

THE EMERGING OF CIVIL ORGANIZATIONS AND CHANGES OF GOVERNANCE IN RURAL CHINA

-- A CASE STUDY ON DONGSHENG VILLAGE, CHANGQIAO TOWN, ZHANGPU COUNTY, FUJIAN PROVINCE

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I. Foreword

Since China implemented the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, China's rural areas have undergone great changes. So far as economic restructuring is concerned, the current contract responsibility system replaces the original people's commune system. So far as political system is concerned, the various civil organizations begin to emerge and the villagers' self-governing system based on civil organizations is gradually implemented. Economic and political restructuring is gradually carried out in rural areas. This reflects Deng Xiaoping' tactics for reform. "Since the 80 per cent of our people live in the country, China's social stability and its economic development depend above all on the development of the countryside and the improvement of rural living standards." "Devolving authority to the localities and the people, which in the countryside means the peasants, is the height of democracy."¹ Actually, China's problem is mainly the rural problem, because there are over 800 million peasants among more than 1.2 billion Chinese people. The same is true of civil organizations. At present, there are 2,135 counties, 44,689 townships and towns and about 740,000 administrative villages in China.² Since the 1990s, many civil organizations have developed extensively in townships, towns and villages below the county level. According to conservative estimates, at least over 3 million civil organizations at the levels of township and village have been registered or have not been registered throughout the country, accounting for over two-thirds of the total civil organizations. It is obvious that if we do not do research on rural civil organizations and governance, it will be hard for us to gain an understanding of the current conditions of China's civil organizations and governance.

In this research, the author takes Dongsheng Village, Changqiao Town, Zhangpu County, Fujian Province as a case and carries out research on the development of rural civil organizations and their influence on changes in rural governance, mainly because

the village is above average in terms of the level of economic and cultural development and social and political structures and the research is of particular, forward-looking significance.

Zhangpu County in which Dongsheng Village is located is under the jurisdiction of Zhangzhou City, Fujian Province. It is among the coastal open counties which were first approved by the State Council. It is located between the two special economic zones of Xiamen and Shantou. It is close to the Taiwan Straits in the east, to Shantou in the south and to Zhangzhou and Xiamen in the north. The county has 20 townships and towns and 11 farms, forestry stations, saltworks and tea plantations with a total population of 790,000. Its area is 1,981 square kilometres, its cultivated area is 530,000 mu (one mu is equal to 0.0667 hectares), its hilly area is 1.64 million mu, and its area of shoal is 932,000 mu. In 1997, the gross national product of the whole county was 4.06 billion RMB yuan. Its total output value of industrial and agricultural production was 9.95 billion yuan, of which its total output value of industrial production was 7.772 billion yuan and its total output value of agricultural production was 2.182 billion yuan. Its revenue was 216 million yuan. The yearly per capita income of urban residents was 5,096 yuan, and the yearly per capita net income of peasants was 2,920 yuan and approximated 2,160 yuan of the yearly per capita income of farmers throughout the country in 1998.³

Dongsheng Village is located in Changqiao Town in the northwest of Zhangpu County. Before liberation, it was called Xiyan Village. Its exact history cannot be ascertained. But the “Yiyuan Chamber” – the indigenous chamber as the main architecture of the village has a history of over 300 years. For most of the time in history, the whole villagers mainly lived in the “Yiyuan Chamber”.⁴ The chamber had a total of over 30 houses. Generally speaking, a household lived in a house. After liberation, the population increased and the village gradually expanded. At present, the whole village has 1,156 people and 265 families. Over 100 people come from other places. Most of them are the hired laborers who are from the north and the neighboring counties. Most of the people in the village are surnamed Huang, and people only in two to three families are not surnamed Huang. The Huang clan has a total of seven branches (locally called), of which the third branch has left the village. Now the fourth and first branches have more people. Especially the fourth branch is most powerful, because it has over 400 people. The village has 23,000 mu of the hilly area and 1,450 mu of cultivated land. Dongsheng Village is an advanced village in Zhangpu County. The living standards of its villagers and the overall level of its social development are high in Zhangpu County. In 1998, the total output value of the village was more than 80 million yuan. Five years ago, the per capita income of the whole village was 3,500 yuan. In 1998, it came to 4,290 yuan, 1.45 times as much as the yearly per capita income of peasants throughout the county and about two times as much as the yearly per capita income of peasants throughout the country. The per capita area of housing was over 80 square metres. Five years ago, it was about 50 square metres. The main source of villagers’ income was fruit trees. The whole village had over 300 household orchards. On average, a household had over one orchard.⁵

In addition to high level of economic development, Dongsheng Village is more advanced than other neighboring villages in other aspects. For example, the rate of birth

control is 100%, the rate of telephone installation is 98%, the rate of major criminal case occurrence is 0%, the enrollment rate of schoolage children is 100%, and the rate of television use is 100%. Therefore, Dongsheng Village has obtained many honorable titles. The main honorable titles are as follows:

- 1) The title of the “unit cited for ideological and cultural progress” conferred by Fujian provincial Party committee and provincial government (in April 1987 and December 1995);
- 2) The title of the “advanced collective cited for family planning in Fujian Province” conferred by the provincial government;
- 3) The title of the telephone model village” conferred by the general office of the government of Zhangpu County and the posts and telecommunications bureau (November 1997);
- 4) The title of the “1,000 advanced villages throughout the country cited for afforestation” conferred by the National Greening Committee (1998);
- 5) The title of the “star village” conferred by Fujian provincial Party committee and provincial government (1991);
- 6) The title of the “advanced primary Party organization” conferred by Zhangzhou municipal Party committee (July 1997);
- 7) The title of the “advanced primary Party organization” conferred by Fujian provincial Party committee (July 1997);
- 8) The title of the “up-to-standard village cited for improvement at the village level” conferred by Zhangpu county Party committee and county government;
- 9) The “village cited for ideological and cultural progress” conferred by Fujian provincial Party committee and provincial government (February 1998).⁶

II. Process of Development of Civil Organizations in China’s Rural Areas

Civil organizations in China’s rural areas have a long history. For over 2000 years from the unification of China in the Qin Dynasty to the collapse of the last feudal dynasty, the Qing Dynasty, except for some periods in the Yuan Dynasty and other dynasties, the Central Government did not establish the administrative organs at the village level and rural areas were governed by relying on rural civil organizations composed mainly of country gentlemen. After the Qing Dynasty collapsed, the Kuomintang government established village offices in rural areas for the first time, so that these village offices served as the grass-roots administrative organs of the government. But civil organizations in rural areas did not disappear totally. For example, temple fairs, clansmen’s associations, ancestral halls, country worthy associations, civil corps and mutual aid foundations of all descriptions still existed in most of the rural areas and continued to exert an important influence there.

After the Communist Party of China was at the helm of the state in 1949, economically it implemented the people’s commune system based on the collective ownership and mandatory economics. Politically, it implemented the centralized administrative system featuring the Party’s unified leadership. The Party branches were

established in almost all rural areas and served as the nuclei of administrative power in rural areas. The Party branches and production brigades exercised the political and economic management of rural areas. Before the 1980s, such traditional rural civil organizations as temple fairs, clansmen's associations, ancestral halls, country worthy associations were regarded as feudal remnants or reactionary forces and were eliminated. They were replaced by some new rural organizations, for example, peasant associations, women's federations, the Youth League organizations, agricultural cooperatives, mutual aid groups and production teams. In fact, they were the executive organs of the Party branches and the rural organizations prescribed by the Central Government. They exercised mandatory management. No matter whether peasants were willing, they generally had to join the corresponding organizations. Other organizations which were established voluntarily by peasants were not allowed. They were banned as soon as they were discovered. Therefore, for about 40 years from 1949 to 1980, strictly speaking, there were no voluntary, self-governing civil organizations in China's rural areas.

In 1978, China implemented major economic and political restructuring under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Reform first proceeded in rural areas. The household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output for peasants replaced the original people's commune, and the household private economy began to develop. Thanks to the new economic structure, peasants enjoyed the freedom to use their land and labor force and engage in business operation. This greatly aroused the initiative of peasants for production and helped raise their living standards. From 1978 to 1998, the per capita income of rural households increased from 133.6 to 2,160 yuan, there was a net increase of 350% after allowing for price rises and the yearly average growth rate exceeded 8%.⁷ Because of the disintegration of the people's commune and the implementation of the household contract responsibility system, the rural economic activities and the entire rural social and political activities underwent earth-shaking changes. One of these changes was that rural civil organizations began to recover and grow slowly.

After China carried out the reform designed to establish the market economy in 1978, by and large, the development of rural civil organizations experienced the two stages. The first stage is from 1978 to 1992. At this stage, some important rural civil organizations began to recover or emerge, for example, villagers' committees, temple fairs, family planning associations, public security committees, unlicensed private bank (a kind of private cooperative foundation), etc. According to the conditions in Dongsheng Village, the rural civil organizations had the three features at this stage. First, civil organizations developed very rapidly. Most of the current civil organizations in Dongsheng Village developed at this stage. Second, management was rather chaotic. There were no regulations on the internal management of all these organizations and on the government's external management of them. Third, the Party branch had absolute leadership of the various civil organizations. In fact, the villagers' committee which served as peasants' self-governing organization was an executive organ of the Party branch. The second stage is from 1992 until now. The main features of this stage are that rural civil organizations are more self-governing and especially such important

villagers' organizations as the villagers' committee and the senior citizens' association begin to play an important role in the management of village affairs and become a major factor affecting the life of villagers. At this stage, governments at all levels have formulated and promulgated new administrative laws and regulations, for example, the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China, the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Associations (Revised) and the Regulations on the Management of Civilian-Run Nonbusiness Units formulated by the Central Government, the Detailed Rules on the Elections of Villagers' Committees and the Rules of Family Planning Associations formulated by Fujian Province and the Village Regulations formulated by the villagers' representative conference of Dongsheng Village. The internal and external management of civil organizations is obviously more standardized than before.

At present, Dongsheng Village has 18 civil organizations. They include the villagers' committee, the Youth League branch, the women's federation, the senior citizens' association, the association for the study of fruit trees, the public security committee, the family planning association, the mediation association, the economic cooperative, the population school, the senior citizens' school, the militia battalion, the villagers' groups, the villagers' representative conference, the temple fair, the able persons' association, the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management, the villagers' group for handling financial affairs, etc. Almost all adult villagers join one or more civil organizations. These civil organizations fall under several categories according to our different standards for classification. With regard to their major functions, they can fall under the two categories – power and service organizations. The villagers' committee, the family planning association, the senior citizens' association and the villagers' representative conference belong to power organizations. They play an authoritative role in looking after the everyday life of villagers. The public security committee, the association for the study of fruit trees, the mediation association and the economic cooperative belong to service organizations. The Youth League branch, the women's federation, the population school and the militia battalion belong to subsidiary organizations and are affiliated to the Party branch. With regard to their activities, they fall under the permanent and provisional organizations. The temple fair, the able persons' association, the population school, the senior citizens' school, the villagers' representative conference, the villagers' group for handling financial affairs and the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management are provisional civil organizations. Other organizations are stable permanent organizations.

