



On Definition of Farmers and Its Connotation & Particularity in Modern Agricultural Background

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Abstract

As part of social stratum, definition of farmers was made certain in traditional agricultural society. In modern society, definition and connotation of farmers need to be given new meaning because features of agriculture transits from traditional agriculture to modern agriculture. In this paper, the author establishes definition of farmers and its connotation and particularity in modern agricultural background by comparison of features between traditional agriculture and modern agriculture. That is, modern farmers are entities of producers and operators that deploy resources in virtue of the market, guide production based on market requirements, supply the market with new products, and regard commercial activities as their stage. Meanwhile, they have characteristics of independence, self-determination, go-aheadism, sociality and innovation compared with traditional farmers.

Keywords: Modern agriculture, Definition of farmers, Agro-businessmen

China is going through a fast social transformation period, which has changed status and roles of social structure and all social strata, so former theories or concepts may mean nothing to the transformed society. In rural economic field, the current modern agricultural construction will bring essential changes to rural social structure and economic structure. Farmers, as the core of modern agricultural construction, will also be endowed with new connotation historically. Therefore how to define the concept of farmers is related to basically positioning of farmers, which means a lot to modern agricultural development and new rural construction.

1. Definition of farmers in traditional agricultural background and its discussion

Definition of farmers and their social structure is basis for study on them, and is also an important basis for construction of Chinese modern agriculture.

China has a brilliant ancient agricultural civilization, so the concept of farmers was recognized early in the old times. According to relative literatures, initial demarcation on farmers was mostly made based on their identity. For instance, in “Gu Liang Zhuan · Cheng Yuan Nian” (BC590), it is recorded that, “there are four types of civilians, namely, bookmen, merchants, farmers, and craftsmen.” “Four types of civilians” here may refer to the system of “Four types of civilians for different occupations” by Guan Zhong. When as prime minister of Qi Guo, Guan Zhong implemented this system. And he regarded the following as measure for stabilizing the national order: sons of scholars as scholars forever, sons of merchants as merchants forever, sons of farmers as farmers forever, and sons of craftsmen as craftsmen forever”. Afterwards, “Han Book Shihuo Records” named as the first Chinese economic history, further expounded on the signification of “four types of civilians”, namely, “those that learn to be an official named as bookmen, those that plough and plant named as farmers, those that make handicrafts named as craftsmen, and those that sell goods named as merchants”. From the classification standard, we can see that, farmers at that time referred to those “that plough and plant” and undertook agricultural production. This knowledge has been influential until now. “Ci Hai” published by Shanghai Ci Pressing House in 1980, and “Dictionary of Economics” in 1992 explained respectively on farmers like this: “laborers who directly conducted agricultural production”, and “laborers who directly conducted agricultural production (not including agricultural workers)”. Externally, definition on farmers by the American Everett M. Rogers is

most representative. In "Rural Social Changes", he thought that, "farmers are producers of agricultural products and traditional countrymen, who tend to be relatively modest, and most of who are autarkic (although not in complete need). That is to say, most of foodstuff and other things they produce are consumed by themselves. Therefore, farmers are autarkic agricultural producers." This also means that, in traditional agricultural background, identity of farmers is positioned as "agricultural producers".

With the social development, social division of labor has been more and more meticulous, especially the springing up of modern agriculture. Definition of traditional farmers not only can't cover features of modern farmers, but also has brought about negative influences on construction of modern agriculture. This phenomenon has aroused attention of scholars. For example, Zheng Hangsheng and Wu Lizi hold the view that, definition of traditional farmers is based on such three unreliable hypotheses as farming hypothesis, rural hypothesis and major occupation hypothesis. After study, they came to a conclusion that, tendency and proportion of non-agriculture in farmers are both increasing, and they are no longer "countrymen" with strong rural features. Therefore, theory on farmers needs to be re-constructed. After study on structure of farmer income, Qian Hang also got a conclusion in support of this viewpoint. Song Guiwu didn't give any direct definition on farmers after study on it, but rather believed that four dimensions should be noticed: time, space, value and domain. In his opinion, specific farmers are only one point in the thought space, and changes happened to them with variance of time, space, value and domain. Only in this way, can definition of farmers take an epoch vigor on it. Then, how should farmers be defined in the modern agricultural background? And what kind of connotation and features should it possess?

