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How political capital contributes to a stratified rural China **— based on investigation in Z village, Anhui province, China¹**

Gradually, with the increase of domestic economy, stratification has appeared in rural China in the past twenty to twenty-five years. Stratification in this paper is confined to economic stratification which includes household income per year and total assets. A domestic characteristic of such stratification in rural China is obvious that political capital owner plays the most important role in the process. The political capital owner means that who occupy political positions in rural areas. They can achieve social, economic, and cultural capitals through political capital. Such inequality on opportunity mainly contributes to a divided rural China. In addition, the amazing improvement of urbanization in China today also has influence on the stratification, to a certain extent. It seems that ‘socialist village’ model, typical as the Huaxi Village model (华西村模式), can solve the increasingly severe stratification issue through a collectivism way on economy, for instance, establishing village-owned enterprise sharing out bonuses. This way, however, just works superficially. Even, on the contrary, such model will cause more serious political and economic inequality in rural area. Form a modern village public sphere, as one probable way to solve the economic stratification problem, confronts the dilemma under current CCP political system in rural district.

1. Hypothesis and methodology

Under current political system, political capital contributes to the stratification issue through two ways, on the one hand, directly converting into economic capital and cultural capital, and such inter-convert is without equal distribution among villagers and elites; on the other hand, indirectly through urbanization process.

We did a field empirical research in Z village in December, 2012. Necessary information was collected by our team through structural and semi-structural

¹ This paper is used for applying for the Kyoto University – Nanjing University Sociology & Anthropology Forum, on August, 2013, the city of Kyoto, Japan. I myself take all responsibility for this paper. Timeline: primary thought and empirical investigation, Nov. to Dec., 2012; first draft, Jan., 2013; thanks for the help on sentence revise from Peter Bollig from Kansas University, and Zoe Elizabeth Noyes from the Law school, American University. The second draft was used as a presentation on Professor Webb’s ‘Modernity’ course, Jan., 2013; third and forth drafts, Apr. and May, 2013. This current version is the forth draft. This paper will be perfected continuously.

interviews². As for the sample selecting, firstly we got to know basic information of Z village in advance through talking with village director. Then our team made an exploratory research in order to primarily know economic situation of Z village and modify interview questions. After this step, we select different households on different economic income levels in order to make samples we selected typical on the whole. The final sample number was around 203. After information collection, my teammates and me worked together to arrange and exchange important information.

Here is the basic information of Z village. It locates in Jixi Town, Xuancheng City, Anhui Province, PRC. With nearly one thousand year long history, Z village which contains five natural villages develops well in current time. Now there almost 1,700 people live there. Among all these residents there are eighteen family names, and the family name Hu (胡) occupies around ninety percent of the whole. Z village is around 5.21 square kilometers with average 0.7 square kilometers cultivated land per person. Residents mainly develop crop farming and forestry. Furthermore, inhabitants pay much attention to education for their children.

2. Brief review: stratification in rural China from 1949 to today

Before the year of 1976, in Mao's socialist China, positive or negative, Central Government policy always had huge impact on every aspect. Recurring upheavals happened in the fragile rural China, a main stage of kinds of socialist movements. Dramatically, rural China stepped into a time of economic development as well as stratification after the reformation initiated by Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping in 1978, another vital turn point for China in last century.

(1) From 1949 to 1978

After the CCP came into power in 1949, China's mainland turned into 'Mao Zedong's time'⁴. Until 1976, in his time, rural China was regarded as subordinate to urban China, and agriculture was subordinate to heavy industry. In the political dimension, Liu Shaoqi gave a lecture on "how to be a good communist" to call for cadres to selflessly "serve the people"⁵. In the economic dimension, peasants' private lands obtained from the third Land Reform in 1952 gradually became collectively owned. Including the 'Great Leap Forward' from 1958 to 1960, and the 'People's Commune' beginning at 1960, this series of communist movements finally made the countryside a non-stratified society from economic perspective, which was the goal of Mao's socialism and communism. Then, "between 1970 and about 1977, a special place was occupied by the campaigns to 'learn from Dazhai' (Tachai, 大寨)"⁶. Why

2 Interview questions are seen in the accessory I in both Chinese and English versions.

3 In order to collect more information to support my research, I will do more interviews in future.

4 'Mao's time' for short

5 Larry M. Wortzel, *Class in China Stratification in A Classless Society*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. p.83.

