

# Thirty Years of Reform and Social Changes in China

*Edited by*

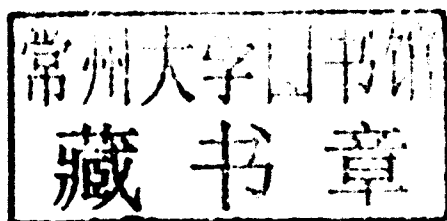
LI Qiang

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Thirty Years of Reform and Social  
Changes in China

# Social Scientific Studies in Reform Era China

VOLUME 4



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## PREFACE

In China, the reform that lasted for around 30 years was first known as the “reform of economic system,” and the most important aspect of the reform was the introduction of the operation mechanism of the market. The so-called operation mechanism is mainly three markets: commodity production, labor market and financial credit market. China’s 30 years of economic reform had also followed these three strides sequence. The first stride was the establishment of the commodity market mechanism; the core was the price and the price mechanism. This was established because of the deep price of the reform in the late 1980s. In the mid-1990s, the seller’s market was finally transformed into the buyers’ market, and the transformation of price mechanism to market was finally successful. The second stride, the core of reform in the 1990s was the labor market mechanism. As a result, a serious issue of unemployment occurred. About 27 million people were unemployed at the peak, and the short-term pain was also obvious, where the older working generation paid a great price for reform. In the late 1990s and the early years of new century, the traditional system of a “secure job” (“铁饭碗” *TieFanWan*) was finally destroyed, and labors were disposed by the market, which was accepted by the entire society. The third stride is the recent experiment of financial credit in the market. This reform is not tranquil, and the sudden rises and falls of the stock index cause great anxiety for many people. Up till now, it can be said that this third stride is in its experimental stage. The three strides are a summary of the 30 years economic system reform. A summary of the introduction of the market mechanism during these 30 years is an economists’ task, and therefore economists hold the greatest voice.

This book is not a summary of the reform from an economics angle, but an analysis from the angle of sociology. Although the economic reform stated the reform, because the entire society is integrated, once the economic system is transformed, other parts of society cannot escape change. The 30 years of transformation has far exceeded the economic scope, and has evolved into the transformation of entire society. What changes actually happened in the society? How do the sociologists summarize these changes? It is difficult to create a summary of social changes during these 30 years. Among them, a substantial part is the

concept of "society," which is so big that it encompasses almost everything. Except for nature, everything else can be considered society. Then, what do we analyze, and what do we not analyze, and how do we choose? All are difficult problems. The author believes that sociologists' summary grasps two principles. One is the crowd principle, the society is composed of the crowd, therefore, sociologists should put emphasize on the crowd. The concept of crowd is not small, it may be crowd of social class, the crowd of age, the crowd of sex and the crowd of benefit difference etc. In brief, the society is gathered into the group. Another is the overall principle or the whole principle, because the society is a whole, although the economists, politicians and psychologists etc. attempt to investigate the society from the angle of their own subject, the society does not change solely in one area. Social change is also a whole, just like a person's organism does not change because of doctors' division of various subjects, therefore, a characteristic of sociologist is to pay attention to these changes which have general characteristics in social changes.

The arrangement order and logic of the chapters of this book are as follows. Chapter One discusses the changes during the 30 years from the angle of the entire social structure; Chapter Two discusses the changes of the countryside, agriculture and farmers from the rural society at the beginning of reform; Chapter Three moves from the countryside to the city, and it studies the movement of farmers to the cities, namely the tide of migrant workers; Chapter Four delves into the urban society, and discusses the changes of urban community, urban management and resident life; Chapter Five continues the urban topic, and discusses the changes of the "unit system" as the urban social basis; Chapters Two to Five looks into the two main regions of Chinese society, the urban society and the rural society, as well as the relations between both. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight respectively analyzes the social changes from three concrete domains. Chapter Six studies the consumer group, and the influences on consumption and consumers and the changes that occur after the massive commodities in the economic domain are produced; Chapter Seven discusses the relationship between technological development and social changes, Chapter Eight analyzes the sexual distinctions between women and men, and especially the changes women have in their social position during the reform. Finally, Chapter Nine gives a summary of the entire book through the analysis on social policy changes during the 30 years.

The transformation for 30 years has a huge impact force. Compared with the society 30 years ago, everyone accepts that the society has gone through great change. But sociologists pay closer attention to the social intrinsic changes, namely the transformation of system, the institutional transformation, the transformation of policy, the change of relations and the idea renewal. The experiences during the 30 years proved that, the intrinsic change must be more difficult and slower than the external change. Moreover, transformation and non-transformation always coexist and interact. In each aspect, there is a part that changes and a part that does not change. From this angle, we discover that the Chinese society is also the equilibrium between transformation and non-transformation. Through the preface, I try to elaborate on the characteristics of China's social transformation and inheritance in the following five aspects.