2. Modern agriculture and its features

Agriculture can be traced back to the remote antiquity, and it is the first industry that human beings depend on after the formation of "differentiation of human beings and apes". After the developmental period of original agriculture featured with shifting agriculture, and with thousands of years' history, traditional agriculture has borne colorful human civilization. Common defect of traditional agricultural civilization lies in the fact that, its productivity is low, and farmers are defined as "autarkic agricultural producers". In the late 1600s, demand of industrial revolution on raw materials of agricultural products was highly increased, which promoted the transition and transformation of traditional agriculture into modern agriculture. In the 1800s, basic theories, such as Liebig Theory of Plant Nutrition, Darwinian Evolutionism Mendelian Genetics, and achievement of industrial technology – from naissance of steam engines to gradual use of agricultural machines with tractors as representation, as well as progress of chemical industry all contributed to revolution of agricultural production structure. Especially in the second half of the 20th century, development of biological and informative technologies has endowed agriculture with features of modern industry.

In western developed countries, agriculture has become one member of modern industry. Americans define agriculture as "food and fiber system", Japanese as "agriculture and food related industry", and Canadians as "agriculture and farm produce industry". As a matter of fact, in review of features of agricultural development, modern agriculture is a commercialized and marketed enterprise-type agriculture which has been gradually shaped since the industrial revolution. The Academician of Chinese Academy of Sciences Shi Yuanchun defines modern agriculture as a modern enterprise that is forerun by biological and informative technologies, and that is aimed at the global economy and integration of agriculture, industry and trade. Compared with traditional agriculture, modern agriculture has its own special features in production target, production means, operation system and modes:

2.1 Production target

Production target of farmers in modern agriculture is not for "self-use", but for "use of others". That is, their production target is not for their own consumption, but for supplying commodities to the market. In the circumstance of market economy, farmers are active participants of market economy, and they realize the maximum of their own interests through market competition. Therefore, they not only focus on their own consumption and agricultural production per se, but also concentrate on changes in supply and demand relationship on the market, so as to make sure centre of their production factor collocation. At the same time, farmers may take an initiative to cooperate with other market factors, and enjoy socialized agricultural production service, so as to obtain maximum benefits with limited resources. In view of that, farmers are not only producers, but also proprietors, so definition of traditional farmers is not applicable in defining modern farmers.

2.2 Production means

Whether in respects of dynamic means or technical means, modern agriculture has qualitative difference from traditional agriculture. In terms of dynamic means, man and livestock dynamic power and handwork tools are replaced by electric power and machines. In recent years, combination of agricultural machines and computers as well as satellite remote sensing has appeared in developed countries, and water-saving equipment and automatization facilities are applied into agricultural production. Realization of networking on farmland adequate irrigation, farmland gardening, agricultural facility, traffic transportation, energy sources convey, and information communications ,etc, has enabled

modern agricultural dynamic power to have a feature of diversified drive. Natural power that traditional agriculture has been relying on in the long run has been replaced by non-natural power in modern agriculture. Just as Bernal said, "agriculture --the originally primary traditional occupation for human being, is more and more becoming an industry with features of science with a fast speed." Technically, after the "Green revolution" centered with seed improvement of hybridized corns, hybridized rice, and hybridized wheat, etc, biological and informative technologies are also gradually deepening into various aspects, such as agricultural seed quality resources, propagation breeding, soil improvement and plant protection, etc., Depth and extent of agriculture is continually expanding, which has made unclear bound between agriculture and non-agriculture. Control on agriculture is greatly enhanced, so new agricultural production modes such as "Precision agriculture" has come into being. Changes in agricultural production means also call for new requirements for farmers. They should not only have essential cultural making, but should have definite operation and management making.

