

The History and Contemporary Enlightenment of the Rural Land System Reform Led by the Communist Party of China

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Abstract

The rural land system in China has achieved a historical transformation from feudal proprietorship to peasant proprietorship and later to collective ownership, and has now reached the beginning of a new stage. This provides the foundation for future social development in China. The Communist Party of China (CPC) has played a leading role in the rural land system reform. The history of this reform has important implications on the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, especially on the implementation of rural revitalization strategy, in the new age.

Key words: Communist Party of China; Farmer; Rural land system; Institutional civilization; Modernization

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The basis of China's modernization lies in the farmers. China's modernization is impossible without modernization of farmers. The key of modernization of farmers is land, which is inseparable when studying the issues of farmers. The centennial history of Chinese

revolution, construction, and reform led by the Communist Party of China (CPC) has shown that there is an inherent logical connection between issues of farmers' land and China's modernization. Therefore, studies of the history of the rural land system reform led by the CPC is of great theoretical and practical significance.

1. FROM FEUDAL TO PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP: A HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF CHINA'S RURAL LAND SYSTEM

During the democratic revolution of the old type, with the accumulated poverty and weakness, China had become a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. All classes of society were searching for, from their perspectives and with great difficulty, a possible future for China. The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement was, in a broad sense, a revolutionary war against feudalism and invasion waged by the Chinese peasantry. Although it had proposed the idea of "the tiller has his land", due to the lack of advanced and practical ideological guidance and practical measures, and lack of understanding of the internal conflicts in China's social development, the movement failed just like other peasantry resistance movements in the past. As a self-rescue movement of the landlord class, the fundamental starting point and focus of the Westernization Movement is to maintain the feudal tradition, rather than learn the political and economic system from capitalism. It was impossible for the movement to touch the foundation of China's feudal society – feudal proprietorship. Thus, it could not prevent the decline of China's society and its failure under the aggressive attacks of foreign forces and powers. As the first attempt of bourgeois political reform, the Hundred Days Reform in 1898 had played an enlightening role with its proposition of "saving the name from subjugation and

striving for survival”. However, political propositions that stopped at constitutional monarchy could not shake the foundation of the feudal system – feudal proprietorship. As an anti-imperialist, patriotic movement initiated by peasants, the proposition of the Boxer Movement, which is “supporting the Qing Dynasty and exterminating the foreign powers”, had implied the lack of understanding from the peasantry about the basis of the social issues. How can the feudal proprietorship be affected under the proposition of “supporting the Qing Dynasty”? It had also implied that national conflicts had become the major issue of the society. The Revolution of 1911 was a great bourgeois democratic revolution with proposition of “equal land ownership”. Unfortunately, it failed to notice that the greatest force of China was the peasant class, let alone caring about the fundamental interests of that class, and simply ignored the conditions for a successful revolutionary: the request of equal distribution of land from the farmers in China. It was impossible for this revolution to succeed. As an ideological and cultural movement with the nature of bourgeois democracy, although the New Culture Movement recognized the poisonous of feudal culture, it failed to realize that the root of such culture lied in the feudal proprietorship. In conclusion, the old democratic revolution, which failed to shake the foundation of the feudal system – feudal proprietorship, was, to a great extent, an extensive and profound social enlightenment at that time.

During the period of the new democratic revolution, under the leadership of CPC, Chinese society had completed the system transformation from feudal proprietorship to peasant proprietorship, from large private ownership for landlords to small private ownership for peasants. This had laid the most important institutional foundation for the fundamental transformation of China’s social nature. During the Great Revolution, the CPC had gradually realized that a consolidated alliance between workers and farmers was the key to victory, and the request of farmers about land ownership had to be met. The fundamental leadership of CPC among farmers can only be achieved after solving the issue of land ownership. During the Agrarian Revolutionary War, the feudal proprietorship was replaced by peasant proprietorship in the rural revolutionary bases areas. This change had met the farmers’ fundamental request for land, consolidated the foundation for revolution, and liberated and developed the productive forces. During the Anti-Japanese War, the rent and interest of land was reduced by CPC. Due to the special circumstance at that time, such land policy was the only one that could maximize the interests of all sectors of the society. It helped establish a strong, united national front for the war and motivate all parties to focus on the overall plan of the war. During the War of Liberation, through the land reform in the liberated areas, CDC was able to “replace the feudal proprietorship with complete

equal distribution of land, and handover the ownership to farmers, who can rest assured and focus on production and improvement.” (Mao, 1996, p.23) The long cherished wish of farmers had been granted and the fundamental interests of farmers had been met. This greatly motivated the farmers to participate in the revolution. “Only with the victory of land reform could we win and overthrow Chiang Kai Shek.” (Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 1987)

The historical transformation of China’s rural land system from feudal to peasant proprietorship had adapted to the internal needs of the production relations, liberated and developed social productive forces, and promoted development of Chinese society.