6 Frank Leeming, *Rural China Today*, New York: Longman Group, 1985, pp. 25.

Dazhai became the most typical socialist model then? Mostly because Dazhai combined political principle that laying emphasize on absolute equality and economic principles paying attention on agricultural production together perfectly in that special era⁷, which distinctly reflected the huge influence of the socialist political system then. Hence, economic stratification from 1949 to around 1976 was effaced by political movements gradually.

Furthermore, in the period from 1976 to 1978, these two years was seen as a transnational period. Economic situation in rural China was still worse off as a consequence of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ together with the rigid bureaucratic system, which stimulated Chinese peasants and initiated a bottom-up rural reformation regarded as the forerunner of the Reform and Opening Policy.

(2) After the Reform and Opening Policy, particularly after 1984

After fierce political struggles, in this period, “enrichment of the people, especially the working class, is now a proclaimed aim of the Chinese system”⁸. In rural China, grain production was the biggest problem for peasants who strived against long-term famine, starvation, and penury mainly causing by inflexible political system and ridiculous economic decisions then. They were in badly needs of food growth. The Reform and Opening Policy, which originated from the spontaneous land reform by peasants in Anhui and Sichuan province, was the turning point of economic stratification in rural China. People’s communes in this period were canceled formally⁹. After the upsurge of grain production, before 1984, the year of the urban economic reform, Chinese peasants earned money just from agriculture. After the urban economic reform, the process of Chinese urbanization speeded up. Meanwhile, the *Hukou* (户口) system which plays a significant role in national population organization of PRC¹⁰ embraced itself reformation. Even some scholar believes that the real Chinese miracle happened in 1980s originated in rural China¹¹. Because of the loosening of limitation on urban household registration for normal peasants¹², economic stratification in rural China appeared gradually, which will be analyzed in detail later.

3. As a reality: rural China now is divided into three classes

In this paper, the theoretical hypothesis of the stratification phenomenon in rural

7 Ibid., pp. 25.

8 Ibid., pp. 3.

9 Ibid., pp. 38 – 40.

10 Fei-Ling Wang, China’s Evolving Institutional Exclusion: the Hukou System and Its Transformation, China Papers, New Zealand Contemporary Chin Research Center, 2009, No. 18, pp.1 – 28.

11 Yasheng Huang, Professor of Global Economics and Management, *China Boom: Rural China in 1980s*, July 1, 2010, presented on the website: <http://asiasociety.org/essays/detail/212>

12 In the beginning of 1980s, such political loosening just aimed to village cadres’ families.

China is: economically speaking, there exist three classes, namely the upper-class, the middle-class, and the lower-class in rural China today. This assumption can be proved from three aspects as follows:

(1) Relative research overview: the stratification is inevitable

Some Chinese scholars have noticed this stratification issue in rural areas. As Yan Yunxiang mentioned¹³, Chinese rural reform in the early 1980s held the slogan that ‘let some peasants get rich first’, however, who would get rich first was the core issue at the beginning of reformation. Based on his empirical research on Xiajia village, Heilongjiang province, he classified this village into four classes based on economic performance. And he put forward that “political capital including social networks and fixed salaries”¹⁴ made four households the top ten richest in this village. Lu Xueyi did his analysis on consumption in rural areas. He found that the difference on consumption among farmers has taken place¹⁵, which meant that the economic stratification in rural area has appeared to some extent. He also quoted data in 2004 provided by State Statistic Bureau to prove his viewpoint¹⁶. Zhang Qian Forrest once did analysis on Chinese social hierarchy from history to today including the socialist political hierarchy in Mao’s time¹⁷. He thought that “in both rural and urban areas, a new economic elite has emerged”¹⁸, and there existed the “official-commoner division”¹⁹

How many classes are there in rural China? To some extent, skill differentiation and distribution of economic capital in rural China lead to the stratification. For instance, the incomes of peasants who work in non-agricultural industry, township enterprise, and agriculture are different²⁰. Based on such differentiation, some scholars provide an eight-class division²¹, or ten-class division²². All in all, regardless of how many

13 Yunxiang Yan, The Impact of Rural Reform on Economic and Social Stratification in a Chinese Village, *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 27 (Jan., 1992), pp. 1-23, The University of Chicago Press, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University, Australian National University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*. At 1 – 3.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 14.