In comparison with general urban civil organizations, the civil organizations in Dongsheng Village have the two distinctive features. First, almost all these civil organizations do not go through legal registration formalities in the government department for the management of civil organizations, but they are legal organizations. Their legitimacy is mainly based on the following aspects:

- 1) The state laws, for example, the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees and the Law on the Elections of Deputies to People's Conferences below the County Level;

- 2) The relevant regulations of local Party and government departments, for example, the Regulations on Family Planning formulated by the provincial government, etc.;
- 3) The consent of local Party and government departments. All civil organizations in Dongsheng Village are approved by the government of Changqiao Town, and most of them are established according to the unified requirements of the town Party committee and town government.

Second, the influence and status of some traditional organizations are increasingly weakened. For example, the influence of the Youth League organization, the women's federation and the militia battalion is weaker than before. Now they seldom conduct normal activities. On the contrary, some organizations which are restored or emerge become strong and effective, for example, the senior citizens' association, the economic cooperative, etc.

III. Introduction to Rural Civil Organizations

Civil organizations in Dongsheng Village reflect the current conditions of rural civil organizations in south China to a large extent. Because there are no works on the introduction to and study of them, the author finds it necessary to give introduction to them.

- 1) The villagers' committee. At present, it is the most important civil organization in China' rural areas. In fact, it has replaced or is replacing the original Party branch and becomes the most authoritative administrative organ in many localities. According to the provisions of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees (for Trial Implementation), the villagers' committee is the villagers' grass-roots mass self-governing organization for self-management, self-education and self-service. It handles the village public affairs and matters for public good, mediates in civil disputes, helps safeguard public security, reports villagers' opinions and requests and makes suggestions to the people's government. The villagers' committee is not responsible to the people's government in the locality, but it is responsible to the villagers and reports work to them.⁸

The villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village was established in 1988. It consists of five members. It has a director (also called village head), two deputy directors (deputy village heads), a woman member and a militia member. All members of the villagers' committee are Party members. Like the conditions in most of the rural areas throughout the country, village head serves as deputy secretary of the Party branch of the village. Members of the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village are directly elected by villagers, but "sea election"⁹ in some economically developed areas is not implemented in Dongsheng Village. After candidates are recommended by the Party branch of the village and villagers and are approved at the villagers' representative conference, they are elected by all villagers through secret ballot. From our investigation, we find that candidates for the villagers' committee and members formally elected basically reflect the will of the Party branch

and can better carry out its policies.

The main responsibilities of the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village are to organize and lead villagers to develop the economy, for example, village cadres take the lead in contracting hillside fields and planting fruit trees; to take the initiative to provide services and coordination for the production of the village, for example, to establish the economic cooperative and the association for the study of fruit trees and provide services for raising the yield of fruit trees and the sale of fruit in other areas for fruit growers; to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the village collectively-owned economic organizations, villagers, contractors, jointly operated households and businessmen from other areas; to manage the land and other property collectively owned by the villagers, tell villagers to make rational use of natural resources and preserve and improve the ecological environment; to publicize the Constitution, laws, regulations and state policies, tell and urge villagers to perform their due obligations according to law and take care of public property and help villagers conduct all kinds of the activities designed to promote ideological and cultural progress.

Like other localities, members of the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village are not divorced from production. But they often attend meetings and handle village affairs in light of needs. So every member has to spend much time on the public affairs of the village every year. The government does not provide funds to the villagers' committee, and funds for the operation of the villagers' committee and economic compensation for its members are reimbursed from the public finance of the village. Dongsheng Village has a high collective economic strength, and no indiscriminate levies are levied on peasants for the finance of the village. The public finance of the village mainly comes from the income from land contracting, management fees and rent from the land used by businessmen from other areas. According to the current regulations of Dongsheng Village, village head and secretary of the Party branch get a subsidy of 150 yuan every month, deputy village head 120 yuan every month, and member 100 yuan every month.¹⁰

2) The senior citizens' association (also called the elderly association). It was a civil organization which developed rapidly in China's urban and rural areas in recent years. At first, it was a mass organization which mainly consisted of retired cadres and workers in the cities. Later, it was gradually established in vast rural areas. But the rural senior citizens' association in some parts of Fujian and Jiangxi in south China is of special significance. It generally becomes the elderly organization in rural areas and even a traditional clansmen's organization. Even if the senior citizens' association do not become a traditional elderly organization or clansmen's organization in rural areas which are greatly affected by the traditional culture, it often has a special status. This is true of the senior citizens' association in Dongsheng Village.

The senior citizens' association of Dongsheng Village has only one membership qualification, that is, its elderly villagers. According to the current Chinese standards for senior citizens, the senior citizens' association of Dongsheng Village consists of the senior citizens who are 60 for men and 55 for women. It has 132 members. The leading body of the senior citizens' association is the executive council. It is responsible for initiating the activities of the senior citizens' association. President of the executive

council is the top leader of the senior citizens' association. It has a president and a vice-president. The current president is 68 years old. He is an old village head and an old Party member. He enjoys a high reputation in Dongsheng Village. He is asked to participate in the discussion of any major matter arising in the village. It also has a secretary-general and seven members. All these leading comrades are the country worthies who enjoy high prestige and command universal respect in the village.

The senior citizens' association has the management group, the finance group, the recreational group, the coordination group and the funeral group. Every group has a head, a deputy head and three to four members. In addition, the senior citizen's association in Dongsheng Village has a senior citizens' school. The village head concurrently serves as its principal, and secretary of the Party branch of the village concurrently serves as its honorary principal. President and a vice-president of the association concurrently serve as its two deputy principals. The school also has a dean responsible for teaching and two teachers. Members of the senior citizens' association are naturally students. The school gives lessons in the afternoons of the first and fifteenth days of every lunar month. The major courses are the course on the situation (secretary of the Party branch of the village usually gives the first course on the situation) and the courses on village plan, construction, elderly health care, culture and scientific and technical knowledge. Students sit in on classes free of charge. They learn these courses voluntarily. Most of them can go to school on their own.

The activities of the senior citizens' association are varied and colorful. The routine activities are as follows:

- 1) There are elderly recreational activities. There is a room for the activities of senior citizens. Senior citizens play chess, mahjong and poker, read books and chat here almost every day;
- 2) There are the activities of health care. Doctors of the village clinic give physical examinations to senior citizens at regular intervals and teach them to do health exercises and practise qigong and taijiquan;
- 3) The senior citizens' association participates in the discussion of some important matters of the village and in the policy-making. Before the Party branch of the village and the villagers' committee make major policies concerning the economic development and capital construction of the village, they usually solicit the opinions of the principal leading comrades of the senior citizens' association. The leading comrades of the senior citizens' association also concurrently hold the leading posts of some important organizations, for example, president of the association concurrently serves as a full-time vice-president of the family planning association, another important civil organization;
- 4) The senior citizens' association organizes some activities of the village for public good, for example, it presides over the ceremonies of weddings and funerals in the village, organizes villagers' public memorial ceremonies and theatrical performances and provides tableware for the banquets for weddings and funerals; and
- 5) The senior citizens' association provides other services to the elderly, for

example, it helps the elderly overcome difficulties and organizes them for study.

The work of all the leading comrades and members of the senior citizens' association is voluntary and unpaid. But the senior citizens' association needs a considerable income to be used as huge funds for its activities. For example, in the first quarter of 1999, the total income of the senior citizens' association was 7,810 yuan, and its total expenditures were 6,015 yuan. The income of the senior citizens' association mainly consists of the following five sources: membership dues, every member pays ten yuan every year; donations made by its members voluntarily, donations are mainly made to support some important activities; a fixed sum of money appropriated from the village finance, the villagers' committee appropriates 10,000 yuan to the senior citizens' association from the village public finance every year; donations made by the Party branch of the village, the villagers' committee and other units, the Party branch of the village, the villagers' committee and other village enterprises make donations in light of the needs of the senior citizens' association and the village finance, and one-time donations are usually made around the Double Ninth Festival; income from the business operation of the senior citizens' association, this is the most important source of its funds. The senior citizens' association operates a fruit tree station with an area of 10 mu. The yearly income from its business operation is about 30,000 yuan. This is the biggest income it gets. It gets other income, for example, earnings from leasing its tools and from its paid services.

The expenditures of the senior citizens' association mainly consist of these items: operating costs which mainly refer to some productive expenses for fruit trees and tools costs for governing weddings and funerals; expenses for the activities of senior citizens, for example, going out for tourism, elderly health care, recreational articles and stationery; its regular expenses, for example, expenses for office articles, telephone rates and reception fees; expenses for the Spring Festival, the Double Ninth Festival, the Mid-Autumn Festival and celebration of members' birthdays; other expenses, for example, expenses for offering sacrifices to the ancestors, expressing solicitude for poor senior citizens and organizing theatrical performances.

The senior citizens' association of Dongsheng Village implements a transparent and standardized system of financial management. Its finance group is responsible for all financial activities. There are detailed accounts for all items of income and expenditures. Its finance group puts up wall newspapers to make detailed accounts including major income and expenditures known to the public and accepts the supervision of all its members.¹¹

(3) The family planning association. It is one of the most important civil organizations in China's vast rural areas, because strictly carrying out the policy of family planning is one of the basic state policies of the Chinese government and the family planning association is responsible for the organization of the implementation of this policy. Whether to strictly implement the Chinese government's policy of "one child for a couple" is a major index for assessing the village cadres. Over a long period of time, the village cadres in many localities once used some rude means to punish villagers who violate this policy. This became one of the main reasons for antagonism between cadres and

peasants. Since the 1990s, local authorities have revised the rural policy of family planning and changed the policy of “one child for a couple” which has been strictly implemented in cities. When the first child is a boy, a couple can have only one child. If the first child is a girl, the couple is allowed to give birth to the second child three to five years later. The peasants in Dongsheng Village call this the policy of “one child and a half”. The policy of “one child and a half” greatly eases antagonism between peasants and cadres in rural areas. But family planning is still a major and difficult problem concerning rural policy. So the family planning association is still particularly important.

The family planning association of Dongsheng Village operates in the office building of the village. It has an office. Its leading body is the council which consists of six members. Deputy Secretary of the Party branch concurrently serves as president of the council, and president of the senior citizens’ association concurrently serves as its full-time vice-president. It also has a vice-president and a secretary-general. All women of child-bearing age are its members. It has a total of over 140 members who are divided into six groups. Funds of the family planning association mainly come from the village finance. Every year it has about 1,000 yuan used for various activities. Members, president and vice-presidents of the association do not have subsidies and provide voluntary services.