2.3 Operation system

The system foundation for modern agriculture is market economy. With this system, agriculture is no longer autarkic smallholder industry, but a modern industry that is applicable in market economy, supplies the market with agricultural products, and participates in market competition. Therefore, modern agriculture needs perfect industrial system, which is an important sign of modern agriculture. Industrial system of modern agriculture is applicable in the huge market, organized, and has large-scale production. Within this system, development of modern agriculture has broken through disjointing of production, processing and sale, mutual separation between branches, and obvious town and rural circumscription in traditional agriculture. Modern agriculture makes general use of such producing organizational forms for production as agricultural companies and agricultural cooperative organizations with properties of modern enterprises. There appears a tendency of mutual penetration and mutual amalgamation between agriculture and some various fields, such as industry, commerce, finance, science and technology, etc.. Town and rural economic development has had no obvious regional and industrial limitations. Agricultural chain and radius of agricultural product market have been greatly extended. Specialized production of agriculture, entrepreneurial operation, and socialized service have gradually come into being And even consumption of farmers has gradually transferred from self-support into commercialized consumption. Modern agriculture has broken through internal material circular mode of agriculture, and further implemented open circular mode of materials, which means that modern agriculture has developed from self-support agriculture into market agriculture. In such operation system background, farmers are no more agricultural laborers, but proprietors of agriculture.

2.4 Operation mode

In modern agricultural background, production mode with a family as a unit in traditional agriculture is going to be replaced by modern enterprise operation mode with definite economic scope and organizational structure, which is determined by property of modern agriculture and national situation of China. In the national situation with a large population and small area, modern agricultural operation mode generally adopts intensive operation. In this kind of operation, relatively much capital (including material capital and human capital) is launched into limited land, new scientific technology is adopted, and agricultural operation mode of industrialized operation is implemented through certain organizational carrier. Compared with extensive mode traditional agriculture which is an external quantity expansion development mode, intensive operation is a kind of internal quality centralization development mode. Centralization types can be classified into industrial centralization, enterprise centralization and garden centralization. Changes of modern agricultural operation mode have also proposed new requirements for farmers as principal part of agriculture. If farmers are still positioned as "agricultural producers", then they can not assume the task of building modern agriculture.

3. From farmer to Agro- businessman --- a qualitative leap

The key of developing modern agriculture is the issue of farmers, since modern agriculture is in need of new types of farmers. According to definition by Chinese government, new types of farmers are those with "literacy, technology, and capacity of operation", which is defined from the perspective of essential property of new types of farmers. Economically, the essence of new types of farmers should be "Agro- businessmen"

Compared with concept of "farmers", concept of agro-businessmen" has had greater development in its connotation and extension. Connotation of the former merely includes labors of agricultural production, which determines that farmers can not assume functions of modern agricultural construction. Modern agriculture is a revolutionary reformation on traditional agriculture, and is a new type of diversified and comprehensive industry being developed. Farmers are principal part of modern agricultural construction. Based on the fact above, connotation of farmers has to be diversified, not merely "agricultural producers". But connotation of agro-businessman includes those labors of agricultural production, labors and organizers of agricultural products processing and proprietors of agricultural product marketing. As for the extension, concept of traditional farmers is confined only to the scope of "agricultural production", while concept of agro-businessmen not only includes "agricultural production", but also extended to industrial fields or

commercial fields related to agricultural production, such as “agricultural product processing” and “agricultural product marketing”, etc., Currently, western agriculturally developed countries always study on agriculture with its relative industries. For instance, Texas A·M University in American set up International Food & Agribusiness Management Association, which is an international organization specially studies agriculture and its agribusiness management. Its purpose is to organically combine production factors of agricultural production and processing as well as sale, so as to form the largest productivity. In 1999, Holand established the world-famous Agricultural Chain Competence Center, whose target was to cultivate agricultural chain of domestic agriculture and the agribusiness through international cooperation. Proposing and implementation of agricultural chain theory essentially meant realization of optimized collocation of production factors to the greatest extent. In 1989, Australia set up Export Marketing Skills Program, whose aim was to improve market operation capacity and management ability in agricultural enterprises on the part of agricultural producers and operating principals of medium and small-size agribusiness. And its aim was also to take full advantages of international and domestic production and market resources. All in all, in the modern agricultural background, concept of farmers has developed towards diversification, and has surpassed scope of “agricultural producers”.

Proposing of agro-businessman provides theoretical and conceptual break-through meaning for us to cultivate new types of farmers, to develop modern agriculture and to further promote construction of harmonious society.

