



How Can Rural China Respond to the Challenges of Globalization?

Chan Wing Wa, Edwina

Liberal Studies Subject, Centre for Assessment Research and Development,

Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong

10 Lo Ping Road, Tai Po, New Territories, Hong Kong, China

Tel: 852-9091-4178 E-mail: edwinacww@yahoo.com

Abstract

Globalization is an irreversible development and the main purpose of this paper is to rethink how Mainland China responds to the challenges of globalization in rural area. To achieve this aim, this study will be divided into three parts. First of all, it will examine the phenomenon of privatization and dumping in rural China as a result of globalization. It will then try to consider the feasible top-down administrative changes of Chinese government. The last part will explore the new modalities of political engineering and social transformation of the state-society relation resulted from the bottom-up resistance to globalization.

Keywords: Globalization, Glocalization, Privatization, Sino-foreign joint venture, Counter-hegemonic consciousness, State-society relation, Trans-national civil society, Submerged networks

1. Introduction

“Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains.”(Note 1) Rousseau’ discourse could vividly depict the life of the peasants in rural China in where they had no choice but to create their own choices. In a communist country, like China, injustice resulted in the process of glocalization. (Note 2) Globalization is one of the six modules of Liberal Studies subject in the New Senior Secondary School Curriculum of Hong Kong. It is palpably an irreversible development and the main purpose of this paper is to rethink how Mainland China responds to the challenges of globalization in rural China. To achieve this aim, this study will be separated into three parts. First of all, it will examine the phenomenon of privatization and dumping in rural China as a result of globalization. It will try to consider the feasible top-down administrative changes of Chinese government. The last part will explore the new modalities of political engineering and social transformation of the state-society relation resulted from the bottom-up resistance to globalization.

2. Privatization and dumping in rural China as a result of globalization

2.1 Privatization in rural China

“I am just a farmer. I know I don’t matter.” (Note 3) In mid-January this man joined a protest against the local government over its seizure of communal farmland, which was then leased to a Hong Kong textile factory. He lived in a village called Panlong. Panlong came into existence when the leaders of two villages, Peace and Patriotism, decided to merge their farmland in 2003 and rent it to a Hong Kong company that wanted a large lot for building a textile factory. Panlong soon disappointed its residents. Villagers claimed that they had not been consulted on the land deal, and many resented their farmland being taken away. “Time” magazine (2006) denoted that the peasant suffering was caused by Sino-foreign joint venture and privatization.

Even worse, the village leaders told the peasants that compensation per mu (1mu =0.067 hectare) was around \$100 a year, when the textile factory was actually paying \$3,300 per mu. It was not clear where the rest of the money had gone to; however, several village committee members started building homes or bought new cars. “The entire village is doomed anyway. We have no money, no job, no land. There’s nothing left to be scared of.” As the villagers can do nothing, they gathered near the disputed land, brandished pitchforks and blocked a local highway. Villagers alleged that a 13-year-old girl was beaten to death and that about 20 were seriously injured. By the central government’s own count, there were 87 000 “public-order disturbances” in 2005. Local governments might have been given behind-the-scenes support for such bloodshed activities or directly employ criminal forces to do their work for them. There seemed to have a tendency towards homogenization of state policies so as to privilege the interest of the capitalists. Global market ideology overshadowed local social and communal values even in a communist country like China. When privatization and globalization embedded in China, peasants were deprived of land ownership which was pledged in the Constitution.

2.2 The new hybrid of globalization and local corruption

As Unocal was morally responsible for the relocation, forced labour, torture, murder and rape inflicted on hundreds of

the Karen people in Burma, the Sino-foreign joint venture violated internationally recognized human rights of land property. The Chinese peasants were waiting for the central government to fix things, but they doubted if the central bureaucracy would. China's legal framework had not caught up with its economic development, leaving farmers without a proper channel to appeal. The new hybrid of globalization and local corruption deteriorated the life of the peasants. Peasants once were the backbone of communist regime felt being excluded from China's full-throttle economic development in the globalization.

2.3 The frustration of returned migrant women workers/migrant workers

70 000 Hong Kong factories and hundreds Western joint investment parks were set up in Mainland China and the business were intruding northward and westward from Pearl River Delta to Changjiang River Delta and Northwest of Mainland China. Poverty-stricken *dagongmei/dagongzai* (migrant women workers/ migrant workers) suffering from exploitative work in the Sino-foreign factories in the Pearl River Delta returned to their rural villages to which the status, identity, rights, and means of survival were ascribed found their farmland being seized by the Sino-foreign joint venture would be very frustrated. The exploitation went deep into the heart of the peasantry when the peasants once were the backbone of communist regime were the ones who were losing out of the most.