The main responsibilities of the family planning association are to publicize the government’s policy toward family planning, supervise villagers’ implementation of the policy toward family planning, punish villagers who violate the policy, give rewards to the couples who set a good example in implementing the policy, provide medical and health services to young couples and console and help the women who have child-bearing operations. The family planning association has the village “population school”. Secretary of the Party branch concurrently serves as its principal. All man and woman villagers who are 18 to 45 years old are naturally students. They must go to classes. Otherwise, fine is imposed on those who refuse to go to classes. Classes are given twice in the first half and the second half of every year. Secretary of the Party branch, president of the family planning association and the town leaders concerned voluntarily give lessons. The contents of teaching are mainly the policy toward family planning, medical care and knowledge about good prenatal and postnatal care.

The family planning association mainly relies on a series of compulsory systems and regulations to perform its responsibilities. The family planning association of Dongsheng Village formulates or implements 15 systems and regulations according to the government’s policies, laws and regulations. They include the Regulations on the Work of Family Planning Associations at Village Level in Fujian Province, the Responsibility System of Making Cadres of Two Village Committees Take Charge of Family Planning, the System of the Work of Family Planning Associations at Village Level, the Responsibilities of Presidents of Village Family Planning Associations, the Standards for Family Planning Associations in Qualified Villages, the System of Management of Issuance of Family Planning Certificates at Village Level, the System of Reporting Family Planning Cases, the System of Management of Family Planning Statistical Accounts at Village Level, the System of Management of Family Planning among the Floating Population at Village Level, the System of Promising to Provide Family Planning

Services, the Birth Control Target during the Period of the Ninth Five-Year Plan, the System of “Six Goods and Three Nos and “Four Haves and Three Implements” for Qualified Villages, the System of Regular Meetings on Family Planning Work at Village Level, the System of Family Planning Publicity and Education at Village Level, the Responsibility System of “Two Checks and Two Supplements at Village Level, etc.¹²

All villagers must observe the above-mentioned regulations. If a villager violates these regulations, he will be punished. The general form of punishment is imposition of fine. According to the regulations of Fujian Province, if the first birth is a girl in Dongsheng Village, the second birth is permitted four years later. If the first birth is a boy, the second birth is not permitted. A heavy fine is imposed on the couple who gives birth to more children than what family planning allows. So far such cases have not occurred in Dongsheng Village. Fine which is as high as several thousand and tens of thousands of yuan is imposed on the couples who give birth to more children in some villages. If the second birth is still a girl, the household is called the “household with two girls”, no birth is allowed. But the couple can enjoy a series of preferential treatment. The measures of preferential treatment for the “household with two girls” in Dongsheng Village are as follows:

- 1) 200 yuan of the previous engineering fee is reduced or exempted;
- 2) 86 yuan of the fee raised for education is reduced or exempted;
- 3) 50 yuan for voluntary labor is reduced or exempted;
- 4) 46 yuan of students’ miscellaneous fee is reduced or exempted;
- 5) To study in agricultural correspondence school free of charge (65 yuan);
and
- 6) 500 yuan of old-age insurance fee is reduced or exempted.¹³

The “household with two girls” enjoys the preferential policy mainly for two reasons. First, the man villagers are still the main labor force in rural areas. Second, there has been the concept of looking up on men and down on women in the traditional culture for a long time.

4) The Youth League branch. The village Youth League branch is a rural primary organization of the Chinese Communist Youth League. The Youth League branch and the Party branch have existed for a long time. It once played a major role prior to reform and opening up. It was a major assistant of the village Party branch and assisted the Party branch in managing the young people in the whole village. But its role has been greatly weakened. On the one hand, the power of the Party branch is weakened. On the other hand, the Youth League branch lacks authority and is not very attractive. The Youth League branch of Dongsheng Village has 5 members. It has a secretary and a deputy secretary. It has 150 League members. Its secretary obtains 100 yuan as a monthly subsidy. Other members have no subsidies. The yearly operating funds of the Youth League branch are about 1,000 yuan which comes from the village finance. The Youth League branch of the village does not conduct many activities. Its main activity is to fulfill the tasks assigned by the Youth League committees at the higher levels, for example, celebrating the Youth Day (May 4), doing voluntary labor, holding evening parties and attending the activities for county and town League members.

5) Women’s federation. Like the Youth League branch, the women’s federation is a

mass organization of official nature which has existed for a long time. Its main responsibility has undergone a gradual shift from the original management of women to the protection of women and children, settlement of disputes between couples and between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Its function of management of women has been basically transferred to the family planning association. Its other functions include organizing the celebration of the International Working Women's Day (March 8), cleaning the village, doing other voluntary labor and publicizing and guaranteeing the women's rights and interests. The women's federation of Dongsheng Village has a director and three members. Its director concurrently serves as member of the council of the village family planning association. A small amount of its operating funds comes from the village finance.

- 6) Public security committee. It is a subsidiary of the villagers' committee which consists of four members. The village head concurrently serves as its director. There are still three members. The basic responsibility of the public security committee is to guarantee the security of villagers and their normal living order, for example, to organize them to patrol at night. It has a joint defence group consisting of five persons, of whom three are members of the public security committee and two are recruited from society. The public security committee gives subsidies to its members and members of the joint defence group who patrol. All funds come from the village finance.
- 7) Mediation association. It has an office in the office building of the village. It consists of three persons. Member of the Party branch concurrently serves as its director. There are other two members, of whom one is director of the women's federation and the other is a villager. Its main activity is to mediate in disputes among family members and between neighbors. It does not conduct many activities. When disputes arise, members of the mediation association ask persons concerned to come to the office and also take the initiative to go to the homes of the latter. The mediation association plays a great role. It can generally settle small disputes through mediation, and the town public security police office will settle serious conflicts. The funds of the mediation association also come from the village finance.
- 8) Economic cooperative. It consists of three persons. It has an office. Deputy village head concurrently serves as its director, and other two persons are villagers who are capable of doing business. The main role of the economic cooperative is to provide business intermediate services, consultancy and intermediate services for helping villagers sell farm products. As a site for business talks with and reception of foreign entrepreneurs who come to the village, the economic cooperative collects appropriate transaction commission according to percentages as the sources of its funds. The main function of the economic cooperative of Dongsheng Village is to organize fruit merchants to come to the village to purchase the fruit of the village in the fruit harvest season.
- 9) The association for the study of grain and sugarcane and the association for the study of fruit trees. It has an office. It is an organization established without registration. The association for the study of grain and sugarcane and the

association for the study of fruit trees are an organization with two names. Deputy village head concurrently serves as its president. It has five members mainly consisting of villagers who are experienced in growing grain, sugarcane and fruit and have scientific and technical knowledge. Its main activities are to provide scientific and technical services to villagers, including publicizing scientific and technical knowledge and preventing and controlling plant diseases and eliminating pests. Its members provide services free of charge. Funds for some necessary activities come from the village finance. Its yearly funding is 1,000 yuan mainly used for purchase of books and experiment.

- 10) Village militia battalion. The militia battalion consists of two parts, that is, primary and ordinary militia. Primary militia are the young villagers who receive systematic military training, are strong and have a high comprehensive quality. There are 18 primary militia in Dongsheng Village. Ordinary militia are all men villagers who are 18 to 45 years old. There are several hundred ordinary militia. Every year primary militia assemble for one-month training and are grouped into reserves. Its main task is to deal with an emergency, for example, to fight floods, provide emergency rescue and be on duty for war preparedness. Other militia do not assemble for training. Every year a broadcasting meeting is held. Funds for militia training can be collected from villagers according to the government's regulations, but funds for militia in Dongsheng Village are paid from the village public finance.
- 11) A common foundation which is called "unlicensed private bank" or "mouse association" in rural areas in Fujian Province exists in rural areas in south China. Actually, it is a disguised unlicensed private bank. Many of these foundations attract deposits from many peasants by offering high interest. Although what these foundations have done violates the government's financial laws and regulations, they usually get the support of local governments. The defrauding of the funds of "unlicensed private bank", the loss of these funds following blind investment or squandering or waste of these funds by cadres have frequently occurred these years. So villagers often appeal to the higher authorities for help or make trouble. This becomes an important factor which affects stability in China's rural areas. Fortunately, Dongsheng Village does not establish the foundation. There is only a foundation for the welfare of senior citizens in the village. It is organized and managed by the senior citizens' association. It is only confined to the senior citizens' voluntary contribution of funds. These funds are mainly used for the mutual help among senior citizens. The welfare foundation also makes small investment. Profit is used for the activities of the senior citizens' association.
- 12) Such organizations as the villagers' representative conference, the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management, the villagers' group for handling financial affairs, the able persons' association and the temple fair are provisional organizations which conduct activities at irregular intervals. They have neither fixed assets, nor fixed organizational structure and nor fixed sources of funds. The villagers'

committee calls the villagers' representative conference and the able persons' association. The main function of the former is to elect the new villagers' committee and discuss important village affairs. After the new villagers' committee is elected, two meetings are generally held every year, at which the report of the villagers' committee and the opinions about village affairs are listened to. The able persons' association mainly consists of the able persons of the village. When the villagers' committee deals with the major problems concerning the development of the whole village, it often takes the initiative to call these able persons to hold the meeting and solicit their opinions. The main functions of the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management and the villagers' group for handling financial affairs are to see whether the villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations make village and financial affairs known to the public. There is no Buddhist temple in Dongsheng Village. There is a temple in the neighboring village at which the Buddha called "Xizai Buddhist Idol" is enshrined and worshipped. It is a local idol. There is a big temple fair every four years. Every family in Dongsheng Village sends its members to attend it. A villager is voluntarily responsible for raising funds from the followers of the village and contributing them to the Buddhist temple. Usually there are not special religious activities. Every family goes to the temple to worship the idol in light of its own needs. The "Xizai Buddhist Idol" in the temple is often lent for worshipping. This is called the "visiting". When the "Xizai Buddhist Idol" passes the door, every family worships it. Villagers have faith in it. There are few other religious activities. There are only two Christian households in the whole village.¹⁴

IV. Environment for Growth of Rural Civil Organizations

The development of rural civil organizations is seriously checked by the corresponding political, legal, economic and cultural environment. Prior to reform and opening up, China's rural areas implemented the highly centralized economic structure and political system and there was no political, legal and economic basis necessary for voluntary and independent civil organizations, so no civil organizations emerged. Under the conditions at that time, any civil organizations were regarded as the remnants of feudalism or as the bourgeois things and eliminated, and even clansmen's organizations which had existed for a long time in history disappeared.