15 Xueyi Lu, Institute of Sociology, Chinese Academy of Social Science, *The Changing in Agriculture, the Countryside and Farmers in China*, presented on the website: <http://www.sociology.cass.cn/english/papers/P020070306306524375309.pdf>

16 “in 2004, the rural people can be divided by annual income level as: less than 600 RMB: 2.25%; 601-1000 RMB: 6.07%; 1001-3000 RMB: 51.3%; 3001-5000 RMB: 25.29%; above 5000 RMB: 15.02%. These numbers are indicative to the stratification of rural population in terms of asset/income.” *Ibid.*, pp. 9.

17 Qian Forrest, Zhang, Singapore Management University, Status and Hierarchy: A Framework for Understanding Stratification and Inequality in Today’s China, *In Understanding Chinese Society* (pp. 96-110). London: Routledge. Available at: http://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/soss_research/1037

18 *Ibid.*, pp.2.

19 *Ibid.*, pp.13.

20 何朝银, 人口流动与当代中国农村社会分化 [J]. 浙江社会科学, 2006.02, 95 – 102. pp.98.

21 朱宏军, 郭玉亮, 转型期农村社会阶层分化的现状及特征分析 [J]. 南京林业大学学报(社会科学版), 2005, 04, 15 – 19, pp.16 – 18.

divisions we choose to classify Chinese rural society, the phenomenon of stratification, surely speaking, really exists.

(2) CGSS Data analysis

According to national statistic data, the average income of rural people in the year of 2008²³ is 4,700 Yuan, with a GDP per capital of 22,640 Yuan to all Chinese citizens. These two data in this paper are going to be used to measure and identify rural class division. What's more, through analyzing the latest database, the CGSS 2008²⁴ by statistic software STATA, the three-class division is clearer, concreter, and more specific.

According to data analysis, as a matter of fact, different self-identifications given by rural residents show the subjective class stratification. From Chart 1.1 we can see that, 33.49% of them regard themselves as belonging to the lower class, while 54.64% think they belong to the middle class. Although only 1.74% of them have the upper-class identification, the upper-class truly exists in rural area.

Belongs to	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Lower	866	33.49	33.49
Workers	262	10.13	43.62
Middle-lower	639	24.71	68.33
Middle	774	29.93	98.26
Middle-upper	41	1.59	99.85
Upper	4	0.15	100.00
Total	2,586	100.00	

Chart 1.1: Self-consciousness on social stratum

Objectively speaking, based on the GDP per capital date mentioned before, the income gap among rural Chinese indeed takes place. And moreover, such a gap is huge to some extent. Through Chart 2, we can see the income differences among the three classes.

Variable	Observation	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Lower	503	1770.119	1333.227	0	4,600
Middle	488	10209.18	4725.123	4,800	22,600
Upper	73	53824.25	79571.82	23,000	612,000

Chart 1.2: Different classes' average income per year

22 陆学艺，张厚义，张其仔，转型时期农民的阶层分化—对大寨，刘庄，华西等 13 个村庄的实证研究 [J]. 中国社会科学，1992, 04, 137 – 151, pp. 140 – 144.

23 Rural people mean those who hold the rural household registration.
CGSS 2008: China General Social Survey in 2008, collectively made by Ren Min University and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. It is legally downloaded.

(3) Empirical research: investigation in Z village in Anhui Province, China²⁵

Although Z village is not a very wealthy village, the stratification inside is surprising. Based on information obtained through the investigation to villages²⁶, the richest household in Z village could earn hundreds of thousands Yuan per year. However, such a household is rare, like, for example, the family of village secretary of Z village, who established a family-owned toy factory several years ago. Most villagers earn thirty to fifty thousand Yuan per year, and they regard themselves as middle class. And some villagers just relying on agriculture see themselves as lower class. Here are four interview records:

Record one: male, around 50 years old, lives with his wife. His son works in Hangzhou city, and daughter works in Nanjing city. He and his wife earn money from a small scale farmland. His class identification is “I belong to the middle class, and maybe even lower class. I can’t earn too much in one year. I am much worse off than the rich in our village, also there are some villagers who are worse off than me in my village though”.

