CHAPTER 2

The Scale and Distribution of New Rich Peasants after the People’s Republic of China’s Land Reforms

Su Shaozhi

Abstract

Between the conclusion of Land Reform and the eve of the agricultural cooperative movement, few new rich peasants were created around the country, and those who did were created slowly. There was only a real correlative relationship between the degree of rural affluence and the proportion of new rich peasant households to total rural households across all provinces; however, there was a positive correlation between these two factors within individual provinces. The proportion of new rich peasant households to the total number of rural households in areas with relatively high degrees of rural cooperatization and restrictive policies on new rich peasants was not necessarily lower than—and in some cases was higher than—other areas. These data indicate that many factors influenced the creation and development of new rich peasants, and that analysis of a single factor would be insufficient to explain the complex socioeconomic issue of new rich peasants.

Keywords

new rich peasant – scale – distribution

A rural investigation report issued by the Ministry of Finance in 1952 defines “new rich peasants” as follows: “They are rich peasants produced following land reforms. New rich peasants are delineated on the basis of the stipulations regarding rural class differentiation issued by the State Administrative Council. All those whose total of exploitation (including hiring laborers and issuing debt) exceed twenty-five percent of their total income shall be known as rich peasants.” In 1955, the leadership of the People’s Republic of China

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2 Nongcun jingji yu nongmin fudan diaocha ziliao《农村经济与农民负担调查资料》Materials Regarding Investigations into Rural Economies and the Burden on Peasants] volume
made the following judgment: new rich peasants were emerging everywhere following land reforms; polarization grew more severe daily, and capitalist forces spread unchecked. This appraisal of rural conditions at the time was an important reason behind the acceleration of both agricultural cooperatization and collectivization. In recent years many academics studying the issues of agricultural cooperatives have noted that under historical conditions of the time, appraisals of polarization were frequently made too harshly. However, there has been no dedicated research performed on the key reason behind said polarization: the concrete conditions for the creation of new rich peasants. On the basis of data I have been able to collect on the issue, I have performed research into the scale and distribution of new rich peasants created in the Chinese countryside between the end of land reforms and the eve of collectivization. Owing to the scattered nature of historical materials in this area and my own limited abilities as a researcher, this essay should be considered no more than an initial foray into this field. I hope that any academic colleague interested in this issue will send me valuable opinions.

## 1 The General Trend for the Creation of New Rich Peasants

Back during the War of Resistance against Japan, people's democratic regimes were established in resistance bases. These regimes either reduced rents and interests or outright launched land revolutions (for example, in some border regions of Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia). Feudal land ownership systems were either abolished or greatly weakened. At the same time, with the encouragement and support of democratic governments, the proactivity of peasants (nongmin) to produce was increased, and economic development caused important changes to the class structure of rural areas. Specifically, those changes were a weakening of the old economy run by landlords and rich peasants, a reduction in the number of poor peasants, and an increase of middle peasants. Among those ranks, a minority of formerly poor peasants experienced rapid economic development and were elevated to the ranks of rich peasants. A classic example of a new rich peasant from this era was Wu Manyou 吴满有 from the border region around Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia. During the war against Japan, the democratic regimes adopted policies to encourage new rich peasants, honoring those who remembered their roots after becoming rich, actively developed the economy, and supported the democratic governments. In the land reforms that followed the War of Liberation, new rich peasants were

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