The reason why civil organizations in Dongsheng Village developed rapidly after the 1990s was the disintegration of the original people's commune with a serious economic compulsion and the implementation of the household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output. Under the system of the people's commune, villagers basically did not own land and other property. They did not have the private interests which they controlled. They even did not have the power to make decisions about what to grow in the fields. The mandatory and entirely collectively-owned system of the people's commune greatly dampened the peasants' initiative for production and seriously impaired the development of rural productive forces. The peasants' income was very low

and they lived in dire poverty. They had neither free time nor spare cash to participate in the voluntary organizations. After the household contract responsibility system was implemented, farmland was distributed to villagers and was operated independently by them. As a result, the mandatory system in rural areas lost the basis for its existence, and peasants had great power to make economic decisions. For example, they were able to control land, time and labor. This greatly raised their living standards. In 1998 the rural per capita income in Dongsheng Village was as high as 4,290 yuan, almost 11 times as much as the country's rural yearly per capita income (378 yuan) in 1978 prior to reform. Under these economic conditions, the senior citizens no longer do farm work, and various recreational activities can be organized. The village has a sufficient public finance and provides financial support to guarantee the normal activities of such civil organizations as the villagers' committee, the family planning association and the senior citizens' association. From the economic changes and the development of civil organizations in Dongsheng Village, we can draw the conclusion: The free control of property and labor force and high living standards are the two necessary economic environment for the growth of rural civil organizations.

Many scholars often draw this conclusion while discussing the 21-year reform in China: China pursues a way of first economic restructuring and then political restructuring. So far it has not introduced important reform to its political system. Therefore, its reform succeeds. On the contrary, the former Soviet Union pursued a line of reform featuring first political restructuring, then economic restructuring, so its reform failed.¹⁵ This view has its limitations. It defines China's political development according to Western political criteria and regards multi-party system, separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers and Western democratic representative system of government as the sole criterion for political restructuring. According to this criterion, we can say that China's political restructuring has not undergone any substantial reform so far. But there should be other criteria for judging political development, for example, relations between the central authorities and the local authorities, relations between the Party and the state, relations between the government and citizens, relations between the government and enterprises, the system of selecting cadres, the system of leadership for the Party and the state, the system of political management, political culture, political tolerance, conditions in basic human rights, etc. According to these criteria, it is easy to find that the entire political situation in China has undergone tremendous changes since the policy of reform and opening to the outside world was implemented. The political change is the basic political environment for the growth of rural civil organizations.

Like other rural areas, Dongsheng Village exercised highly centralized political leadership prior to reform. During the period of the "cultural revolution", the powers of the village were vested in the village "revolutionary committee". But the Party branch was always the only organ of power. Although the village Party branch and the revolutionary committee were not the government organs of power according to legal provisions, in view of their actual role, they fully performed the functions of government power. The Party branch and the revolutionary committee were the units which combined the powers of political, economic and cultural management. There were also six production teams

under them. Under the unified leadership of the Party branch and the revolutionary committee, villagers had no powers of democratic election and self-governance and were not able to freely control their behaviors. The Party branch or the revolutionary committee completely controlled the farm work, distribution and labor time of every villager through production teams. Politically and economically, villagers had to accept the arrangements made by production team leaders unconditionally. If they were disobedient, they received economic punishment, for example, reduction or deduction of cash value of their workpoints. They also received political punishment, for example, compulsory participation in study classes, criticizing of commune members and even holding meetings to criticize and denounce them. The Party and the state incorporated every peasant into the highly centralized political process through the tight hierarchical system consisting of the village Party branch, the revolutionary committee, production brigade and production team, resulting in their complete loss of independence.

After the 1980s, the Chinese government first implemented separation of government administration from commune management, separation of the functions of the Party from those of the government and separation of economic management organs from administrative departments in rural areas. It was particularly stipulated that the village Party branch no longer served as an administrative organ for direct management of village affairs, the village revolutionary committee was banned, the administrative functions of the original production brigades were eliminated, the villagers' self-management organ – the "villagers' committee" was established and the decision-making power at grass-roots levels was increased. Because of all these major aspects of the rural political reform, the original political model of absolute centralism began to disintegrate and was replaced by a political model of relative pluralism. The process of transformation of the political model in Dongsheng Village was basically completed till the late 1980s. This is mainly manifested in these aspects. The hierarchical production teams for direct management of villagers disappear and are replaced by entirely loosely organized villagers' groups. The village Party branch no longer exercises direct management of villagers' affairs and is replaced by the villagers' committee. Villagers enjoy the right to freely elect village cadres for the first time. The political study class, political evening school, political mobilization meeting and political movement which villagers had to participate in are gone forever. Villagers can air their different views. They are not criticized for their different views. The rural political pluralism based on the rural economic pluralism is the basic political environment for the rapid development of civil organizations in Dongsheng Village.

The legal environment for rural civil organizations is different from that for urban ones. From the case of Dongsheng Village, we can see that most of its civil organizations are different from urban civil organizations which must be first registered in the departments of civil affairs and then become legal. Except for the villagers' committee which is established and registered in strict accordance with the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China, other civil organizations are not registered and managed in strict accordance with the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Associations and the Regulations on the Management of Civilian-Run Nonbusiness Units. For example, the village's association for the study of

fruit trees and the senior citizens' association are civil social organizations in nature. According to regulations, they must be registered in the department of civil affairs. However, formalities for their formal registration have not been handled so far. The village's economic cooperative is a civilian-run nonbusiness unit. According to regulations, it should be registered in the county bureau of civil affairs. However, formalities for its registration have not been handled. Villagers think that all these unregistered civil organizations are legal. Their main legitimacy is grounded on the documents and regulations of the Party and the government at higher levels. In the eyes of villagers and village cadres, these internal regulations and promulgated laws have the same value. Therefore, from the legal environment for the emergence and existence of civil organizations in Dongsheng Village, we can see that at present, the legitimacy of China's rural civil organizations is mainly based on the documents and regulations of the leading bodies of the Party and the government at higher levels and not on the state laws which have been promulgated.

The emergence and development of rural civil organizations are also checked by traditional cultural environment. Prior to reform and opening up, the Party and the government took various compulsory and non-compulsory measures, tried to completely eliminate the Chinese traditional politics and culture and even initiated such mass political movements as the "elimination of the 'four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits)" and the "cultural revolution". Under the strong political offensive, the impact of the traditional culture was minimized in the Chinese history. But the influence of the traditional culture on rural areas has been pent up in the hearts of villagers and has not been completely eliminated. After China implemented the policy of reform and opening up, the rural political environment was tolerant, the traditional culture gradually restored its influence on the rural life. From the case of Dongsheng Village, we can notice at least the tremendous influence of country worthy culture, villagers' self-governance and clansmen culture. Such villagers' organizations as the villagers' committee, the able persons' association, the senior citizens' association, the public security committee and the temple fair almost have their sources in the history of Dongsheng Village. The temple fair reflects the influence of the traditional Buddhist culture, the able persons' association reflects the tradition of country worthy politics, the senior citizens' association reflects the value of the clansmen's culture and the villagers' committee can be regarded as a continuation of villagers' self-governance.

V. Funding Sources of Rural Civil Organizations and Their Internal Mechanisms

Funding sources of rural civil organizations are very different from those of urban ones. The urban civil organizations have roughly three funding sources. First, their funds are fully appropriated by the government, for example, such mass organizations as the trade union, the Communist Youth League organizations and the women's federation and such professional management organizations as the Chinese Association for International Understanding, China National Light Industry Council, China Law Society and China Association for Science and Technology. Second, some funds are

appropriated by the government, and some are raised by them, for example, the chamber of commerce and some academic associations. Third, all of their funds are raised by them, for example, all civilian-run nonbusiness units. Rural civil organizations get no appropriations from the government, and their funds are paid or contributed by villagers.

Civil organizations in Dongsheng Village have three main funding sources. First, there are membership dues. Other organizations do not have income from membership dues. But only the temple fair, the senior citizens' association and the Communist Youth League branch have such income. According to rules or usual practice, members must pay membership dues as funds for the activities of these organizations. Liaison men collect the funds of the temple fair from villagers, and villagers voluntarily contribute money. Members of the senior citizens' association pay 10 yuan every year, and the association completely controls membership dues. Membership dues of the Communist Youth League branch are paid on a monthly basis according to income, but most of them must be paid to the town Youth League committee. Second, there is income from paid services paid by civil organizations, for example, the village economic cooperative, the senior citizens' association, etc. They provide some services to villagers and collect some fees as funds for their activities. Third, there are appropriations from the village. This is the main funding source of all civil organizations in Dongsheng Village. Except for the above-mentioned senior citizens' association, the economic cooperative, the temple fair and the Communist Youth League branch, other organizations have only one funding source, that is, the subsidies from the village. Except for the economic cooperative, other organizations which have other funding sources also enjoy subsidies from the village. It is a common thing in China's rural areas that villages provide subsidies to villagers' organizations. But the case of Dongsheng Village is more outstanding, because its financial situation is good. The village has a village-run enterprise, that is, the fruit tree station with about 40 mu of land. A person contracts the enterprise and pays a profit of 100,000 yuan every year. The village has two enterprises invested by entrepreneurs from Taiwan, Jingu Preserved Fruits Plant and Dongsheng Mineral Water Plant. The village collects land rent from them. It has 23,000 mu of collective-owned hilly land, all of which is contracted by villagers. The period of contracting land is 30 years. Villagers pay 8 yuan for every mu of fruit trees as the contracting funds to the village every year. In 1998 the net income of the village was about 600,000 yuan.¹⁶

Qualifications of members of villagers' organizations are less strict than those of urban civil organizations. In Dongsheng Village, all adult women are naturally members of the village women's federation. They do not need to apply and pay membership dues. This is true of the senior citizens' association. All villagers, including men over 60 years old and women over 55 years old, are naturally its members. But its members must pay membership dues. Otherwise, they will be disqualified. The requirements set by the village Communist Youth League branch are relatively strict. Not all young people can become League members. Young people have to handle a series of procedures such as application and the check of the League branch. After they can become League members, they must pay membership dues. About one fourth of the young people who are old enough to join the Communist Youth League can become League members.

Qualifications for the able persons' association and the association for the study of fruit trees are relatively strict. Their members must master professional skills and have experience in production, but there are no requirements for application procedures and obligations for membership dues. With regard to the main qualifications of the mediation association and the family planning association, their members should have a strong sense of responsibility, have experience in handling the relevant matters and enjoy high prestige. With regard to the qualifications of the public security committee, its members should be strong, have some technology and experience about security. Usually, they are selected from demobilized soldiers. Members of the mediation association, the family planning association and the public security committee do not need to handle procedures for application and registration, but they are recruited by the villagers' committee and the Party branch.

