

# Reflection on the Route of Rural Modernization in China

—— Comments on the Concept of “New Earthbound China” Proposed by Xu Jieshun and He Xuefeng

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**Abstract:** During the exploration of rural modernization in China, the route of rural urbanization proposed by Chinese scholars mirrors the general path of development in western countries. Starting from the concept of “new earthbound China,” put forward by Xu Jieshun and He Xuefeng, and based on the reflection of the disadvantages of industrialization, this paper probes the nature and significance of “village” by examining the development process of human civilizations so that another possible route may be created to achieve rural modernization in China.

**Keywords:** new earthbound China; the nature of village; crisis awareness in the heyday; Chinese path

## 1. 1. Introduction: “Chinese Problems”

It has been a century since Chinese intellectuals explored the path of rural modernization along with the origin of modern Chinese society. During this exploration, the theme of rural construction varies greatly. During the “May 4th movement” period, Chairman Mao Zedong put forward the New Village Idea, holding property publicly-owned, establishing services sharing, eradicating private ownership and exploitation systems while establishing an equal social relationship, which was regarded as the ideal social model. The rural construction movement in the 1920s and 1930s was the practice of Chinese intellectuals to consciously reform rural areas for modernization. After 1949, when the Communist Party of China took power, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the social reform in rural areas was centered on new socialist relations of production. The rural social reform,

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in the 1980s and 1990s, started with the household contract responsibility system, was a practice of taking economic construction as the central task. In October 2005, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee formally proposed to “promote the establishment of a new socialist countryside.” In 2006, Document No. 1 of the CPC Central Committee “*Opinions on the promotion of socialist new rural construction of the CPC Central Committee and State Council*” specified five aspects of rural construction, including economic construction, political construction, cultural construction, social construction and party building, marking the beginning of the new historical stage of China's rural modernization..

For rural modernization, the book *The End of The Peasants*, published in 1967 by French Scholar Henri Mendras, represents the general path of the West. One of the important propositions in the book is that the peasantry, as a traditional class, has come to an end in the developed countries of Europe. “In the eyes of some people, the book defends the industrialization of agriculture, the death of small-peasant economy, the victory of modern large-scale agricultural operators and the disintegration of peasant families.”<sup>[1]</sup> Industrial civilization first developed in Europe, where the agricultural population now accounts for only a small proportion of population in the old industrialized countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, agricultural employees account for less than 2% of the total employed population, while in the United States only 0.9% were involved in agricultural production at the beginning of the 21st century. Although France is a traditional European agricultural power, farmers only accounted for 16% of the total population in the early 1950s, and dropped to 10% in the 1970s, then further fell to 4% in the 1990s. This is the Western background for the rural modernization in China.

However, unlike Western societies, China's

agricultural population accounts for more than 80 percent in the traditional Chinese society. In the modernization process, especially after the Reform and Opening-up, with the flow of large numbers of migrant workers into the cities, the current agricultural population has decreased, but the rural population is still more than 900 million, accounting for 70% of China's 1.3 billion people. In the view of some scholars, the path of modernization in China's rural areas seems to be self-evident: Take the Western road, reduce the agricultural population, and accelerate the process of urbanization. Therefore, the “Three Rural Issues” of “agriculture, rural areas, and peasants” in the field of social sciences and the “New Three Rural Issues” of “peasant workers, landless peasants, and the disappearance of villages” are discussed around urbanization. In recent years, nearly 300 million farmers have moved to the cities as migrant workers. Some scholars, especially “the economists,” advocate that in accordance with the requirements of the modern (Western) countries, the size of the urban population is a sign of industrialization. The question following is what a spectacle it is that hundreds of millions of farmers are still flooding into the cities. This is a “Chinese problem” that no other country in the world would encounter.

Is urbanization the inevitable and the only choice of China's rural modernization path?

It is of practical significance to review Mr. Fei Xiaotong's exploration. Mr. Fei has proposed the proposition: Small town, big problem. The term “small town” does not have the meaning of “city” in the definition of Mr. Fei's concept, but refers to the “town” level. Fei Xiaotong regards “market town” as “rural central community,” an intermediate region that differs from either “city” or “township.” The region is more closely related to the rural area rather than the urban area.<sup>[2]</sup> As it affects the choice of the path of Chinese rural modernization, “market town”

is a big problem and arouses great attention from Mr. Fei. Implementing the policy of actively developing "market town" is "to solve the problems arising during socialist modernization."<sup>[2]</sup> The development of market town is determined by China's national conditions. "Small town problems neither come from nowhere, nor are man-made, but were put forward in the development of objective practice. Small towns should be built into political, economic and cultural centers of the countryside. The construction of small towns is a big issue in developing the rural economy and solving population employment."<sup>[2]</sup> Thus it can be concluded that the core connotation of Mr. Fei Xiaotong's thought is that China's rural modernization cannot be achieved by rural population flooding into cities, but by it is the development of towns. This is the "big problem" of China.