2.4 Dumping and production subsidies in rural China

Dumping and production subsidies of the developed countries resulted in the severe suffering of the sugar farmers in Guangxi. Since 2001, China's sugar market had been liberalized as part of China's commitments to the WTO. Under this global regime, 1.6 million tons of sugar was allowed to enter China's domestic market each year. Sugar prices in China had dropped by 35 per cent since 2001. Thirty-nine counties, and some 26 million people worked in sugar production in Guangxi were dragged back into the abyss of poverty. (Note 4) It was reported that the income of each person there was only RMB0.06Yuan per day (US\$1-RMB8.28Yuan) in 2003. (Note 5) The European Union depressed the world sugar price through a package of trade-distorting policies, including export and production subsidies, and restrictions on market access. As a result, EU sugar beet farmers could produce excess amounts of sugar beet, and still earned high profits. The Chinese peasants were afflicted from this unfair trade under globalization.

3. The feasible top-down administrative changes

3.1 Work with other developing countries in the WTO negotiations

Our Mainland government could address the challenge of economic globalization and drag the peasants out of the abyss by working with other developing countries in the WTO negotiations to fight for a quick schedule and effective way to eliminate all export distorting subsidies. Chinese government could reassert the sovereignty of nation-state as a defensive barrier against the control of foreign and global capital. It was widely acknowledged that efforts of the pre-WTO Chinese to impose controls on capital flow during the 1998-99 financial crises protected the economy from bankruptcy. From the effective experience of interference in 1998 HK stock-market, one should be convinced that if China was a big market, the global economy would hesitate to boycott the trade with China.

3.2 Promulgate national policy of "Building a harmonious Society"

To fulfil the call of President Hu Jintao to "build a harmonious society" so as to take a more socially responsible form of development in the reign of globalization was claimed to be the focus of the Tenth Five Year Plan and the National People's Congress (NPC), Mr. Lu Zhiqiang, the Vice-President, Research Development Centre of the State Council, indicated that Mainland government had adopted a series of strategically significant policies to address the challenges of China's accession to the WTO and globalization. (Note 6) The central government tried to adjust the internal structures by tearing down the party interventions into enterprises and introducing social security system.

3.3 Institute an effective local administration system

Local officials' promotions should not just tie to high rates of growth or foreign investment, but also the provision of adequate social services. The hands-off policy by Beijing would leave each county free to pursue its own get-rich-quick schemes, sometimes resulting in officials lining their own pockets first. Trimming the bulky 5-tier central-province-municipal-prefectures-counties into 3-tier could reduce administrative burden and alleviate the tax burden of peasants.

3.4 Launch a direct payment system in the Sino-foreign Joint Venture

The Sino-foreign Joint Venture could channel money more directly to the landowners through post-office account instead of leaving pay at the discretion of local officials. To comply with the win-win theory, they could negotiate to make peasant the shareholders of the new industries in the age of globalization.

3.5 Verify a proper legal procedure in China

Some mechanisms should function to warrantee that the principles of voluntary, participation remuneration, standardization and order were adhered to whenever land use right in rural areas changed. Chinese government could

set up independent land-arbitration panels for farmers to claim lost revenue to supplement the direct petitions to Beijing, otherwise, globalization was nurturing a hegemonic giant to corrupt the rural areas. The unscrupulous local party cadres would become increasingly strong to exploit since incorporating a market discourse could legitimize its political power, change its political technologies, and enlarge its bureaucracy.

4. New modalities of political mechanism and social transformation of the state-society relation resulted from the bottom-up resistance

Obstruction of government decrees was detrimental to the alleviation work of the central government. When Central government recently decided to abolish the rural tax, some local bureaucrats resorted to charging illegal fees and levies, or appropriating land to lease to foreign investors. Without doubt, this would aggravate the difficult livelihood of the peasants. For example, the former Vice Education Minister Zhang Baoqing grumbled: 'China's biggest problem is [the] obstruction of government decrees. Things formulated in Zhongnanhai (China's White House). ... the lower levels didn't listen at all.' 305 counties spent no public money at all on long-to-germinate education in 2004, according to the Education Ministry. (Note 7) When the top-down administrative changes failed to apply in the rural area, the bottom-up resistance to globalization could still generate new modalities of political mechanism and social transformation of the state-society relation.

4.1 Enlighten peasants about fair trade

Peasants could be enlightened to believe that refusal to 'accept and adjust stage of globalization' (Note 8) was justifiable. Their needs should be addressed and someone could go to awaken the counter-hegemonic consciousness of peasants through charity and educational projects done by famous rich people, non-government organizations such as Oxfam (Note 9) and TV stars. It is impossible for the Chinese people to form political organization outside the state hierarchy and that peasants could form some sorts of civil society in which peasant might organize their opposition and construct an alternative legal hegemony within the state. Peasant could become customers and at the same time the stakeholder in related agenda.

4.2 Access to global information technologies

People could deploy the global information technologies such as Internet and Cyber-school of Oxfam to arouse the counter-hegemonic consciousness of the new peasant generation to create new strata relations, new individual consciousness and identity. Uncensored satellite feed could provide the peasants some ideas how the outside world viewed their stories. When Beijing government allowed the rotten practices like dirty preserved vegetable, fake milk and fake light soya sauce to be uncovered, she would allow media people unveil the corrupt practice of the rural leaders. Mobile phones and the Internet could help to connect and save victim citizens with the click of a button.