But if villagers want to become members of the leading groups or the core of leadership of these villagers' organizations, there are many restrictive conditions. For example, if a villager wants to become a member of the villagers' committee, he should have a high quality. He should be enthusiastic about public welfare and have a strong capability of organization and leadership, a strong economic strength, great enthusiasm for participation of administration of village affairs and a good spirit of cooperation. Because a villagers' committee is a villagers' self-governance authoritative organ and the most important civil organization in rural areas, its leader is freely elected by villagers according to legal provisions. Electoral procedures for the villagers' committee in Dongsheng Village are simple. The village Party branch presents a list of candidates for director, deputy directors and members of the villagers' committee after soliciting the opinions of representative villagers. There is a candidate more than posts for director and deputy directors respectively, and there are two candidates more than posts for members. After candidates are determined, the list of candidates is presented to all voters for direct voting. If candidates are voted through by half of the voters, they are formally elected. When all candidates are voted through by half of the voters, those who obtain more votes will be elected. After village head, deputy village heads and members are elected, the list of them must be submitted to the town Party committee and the town government for approval. According to the provisions of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees, candidates for village head, deputy village heads and members can be nominated by the village Party branch, over 10 villagers or villagers' groups. But candidates for director, deputy directors and members of all previous villagers' committees in Dongsheng Village are nominated by the Party branch. The incident of vetoing the list of candidates nominated by the Party branch which has occurred in many places has never happened.¹⁷

The villagers' committee is elected, and the League branch is elected by all League members according to the Constitution of the Communist Youth League. In addition, the leading cadres of all other civil organizations in Dongsheng Village are not elected. The responsible person of the senior citizens' association and the liaison person of the temple fair are recommended by their members. After the responsible person of the senior citizens' association is recommended, this must be approved by the village Party branch and the villagers' committee. The leading cadres and members of the village

family planning association, the public security committee, the mediation association, the militia battalion, the association for the study of fruit trees, the able persons' association, the senior citizens' school, the population school, the women's federation, the villagers' group for handling financial affairs and the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management are appointed by the village Party branch and the villagers' committee.

Most of the 18 civil organizations in Dongsheng Village do not have strict internal organizational structure and even do not have subsidiaries. They are loosely organized. But the villagers' committee, the senior citizens' association and the family planning association which play a most important role in the development of the village have strict organizational structure and management system. The formal subsidiaries under the villagers' committee are the villagers' groups, the villagers' representative conference, the public security committee and the militia battalion. The villagers' committee also controls most of the villagers' organizations. The subsidiaries under the senior citizens' association are six functional groups and a senior citizens' school. The subsidiaries under the family planning association are six local groups and a population school. Although almost all villagers' organizations have their own regulations, the villagers' committee, the senior citizens' association and the family planning association have the largest binding force on the members of the former. Except for the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China, the most authoritative and important regulations of the villagers' committee in Dongsheng Village are the Regulations of Dongsheng Village. The current Regulations were promulgated in 1994. There are 15 articles.¹⁸ People notice that almost all of 15 articles are the villagers' obligations and begin with "not allowing" or "prohibiting". As mentioned above, the family planning association of Dongsheng Village has 15 regulations and rules. Most of them are provisions on the obligations of its members, and only few are provisions on the rights of its members. Although the senior citizens' association has only the Rules of the senior citizens' association of Dongsheng Village, it formulates detailed provisions on the rights and obligations of its members. There are almost no mandatory provisions on punishment, but its members can abide by the above rules as conscientiously as the villagers' committee and the family planning association observe their rules. We can say that the villagers' committee and the family planning association basically rely on the mandatory rules to manage their members, and other organizations mainly rely on the common understanding and acceptance among their members.

Apart from rules and regulations, the operation of rural civil organizations relies on the personal ability and prestige of their leading cadres. Almost all the most influential and active villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village have one or several leading cadres who are very capable of leadership and enjoy high prestige. For example, deputy secretary of the village Party branch concurrently serves as director of the villagers' committee and is one of the members of the two influential Huang clan (the first branch) in the village. He, 36 years old, is young and strong. He is very capable of leadership and management. He enjoys high prestige among the villagers. Another deputy secretary of the Party branch concurrently serves as president of the family planning association. He is fair and just in handling affairs and is bold and resolute in action. He is deeply

respected by villagers. President of the senior citizens' association concurrently serves as its full-time vice-president. He once served as the village head for over ten years. He came from the most powerful Huang clan (the fourth branch) in the village. He is honest and upright, enjoys high prestige and respect and has good relations with other villagers. The personal charm of these leading cadres greatly increases the cohesiveness of these organizations and the sense of acceptance among their members. Actually, the three villagers' organizations are also the most active villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village. Especially the senior citizens' association conducts many activities almost every day.

VI. Rural Civil Organizations and the Party and Government

If any civil organization exerts a great influence in China, it must maintain good cooperative relations with the Party and the government. Rural civil organizations are no exceptions. To be specific, there are the three reasons for the need to maintain close relations between rural civil organizations on the one hand and the Party and the government on the other. First, the rural areas were led by Party branches prior to the 1980s. Self-governance was gradually implemented among villagers in the late 1980s. But it is not mature. Party branches exercise administration in most of the rural areas. Even in the places where villagers' committees are influential, the village Party branches are still one of the power centers in rural areas. Second, the Chinese Communist Party is the only ruling party. It exercises unified leadership of the political, economic, military and cultural affairs throughout the country, including the leadership of the rural work. According to the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees adopted recently, villagers' committees which serve as villagers' self-governing organizations must subject themselves to the political leadership of primary Party organizations. Third, the Chinese Communist Party has over 60 million members, accounting for almost one-twentieth of the total population all over the country. It consists of most of the elite from all walks of life, including the elite from rural villagers' organizations.

Except for the liaison persons for the temple fair, almost all the leading cadres of 18 formal or informal civil organizations in Dongsheng Village are Party members. Five members of the villagers' committee are Party members. Members of the village Party branch concurrently serve as the leading cadres of the majority of the most important civil organizations. There are a total of 42 Party members in Dongsheng Village. There is a village Party branch consisting of five members, including a secretary, two deputy secretaries and two members. Five members of the Party branch hold at least more than one post in various village organizations respectively. Because secretary of the Party branch is responsible for its overall work, he holds few posts. He only concurrently serves as principal of the population school and honorary principal of the village senior citizens' school. One deputy secretary concurrently serves as village head and director of the village public security committee. The other deputy secretary concurrently serves as president of the family planning association. One member concurrently serves as the village mediation association. The other member concurrently serves as commander of the militia battalion. President of the senior citizens' association is an old Party member

and old secretary of the Party branch. Other vice-presidents and secretary-general are also old Party members.¹⁹

According to the relevant provisions of the current Constitution of the People's Republic of China and the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party, the Party committees at all levels exercise unified leadership of all the departments and local affairs, but the leadership cannot replace the functions of the government. The Party does not exercise direct administration and management of social affairs, but it exercises political leadership. The political leadership is exercised through three methods: first, to recommend cadres to the government and the relevant departments; second, to formulate important line, principles and policies; and third, to implement the requirements and wishes of Party organizations with the help of the cadres who are Party members in all departments and localities. The Party branch of Dongsheng Village exercises the leadership of villagers' organizations according to the above-mentioned political principles. The village Party branch recommends to the relevant organizations the leading cadres of all important villagers' organizations. For example, the Party branch recommends village head, deputy village heads, candidates for members of the villagers' committee and candidates for the leading cadres of the senior citizens' association, the family planning association, the mediation committee, the public security committee, the Youth League branch and the women's federation. With regard to the major matters of the village, for example, the plan for the development of the village, capital construction, the amount of funds retained by the village and collection of these funds and the village public investment, the Party branch makes proposals and asks the villagers' committee for implementation, or the villagers' committee makes proposals and asks the Party branch for approval. As the village highest organ of self-governance, the villagers' committee must report work to the village Party branch at regular intervals and request the Party branch for instructions on the major matters. It must accept the supervision of villagers and the Party branch. The village Party branch holds a regular meeting on work every two weeks, deliberates major matters concerning the whole village, assigns work and sets requirements to the Party members in the whole village. The CPC Central Committee's principles and policies on rural work and peasants are implemented by the villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations via the provincial, county, municipal, township and town Party committees at all levels and the village Party branch.

China's administration constitutes a matrix system featuring the integration of departments and regions at different levels. Laterally, all departments should accept the leadership of the Party committees and the governments at the corresponding levels. Vertically, all departments should accept the leadership or guidance of the Party and government departments at higher levels. The management system is also applicable to rural civil organizations. In Dongsheng Village, few civil organizations such as the temple fair and the able persons' association are not led by the departments at higher levels. Almost most of the organizations are led by the organs at higher levels. The family planning association, the senior citizens' association, the militia battalion, the association for the study of fruit trees, the Youth League branch, the economic cooperative and other organizations are led by the organizations at corresponding levels. They should accept the guidance and leadership of the villagers' committee and the village Party branch as

well as the town organizations at higher levels. Especially the family planning association, the Youth League branch, the women's federation, the militia battalion and other civil organizations with official nature maintain close ties with the organizations at higher levels. The town organizations often give instructions and orders to the village organizations. The villagers' committee is not led by nominal departments at higher levels, but it is the highest organ of management. Of course, it should accept the leadership of town and township Party committees and governments. The town exercises the leadership of the villagers' committee through the assignment of "cadres residing in the village".

"Cadres residing in the village" are also called "cadres responsible for the village". They refer to town and township cadres residing in the village who are sent to the village to work for a long period of time (generally one to three years, in rotation). The number of "cadres residing in the village" is determined according to the size of the village and the concrete work. They are four to five at most and one to two at least. The main responsibilities of "cadres residing in the village" are to implement the principles, policies and instructions of town and township Party committees and governments in the village; to report the situation, problems and requirements in the village to the town and township leading bodies; to guide and assist the village Party branch and the villagers' committee in their work; to examine the family planning work in the village; and to collect the various taxes paid to the state by villagers and various fees (funds collected by the township under overall planning) paid to town and township governments by villagers. In fact, the last two functions become the current main functions which most of the "cadres residing in the village" should perform.

This is true in Dongsheng Village. Although Dongsheng Village does not find it hard to raise funds collected by the township under overall planning, because it is a "star village" and a key village, there are more "cadres residing in the village". There are a total of three. Dongsheng Village does better in all fields of endeavor such as economic development, family planning and villagers' self-governance. "Cadres residing in the village" do not have to handle many matters. Their main function is to raise funds collected by the township. The Central Government stipulates that the village can retain some of the funds collected by the township under overall planning (the percentages of the retained funds vary according to kinds of fees and areas), so as to arouse the initiative of the village. This is also called the retention of funds by the village. But the total of funds collected by the township under overall planning and retained by the village (peasants call this "collection of funds by the township and retention of funds by the village" cannot exceed 5% of the peasants' per capita net income (using the 1995 figure as the base figure) in the township and town. On the one hand, grass-roots governments without "collection of funds by the township and retention of funds by the village" will not have sources of funds, so township and town cadres will compel peasants to pay these funds. On the other hand, many peasants cannot pay these funds or are unwilling to do so. So there are conflicts. These conflicts are the root causes for affecting the stability of China's rural areas. Dongsheng Village sets a good example in this regard. Because the village collective economy is developed, peasants are exempt from all funds retained by the village. In 1998 and 1999 the per capita "funds collected by the township under

overall planning” in Changqiao Town where Dongsheng Village is located were 48 yuan and educational surcharge was 50 yuan. But 10% of the peasants still refused to pay “funds collected by the township under overall planning”. About 50% of the peasants in Zhangpu County in which the village is located have not paid funds collected by the township and retained by the village. From this we can see that it is very hard to urge peasants to pay these funds.²⁰

Fundamentally speaking, the relationship between rural civil organizations and the Party and government departments at lower levels features cooperation and conflicts. In most of the cases, most of the rural civil organizations maintain good cooperative relations with the Party and government departments at lower levels. The Party and government departments at lower levels are the departments of power, so cooperation with them is a necessary precondition for protecting and promoting the public interests of members of all civil organizations. But rural civil organizations must work for the interests of their members. While working for the interests of their members, they often run into conflicts with the governments at higher levels and the Party organizations at lower levels. In some cases, the Party members who serve as the leading cadres of civil organizations are even on the side of their members and run into conflicts with the Party organizations or governments at higher levels. But the villagers’ committee and other villagers’ organizations in Dongsheng Village maintain harmonious relations with the village Party organization and the town government. Of course, there are frictions with regard to some problems related to their interests. But these frictions do not become large-scale fierce conflicts. A typical event of violent clash in the neighboring village shows that there are conflicts between rural civil organizations and the government.