Record two: male, around 50 years old, his elder daughter works in Hangzhou city, and young daughter works in Shanghai city. He has own medium-scale business in the village. His life quality is better than average level of Z village. And his class identification is “I belong to the middle class, and I am better off than other families, like my neighbors. From this perspective, I am the member of upper class. However, I am not as rich as those who own factories, like our village secretary. So, all in all, I regard myself as middle class, or middle-upper class”.

Record three: male, the village director, around 55 years old, his daughter now works in Japan, and his son has set up a company in Hangzhou city. His wife lives in the town. He runs his own business in Jixi town.²⁷ He thinks that he belongs to the middle-upper class. “I am the village director, so I have responsibility to create better life for villagers. I have my own business in the town. My wife takes care of it. In this village, of course I am not the richest. But I am better than the average level. So I can say that I belong to the middle-upper class”.

Record four: Male, around 45 years old, the village Party secretary. His father had once been the village Party secretary. His father set up a factory in the town which now is ran by him. This factory can bring lots of economic benefits to him per year. He says that “Maybe I am a little bit richer than some other villages, and all money is legal. Running a factory is not an easy work. I regard my household as middle-upper class because some other villagers are richer than me actually. They have business in cities. I have responsibility to make our village better, not just my family.”

25 I did this investigation in Zhai Tan village (‘Z village’ for short), Jixi county, Anhui province, China, in December, 2012.

26 I use structured interview to collect information.

27 Ruled by the Constitution, people in rural area enjoy self-governance, and the village director is not official as such. Thus, they can run business legally. Because of this reason, it is easier for the inter convertibility between political capital and economic capital in rural China.

From these records, we can clearly know that the economic stratification is to some extent usual in Z village. Income gap sometimes can be large in rural area, not only in Z village but also in many other Chinese rural areas. Now we should to analyze the reason which mainly leads to such stratification.

3. Reasons of stratification in rural China

In this paper, holistically speaking, stratification in rural China is caused collaboratively by two reasons, the internal reason and the external reason.

(1) Internal cause: how political capital influence stratification

a. Capital theory: Bourdieu, Coleman, Lin Nan, and Granovetter

Bourdieu's capital theory is based on 'social world' framework, an "accumulated history". He thought that "capital, which, in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulated and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible"²⁸. His capital theory shows that Bourdieu regarded capital as the potential capacity for an individual to hit his or her goal in specific social occasion, and that, capital is attached to one's social identity which has a positive relation with the quality and quantity of capital he or she can use.

In fact, Bourdieu's capital is not limited to economic capital. Bourdieu put capital into the social structure, which is broader than economic structure. He firstly "expanded the ideas and metaphor of economic interests to include non-economic goods and services"²⁹. Then he provided three different types of capital, namely the economic capital containing money and property; the cultural capital containing cultural goods and service like educational credentials, and personal taste; the social capital containing acquaintances and social networks³⁰.

To Bourdieu, political capital belongs to social capital. It is a "variation of social capital"³¹. His analysis on political capital is somewhat limited. Instead, he focused more on cultural capital than political capital. Cultural capital, in European tradition and society, is a symbol of social status. However, in rural China, it is political capital that functions behind cultural capital, and especially reflects on the issue of education which will be further discussed later.

From the perspective of social exchange theory, Coleman thought that social actors

28 Only in the social world framework can capital function. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Forms of Capital*, New York: Greenwood, *Handbook of Theory and Research For the Sociology of Education*, 1986, pp.241 – 258.

29 Ibid., pp. 241.

30 Kimberly Casey, *Defining Political Capital: A Reconsideration of Bourdieu's Interconvertibility Theory*, Illinois State University Conference for students of Political Science, April 4, 2008, pp.2.

31 Ibid., pp.3.

exchange social resources with each other for the sake of self-interest. Such tremendous times of exchanges firstly form social knots and ties, then the whole social network. That is to say, social ties consist of social structure, and they themselves are social capital³².

Lin Nan concentrated on the direct and reciprocal relation between social capital and other factors, including individual social status, economic benefits etc. He provided seven assumptions that constitute his capital theory. Combing Bourdieu's 'social structure', Coleman's 'social exchange', and Lin Nan's 'social resource', we can see that capital functions in a specific system in which embed different kinds of social resources. Therefore, Granovetter's 'embeddedness theory'³³ seems quite eloquent and useful. Granovetter figured out that capital is embedded into social-economic structure.