When we look back to Mendras after we review Fei Xiaotong, we find that Mendras' views on rural development in France seem to be different from the period after *The End of The Peasants* was published 20 years ago. His thoughts were close to Mr. Fei Xiaotong's. At that time, one of the most important features of French society was the "amazing revival of rural society."<sup>[1]</sup> "The village has become a place of life again." Twenty years ago, towns were not bright or vigorous at all. Over the past decade, in every town, even the smallest ones, a kind of new social vitality sprouted in every aspect. All attempts to re-concentrate towns failed. It strongly suggests that the rural community has regained a rare and fantastic vitality. "Towns have regained social, cultural, and political vitality after a period of shock that they were thought to be dead."<sup>[1]</sup> The "real problem" put forward by Mendras is "to find an art of living in the woods" and let "the village return to a place to live."<sup>[1]</sup>

This paper discusses the path of rural modernization in China under the background of double tendency, namely "urbanization" and "return to the countryside." Here, the concept of "new earthbound China" put forward by Professor Xu Jieshun and Professor He Xuefeng from different perspectives plays an enlightening role.

## 2. Local development: Exploration by Xu Jieshun

One of the characteristics of Professor Xu Jieshun's thought on rural modernization is to explore a new path different from "urbanization" from the practical field experience of individual survey. This is "local development." The formation of this thought went through half a century of exploration.

Xu Jieshun started his observation and study on Chinese rural areas in 1964. As a college student, for political task of the "socialist education movement," he went to Pingzhai Brigade, Chen Yang Commune, Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, and Guangxi to investigate.<sup>①</sup> He said in an interview with me:

In the first field I investigated the social ecology of a traditional village, particularly the social ecology of traditional villages of ethnic minorities. Such investigations took place unconsciously. In the 1960s, investigations in the field were a political task instead of work in the field purely. At that time, it was socialist education movement at Pingzhai Brigade, Chen Yang Commune, Sanjiang Dong Autonomous County, Guangxi. I had not graduated from university yet. This was my first investigation in the field, lasting for eight months in the village. This was an unintentional field survey on the

① 20 years later, Xu Jieshun went back to this village to pay a return visit. Traditions of Chengyang bridge was edited by Xu Jieshun, Yang Xiunan, Xu Guilan and published by Guangxi Nationalities Publishing House, 1992.

Chinese rural area of the 1960s, which had not yet entered the process of modernization.

Since modern times, "Learn for life" has been stressed rather than "Learn for knowledge" in Chinese academic circles. So Professor Xu Jieshun's experience has political implications. The significance of his first field experience lies in the formation of the thinking orientation in which he thinks about rural issues from their reality rather than pure abstract speculation. This orientation was reinforced in subsequent fieldwork. His second field survey was the study in the 1980s on the change of Zhuang Village, Nanxiang Town, Hexian District, Guangxi in the first decade after the Reform and Opening-up, and he published the book *Spring in Nanxiang Town*.

In the late 1980s, I went to Nanxiang Town, Hexian District, Guangxi. This is a village of Zhuang nationality where I did my second field work. We documented the changes of the past decade in terms of social changes, cultural changes and changes in economic life. The ten years from 1978 to 1988 witnessed dramatic changes, especially changes in the rural area of ethnic minorities. This field work is comparatively conscious and my first conscious action in the study of anthropology. The most prominent point is that the town, a previous traditional rural society, which has its own small-scale industry, has taken a step forward.<sup>[3]</sup>

"The traditional rural society has had its own small-scale industry," which suggests that a village can develop on its own. With this discovery, his thought of "local development" has some kind of budding consciousness, which can be regarded as the first event that inspired him to think about China's rural modernization. By 2005, his thinking on rural modernization path has been basically mature. In an article published in 2005, he formally put forward the idea of "local development." "The purpose of the discussion of the future trend of

China's rural development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to explore new ways for Chinese farmers because 'it is hard to defend their land and not easy to leave' over the years after the Reform and Opening-up. The solution is to realize the urbanization of Chinese farmers' rural life, transform farmers, rural areas and agriculture locally."<sup>[4]</sup> This conclusion seems to be simple, but it is a new idea and a new path with profound connotations.

Later in his third field, his thinking becomes quite definite and clear. In 2006, in the study of the Wuyi model of new rural construction, he borrowed the classic Marxist writers' discussion on "urban & rural integration" to further demonstrate "local development"<sup>[5]</sup> and raised the concept of "New Earthbound China." Also, he discovered and built the "Wuyi model" in reality and published the book, *New Earthbound China*.