Through the approval of the village Party branch, in 1995 the villagers’ committee of Youche Village which is near to Dongsheng Village signed a contract on leasing some land used for cemetery with the county bureau of civil affairs. But under the influence of traditional concepts, many villagers think that the cemetery is the graveyard and that it is inauspicious to build the cemetery in front of the village. They resolutely opposed the leasing of land to the government. Under the leadership of the village elders, the senior citizens’ association organized villagers to oppose the leasing activity. Since the senior citizens’ association failed to negotiate with the village Party branch, the former directly organized over 100 villagers to present a petition to the county government for two days in succession and requested the government to abolish the contract on leasing land. The government and the Party organizations persuaded the villagers and members of the senior citizens’ association who organized the protest, but this did not achieve the desired results. When the government sent the personnel to conduct on-site survey of the leased land, the senior citizens’ association called more than 200 villagers together once again to oppose the survey through violence and smash the surveying tools. The government sent the police to detain three key elements, charging them with the crime of hindering the performance of official duties. After violent clash, the senior citizens’ association organized several hundred villagers to hold a demonstration in front of the seat of the county government. The government had to send its representatives to negotiate with villagers. After the government agreed on the request of the villagers, the demonstration came to an end. This event shows that some rural civil organizations are

more powerful than the village Party branch, dare to have a trial of strength with the Party organizations and the government at lower levels and do not necessarily fail in the rivalry.

VII. Functions of Rural Civil Organizations

Different rural civil organizations perform different functions. From the case of Dongsheng Village, we can see that they perform the functions of management and services. To be specific, they mainly perform these functions: to promote the self-governance among villagers, provide various services to villagers, mediate in disputes among villagers, assist the old, weak, sick and disabled, maintain rural stability, improve relations between peasants and the Party and the government, promote the development of the rural economy, etc.

The first function of rural civil organizations is self-governance among villagers. In the late 1980s, the Chinese government decided to gradually abandon the former political system whereby the village Party branch or the revolutionary committee exercised direct management of villagers in rural areas and implement the self-governance among villagers. The precondition for self-governance among villagers is that there must be one or several organs of self-governance which are different from the former Party branch or the revolutionary committee. According to the regulations of the Central Government, the organ of authority for self-governance among villagers is the villagers' committee. The main responsibility of the villagers' committee is to manage villagers' affairs. This is reflected from the above-mentioned functions of the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village. Actually, the functions of the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village are specified according to the standards for the administrative organ. Its five members effect division of labor according to administration. Village head manages the affairs of the whole village, a deputy village head is responsible for economic management, another deputy village head is responsible for public security, a member is responsible for the work concerning women and family planning and another member is responsible for the work concerning militia. Because economic affairs and public security are arduous, there are two subordinate organs under the villagers' committee: the economic cooperative led by a deputy village head and the public security association led by village head and a deputy village head. A village with several thousand people has various affairs and villagers have got used to subjecting themselves to traditional administration, so only the villagers' committee which consists of five part-time peasants finds it hard to exercise governance and the villager Party branch and other civil organizations jointly manage many village affairs. For example, the village Party branch is the policy-making nucleus of the whole village, exercises direct management of the important family planning association and the mediation association and monitors the villagers' committee.

Rural civil organizations perform the functions of self-governance and self-management. Another basic function of these organizations is to provide services to villagers. To the government, villagers' organizations are established to first exercise self-management of peasants, so their first function is to exercise management. To

villagers, villagers' organizations are welcomed because they provide many services to villagers. In fact, almost all rural civil organizations perform the functions of management and services. The villagers' organizations which do not perform the functions of services and management find it hard to exist in the rural areas, but they lay particular emphasis on different aspects. Some organizations pay more attention to management, and others pay more attention to services.

Of the civil organizations of Dongsheng Village, the villagers' committee, the family planning association, the villagers' groups, the Youth League branch and the women's federation pay more attention to management than services. The above-mentioned civil organizations manage the village's development plan, capital construction, public property and collectively-owned economy as well as villagers' taxation, military service, marriage, family planning, public security and other matters. To the government, they are the organs of villagers' self-governance and self-management. To the villagers of Dongsheng Village, they are managers. For example, if villagers want to build their housing, they should first present applications to the villagers' committee. After securing approval, they can handle registration in the town government and pay land and house taxes. If villagers want to marry, they should first present applications to the villagers' committee. After securing approval, they can handle registration in the town department of civil affairs. If a couple wants to give birth to a child, they must apply for birth target to the family planning association. After securing approval, they can obtain birth license from the town family planning association. Only after getting birth target can a woman be pregnant. Other villagers' organizations such as the senior citizens' association, the association for the study of fruit trees, the economic cooperative, the mediation association, temple fair and the militia battalion mainly provide services. For example, they provide health services to villagers, organize recreational activities among villagers, mediate in disputes between the wife and the husband within a family, between parents and their children, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law and between families and patrol for public security.

An important function of rural civil organizations is to help the old, weak, sick and disabled. Respecting the aged, cherishing the young and helping the poor are the fine traditions of the Chinese nation and are particularly deep-rooted in vast rural areas. If any rural organizations, official or civil, do not do something they can to provide help to the old, weak, sick and disabled, they will not enjoy prestige and status. Prior to the introduction of the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, the system of the "households enjoying the five guarantees" was generally implemented in China's rural areas. The "five guarantees" refers to guarantees of food, clothing, medical care, housing and burial expenses for childless and infirm old persons. Production brigades paid all the expenses for the "households enjoying the five guarantees". With the disintegration of production brigades, the system of the "households enjoying the five guarantees" was abolished. Although the living standards of peasants have risen considerably since the policy of reform and opening to the outside world was implemented, the old, weak, sick and disabled villagers are unavoidable in every village. Who helps them and how to assist them are the pressing problems in China's rural areas following the reform. In Dongsheng Village, this problem is solved mainly through the

villagers' committee. The villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations provide assistance to the old, weak, sick and disabled villagers through the following methods. First, the senior citizens' association is established to provide a large sum of money to assist senior citizens in health and recreational activities. Financial assistance worth about 40,000 is provided directly or indirectly every year. Second, some villagers' organizations help the old, weak, sick and disabled through self-help. For instance, the senior citizens' association establishes the senior citizens' welfare foundation and provides appropriate subsidies to poor senior citizens. The family planning association provides subsidy and tax reduction and exemption to the "household with two girls". Third, the villagers' committee gives special treatment to some households in dire poverty, including granting relief funds, exemption of the fund collected by the township and tuition and miscellaneous fees for pupils. Fourth, the medical insurance system is established to help villagers participate in the insurance system. At the same time, a clinic is established in the village to provide medical treatment and health services to villagers.

An important function of rural civil organizations is to provide economic services to villagers. The various villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village provide economic services through the performance of the functions of public economic management, overall arrangements for the economic affairs of the whole village and demonstration and even approval of the method of production and operation. For example, they help villagers contract barren hills, grow fruit trees and increase income. Ten years ago, no villagers were willing to contract barren hills. But the villagers' committee thinks that this is the best way to help villagers in Dongsheng Village become rich. So it decides that its cadres take the lead in contracting barren hills to grow fruit trees and strives to persuade other villagers to do so. After a period of persuasion and demonstration, most of the villagers are willing to contract barren hills and grow fruit trees, but very few villagers are still unwilling to do so. Under these circumstances, the villagers' committee takes measures to compel very few villagers to do so. The villagers' committee stipulates that if villagers do not contract barren hills or do not grow fruit trees after contracting barren hills, economic punishment will be imposed on them. These measures are called "compelling villagers to become rich". In fact, this is a way of compelling villagers to accept good advice, which has caused a great dispute in the academic circles so far. This is because many ways of "compelling villagers to become rich" bring disastrous consequences. But many methods are successful. Dongsheng Village is an example of success. The barren hills which villagers were unwilling to contract a few years ago have many fruit trees which become a major source of income for them. In addition, the villagers' committee and such villagers' organizations as the association for the study of fruit trees and the economic cooperative provide services in the marketing of products, scientific and technical guidance, supply of improved varieties.

Villagers' organizations also assume the public management responsibilities of the village. In Dongsheng Village, one of the basic functions of Dongsheng Village is to make overall plan for capital construction in the whole village and first make unified plan for the construction of the housing of villagers. From 1998, all newly built housing of villagers had to meet the requirements set in the plan. The villagers' committee makes

unified plan for the construction of roads, and facilities for running water and sewage in the village, organizes construction engineering and pays fees for public facilities from public finance. Fees for primary school buildings and wages for some teachers in civilian-run schools are also allocated from the village finance, and the remainder is paid by the township and town governments. The villagers' committee, the senior citizens' association, the temple fair and other villagers' organizations are responsible for celebrating traditional festivals and ceremonies for wedding and funeral which the Chinese peasants value, for giving rewards to villagers who perform meritorious deeds to the village and for expressing greetings.

VIII. Concluding Remarks: Rural Civil Organizations and Good Governance

The emergence of civil organizations is an inevitable result of the market-oriented economic restructuring in China's rural areas. This thoroughly changes the structure and situation of governance in China's rural areas and promotes democracy and good governance in an all-round way.

Since the villagers' governance based on the villagers' committees was introduced in rural areas, the system of making financial affairs and village affairs known to the public has been generally implemented in China's rural areas. This greatly increases rural political transparency. The system of making village affairs and financial affairs known to the public in rural areas is an important system which is implemented according to the requirements set by the Central Government. This is clearly stipulated in the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees and relevant documents issued by the CPC Central Committee. Party and government departments at all levels formulate detailed rules for implementation according to the above-mentioned law and regulations. Governments at the levels of county and township also establish special offices for making village affairs known to the public and are responsible for the guidance, supervision and examination of the work in villages.