All in all, based on Bourdieu, Coleman, Lin Nan, and Granovetter's capital theories, political capital seems to be "the sum of combining other types of capital for purposive political action or the return of an investment of political capital which is returned into the system of production"³⁴.

b. Political capital in rural China today

Why pay much attention to political capital in rural China today? It is mostly because the current political situation in China today, that is dominated by the CCP political bureaucratic system has a deep influence on not only urban regions but also countryside. Based on the Constitution of PRC, the governance in rural China is self-autonomy by villagers. Nonetheless, the effect of Party organization on basic level is still huge in today's countryside.

Inasmuch as there is an entire political structure in rural area which has direct connection with higher level bureaucratic system, and also political factor plays a key role in daily affairs, political capital which exerts function in political structure should be paid great attention.

Therefore, we should define what actually the political capital in rural China is. In this paper, based on hypothesis, information obtained from investigation, and relative capital theories, political capital in rural China means the capacity to directly or indirectly gain economic, cultural, and social resources for individuality, family, or clan through his or her political position and status.

c. Two kinds of political leadership identity in rural China

As Fei Xiaotong pointed out in his classic³⁵, in rural China, there existed a 'gentry

32 Gao Lian-ke, On the Theory of Coleman's Social Capital, Journal of Bei Hua University (Social Science), 2005,6 (2).

33 This theory is provided by Granovetter in his book *Embeddedness*. Embeddedness is the core concept.

34 Op, cit., Kimberly Casey, pp.4.

35 费孝通, 乡土中国[M], 北京: 北京出版社, 2005.

group' between national power and local peasants. Such a Chinese gentry group was vital for local social control and management before 1949, a period during which Chinese society was mutually constructed by the state and clan³⁶.

From 1949 to 1978, the gentry group was eliminated by socialist and communist movements. The Party organization replaced the gentry group to control villagers as well as manage social affairs. A turning point occurred in the year of 1982 when the basic principle of 'villager autonomy' that regulates the village direct-democracy was formally ruled by the Constitution³⁷. This kind of villager autonomy, similar to the situation before 1949, needs village elites. However, local power should be controlled by the Party organization. Based on this logic, therefore, the leadership constituted by village elites after the year of 1978 in rural China has two identities. One is that they belong to local gentry group; second is that they are members of political power system. Their elite identity is the basis for their political leadership, and their leadership identity is directly and tightly connected with the whole political power system.

d. How political capital in rural China contributes to the stratification?

To begin with, "political capital as the capacity to influence political decisions"³⁸ which "includes big as well as small decisions that are taken everyday in a great variety of public and private arenas"³⁹, brings political resources to political capital owners. Namely, when you have power to make decision(s) on daily affairs, you gain the political capital which can potentially bring about benefits.

Secondly, political capital can consequently bring about social, economic, and cultural capitals. Such capital inequality contributes to stratification in rural China consistently. Why can political capital result in capital gaps in other forms of capital? It is because different kinds of capital are related with one another. Bourdieu thought that different types of capital are inter-convertible one into another. As Casey said, "Inter-conversion is strongly metaphysical in orientation since exchanges between material and non-material forms are involved"⁴⁰, and also it is not equally possible in all directions⁴¹. Based on the context of rural China, political capital and social capital are close to each other. Social capital is the possibility of using social resources in social network. In the Chinese cultural context it corresponds to 'Guanxi (关系)', or 'social connection', the Chinese way to gain social resources. Social capital can be seen as the bridge between political capital and economic capital.

36 即家国同构：国家权力在家族运作中的复制，所谓的“国法”、“家规”，以此维系社会稳定。

37 The Constitution of PRC in 1982, Article 111.

38 Daniel Schugurensky, Citizenship Learning and Democratic Engagement: Political Capital Revisited, The 41st Annual Education Research Conference: Conference Proceedings, pp. 417 – 422, at 420.

39 Ibid., pp.420.

40 Op.cit., Kimberly Casey, pp.3.

41 Op.cit., Kimberly Casey, pp.3.

According to Lin Nan's theory⁴², a higher structure position can lead to more social capital; the one who has more social capital can get a change to have more access to better economic resources, in China, which means chances like establishing a factory or natural resources trading. Actually, pragmatically speaking, economic capital refers to many aspects including average income per year, quality of daily life, quality of education, and to most Chinese especially the concept of 'face'⁴³ etc.