Traditional farmers corresponded with natural economy. They began with the sunrise and stopped with the sunset, and the products they produced were mainly consumed by themselves, and it was a typical natural product economy, which was a fundamental positioning on farmers in Chinese agricultural society with thousands of years. After 1949, China implemented planned economy under the public ownership, and the former traditional farmers were named as team members or associators of people community in the collective economy. However, their products were still planned products, not commodities. Without consideration of changes in production relation, no qualitative change has taken place in their labor property (or property of economic activities). The so-called “handing in public grain, selling remaining grain, and the rest for ration” was target of farmers’ production cycle and production activities in the planned economic system. Farmers at that time were still traditional farmers with autarkic property. But differently, means of production was changed from private owned enterprises into state owned enterprises, and economic shape was changed from natural product economy into planned product economy.

Agro-businessmen corresponded with market economy. Since the policy of reforming and opening-up, China has implemented socialism market economic system, which defines farmers as participation groups in the market system, and in which status and role of farmers have changed. Based on survival and development needs and in the market economic system, farmers’ agricultural labor is no longer aimed at self-consumption, but at commercial exchange. This kind of exchange integrates rural and social economy into one, and changes the puzzled situation in which rural economy is totally out of the development of social economy. Through economic integration and commercial exchange rural economy has got consecutive improvement. It goes without saying that, farmers merely with traditional particularity can not adapt to features of new rural economic development. new economic system and relation calls for higher requirements of cultural making, technical level and operating as well organizing capacities from farmers, which is exactly the concept scope of agro-businessman. Only one Chinese character difference between farmers and agro-businessmen, but their connotations are worlds apart. Agro-businessman is expression of economic meaning for modern farmers, and is a new category. What agro-businessmen reflect is a new economic relation: entia of producers and operators that deploy resources in virtue of the market, guide production based on market requirements, supply the market with new products, and regard commercial activities as their stage.

4. Particularity of modern famers --- clear-cut positioning view of subjectivity

As far as essential differences between traditional farmers and modern farmers, the main different lies in the positioning of their subjectivity. Subjectivity of human beings is their essential particularity, which means that people start from their principal status in the practical activities, and which is functional feature in controlling objects in different ways. The reason why traditional farmers can not play their role in modern rural economy is that, they are not aware of their subjectivity. In “Transforming Traditional Agriculture”, Schultz held the view that, traditional agriculture can do nothing for economic development, which is not only due to operation mode of traditional agriculture, but mainly due to the fact that, traditional farmers don’t possess subjective and objective capacities for making contributions to rural economic development. therefore, in the final part of this book, Schultz postulated the idea of investing human resource capital in farmers, and human resource capital theory was thereby formed. As for modern farmers who play a subjectivity role in the rural economic development, it is required that they have definite subjectivity consciousness. This should contain several aspects, such as independence, self-determination, initiative, sociality and creativity of human beings.

Their independence is revealed in the independent social status and professional features. It means that farmers can have equal development opportunities and rights as other social strata, and they have ability and requirements of

obtaining more social resources and system planning for enjoying social development achievements with other social strata.

Their initiative is revealed in the strong push towards promoting their own wealth and rural economic development, in their desire and ability in initiatively learning modern science, intelligence development and policy support.

Their self-determination is revealed in the democratic management and self-management rights of selecting their profession and labor means, independently dominating their labor target and labor achievements, independently deciding to enter or exit market network, participating in market competition and independently participating in rural political organizations of grass roots.

Their sociality is revealed in the fact that, they are no longer confined to the enclosed life of "not communicating even though the sound of chooks and dogs can be heard", life target they are in pursuit of is no longer the plain rural tranquil of "thirty mu of land and one head of cattle, kids and wife and in a warm "kang""", and that farmers put themselves in the whole social environment, and communicate successfully with other social strata. They are no longer unacquainted with modern cities, no longer feel awe-stricken against business suits, and have complete confidence to have economic or social communications with people in cities. They directly position themselves as equal members as others in the social system.

Their creativity is revealed in their creative spirit, undertaking consciousness, and creative labor in altering their destiny and developing rural economy, as well as in constantly upgrading and realizing their social value and self-value.

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