The third field memory is the inspection on China's new rural construction experience in 2006. It was an excellent chance to study the new rural construction in Wuyi, Zhejiang. I graduated from university in an urban area and went to a rural area to work. I worked there for 20 years and left for another 20 years. Everything changed when I came back. Aren't we talking about "dreams"? Fei Xiaotong wrote *Earthbound China*, and discussed when our countryside experienced those changes, and where the new earthbound China was? It is the dream we pursued. At that time, I wrote: This county is a sample of new earthbound China. As a traditional backward society, how fast it is developing! At that time, they were very proud of their annual financial revenue of 700 million yuan. Now it is more than 3 billion yuan. I studied the social and cultural changes of the county. I recorded the change of the past 20 years since the Reform and Opening-up. They are very experienced in the relationship between human and nature, and human themselves. What's the height of new earthbound

China to be upgraded to? It is how to take the path of modernization for Chinese rural areas. Therefore, I mentioned the integration methods of rural and urban areas in the book. We strictly adhered to the new earthbound China principles, so the dream came true here.<sup>[5]</sup>

“New earthbound China,” a corresponding and transformed concept of “earthbound China,” upgrades the Wuyi model to the level that shows China's rural areas should take the model of modernization road. This is an intuitive understanding, but also knowledge gained from direct experience. Although there is no theoretical proof, it raises an important issue: China's rural areas should develop “locally” (adhere to “rural” development) rather than “development by moving to urban areas” (urban development). Wuyi is an agricultural county located in a hilly area. The Wuyi model is a rural “local development” model, which does not include the connotation that the farmers move into the big cities.

The fourth field investigation took place in Nandeng Village, Yongfu County, Guilin. It indicates that the consciousness of rural modernization “local development” by Professor Xu Jieshun has turned into a scholar's social practice action. The achievements were two field work reports namely *Overdue Turn-back of Fu Village*<sup>[6]</sup> and *Hard Progress of Fu Village*.<sup>[7]</sup> These two reports are reliable records of his direct involvement in local village building and renovation practices, and a distinctive and interdisciplinary field practice. Professor Xu Jieshun, an enterprising and capable practice activist, is even better than the local leader. As a scholar, within 10 days, he resolved the problem that had troubled the developers and local government for a long term in accordance with his thought of “local development” on rural development. As a mentor, organizer and mass promoter, he gave us a wonderful story about the 10 days of work:

The fourth field report studies the records of China's current rural social transformation. Twenty years of transition passed, and the society has been changing rapidly. Now the development of rural areas has gone deep into the heart of the rural area. My field work in Nanden Village, Yongfu County, Guilin reflects the current situation of this rural area. The developers have already started their work. There are good sceneries and stone caves in this village, which are expected to be developed into a scenic spot. The village is not very big, with only about 40 families. The wealthy developer from Zhejiang invested 100 million yuan, but he never imagined the difficulties to remove the native families. They rejected being removed and even kept staying there after the investment was made and the roads were built. The District Party Secretary sent more than 100 section chiefs and directors to repeatedly persuade the natives to move out of the village. However, one month passed, only half of them signed to move. Then in 2008, the developer turned to me for help. I told him that it all depended on his choice. If he insisted on moving out all the farmers, it would be very difficult, and the farmers would still disagree to move out. However, if he agreed with my proposal, it would be very easy. I could help him out immediately. I explained to him my proposal, that based on anthropology, he should keep the farmers and jointly develop locally. I explained to him why he should keep the farmers. If the farmers stayed, a crowd of people would be gathered there and he could lead the farmers to become rich. He thought about it a little bit and agreed with my proposal, and then I went to the village with two doctors and four graduate students.

On April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, we arrived at the village and lived in the local farmer's home. We visited every family there and collected first-hand information. On the eighth day, we held a meeting to explain to them our purpose of this visit, what kind of help



we needed from them and vice versa. All of them were interested and everyone came to the meeting. It was a fantastic meeting. I explained to them the practical condition according to my investigation and suggested that they should cooperate with the developer to develop countryside tourism. I promised them that they wouldn't move away. Within less than 10 days, almost all the farmers agreed with my proposal. On the ninth day, I reported to the township government. They even didn't believe in what we said, as they had already spent two years and they even dared not step into the village. When they sent us to the village the first day, they left as soon as we got out of the car. The Township Party Secretary asked me for confirmation, and I confirmed to him that we did solve this problem. We managed to do it in accordance with anthropology, regarding people as priority. He asked me to make a report. Then on the tenth day, I made a report to all the cadres of the township. I said that you worked diligently and I admired your working spirit, but you may not know what exactly the farmers needed even if you worked in townships. I raised three questions about the features of Chinese farmers. I told them how to solve the farmer problems with anthropology. After this field work, I published the *Overdue Turn-back of Fu Village*, a record of the ten days' work.

After the ten days, what was the next step? We needed to help them further. I planned three projects for them. First, a water supply project. The government also had such a plan to solve the drinking water problem of farmers. Second, a sanitary project to build toilets. Third, a road project. These were also the three missions of the new rural construction. Let's take the water supply project as an example, in which the deep-rooted bad habits of traditional farmers were completely exposed in the social transformation period. They asked if the water supply project was needed. According to their knowledge, there was bacteria in the overnight

water. After a series of meetings, finally they agreed. Everybody signed and put their thumbprints on the document. Then we applied 100,000 yuan project funds for them. But according to relevant regulations, they should pay 10,000 themselves and the other 90,000 would be paid by the government. That meant everyone should pay over 80 yuan on average but the village was really poor and they had no money. What could we do? After another round of persuasion, the developer agreed to sponsor the senior over 60, and children below 18 and then everyone needed to pay 35 yuan. But they still disagreed. My students and I agreed to sponsor their 10 percent, 1,000 yuan, and gave cash to them directly on site. Finally, they agreed with our proposal, paid and signed the agreement. However, later some farmers raised questions once again, saying they did not want to sell the land to us and wanted the money back. Within only half a year, they agreed, regretted and disagreed, paid and refunded, again and again. We almost lost patience with them. At the meeting, I told them that if they wanted to wait until the next century, I would wait together with them. At last, we finished the water supply project before the Spring Festival. We just wanted to finish the project. The *Hard Process of Fu Village* is the record of these three projects.