2. FROM PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP TO COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP: A HISTORICAL LEAP OF CHINA’S RURAL LAND SYSTEM

After the founding of the New China, according to the situation of China’s rural areas at that time, the CPC had implemented peasant proprietorship all over the country. This policy met the needs of social development at that time, helped restore order in the rural society, and greatly promoted social stability, recovery, and development of productive forces. As the situation changes both domestically and internationally, China was ready to carry out large-scale economic construction. Under such circumstance, proper planning and management of rural land was conducive to improving labor productivity and promoting industrialization. Thus, the state had adjusted the rural land system and implemented the collective ownership in a timely manner. China’s rural land system had achieved a historical leap with this agricultural cooperation. With agricultural cooperation, unified purchase and sale of grain, and dual urban-rural household registration system, a development path with Chinese characteristics in which rural areas supporting cities and industries had been formed.

During the reform and opening up, China’s urban-rural social relations have undergone historical and profound changes. The transition from a planned economy to a market economy system has promoted the reform and development of rural land system. We have transformed from people’s commune agricultural cooperation to family contract responsibility system, and the rural land system has transformed from “collective ownership, collective management, large in size and collective in nature” to “collective ownership, family contact, and double-layer management system”. “Policies should be more relaxed in areas with vast territory, sparse population, backward economy, and poor living conditions, in order for them to really adapt to local conditions and develop

their own characteristics...Don't be afraid. This will not affect the socialist nature of our system.” (Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 1998) Such management not only ensured the socialist nature of the land system, but also fully motivated the farmers' productivity. It liberated and developed the productive forces to a great extent, enriched and developed the form of agricultural cooperation, and created a solid material foundation for agricultural modernization.

3. IMPORTANT ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE RURAL LAND SYSTEM REFORM LED BY THE CPC

Studying the history of rural land system reform in modern China has important enlightenment for the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, especially for the implementation of Rural Revitalization Strategy, in the new era.

First of all, really caring about the interests of the majority is the basis to the success of CPC. The modern history of China has shown that the support of the majority was the key to establish leadership of revolution, construction, and reform. And in order to obtain their support, we must strive to meet their practical needs. One important reason that the CPC has been able to obtain the support of Chinese people and has become the center of the stage in Chinese history was that it has made continuous efforts to satisfy the fundamental needs of farmers, who accounted for the majority of population in China. Among the needs, the most fundamental one is the relationship between farmers and land. Only by satisfying the farmers' long cherished wish for land can we fully motivate their initiative for revolution and production.

Second of all, the CPC has complied with the historical development of China; that is, the CPC fully understood the adaptive relation between productivity and production. Production relation must meet the needs of the development of productive forces, which is the basic conclusion of Marxism. The series of rural land system transformation, from large-scale private ownership to small-scale private ownership and later to collective ownership, led by the CPC has demonstrated that the CPC fully understood and has successfully applied the rule that production relations must adapt to the development of productive forces. Surpassing the current level of productive forces and blindly pursuing “advanced” and “high allocation” in production relations will only result in disconnection between production relations and the productive forces, which will hinder the development of productive forces. In the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, especially for the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, in the new era, we must proceed based on the current situation and adjust

the institutional arrangements for rural lands. We cannot be too conservative, which will dampen the productive enthusiasm of the farmers; nor can we rush to advance beyond the current stage of historical development.

Thirdly, the leadership of COC on rural land system is the fundamental assuredness to achieve such historical rural land system reform. When studying the development of modern Chinese society, we will find that the CPC has played an extremely important leading role in China's social development. The highly unification of the reform of rural land system in China and the realization of the fundamental interests of farmers was only possible because of the leadership of the CPC. That is, the CPC is the leader and the protector of the fundamental interests of farmers. It is necessary to uphold the leadership of the CPC over China's rural land under the current situations, which is a high degree of unity among historical, practical, and political logics.

Fourthly, we must realize the fundamental role of rural land issue in China's modernization development. Modernization is essentially the modernization of human. China is a traditional large agricultural country with farmers being the majority of the population. In this sense, the modernization of China is the modernization of farmers. It is impossible to achieve modernization without the modernization of farmers. In order to achieve that, we must realize the fundamental role of rural land issue in modernization of farmers. The rural land system reform must always take the fundamental interests and modernization of farmers as the basis.

Lastly, we must pay attention to the key role of land system civilization in social development. Marxism believes that politics is the collective embodiment of economy, and institution plays a key role in social development. Institutional civilization is a consequence of institutional construction, and it is also reflected through the construction process. To a certain degree, the institutional civilization is an embodiment of the civilization of a society. And agricultural institutional civilization reflects the degree of agricultural civilization. Therefore, we must pay attention to the key role of land system civilization in social development.

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