4.3 Engage sustainable strategies to defend civic rights

The villagers could learn to defend their rights individually. They should never attempt to negotiate with local officials in the form of organized groups. It would touch the nerve of the government like *Falungong* (Note 10). The peasants could multiply membership, adopt the flexible guerrilla strategies, take a multiple-front, penetrate into the power matrix of economy, state, effect socio-cultural discourses in this expanding global world and negotiate not only with the economic and political factors but also cultural and psychic experiences. (Note 11) This kind of civil society should concern questions such as equity, participation.

4.4 Restore healthy state-society relationship

One could help break down the rumour that the state was not helpful and restore healthy state-society relationship and implemented the 10th NPC policy of building a harmonious social relationship. The Chinese government seemed to be preparing to adjust the internal structures by tearing down the party interventions into the enterprises, introducing social security system in urban areas; developing human capital and attracting human resources; streamlining the state institutions and reconstructing the legal system. We could urge Mainland leaders to institute independent commission against corruption and democratic election at the county levels to meet the challenges of globalization and generate a cordial social transformation of the state-society relation.

4.5 Mobilize Chinese think-tank

The patriotic Chinese economists could convince Beijing government that the losers who had participated more deeply in global processes, found themselves worse off. The Chinese think-tank could convince Beijing government that the link between poverty and globalization was co-related. When poverty was seen to be a relational rather than a residual phenomenon, new policies at international level were vital in actualizing global justice and unveiling the hybrid of globalization and poverty

4.6 Network with trans-national civil society

The submerged networks (Note 12) could support the negotiation works of the peasants by engaging in lobbying,

consultation and the dissemination of information. They were some sorts of civil society that had no clearly defined organizational structure and in which peasant might organize their opposition and construct an alternative legal hegemony within the state. When globalization was a contributory factor in major global schisms, such dialectical engagement, could foster trans-national obligation, a sense of collective identity, raising universal consciousness and providing a voice to those poverty-stricken Chinese on the margins of social, economic and political life.

5. Conclusion

The question we must ask ourselves is: What are the political agendas of the critical discourse of globalization?

In the tidal globalization, the Chinese government seemed to have struggled to adjust the internal structures by tearing down the party interventions into enterprises, introducing social security system; developing human capital and attracting human resources; streamlining the state institutions and reconstructing the legal system. And yet, the issues of peasantry in the rural area and the influx of rural peasantry into the urban areas were still out of touch.

It was believed that every form of resistance to globalization in the rural area should be conducted without open confrontation against the communist Chinese regime. "Submerged networks" with no clearly defined organizational structure might help Chinese peasants respond to the challenge of globalization. James C. Scott's idea of infra-political activities that ranged from foot-dragging, squatting, and gossiping to the development of dissident subcultures could be adopted. (Note 13) When peaceful petitioning failed, peasants might resort to large-scale and "borderless" protests against globalization to make this injustice known through newspapers, broadcasting stations and trans-national civil societies.

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Notes

Note 1. Rousseau believed that the only reason human beings were willing to give up individual freedom and be ruled by others was that they saw that their rights, happiness, and property would be better protected under a formal government rather than an anarchic, every-person-for-themselves type of society.We have nothing to show for ourselves but a frivolous and deceitful appearance, honor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness. [Online] Available:

<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/r/rousseau.htm#SH3b>

Note 2. Glocalization is a process whereby localities develop direct economic and cultural relationships to the global system through information technologies, bypassing and subverting traditional power hierarchies like national governments and markets.

Note 3. Bu, Hua and Jakes, Susan. (2006). Seeds of Fury. *Time*, 167 (10): 20-25.

Note 4. Oxfam.(2003). Bitter Sugar. Hong Kong Briefing Paper, August 2003. *Oxfam, Hong Kong*. Retrieved: (2005-07-27) China WTO network E-Library [Online] Available: <http://www.chinawtonetwork.org/lib/article.php?articleid=39>

Note 5. Apple Daily, Hong Kong. A24, 15 September, 2003

Note 6. The Impact of Globalization on the Chinese Economy Lu Zhiqiang, Vice President (Vice Minister), Research Development Centre of the State Council [www.chamber.org.hk/wsc/information/Plenary 1](http://www.chamber.org.hk/wsc/information/Plenary1)

Note 7. Bu Hua/Shanghai and Susan Jakes/Beijing. (2006). Seeds of Fury. *Time* 167 (10): 20-25.

Note 8. Barry Gills' "Manifesto of Social Rights" against globalization.

Note 9. Oxfam International is a confederation of 13 organizations working together with over 3,000 partners in more than 100 countries to find lasting solutions to poverty and injustice, and to foster a sense of global citizenship.

Note 10. 4 July 1999 Chinese government banned Falun Gong, presuming that very large number of followers could pose a threat to their ruling power, and started brutal persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China.).

Note 11. Pun, Ngai. (2005). *Made in China*. (1st ed.). Hong Kong: Duke University Press.

Note 12. Pun, Ngai. (2005). *Made in China*. (1st ed.). Hong Kong: Duke University Press.

Note 13. Mittelman, James H.. *The Globalization Syndrome*, P. 171