The significance of these projects is the practice of "Local Development" path. Professor Xu Jieshun is very clear that despite of difficulties, local development can finally succeed. It is different from foreign paths.

I've also been to foreign countries, and visited the villages in France, Canada and Australia. Although I did not do a thorough investigation, compared with the Chinese villages, especially the Yao Ethnic and Miao Ethnic in France, the urban concentration path cannot be adopted for the modernization of Chinese villages. Modern economists always insist that millions of farmers

should be immigrated to urban areas within a few years. Urbanization in many places means that the villagers should be forced into cities, like the urban & rural integration in Chengdu. I also have my own opinion about the formulation of urban & rural integration. Does it really mean all the farmers should move to the urban area? I do not agree with the immigration path for the modernization of Chinese villages. Chinese villages should be constructed the same as cities and farmers should live in the same way as urbanites, and also enjoy the fruit of modernization which is the real meaning of New earthbound China. If all the farmers were forced into cities, there would definitely be a major disaster. If the empty-nested, hollowing-out and desolate phenomenon continued to develop, the

modernization of the Chinese village would be on a questionable path. So, the modernization path of China cannot follow the immigration path, but the local development path instead. Earthbound China by Fei Xiaotong is the rural area in ancient China, while our dream is to change the traditional rural area into a new one.

What I have done in Nandeng is to draw the immigrated farmers back to their hometown and develop a local countryside tourism. After 6 years' development, I can tell you that the development there has started to take shape and native farmers have stopped migrating out to work.

During the interview with Professor Xu Jieshun on February 1, 2015, he repeated, "You should not move the native farmers away, but let them stay

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*develop a local countryside tourism*



and develop jointly and locally.” “We should not follow the immigration path for the modernization of the Chinese villages. Instead we should develop locally.” He regards “local development” as a “big problem” and a “strategic problem.” New strategic choices should be made for Chinese farmers as they have experienced both the difficulty of defending and leaving their land. All in all, the thought or path proposed by Professor Xu Jieshun does not come from nowhere, but a unity of thought and practice of a responsible professor based on his experiences at home and abroad in the past half century, and also a product with a combination of individual practice and practice of Chinese villages. Just as Horkheimer said, “As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of factual relations of new discoveries that are used to update the existing knowledge and the application of this knowledge does not originate from pure logic or methodology; this knowledge could only be understood under the background of real society.”<sup>[8]</sup>

The origin of “local development” of Professor Xu Jieshun is also closely related with the “Home and Country Feelings” of Chinese intellectuals.

The purpose of our field investigation is not only to know about them, but also help them with their construction to change the current situation. Chinese scholars differ greatly from Western ones, who record the samples, analyze and study them. Then it is simply finished. For us, after analysis, we intend to help. We participate in the change process. It seems that we are not “bystanders” anymore, but part of them.

“To enrich people” by Fei Xiaotong has a great significance. What’s the purpose of our academic research? Only to collect materials? Actually, it indeed is of certain academic significance. Living in such cultural circumstances, we are willing to contribute to our country and do something good for the countryside. Now that the village still keeps close contact with me, I am still following a villager

with interest and providing guidance to him. He has developed from nothing to building a house (agritainment) with guest rooms and kitchens, in order to set up a model for others in the village. Witnessing his success, other villagers are following him. Even if I am not the real head of the village, I work as a consultant when villagers turn to me for help. Now, I am trying to launch a water conservancy project for them to improve the water conditions there. But I am merely the adviser instead of the operator. At first, they didn’t want to start it as they did not think it would benefit themselves but the developer. But now, they are willing to start the project. I am now helping them to contact relevant water conservancy departments for support. Therefore, I think that we are members, participants and witnesses of the traditional Chinese culture. We cannot live without our cultural tradition. So, I am not a real “bystander.”

The new issue in the discipline raised from this field work is: Anthropologists are placed in the local social practice rather than outside the field, in which Malinovsky’s traditional fieldwork method is abandoned. The researchers do not serve as “bystanders” in the observation and interviews of local culture. We have a great participation sense to transform the society. We are a group with a sentiment of “regulating the family, ruling the country and achieving world peace,” which makes us conduct the involved research. In this creative activity of social research and transformation, we are they, enjoying the same status and mission. Attitudes and methods are consistent. A new path is, more often than not, discovered with a new method.

### 3. Return with Twists and Turns: Exploration of He Xuefeng

Professor He Xuefeng also believes that China’s rural modernization should follow a path that is different from the West. According to He



Xuefeng, the future of rural area is to build "a new earthbound China," a concept he put forward in 2003.<sup>[9]</sup> If Professor Xu Jieshun's idea of "local development" is based on his individual and direct experience, of realistic and steady characteristics, Professor He Xuefeng's idea to place the future on local community is featured with ideal and uncertain characteristics.