First is government-oriented society. Since the Qin and Han Dynasties, China has always had a government-oriented society, namely the organs of state power play the dominant role in the management and decision-making of significant affairs in the politics economy and culture. Through the observation of the 30 years of reform, we may discover that, the launching of reform, the proposal and implementation of important reform measures, the revision of reform strategy, line and policy etc., all were carried on according to the instruction of the organs of state power. Certainly, everything contains contradictory elements, the reform's market principle direction finds a resource allocation center that is not the state political power, but this is certainly in contradiction with the government-oriented society. China's reform tries to seek an equilibrium point between government and market.

Second is overall benefit society. The Chinese society always emphasized overall benefit since ancient times. During the reform, China also has this characteristic; in innumerable choices since the reform, one of core questions is to consider the relationship between overall benefit and individual benefit. But, in the experiments during the first 30 years of new China, the overall benefit was manifested in the benefit of state, collective or unit. After the reform, the basic problems that need to be handled are also the relationship between the whole and individual. A characteristic of reform experiments is to concentrate and to handle the important matters. During the reform, land planning, the construction of development zone and the relocation transformation, all are easily the plan of many square kilometers, which in Western society, where individual standards are emphasized, is seen as



impracticable (said by Liang Shuming 梁漱溟). But, the reform tendency has inspired each person's vigor even more, and manifests the innate behavior of humans, therefore, the reform for 30 years results in the increase of respect and taking seriously the benefit of each person as individual. Thus, the development in recent years increasing shows that the plan based on sacrificing the individual benefit to advance the overall benefit is more difficult to implement. In this way, we may also say that, the reform is also an attempt to seek a new point of equilibrium between the overall state benefit and individual benefit.

Third is society of relations. China is such a society in which the interpersonal relationship and the acquaintance relationship are extremely developed since ancient times, the outstanding contributions of Confucianism is the interpretation of interpersonal relationship rule, so-called the relations between ruler and official as subject to the king, between father and son, between husband and wife, between brothers and between friends. This set of criteria became core content in the social movement. The reform is also a big attack and causes big transformation in social relations. However, it is contradictory that one of the important logics of the reform is its attempt to transform the society from being a society dependent on acquaintance relations into a law-based society, and towards administering a country by law. Therefore, the reform was also an attempt to find a point of equilibrium between a society of relations and a law-based society.

Fourth is status rank society. China always pays great attention to status rank, and the phenomenon, which human is divided into various indications of rank or grade can be found everywhere. The introduction of market mechanism in the reform is a huge impact to the status rank society, but new status rank is forming unceasingly. The reform has the tendency of breaching the status rank to a certain extent, but, on the other hand, it also has the factor of maintaining the status rank. Therefore, the reform is also an attempt to find a point of equilibrium between the competitive society and the status rank society.

Fifth is society of family ethic standard. Because frequent political campaigns before the reform had significant impact to the family ethic standard, when "taking the class struggle as guiding principle", the political trend which easily "betrayed the parents" and "broke off relations between father and son" was prevalent in the society. But this was the incisive opposite to China's society of family ethic standard. Therefore, from the beginning of reform, the social tendency of

“restoration” of family ethic standard was obviously displayed. Before the reform, the core of the people’s commune system rested with its attempt to destroy the family system and realize the “trans-family” disposition of labors, but the successful acts at the initial stages of reform was the result of the successful reconstruction of family standard. The core of “household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output” allowed the family to once again become the center of production and labor disposition. But, contradictorily, the reform must establish the social system in a great extent, and must break through the fetter of original family relation. After the reform, the miniaturization of rural family, where the younger generation left the rural areas, leaving behind the elderly, women and children, the unstable marital relationship of floating population etc., all also have a huge impact to the traditional family ethic standard society. Therefore, it is also the coexistence of these impacts; it is observed that, the reform also seeks for a point of equilibrium between the family ethic standard and personal freedom.

In the above five aspects, there is not only the motive force of transformation, but also one of maintaining the previous condition. It is also seen that a so-called harmonious society is an attempt to find a point of equilibrium between both.

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This book's nine authors come from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China and Zhongshan University respectively. These authors are outstanding persons of respective research field in the sociology, and all have been renowned scholars with many achievements. This book is the achievement of the full cooperation from nine sociologists. The completion process is that, the chief editor first set the frame of the entire book at the end of 2007, the authors then discussed and revised the frame, and the authors contributed correct and penetrating views in respective domain; the first draft was completed in June, 2008, the chief editor gave opinions of revision after reading carefully, the authors completed the revised draft, and then Hu Tao (胡涛), editor of Social Sciences Academic Press (China) completed the edited draft after reading and revising carefully, and finally the chief editor and authors revised once more and finished the book. In the completion process of this book, my friend and colleague, Shen Yuan (沈原), Professor of Tsinghua University gave many very good suggestions, and in the edition process, my graduate student Liu Yang (刘洋) at Tsinghua University assisted to do much on contacting and manuscript collection.

