it would have been impossible to construct overall village authority and order. India's famous *The Laws of Manu* consolidated the hierarchical submission of the village caste system through strict laws. In this way, the village system and serfdom were dependent upon each other, whereas in China it was the household system and the free small peasant who depended upon each other.

After 1949, the commune system in particular brought about a significant rupture in grassroots rural society. Its basic feature was the replacement of the household with the organized peasants in the commune collective. It was the commune rather than the household that embodied social, economic and political organization, as a product of the state's attempt to reform the traditional household. In form, it was similar to the village collective. Organized by the state as horizontal organizations formed from households, communes needed an external force to consolidate their authority and order. Faced with massive state power, the peasants fell in with this horizontal organization, but they did not identify with it as they had with the traditional household. It was for this reason that the people's commune system was accompanied by constant socialist education campaigns in the villages to resolve the clash between the "first, small; second, private" character of the household mentality and the "first, big; second, collective" collective mentality of the commune. Even so, the commune system had to compromise with the tradition of household governance. In the early 1960s, after experiencing severe economic difficulties, the central government formulated the *Sixty Articles on Rural Work*, making it clear that the commune governance mechanism was "three levels of ownership with teams as the foundation." "Teams" were production teams, which were natural villages formed by closely connected households. At the same time, households were still politically responsible units, and their class status remained an important element in governance.

In the early 1980s, the household contract system, after going through several ups and downs, finally broke down the commune system. This was accompanied by changes in rural governance, namely, the emergence of villagers' self-governance. Like the household contract system, this was actually a return to the tradition of household self-governance, or self-governance based on the household. Of course, it was not a simple return. The matters for self-governance were village public affairs (mainly those of traditional natural villages close to each other) that could not be settled by a single household. Therefore, *The Organic*

Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China (for trial use) promulgated in 1987 stated that villagers' committees should be established on the basis of natural villages. The villagers' committees that replaced the communes, however, had to face the institutional legacy of commune organization. As a result, the early villagers' committees were all built upon the commune's original production brigades; that is, they took the production brigade as the basic unit.

Although in legal terms it fell under self-governance mass organizations, the villagers' committee in fact represented a reorganization of the post-commune rural community and possessed certain administrative functions. Therefore, the area under its jurisdiction was an "administrative village" instead of a natural village, and the establishment, scale and operation of the village were organized by the state instead of by the peasants. This is why, ever since villagers' self-governance was put into action, there have always been two intrinsic and insurmountable conflicts within rural governance. Firstly, since numerous administrative matters were the responsibility of these grassroots organizations, the villagers' committees became administration-oriented and their office holders were even referred to as "village officials." As a result, administrative affairs were managed by "the village" while village affairs were administered by "officials"; the one could not be distinguished from the other, and administration overwhelmed self-governance. Secondly, villagers' participation in the management of public affairs was "shelved" as it was difficult to implement. During the implementation of villagers' self-governance, a system of democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic oversight was set up to encourage mass participation. But political participation depends on political trust. The larger the scale, the harder it is to build political trust. For this reason, in many places villagers' self-governance is confined to election of office-holders once every three years, with little participation in daily affairs, thus shelving villagers' self-governance. Simply relying on the villagers' committee for rural governance is not soundly based, which means that it is hard for governance to get traction at the grassroots and household level.

Facing with the quandary of villagers' self-governance, some places have begun to explore moving the self-governance unit downward. The main feature of such ideas is to separate administration and self-governance, so administrative villages would mainly deal with administrative responsibilities assigned them by government. At the same time, full play would be given to natural villages' self-governance role, with its long history, and their self-governance would be based on the household. First, the household would be the unit of political responsibility, with each household being encouraged to "keep well your own house and people." This would constitute the fundamental social order. Then, a household-based council would be set up as a body consisting of popular representation to participate in the common management of the villages' common affairs. It can be seen that whether it be commune governance, characterized by the Eastern system of the Russian village, or the introduction of villagers' self-governance and self-governance, with its introduction of

elements of Western democratic competition, the fundamental role of the household system in rural governance cannot be ignored or neglected.

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