By his own account, Professor He Xuefeng spent more than 1,000 days from 1998 to 2013 on local researches. He also spent almost two months every year in different villages all over China. Thanks to vigorous survey and practical observation of the rural society, he does not move forward with the inference of urbanization in 2050,<sup>①</sup> but thinks in the opposite direction. In the book *The Future of the Country*, he says, "There are serious theoretical misunderstandings in the estimates of China's economic development prospects and urbanization prospects. There are too many abstract contrasts and formalized inferences, the theoretical model is superficial, and the conclusions are often drawn with blindness."<sup>[10]</sup> He believes that the urban areas do not have the ability to absorb so many people in the next 50 years. The export of primary products processing industry cannot lead to the transfer of rural surplus labor, and the tertiary industries are unable to absorb a great number of rural labors.<sup>[10]</sup> Actively encouraging farmers to enter the city can only lead to more urban population and higher urbanization rate, it cannot increase the city's employment opportunities, or increase the level of urban migrant workers' benefits, or speed up urban economic growth. On the contrary, too many farmers' immigration into the city will lead to the fact that workers' negotiating ability decreases as it is too competitive in the labor market, and a large

number of urban farmers have to live in urban slums and suffer the loss of acceptable rural life.<sup>[10]</sup> From China's national condition, He Xuefeng regards farmers' immigration into the cities as an unrealistic path. When he criticized "The fundamental path of Chinese rural area is urbanization" proposed by Lin Yifu, he suggested that the population based in rural areas will still maintain a large number in the long run, migrant workers floating between urban and rural areas will exist for a long time, and urban-rural dual structure will also exist for a long time. In the urban-rural dual structure, the existence of rural non-market factors provides the foundation for the country to build a new socialist countryside.<sup>[10]</sup> His understanding of the new rural construction strategy of the central government is clearly based on the difficulty of China's urbanization. One of his basic ideas is, "The core to build a new socialist countryside is to build a community which the farmers can go out from and return to, one which can accommodate 900 million farmers for labor, and where the farmers can live a decent and dignified life. Then rural areas could become the 'stabilizer' and 'reservoir' of China's modernization."<sup>[10]</sup> For the construction of "community," he believes that the key is to reconstruct the welfare of farmers. Reconstruction of rural welfare is indeed the rural construction and he made specific proposals. First, farmers should be allowed to travel freely between urban and rural areas in the next decade. The key is that the farmers are willing to and are allowed to go back to the village. The current land system, vague but relatively stable, should be reserved so that farmers can return to cultivate their own land in rural areas when their life is tough in the cities. Second, rural construction should focus on the country's growing economic strength and financial

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① According to the prediction of Chinese City Development Report of 2001–2050, the urbanization ratio of China will reach 75% in 2050.

strength to enhance the welfare of rural residents in the next 2 or 3 decades. Third, 900 million or 800 million farmers will live in rural areas and enjoy real benefits which are much higher than their actual income in the next 4 or 5 decades. This will challenge the life and consumption patterns created by multinational companies through advertising and fashion promotion in the market economy. This will change the cultural idea of pursuing income quantity without caring about life quality, and judging life values and ideas through a one-dimension standard: Economic income. In this way, Chinese farmers are conducting a new life test in practice rather than imagination.

In the above expressions, He Xuefeng's path to rural development in China is also a "non-urbanization" one, which is not only from analysis of practical conditions in China, but also from his social ideals. He also mentioned in the preface of *The Future of Villages* that, "I am trying to propose a new approach to China's development path." The core of this proposal is to rebuild rural lifestyles, upgrade the farmer's dominant position and improve their cultural sensibility, and enable farmers to share the benefits of modernization and live a decent and dignified life through new rural construction. I hope to rebuild the idyllic life and hope farmers can continue to enjoy the beautiful environment, harmonious family and friendly neighborhood, like what Tao Yuanming said, "while picking asters beneath the Eastern fence, my gaze upon the Southern mountain rests" after their basic life demands are met. "They still need to work but do not need overdraft physical strength; there is still consumption, but not the pursuit of luxury; there is also leisure, but not empty or boring. In short, the life of farmers is happy, without dependence on high consumption, because the farmers are not able to afford high consumption. Rural areas should retain their native lifestyle which is different from the

consumerist way of life. This is a "low consumption, high welfare" way of life, where experience and interpersonal relationships are emphasized. It is not necessary for farmers to be particularly rich, but may also be happy due to their experience. Farmers consume less, but welfare may be higher."<sup>[10]</sup>