The system of making village affairs known to the public is implemented in Dongsheng Village according to the System of Making Village Affairs Known to the Public in Zhangpu County. To implement the system of making village affairs known to the public, Dongsheng Village specially establishes two provisional organs: "the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management" and "the villagers' group for handling financial affairs". The former consists of the principal leading cadres of the village Party branch and the villagers' committee. Secretary of the Party branch serves as a group head. Village head is a person responsible for routine democratic management. The latter consists of the leading cadres of the villagers' committee and the senior citizens' association. A deputy secretary serves as a group head. In addition, the Party branch and the villagers' committee specially appoint four supervisors for making village affairs known to the public, who are chosen from the Party branch, the villagers' committee and villagers. The content, time and method of making village affairs known to the public must be recorded in the notebook entitled the Work of Making Village Affairs Known to the Public and

Exercising Democratic Management in Zhangpu County for File and Reference, and the working group presents a report to the township government for file.²¹

The content of making village affairs known to the public in Dongsheng Village includes the wages, bonuses and subsidies given to village cadres; the income and expenses of the collective; family planning; the contracting of arable land, ponds, orchards, mountain forests and enterprises; bidding for construction projects; distribution of land for the housing; the area of requisitioned land and compensatory money; apportionment of voluntary labor; the amount of money collected and retained for overall planning and its use; distribution of the target for imposition of grain taxes; distribution of relief materials and means of production; use of anti-poverty funds; items of practical matters for villagers. Most of these items are made known to the public twice a year, that is, during the first ten-day period of January and July respectively. The most important items, for example, contracting of land and enterprises, bidding for projects, requisitioning of land, are made known to the public at any time. The important items, for example, family planning, the income and expenses of the collective, are made known to the public once a month and a quarter. There are two methods of making village affairs known to the public: first, the "column for making village affairs known to the public" is opened on the enclosing wall of the building of the villagers' committee, and village affairs are made known to villagers through blackboard bulletin on time. Second, when some matters are made known to the public, the wire broadcasting of the village is used to broadcast some content to villagers. In addition, several "suggestion boxes" are installed at the main intersections of the village to solicit the villagers' opinions about the village affairs which are made known to them.

The emergence of rural civil organizations greatly promotes the rule of law in China's rural areas. Implementation of the rule of law is a basic goal of the Chinese government. But China had not implemented the rule of law, but the rule by man for a long time. Its citizens lack the awareness of the importance of law, and it is hard to implement the rule of law. Particularly in rural areas, peasants do not know the law and do not abide by the law. This is a great obstacle to implementing the rule of law. Rural civil organizations play a tremendous role in promoting the rule of law in rural areas in the following two aspects:

First, they assist the government in conducting education about the law in rural areas. The villagers' committee, the family planning association, the senior citizens' association, the public security committee and other villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village publicize state laws by holding meetings, running sparetime schools, broadcasting, slogans and wall newspapers. Many villagers state that they know some knowledge about the law through these means. For example, in the population school in Dongsheng Village, the main content of instruction is the state population policies, laws and regulations and accounts for about half of the total.

Second, most importantly, the Village Regulations are formulated to convert state laws into the code of conduct which villagers can accept. Because there is no tradition of the rule of law in the Chinese history, the awareness of the importance of the law is lacking in rural areas. Peasants are not used to handling matters according to the provisions of laws, but are accustomed to village regulations. Therefore, incorporation of

laws into village regulations is an effective means to implement the rule of law in rural areas. The Regulations of Dongsheng Village contain a total of 15 articles, which basically include legal norms which may involve villagers. For instance, Article 1 stipulates that villagers must pay taxes and the funds collected by the government for overall planning on time. Articles 2 and 3 stipulate that disruption and sabotage of such public places as schools and markets are prohibited. Articles 4, 5, 6 and 7 stipulate that gambling, theft, damage of crops and sabotage of public facilities are prohibited. Almost all articles apply or localize state laws and government policies in light of actual conditions in Dongsheng Village so that villagers can readily accept and observe them.

The rise of villagers' organizations effectively checks the corruption of township and village cadres. Because the villagers' committee implements the system of making village affairs known to the public and the income and expenses of the village and its decision-making activities are transparent, villagers can exercise effective supervision over village cadres. In Dongsheng Village, such important economic activities as the salaries and income of cadres, the income and expenses of the village, decision-making activities, enterprise contracting, land requisitioning and use and distribution of land for the housing are made known to the public and are supervised by the specially designated persons. Even if someone wants to engage in corruption, this is not easy. So village cadres are very honest and clean. In the past, town cadres came to the village at the time of fruit harvest whether or not there were matters. Village cadres gave these cadres some fruit. Now they do not have the chance to get fruit, because all orchards are contracted by individuals. The villagers' group for handling financial affairs is mainly responsible for specially examining the public income and expenses of the village and makes known to the public the results of examination and relevant accounts on schedule. The villagers' representative conference, the village Party branch and the working group for making village affairs known to the public and exercising democratic management have the right to examine the village public finance. Villagers can tell their questions to the above organizations and even give anonymous reports to the latter.

There are a number of the mechanisms for making matters known to the public and exercising supervision in some important rural civil organizations, so as to ensure that their leading cadres work honestly. For instance, the senior citizens' association in Dongsheng Village also has a system of making matters known to the public because it involves a large sum of funds. It makes known to the public members' contributions, membership dues and other accounts concerning income and expenses through wall newspapers and clearly records original documents and sums of income and expenses even if there are only several coins. The senior citizens' association has a finance group consisting of four members. Their main responsibility is to manage financial affairs and supervise the financial activities of the leading cadres of the association. All expenses of the association are subject to strict procedures for examination and approval. Major items of expenses must be decided on through collective discussion.

The rise and existence of rural civil organizations are based on the need to vigorously promote the maximization of rural public interests. Good governance aims at the maximization of social public interests. In this sense, civil organizations in China's rural areas play a most important role in promoting good governance in the countryside.

All rural civil organizations including the villagers' committee represent the interests of villagers in varying degrees and seek more interests from governments at higher levels on behalf of villagers. When the interests of villagers are threatened, they play a role in protecting their interests. For instance, villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village try to maximize the public interests of villagers through the following means:

1) They try to seek more interests from governments at higher levels. For instance, in promoting the sale of the products of the village, they persuade the town government to provide some preferential policies to the village, try to get loans from the rural credit cooperative and invite agricultural technical staff from the county and the town to come to the village to give scientific and technical guidance. A new example is that Dongsheng Village plans to construct the building of a primary school which needs investment totaling about 200,000 RMB yuan. According to regulations, investment should be made from the village finance, but the county government can give appropriate financial assistance to the poor village. To strive for investment from the county government, secretary of the village Party branch and director of the villagers' committee present an application to the town and county governments of their own accord and take the initiative to persuade officials concerned. At last, the leading cadres are moved by their unremitting efforts and agree on aid worth 30,000 yuan given gratis. Although 30,000 yuan only accounts for a small percentage of the whole investment, it is an additional investment. Dongsheng Village will not get the additional investment.²²

2) When there are conflicts of interests between the village on the one hand and governments at higher levels and the neighboring villages, they protect the interests of the village. With regard to taxation, imposition of dues and quotas, the boundary of land, roads and water conservancy, conflicts between the village and the town and between villages are unavoidable. When there are conflicts of interests, the villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village always side with their villagers and protect their interests. For instance, according to regulations, the per capita payment for the fund collected for overall planning and educational surcharge which every peasant in Changqiao Town pay a year totals 98 yuan, 20% of which can be retained at village level. But Dongsheng Village exempts the fund retained by the village to protect the interests of its villagers and pays the money in advance which those villagers cannot pay on schedule. Relations between Dongsheng Village and its neighboring villagers are harmonious and there are no serious conflicts. But conflicts between villagers often occur in other rural areas in Zhangpu County. When conflicts occur, the villagers' committee, the senior citizens' association and other villagers' organizations always protect the interests of their village. In few cases, they even go to extremes and become organizers of the fight with weapons among villagers or plotters of the collective appealing to the higher authorities for help.

3) An important task of rural civil organizations and especially the villagers' committee is to maximize the economic interests of villagers. A great plan implemented in recent years in Dongsheng Village is the activity of "striving to become well-to-do and build a new village" which is led by the villagers' committee. With regard to the essential

content of the plan, the villagers' committee takes the lead in contracting barren hills to grow fruit trees, learns scientific and technical knowledge and sets up the "demonstration plot for growing fruit through scientific and technical methods". After it obtains notable economic returns, it spreads experience to the whole village. Every member of the villagers' committee leads a villagers' group to bring barren hills under cultivation to grow fruit and introduces experience in growing fruit through scientific methods to other villagers. After the fruit harvest, the villagers' committee tries to open up the market and promote the sale of fruit produced by the village. At the same time, the villagers' committee also establishes three fruit processing enterprises and helps villagers solve the problem of sale of some fruit. As a result, barren hills with an area of 12,600 mu are miraculously turned into the high-quality fruit forests. The per capita income of villagers increased from about 2,000 yuan five years ago to over 4,200 yuan in 1998.²³

- 4) They develop collective economy and increase the public welfare of villagers. After the household responsibility system featuring distribution of land to households has been implemented in China's rural areas, this greatly arouses the initiative for farm production, raises labor productivity and improves rural living conditions. But this policy also produces some negative influence. Following the disintegration of the village-level collective economy, the village public finance collapses and the public welfare of villagers is seriously impaired so that water conservancy facilities are not repaired, roads are damaged and bridges collapse in many rural areas. On condition that the government no longer interferes in the rural economic affairs, the village public welfare has to rely on the villagers themselves. So various villagers' organizations naturally organize and lead this undertaking. The villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village have done a great deal in developing the village collective economy and made great contributions to increasing the public welfare of villagers. They first establish three village-run enterprises and cultivate collective fruit forests with an area of 23,000 mu so that the net income of the village collective economy came to 600,000 yuan in 1998. The villagers' committee, the villagers' representative conference and other civil organizations use the collective income to improve the public facilities of the whole village, for example, public village building, roads, facilities for water conservancy and running water, schools, cable TV, programme-controlled telephone, FM broadcasting and clinic. As a result, the public welfare of the village is better than that prior to contracting. Only the village public building costs 1.8 million yuan, cable TV 170,000 yuan, and school buildings about 180,000 yuan. If villagers' organizations do not expand the village collective economy, it is hard to develop these public welfare undertakings.
- 5) They promote comprehensive improvement and raise the living quality of villagers in an all-round way. In addition to increase in income, there must be other conditions for raising the overall living quality of rural areas, for example, safe and clean living environment and rich and healthy cultural life. In most of the rural areas in China, all these are not provided by the government and individuals, but villagers' organizations. The public security committee and

mediation association in Dongsheng Village provide villagers with public services concerning public security. The Youth League branch, the women's federation, the senior citizens' association, the temple fair and other organizations provide villagers with public services concerning culture, recreation, health and religion. For example, the village public security committee organizes a special joint defence and patrol group. At night, it patrols in the whole village and ensures public security for villagers. All of its fees are paid from the village public finance. In addition to providing services to senior citizens, the senior citizens' association often organizes performances on New Year's Day and other festivals and enriches the cultural life of villagers. In 1998, the villagers' committee organized an activity for competition in five aspects, that is, to compete to see who grows more fruit; to compete to see who sells more fruit; to compete to see whose cultural life is healthy and rich; to compete to see whose family produces more talented persons; and to compete to see who makes more contributions to the village. The purpose of this activity is to increase the sense of acceptance among villagers and ensure that they love Dongsheng Village and better live and work in peace and contentment.