The economic capital in rural China seems to have greater importance than in urban areas. Two reasons can explain this. First, the gross economic capital in rural China is much less than that in urban area. There is less of a chance for both quantity and diversity for people in the Chinese countryside to gain economic capital. Hence, as a scarce resource, competition for economic capital among people in rural China is furious. Second, based on what aforesaid, however, because economic capital is connected to other capital, especially the political capital, the chance to gain economic capital is not equal to every household, which means that higher political positions brings more economic capital. Unlike when there is a mature economic system on urban area, economic capital embeds itself into social network and political structure deeply.

Based on investigation in Z village, it is obvious that upper class persons in this village mostly belong to the local political elite, typical as the secretary of the Party and the village director. The secretary has a family-owned toy factory. And his father was the former secretary of the Party. The village director runs his own business in the Jixi county town. Actually, his entire family is living in the county. Both of these two political elites are richer than any other villages. As a matter of fact, their economic capital including the chance to set up a factory and business information, are all benefits from their status as political elite.

(2) External cause: in rural China, which kind of people can gain more benefits from urbanization?

Urbanization should be seen as the external cause for stratification in rural area. 'External' means the process of urbanization happens in cities, which of course is outside of the rustic region. Although now China is under an 'urban-rural' division on every dimension, the economic connection between these two parts can not be ignored. Urbanization exerts its influence on stratification indirectly. When analyzing the influence of urbanization, political capital also should be taken into very consideration.

42 Op.cit., Lin Nan. In his book, as aforementioned, Lin Nan put forward to seven assumptions to explain the relationship between social capital (wildly speaking, including political capital) and economic capital. He used several instances to prove his series of assumptions.

43 面子，门庭，皆需经济能力之装饰。这是中国社交文化中必不可少的一环，亦是极为重要之推动力。面子涉及诸多方面，如一家之收入、房子建设之水准、子女教育质量等。在Z村的实地调查过程中，村民对于面子之重视，一如普天下的华人群体。而普遍而言，访谈对象对于自身之经济能力与获取经济收入的途经（经济资本），有着较为清晰的认识。

a. What can urbanization provides to rural area?

The urban-rural dichotomy in China nowadays causes unbalanced development. Li Changping wrote a letter to Premier Zhu Rongji emphasizing the ‘ACF Issues’, namely issues of the agriculture, the countryside, and the farmer. In China, the central government initiated ‘feedback from industry to agriculture’ in the year of 2004. As Joseph Stiglitz who won the Nobel Prize on economy in the year of 2001 once said, the high-tech in America and high-speed urbanization in China are two main engines promoting global economic development. Certainly, Chinese urbanization has huge influence on rural China. What urbanization can provide to rural areas concentrate on three aspects:

Firstly, cities, suburbs, and towns can provides jobs for surplus male and female labor forces in rural areas. Peasants who work in urban areas form the peasant-laborer group. “There are 490 million labor forces out of the 900 million rural population, in which 300 million or more are farming, and the rest 200 million are non-farm job takers, 120 million of which are working out of their home village or home province.”⁴⁴ Secondly, urbanization provides huge market to rural China, which can promote township enterprise’s development. Thirdly, urbanization provides much better cultural and medical conditions for peasants.

b. In rural China, different classes benefit from urbanization differently

In fact, not everyone in rural China benefits the same from urbanization. The profit distribution is influenced by political capital directly.

To those capital owners, political capital and economic capital can convert into each other. They can turn their political into economic capital. For example, the village director in Z village set up his own factory in Jixi town several years ago. His daughter now works in Japan, and his son set up a company with the director’s financial aid. Extremely speaking, in some provinces which have plentiful natural resources, village directors or Party secretary can gain ownership of mineral resource, which brings amazing wealth to them.

To most peasants, working in city is the best way for them to earn money. In Z village, most male labors choose to work in Jixi County, or cities around, like the city of Nanjing, Hangzhou, or Shanghai. Based on investigations, their monthly incomes range from 3,000 Yuan to 6,000 Yuan. Although such a wage level is higher than the average level of Chinese rural area aforesaid in the Chart 1.2, they are still considered as middle class when comparing with the real upper class in Z village.