This is a "test of new life" whose significance lies in the fundamental challenge of some contents of the Western culture. These things are nature's enemies which obtain the life value and happiness from the consumption of non-renewable resources and destruction of the environment. The test of new life will draw lessons from the natural harmony coexistence of oriental civilization, carry forward the great wisdom of oriental civilization, put people first, unify people and nature and develop harmoniously.<sup>[10]</sup> The theory that man is an integral part of nature and people-oriented enlightenment in oriental civilization is great wisdom and the basic premise for human civilization to continue."<sup>[10]</sup> The "high consumption, high welfare" way of life is at the expense of large consumption of non-renewable resources and serious pollution of the natural environment, which cannot be copied around the world, especially for China with a population of 1.3 billion. China's new rural construction focuses on social construction and cultural construction, which is a "low consumption (therefore with low pollution and energy consumption), high welfare" lifestyle. This legitimacy doesn't take the consumption of non-renewable resources or pollution of the environment to prove the value of people, but the harmonious coexistence between man and nature, people themselves, people and their inner world. This legitimacy agrees with the wisdom of "unity of people and nature" in the traditional Chinese civilization, the wisdom of "enough is good" in oriental civilization and the idea of harmony with nature and reverence for nature in environmentalism could provide a possible cultural choice for human

society as the non-renewable resources decrease and the predatory civilizations that are based on the high-consumption cannot sustain.<sup>[10]</sup>

However, there is an entanglement in He Xuefeng's thought. He divides the development of China's rural society into current and future stages. In the same book, he also says that China's rural "urbanization" in the future still seems to be inevitable. "Urbanization and marketization are the major trends in China's development; the ultimate solution to the problem of 'agriculture, rural areas and farmers' depends on urbanization to absorb the rural population", but in the context of extremely large rural population in China, urbanization is a long-term task that can take several generations to complete. Before the immigration of 900 million farmers into the cities, whether and how to provide welfare for farmers and enable them to benefit from China's economic growth from their perspective is a directional problem of new rural construction.<sup>[10]</sup> In 2013, in the preface of the revised *New Earthbound China*, he stated: In the next decade, or 2 or 3 decades, Chinese cities are comparatively strong and the rural area is no longer possible or needed to serve as the stabilizer or reservoir of China's modernization. Therefore, China is no longer a nation bound to the ground.<sup>[9]</sup> It makes us think that there is no intrinsic difference between his words and his objection to the "urbanization" thoughts of Lin Yifu. On February 24, 2015, he further explained his logic through short messages: Totally, I want to explain in three perspectives. First, rural construction as a method; second, western modernization and urbanization; last, return to China's traditional rural life. This is a process close to thesis-antithesis-synthesis. Under current circumstance, it is impossible for China to develop regardless of the international environment, so

China has to enter western discourse and practices, which is western modernization, on which basis China will then conduct Chinese style and modified cultural life practices. Rural construction is a method at first and the purpose in the end. This is my opinion in the conclusion of *New Earthbound China* and my current thinking."<sup>①</sup> "Twisted return" at least shows his disruptive thinking in judgments and value judgments. Therefore it would be easy to understand his contradictory expressions. He insists that 900 or 800 million farmers will live in rural areas in the next 4 to 5 decades; He also says China's urbanization will be very strong in 10 to 30 years. The method and purpose should be unified. If the two parts are separated, the bad results from methods may become a disaster and fail to achieve the purpose. The ideological contradiction of Professor He Xuefeng shows the hesitation of Chinese intellectuals with strong cultural traditions on the path selection under threats of western cultures.

#### 4. Villages: Nature and Significance

The above "New Earthbound China" thought of two professors provides a starting point for this essay on the introspection of China's rural modernization path. The focus of the current academic community is "the development direction of villages," but I would like to know "the origin of villages," which is a thinking on the nature, historical position and significance of villages. "Development direction" and "origin" is the same question. Italian philosopher Giovanni Battista Vico put forward a methodological premise in *New Science*: The origin of materials or contents is also the origin of doctrines or theories. "All theories start from the

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① These are the contents of the short message sent to the author on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

materials it deals with.”<sup>[11]</sup> For New Science, birth and nature is the same thing. Nature decides the future development even though there might be twists and turns. The word “nature” has the meaning of “birth.” “The natural nature of institutions is that they are produced in certain ways in certain periods. The periods and ways decide certain institutions, no other options.”<sup>[11]</sup> Following Vico’s approach, we take the “birth” of the village as its nature, and the historical orientation and significance of the village evolves from there.

The village was “born” in a Neolithic agricultural civilization about 10,000 years ago. The most important human behaviors, over time, include: Collecting & hunting, agriculture, industry, and now information. In the Neolithic Age, a significant revolution, which is the Neolithic revolution or the agricultural revolution, took place in human civilization. The contribution of this “revolution” lies in the fact that humans changed from “obtaining” subsistence to “manufacturing” subsistence. “Obtaining” is just a “taken-away” method of the indigenous materials of the natural world, but “manufacturing” is to create the materials that do not exist in the original world. The grain in agriculture is not the original material of the natural world. There are slash-and-burn cultivation, fertilization and weeding processes between seeding and harvesting. The harvests are not given by the nature directly, but the products of our work and its pattern also differs from the natural species through artificial improvement. Due to the continuing use of artificial planting, new species gradually come into being, like millet and rice. In agriculture civilization, husbandry and handicraft industries also developed. Husbandry is a production economy. We do not eat all the animals that we hunt, but raise them to produce more food. Pottery cannot be acquired from nature directly, but with manual work, despite that we imitate the shapes of natural fruits in the

manufacturing process. All these are fundamentally different from the “obtaining” economy in the collecting & hunting period. Villages enable humans to have the living and spirit homeland instead of no fixed abode. Village is one of the most important and limited creations of human beings. Since then, human beings have changed from adaptation to the nature to active nature transformation, which is a true sense of the “Great Revolution” and a change in the world view of human history, and no other great movement can match this. The industrial revolution, of which the Western countries are proud, is only a little extension of the creative thinking of the agricultural revolution and a derivative of the agricultural revolution. There is no innovation in the world view.