The Chinese rural civil organizations have developed for a short period of time. The political and economic environment for their existence and their structure and functions have many problems. From the case of Zhangpu County and especially Dongsheng Village, we can see that rural civil organizations have the following major problems:

The functions which many civil organizations prescribe or state fall far short of their actual roles. Some even play a negative role. For instance, the county and town governments and the village have formulated a series of the systems for making village affairs known to the public and there are two provisional groups and several supervisors. But much content seems to be a mere formality. Only few items are recorded in the notebook for the Work of Making Village Affairs Known to the Public and Exercising Democratic Management in Dongsheng Village every month. Only 100 Chinese characters were made known to the public in the first quarter of 1999. It is hard to reflect the income and expenses of the whole village and the public expenses of village cadres. The population school in Dongsheng Village only offers half-a-day courses twice a year. But it has a principal and school regulations. But the senior citizens' association operates quite well. It does even more than what it declares. The content of its finance made known to the public is detailed and more detailed than that of the villagers' committee. It is made known to the public once a month. Its senior citizens' school conducts more activities than the population school.

On the whole, rural civil organizations play a positive role in promoting the progress of rural society, but some civil organizations play a negative role. For example, some civil organizations encourage the collective to refuse to pay state taxes, publicize feudalism and superstition, provoke clan disputes and organize fight with weapons between villages. Although the above-mentioned events did not occur in Dongsheng Village in recent years, they happen frequently in neighboring villages. As mentioned above, an outstanding example is that the senior citizens' association of Youche Village organizes

villagers to resist through violence the county government. It indicates two problems. First, some rural civil organizations and especially the senior citizens' association are deeply affected and even controlled by clan forces. They are even more influential among villagers than the villagers' committee and other villagers' organizations. Second, some villagers' organizations risk danger to protect the interests of their groups and violate state laws. Civil organizations in Dongsheng Village set a good example in handling relations with the government and villagers, but we can see that clan forces exert some influence. For example, the fourth and first branches of the Huang clan with more people control almost all the villagers' organizations. Especially the fourth branch of the Huang clan controls about two-thirds of the villagers' organizations.

Most of the rural civil organizations excessively rely on the leadership of the Party and the government in rural areas and show obvious official nature. Few civil organizations are divorced from the Party and government departments and even are antagonistic to them, so they lack legitimacy. The villagers' committee, the Youth League branch, the women's federation, the militia battalion, the family planning association, the public security committee, the mediation association and other organizations in Dongsheng Village rely on the village Party branch and the town Party and government departments to varying degrees. The establishment of these organizations and their internal activities are directly controlled by the Party branch and the town government. They generally report their work to the village Party branch and even ask for instructions from the latter. Almost all their leading cadres and principal members are Party members and are subjected to the leadership of the Party branch. Therefore, they show obvious official nature. But few civil organizations go to extremes. They are organized on their own, have nothing to do with the Party and the government and even do not handle registration in the competent government departments. For example, the temple fair and the senior citizens' association in Dongsheng Village operate independent of the village Party branch and the town Party and government departments.

A number of rural civil organizations are exceedingly compulsory to their members. A distinctive difference between civil organizations and other official organizations is that members of the former join organizations and participate in their activities on a voluntary basis. Civil organizations in China's rural areas still have defects in this regard. In Dongsheng Village, villagers must participate in all the activities organized by the villagers' committee. Otherwise, fine will be imposed on them as punishment. For example, villagers of the right age must go to the population school on schedule and join the village family planning association. All adult villagers must participate in election for the villagers' committee. Otherwise, they will be fined. The Village Regulations of the villagers' committee and the rules of the family planning association are the agreements which their members voluntarily abide by. A precondition for members' observance of these agreements is that they should enjoy the corresponding rights. But we cannot find any articles for the protection of the rights of their members in the Regulations of Dongsheng Village and the rules of the family planning association. But all articles using "prohibit" and "not allow" are formulated to stipulate for the obligations of their members.

Many rural civil organizations exercise chaotic internal management and lack standards and acceptance. Although the villagers' committee, the villagers'

representative conference, the villagers' groups, the family planning association and other organizations have some standards, the activities of these organizations are still conducted at random. The Village Regulations should be the basic standards for the behaviors of villagers, but most of the villagers have a little understanding of them and do not accept them. In comparison with other places, villagers' organizations in Dongsheng Village are sound, but the above-mentioned problems exist to varying degrees. For example, except for the villagers' committee and the senior citizens' association, other organizations exercise chaotic internal management. Even the Youth League branch and the militia battalion which were once subject to standard management seem to be loosely organized and the former high acceptance no longer exists.

The development of rural civil organizations is uneven, and there are great gaps in social, political and economic influence and status between different civil organizations. In Dongsheng Village, the villagers' organizations which are most influential and enjoy the highest reputation are the villagers' committee and the senior citizens' association, but the influence and roles of the Youth League branch, the women's federation and the militia battalion which were once influential are very limited. The main reasons for great gaps between rural civil organizations are as follows:

- 1) Legal status. For example, the status and prestige of the villagers' committee are mainly based on the Constitution, the Organic Law of Villagers' Committees and the relevant regulations of the CPC Central Committee;
- 2) Traditional culture. The Chinese nation has a tradition of respect for senior citizens and a tradition of clan identification. The prestige of the senior citizens' association is based on these traditions;
- 3) Economic strength. It is hard to attract their members, handle practical matters for villagers and win the support of villagers without great economic strength;
- 4) Powerful leadership. Even if the above-mentioned conditions are met, it is hard for an organization to exert great influence and have large forces without a powerful leadership. From the survey of Dongsheng Village, we find that the three villagers who enjoy the great reputation in the village are the leading cadres of the three most influential organizations of the village. They are secretary of the village Party branch, village head and president of the senior citizens' association.

Officials of the Central Government, local officials, scholars and villagers fail to reach a consensus on the nature, functions and significance of rural civil organizations. Most of the officials, peasants and scholars affirm rural civil organizations. They think that these organizations are of significance to promoting democracy and rule of law in rural areas and the development of rural economy, improving the living conditions of peasants, easing conflicts between peasants and the government and maintaining rural stability despite the various problems existing in these organizations. But some people raise questions. Some scholars think that civil organizations in China's rural areas do not operate independently, but are controlled by Party organizations and the government

and are merely the implementation tools of the village Party branch and the township and town Party and government departments. On the contrary, some township and town cadres at the grassroots level think that rural civil organizations are like a wild charger and seem to be out of control. As they said, these organizations perform the functions of management of villagers, their leading cadres are elected by villagers and the Party and the government have no right to interfere. If these organizations are controlled by bad people including rural evil forces or clan forces and if the Party and the government cannot legally interfere, this will cause great harm to the interests of villagers. In fact, these events are not rare.²⁴

From our case study of Dongsheng Village, we reach a conclusion. As the market economy is gradually established in China's rural areas and political and legal environment undergoes changes, all kinds of civil organizations will inevitably emerge in vast rural areas. Their emergence will play a positive role in improving democracy and governance in rural areas. This is an important embodiment of political progress in China's society following the implementation of the policy of reform and opening up. On the whole, however, the degrees of their initiative, independence and voluntariness are not very high and have many problems. If we can take effective measures to solve these problems, China's rural civil organizations will develop on a sound basis. This will play an even greater role in promoting the progress and good governance in China's rural areas. Therefore, we put forward some principled suggestions on improvement of rural civil organizations.

We think that management of rural civil organizations remains to be standardized. Both the government management of civil organizations and the internal management of civil organizations should be standardized. We should further improve state laws and regulations on management of civil organizations, revise or supplement the current Regulations on Management of Civil Organizations and formulate some specific regulations on the existence and development of rural civil organizations. We should provide necessary training to principal members of rural civil organizations in a planned way to ensure that they will conscientiously work for the public interests of other members, increase their sense of acceptance and cohesiveness, know state laws and policies and master necessary management expertise and capability. The Party and government should create a sound environment for rural civil organizations and increase the voluntariness and initiative of their members. The Party and the government should no longer exercise power in rural management as quickly as possible, reduce the administrative power of village cadres and the village Party branch, give more management power to villagers' organizations and achieve complete self-governance among villagers at an early date.

Notes

¹ *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Volume III)*, Deng Xiaoping, People's Publishing House, 1993, pp.77-78 and p.252.

² *China's Statistical Yearbook for 1998*, China Statistics Publishing House, 1999.

³ *Zhangpu*, edited by the people's government of Zhangpu County, the Printing House of Zhangpu County Newspaper Office, 1998.

⁴ Tulou (local-style chamber) is a traditional local-style chamber. It is a round multi-storied chamber which can usually accommodate dozens of households. People of the same clan usually live in the same local-style chamber.

⁵ "Achieving Common Prosperity and Making Concerted Efforts to Build a New Village – the Way the Party Branch of Dongsheng Village, Changqiao Town Leads the People in Efforts to Become Well-to-Do and Build a New Village", the Party branch of Dongsheng Village (a Report).

⁶ Ditto.

⁷ *China's Statistical Yearbook for 1999*, the State Statistical Bureau, China Statistics Publishing House, 1999.

⁸ See *The Organic Law of Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China*, revised and adopted at the Second Plenary Session of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress.

⁹ The "sea election" refers to the fact that the village Party branch or the township and town Party and government departments do not designate or recommend specific candidates for village head and members of the villagers' committee who are directly elected through voting by villagers according to their own wishes.

¹⁰ See Record of Interview 990722.

¹¹ See Record of Interview 990726.

¹² See *A Collection of Standard Documents of Zhangpu County (1990-1997)*, edited by the General Office of the Government of Zhangpu County.

¹³ See Record of Interview 990729.

¹⁴ See Record of Interview 990722.

¹⁵ See "The Political Logic of Chinese Economic Reforms", Susan Shirk.

¹⁶ See Record of Interview 990719.

¹⁷ See Record of Interview 990723.

¹⁸ "Regulations of Dongsheng Village", the villagers' committee of Dongsheng Village, Changqiao Town, October 1994.

¹⁹ See Record of Interview 990719.

²⁰ See Record of Interview 990722.

²¹ "The System of Making Village Affairs Known to the Public in Zhangpu County", the Department of Organization of Zhangpu County CPC Committee.

²² See Record of Interview 990721.

²³ See Record of Interview 990719.

²⁴ See Record of Interview 990716.