To some peasants who have no specific skills or other kinds of human capital⁴⁵, they can just make daily ends meet because their income is meager. I met a man around fifty years old in Z village. He has no children, and he and his wife live off a small

44 Op.cit., Xueyi Lu, pp. 8.

45 Here the human capital means individual ability to earn money, such as a specific skill, or educational background.

farmland. His yearly income is just several thousand Yuan. He has never been political leader in Z village. What he gets from the urbanization is almost nothing.

4. Stratification solidification: current situation in rural China

Based on Sun Liping's theory, the stratification in Chinese society today is solidifying gradually⁴⁶. Interest groups, who gain economic interests from political capital under the current CCP bureaucratic system, fabricate their social networks in which they can accumulate amounts of social, economic, and cultural resources. And they consist of a fixed relationship circle which the outsider has no chance to enter. Such serious social inequality decreasing opportunities for the mass brings about a series of side-effects, such as social and political instability.

In rural China, the process of stratification has not finished yet. Nonetheless, the danger of solidification of stratification has occurred. The upper class in rural areas consolidates its preponderance position through two ways.

(1) Use economic capital to keep the 'ownership' of political capital

Based on Bourdieu's inter-convertibility theory, economic capital can convert into political capital reversely. Generally speaking, economic elites in rural China are always those who have strong social ability. Thus, they have more advantages to get or maintain political capital. As Lu Fuying said, "economic elites governing a village is now a form of self-governance by villagers themselves. Since their authority rises from the villagers, those elites are naturally subject to the approval of the village"⁴⁷. Obviously, the economic capital can help to maintain the political capital, and further to help to maintain the advantageous position in the social stratum.

(2) Strengthen cultural capital through investing in education

Cultural capital always plays a significant role in Chinese society. Cultural capital, to Bourdieu, means educational background, aesthetic taste, and cultural identity etc. In Chinese society, due to the fact that education is directly connected with one's future, especially to people in rural China who lack other opportunities for social mobility. Hence, education is of great importance to the distinction between different classes. Indeed the educational inequality among different classes is more and more obvious. Bourdieu once did an analysis of the French university education system. He found that students from the upper class are more likely to enter better universities at a younger age, and choose better majors than students from middle or lower classes inasmuch as their better ability, such as linguistic competence, which they get from

46 孙立平,《断裂-20世纪90年代以来的中国社会》, [M].社会科学文献出版社, 2003;《失衡-断裂社会的运作逻辑》, [M].社会科学文献出版社, 2004.

47 Lu Fuying, Village Governance by Economic Capable Persons: A New Pattern of Rural Politics in Rural China, *China Economist*, Vol.7, No.4, pp.98 – 106, July – August, 2012. pp.101.

highly-qualified high schools as well as family education⁴⁸.

For economic purposes, the higher one's education background is, the better career and income one can expect. Based on their economic advantage, the upper class in rural China invests more in their children education than the middle and lower classes. This has far-reaching influence on the stratification solidification in the next generation. Namely, generally speaking, the higher educational level that children from the upper class enjoy, the better their future will be, as compared to children from middle or lower classes. Actually, the next generation will inherit its class identity from their parents. Like in Z village, most children from the middle class study in Anhui Technology University, or other provincial universities. In China, Anhui province is lack of resources of high education when compared with Jiangsu province, Beijing city, or Shanghai city etc. By contrast, the village director's daughter once studied in Japan. His son got his bachelor degree from a university in Hangzhou, and although his university is not famous, the city of Hangzhou is much better than cities in Anhui province.

6. Inequality in this generation, and such inequality will be inherited by the next generation

As for this generation in rural China, stratification is heavily influenced by the unequal distribution of political capital. Although the process of stratification has not been fully accomplished yet, the danger of stratification solidification has appeared.

Capital can be inherited. Although political capital can not be inherited directly under the autonomy principle in rural China, it can transform itself into economic and cultural capital. These two important capitals are beneficial to the next generation. Due to this, the inequality will increase consistently, and then bring about even more severe instability to rural areas. Is there any benign development model for rural China to establish a relative equal society? In this society, not only the capital owner but also all villagers can benefit from the political capital.

7. Huaxi model: a real equal socialism model that can solve the stratification problem?

In many years, Huaxi village is considered as a very successful socialism model in China. Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zeming, and Hu Jintao, CCP three generation leaders all spoke highly of Huaxi village because they saw it as a typical token of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Huaxi is unusual because of its the communal fund as a holdover from a village-owned enterprise⁴⁹. Huaxi is proud of its collectivism joint-stock economic

48 [法] 布迪厄, 帕隆索 (P. Bourdieu, J-C. Passeron), 邢克超译, 继承人(*Les Héritier*), [M]. 北京: 商务印书馆, 2002.