However, in contemporary discourse systems, we have defined the industrial revolution “greater” than the agricultural revolution and have put “collecting & hunting civilization,” “agricultural civilization” and “industrial civilization” on a single evolution line, which dislocates the nature of questions and also the conceptual range. From the macro history of human beings, industrial civilizations are the children of the agricultural civilization. Just like the relationship between Adam and Eve: God only created Adam, a non-sexual individual, and created Eve later, using Adam’s rib. When Eve was created, Adam was her father (or mother), but after Eve was created, Adam was her husband, and since then, Adam was in the paralleling husband & wife relationship with Eve. The two Adams are distinctly different from each other, a superior and inferior relationship. However, we often take Adam as the husband of Eve, but forget the even more important fact that Adam is also Eve’s father (mother). The father-daughter relationship and husband-wife relationship are mixed. It is worth reminding that the agricultural civilization is “Adam” with dual identities and the



industrial civilization is “Eve.” It is unwise and unreasonable for the younger generation to deny the elder generation. This essay aims to remind people of the difference between the “matrix” agriculture and “subsidiary” agriculture and also between the “matrix” agriculture and “subsidiary” industry. Its practical significance is to show the epoch-making significance of agriculture that the industry cannot compare. At the same time, this essay does not put the macro history aside, but merely focus on the rise of western industrial civilization in the recent several centuries. Instead, industrial civilization is put in the hundreds of thousands of years of the entire human history to see the nature of history in this essay.

Some anthropologists have seriously explained the significance of the agriculture revolution and limit the mechanization in the Neolithic Age. Cited from Rousseau, Levi Strauss said that Rousseau argues that what we call the Neolithic way of life today represents an experimental manifestation that is closest to that paradigm.<sup>[12]</sup> By the Neolithic Age, human beings had already created most of the inventions due to safety concerns. Human beings knew how to defend themselves from coldness and hunger and also had spare time to think. Despite that humans in that age did not enjoy more freedom than modern people, but only the human nature would make him a slave. “Rousseau believes that if human beings can maintain ‘a harmonious relationship between the laziness of original society and inevitable busyness caused by our pride and arrogance’, it would be more favorable for human happiness. He believes such a condition is best for human beings and the reason why human beings cannot have this condition is due to ‘a certain unpleasant accidental opportunity’, which is mechanization. The mechanization is a dual accidental situation, for it is unique and appears lately.”<sup>[12]</sup> The “creativity” of the agricultural civilization in the Neolithic Age does not separate

humans from the natural world, but turns to a limit utilization of the natural world on the basis of respecting nature, and focuses on “human and nature unity” and “sustained development.” Rousseau and Levi Strauss both take mechanization as the “special and unique” method, but not a general method. When talking about machines, Mendras also cited Beal’s ideas to express similar thoughts, “To a large extent, it is the steamer that imposes its logic on industry and then on the entire society.”<sup>[1]</sup> Villages came into being with the agriculture civilization, and the nature of the agriculture civilization is the nature of “villages,” which emphasize human creativity and respect for nature. The significance of our emphasis on the agriculture civilization is to find an “intermediate point” between industrial civilization which overdevelops the natural resources and over-dependes on natural resources, which concerns the “sustained development” for people’s harmonious coexistence with nature. It is a path that cares about the ultimate future of human beings. In a broader horizon, we need the certain sense that we should think of the rural-urban relationship problem centered on rural areas rather than urban areas.

For “agriculture, rural areas and farmers,” we need a broader vision to trace the origin of agriculture and rural areas and link them with the path of rural modernization and the future development of world history. What contemporary scholars need is the great and distant vision on the development of human history. In current ideological circles, industrial civilization has been placed in a deep reflection status. The industrialized civilization developed by the mechanization of this “unpleasant accidental opportunity” has gone astray and brought bitter fruits and bad consequences to human beings. In the process of industrialization, per capita energy access had a huge increase, resulting in the inefficient and huge loss of energy supply to human beings. In industrialized society, wealth is