Here I appreciate everyone who contributed to this book, and also thank the bankroll of the Ford Foundation in allowing for the research and completion of the book. In order to publish the book during the commemoration of reform for 30 years, the completion of book is hasty somewhat, I'm afraid the oversight is unavoidable in the book, so I respectfully ask for readers' criticism and comments.

This book was translated jointly by Wang Tianfu (王天夫), Associate Professor of the Sociology Department, Tsinghua University, and Doctor of Sociology, University of Chicago, Jin Jun (晋军), Doctor of Sociology, US University of Minnesota, and He Jiangsui (何江穗), Doctor of Sociology, UC San Diego Branch School and Doctor of Sociology, China University of Political Science and Law, and here thanks for their industrious work. Editors Tong Genxing, Qiu Yang and Guo Rongrong from Department of Social Sciences books and International Publication Center of Social Sciences Academic Press

also contributed to the publication of the English edition. We highly appreciate their devotions.

Li Qiang (李强)

In the Lanqiying Subzone of Tsinghua University

October 2, 2008

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Throughout this volume, Chinese names are always ordered according to standard practice in China, with surnames preceding given names. To clarify this ordering, surnames are in small capital letters in the following list of contributors.

LI Qiang is the dean of the School of Humanities & Social Sciences at Tsinghua University, as well as the director of the Department of Sociology, professor and doctoral supervisor. His major academic research interests are social stratification and mobility, social structure, process and problem of urbanization. His key works include *Social Stratification and Income Gap* (2000), and *Migrant Workers and Social Stratification in China* (2004).

WANG Xiaoyi is a researcher of the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, as well as the head of the Rural and Industrial Sociology department, and the director of the Center for Rural Environmental Social Studies, master tutor. His main research fields are rural sociology, rural development, rural environment and rural resource management. His key works include *Inside and outside Village* (2002), and *Industrialization and Informal Finance* (2004).

BAI Nansheng is a professor in the school of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, at Renmin University of China. His main research fields are rural labor market and urbanization, anti-poverty and development, social structure and organization, rural governance. His key words include *Development with Equity* (co-authored, 2005), and *Go Home or Go into town: Research on Rural Labor Migration Return in China* (co-authored, 2002).

WANG Ying is the director of the Community Information Research Center of the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, master tutor. Her main academic research interests concern urban sociology, social organization, social structure. Her key works include *Social Intermediate Layer—Reform and Community-Based Organization of China* (co-authored, 1993), *New Collectivism: The Reorganization of Rural Society* (1996), and *Urban Sociology* (2005).

LI Hanlin is the senior researcher, doctoral supervisor and director of the Bureau of Scientific Research Management of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His main research areas are sociology of science, sociology of organizations, sociology of institutions, social transformation, and social change. His key works are *Thoughts on the Chinese Work Unit Society* (2004), and *Social Process of Organization Transition: From View Point of Social Solidarity* (co-authored, 2006).

WANG Ning is a professor, doctoral supervisor and director of the Department of Sociology at Sun Yat-sen University. His main academic research interests are consumption sociology, tourism sociology, brand sociology, and methodology of social research. His key works are *Tourism and Modernity: A Sociological Analysis* (2000), *Sociology of Consumption* (2001), and *From the Ascetic Society to the Consumer Society* (2008).

QU Zeqi is a professor and doctoral supervisor of Sociology in the Department of Sociology, at Peking University, as well as the director of the Institute of Social Science Survey at Peking University, and the director of the Institute of Social Science Survey at Peking University. His major research areas are business organization, technical application and social change, methodology of survey research. His key works are *The Development Process of Enterprises in the Bordering Areas* (1996), *What is Sociology* (2002), and *China Structural Change of Social Stratum* (2004).

TAN Shen is a researcher associate of the Institute of Society at the Chinese Academy Social Sciences. Her major academic research interests are population movements, women studies, labor studies. Her key works are *The Peasant Mobility and Gender* (co-authored, 2000), and *The Safety and Health of Migrant Women Workers* (2004).

LI Peilin is a senior researcher, doctoral supervisor and director of the Institute of Sociology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His major academic research interests are social development, sociology of organization and industrial sociology. His key works include *Another Invisible Hand: the Transformation of Social Structure* (2005), and *Twelve Lectures on Harmony Society* (2006).

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