49 Nathaniel Flagg, Branding Heaven: Commodity, Fantasy, and Conceptual Architecture in the Chinese Countryside, *Columbia East Asia Review*, pp.19 – 38, at 23.

model. It seems that every villager can gain relative equal profits, which can avoid the stratification. However, we should question that whether this equality is real. Because residents in Huaxi village are much richer than any other villagers in rural areas, some essential issues are concealed.

In the Huaxi model, superficially speaking, political capital is not used to increase personal interests, but to develop the village-owner enterprise, which brings about benefits for everyone. It seems that there is no lower class in Huaxi village, all belong to middle class. However, there is in fact an upper class in Huaxi village, which controls almost all village-owner wealth under its current political-economic system. From this perspective, the stratification in Huaxi village is extreme, different from other Chinese villages, has its own character. Different from the Z village in which village political elites focus more on public affairs, leaders in Huaxi village, especially the Party secretary Wu Renbao concentrate the most on developing collectivism economy.

However, there are several serious inside issues in Huaxi village. First, the connection between political capital and economic capital is tighter than any other places in China. Wu Renbao's family members are almost considered to be the leader group in Huaxi village. Thus, they control almost all political capital. Based on these political capitals, they can further control economic capital like by making decisions regarding the affairs of village-owner enterprises under the collectivist system. Certainly, their incomes are higher than average villagers. We can see that the inter-convertibility between political capital and economic capital is even easier than Z village. Secondly, based on the first point, is Huaxi a real non-stratified village? Wu Renbao's four sons occupy 90.2% amount of village capital⁵⁰, thus making the family the upper class in Huaxi village. Especially after Huaxi village expanded its area to several surrounding villages, the new Huaxi village confronted even more severe inequality in its economic. Thirdly, Huaxi village insists on its so-called socialist way through collectivist governances on social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions, which is close to a totalitarian rule. Thus, the Huaxi model can not really solve the stratification issue in rural China under current CCP system, although villagers in Huaxi village are relative rich.

8. Brief conclusion: the dilemma in front of rural China

Obviously, political capital in rural China can bring about inequality on economic and cultural capitals, which not only impacts this generation but also has side-effect influence on the next generation. The stratification in rural areas has appeared, and has the tendency to be consolidated. Under current political system, no model can be used to solve the stratification effectively. From relative sociological theory, a modern

50 周怡，中国第一村：华西村经济转型中的后集体主义，中国高校人文社会科学信息网：
<http://www.sinoss.net/2010/0313/19437.html>.

public sphere should be established to undermine the huge influence of political capital.

Tocqueville once analyzed the democracy in an American town. He thought that the American town's democratic way was great. However it confronts the danger of totalitarian rule⁵¹ because the mass will be accustomed to being ruled by a political elite. The situation in rural China today is much more complicated than American town then. Under the current CCP political system, direct democracy in rural China is limited due to Party members, who have priority to gain political capital. Hence, it is difficult to form a real public sphere in rural China. As Habermas said, the public sphere is where "citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion, thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely"⁵². Middle and lower classes in rural China need to protect their personal interest through a mature public sphere. However, decision-making on political and public affairs in rural China are mostly determined by elites in political system.

Hence, now, rural China confronts a dilemma: if the political capital owners concentrate on personal interests, the stratification in rural areas will continuously enlarge; if the political capital owners take a collectivism socialism path like Huaxi village, the danger of stratification will decrease, but also increase from a modern perspective.

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51 [法] 托克维尔 (Tocqueville), 张扬译, 论美国的民主 (*De la Démocratie en Amérique*), [M].湖南文艺出版社, 2001.

52 Jürgen Habermas, The Public Sphere, *Princeton Readings in Political Thought*, pp. 709 – 714, at 709. In the village director's eyes, there has appeared a public sphere in Z village because villagers can organize kinds of activities in daily life. For instance, they organized a team in order to help the elderly in village. Indeed these activities reflect the development of villager autonomy, however, a modern public sphere which builds on modern political system. We cannot ignore the difference.

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