more concentrated and labor is more specialized, leading to new social relations and organizations. The class divide widens, and the contradiction between the countries and societies also becomes worse. Since the Industrial Revolution, the seizing desire of the Western world has greatly expanded. European-centrism has led to the desire and action of aggression, conquest and domination of the rest of the world, and has resulted in greater destruction and waste of natural resources. Two world wars caused great disasters and resource waste. After the war, because of fear of being invaded again, the countries invaded also conducted over-exploitation of resources to develop their national economy and enhance national prosperity in the same way. In the current world, environment pollution, global warming, vegetation destruction, the melting of the Antarctic iceberg are secretly bringing great disasters to human beings just as the wars did. American scholar Scott Senuo shows us a self-created "human catastrophe" map in *Bundled World*. The rubbish produced by industrial production and the globalization of the market has filled every corner of the world. The division of labor in this new world further exacerbates the seriousness of the problem. The traditional means of livelihood have been replaced. People work long hours in a toxic environment to seek new livelihoods. The concentration of population in urban areas with inadequate infrastructure has undoubtedly exacerbated global population pressures. The demand for energy and raw materials will lead to the construction of giant dam projects, pit mines and other large-scale development projects, which will occupy the land resources and drive a large number of villagers away from their own land. The process of globalization has embraced and helped parts of the world to thrive, but hampered and suppressed the development of the rest, resulting in a global take-over of the winners and a complete loss for

the losers. Humans are immersed in the dream of a thriving global village, now awakened by the nightmare of the global catastrophe. I am worried that all these problems can only make people feel that the planet where humans are living is bleak. Will this all-around plundering of the planet by human beings cause the earth to lose its bearing on life? Will the cult of globalization hinder the development of the world and ultimately make it unsustainable? Human destruction will end either in ashes from the blasts of a nuclear explosion or submerged in ice water melting from the north and south poles of the Earth."<sup>[13]</sup> German philosopher Horkheimer also worried about the Western industrial civilization-based "modernization" concept "as the basic form of the modern history based and history-given commodity economy contains modern internal and external intense relationship, and it generates these intense relationships over and over again in an ever-increasing form. After an advance, the development of human power, and the period of individual emancipation, it ultimately hinders further development and brings humanity to a new barbaric state after a vast expansion of man's control over nature."<sup>[8]</sup> These are the "warnings in the blooming age" of the new era. It seems that industrial civilization, a troubled child, does not follow the teaching of its "mother."

Then, can human beings save themselves? "Only by changing the existing thinking model of human is it possible to get out of this predicament."<sup>[13]</sup> At present, we need to change the thinking about "development." "Humans cannot always be deceived by false promises of development. All human beings, regardless of color, culture, background, religion or gender, seize new opportunities, and a great part of these opportunities jeopardize our planet. Gradually strong societies and technological developments have accelerated this process, and the direction of development, if left uncorrected, will cause greater

damage over time.”<sup>[13]</sup> An Indian scholar once gave a “warning” on this issue. He pointed out that the contemporary “development” has always been the Western concept of “development.” “The 150 years of colonial rule left us with a forest that was cut down and a silted river and the firm belief that this is the so-called “development.” In the 50 years since the national independence, we have not tried to change this understanding of development, but instead have spared no effort to emulate this ‘development’ model. Sadly, when ecologists in many Western countries have begun to accept Mahatma Gandhi’s worldview, people seem to have forgotten him in his own country and in many other Third World countries.”<sup>[13]</sup> This irony may be more appropriate for China than India: “Human and nature unity” has been the essence of traditional Chinese culture, but now it has gradually been forgotten. We blindly follow the “Western model” and have even lost the original direction.

It is understandable, of course, that the oppressed nations, after experiencing the extreme suffering of the two world wars that humans have never had before, cannot wait to develop. China’s modernization process is also like this. Since 1840, the tragic lesson of “backwardness is to be beaten” has been borne in mind by the Chinese people, and the self-improvement of contemporary Chinese people is based on this painful memory. We need national prosperity, national revival after suffering foreign oppression for over a hundred years and now still faced with such threats, and the people around the world still take the country as a political identity and nation as a cultural identity in contemporary state and nations. It is, of course, necessary to take the Western way as reference to think about China’s modernization. However, when the world colonial

era had passed and the road to industrialization originated in the West had caused environmental problems, affecting human survival, and developing countries have suffered from imitation of the Western road, do we still need to follow the Western concept and value? Do we still take the modernization road of Western villages as the only path for the development of China’s villages?

In contemporary times, we not only need the awareness of the sense of national crisis, but also need to establish a “sense of a global community with a shared future.” (Xi Jinping’s address at the Commemoration of 70th Anniversary of Victory of Chinese People’s Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War on September 3, 2015). As a scholar, it is necessary to discuss China’s modernization in the coming decades or even centuries. But we need a broader vision, which is to see the problems in these decades, centuries or even in a longer period of human history. We urgently need to have a basic view of the whole history of the human species. It is necessary to reflect on the way of thinking that China’s path of development is determined only with reference to the beginning centuries, since the origins of Western hegemonies. “Many keep the original status and very less of them unified.”<sup>[14]</sup> “Rural urbanization” is only a possibility or path selected from the “many” possibilities of Westerners, but this path is not very good and there are more paths to choose, especially with hundreds of years of practice. As a big agricultural country, China enjoys different national conditions than those of the West in rural modernization. Therefore, why do we still follow the same path behind the West?

*(Translator: Wu Hao; Editor: Jia Fengrong)*

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