

Xiwen Chen · Houkai Wei ·
Yaping Song *Editors*

Rural Revitalization in China

A Socialist Road with Chinese
Characteristics



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Chapter 1

Introduction



Changqing Ren

“Sannong” is the abbreviation in Chinese for “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. The issues related to agriculture, rural areas and the wellbeing of farmers have always been fundamental to China, as they concern the overall situation of China’s revolution, construction and reform. These issues are also fundamental to China’s modernization. As the foundation of China’s economic development and the cornerstone of social stability, these issues are critical to the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Leaders of the Communist Party of China have paid high attention to issues concerning agriculture, rural areas and rural people, and have combined the fundamental tenets of Marxism with the realities of China in different stages to provide guidance to, target and serve the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”, thus promoting socialist modernization. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi Jinping attached great importance to the work related to the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” and stressed that addressing these issues should have a top place in the work agenda of the Party. The 19th National Congress put forward the initiative (of rural revitalization strategy) and saw it as one of the seven strategies in the decisive stage of building a prosperous society in a comprehensive way. It is a major strategic decision for the Party Central Committee to solve the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” for a new era. Thinking strategically about the overall situation, and starting from the twin goals of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and realizing the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation with respect to the new conditions and problems faced by the countryside in its reform and development, President Xi Jinping came up with a series of new ideas, new theories and requirements on the development of “agriculture, rural

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areas and farmers,” which constitute an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

1 Importance of Agriculture, Rural Areas and Rural People

Agriculture is the foundation of the national economy, the most basic material production sector, and the fundamental guarantee of economic and social development, which is related to the overall situation of reform, opening up and modernization. Since agriculture holds the key to feeding over 1.3 billion people, it is of great importance. As the place where the majority of rural people live, the countryside maintains the local culture of the Chinese people and is also an agricultural ecosystem and leisure space for urban residents. As an agricultural country with a large population, rural people make up the largest percentage of the population in China. Therefore, President Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed that the Party should attach great importance to issues related to agriculture, rural areas and rural people.

1.1 The “Issues Relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” Are Fundamental Issues in the Progress of China’s Modernization and Realizing Great National Rejuvenation

“Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” have special historical and practical significance in China. If China handles these issues in different historical periods well, her cause would advance smoothly so that socialist modernization would achieve further development; otherwise, her course would suffer from setbacks. President Xi Jinping indicated in the report to the 19th CPC National Congress that, “Issues related to agriculture, rural areas, and rural people are fundamental to China as they directly concern our country’s stability and our people’s wellbeing. Addressing these issues should be placed on the top of the Party’s work agenda.”¹ Since the 18th National Congress, President Xi Jinping repeatedly stated that the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” are fundamental to the progress of China’s modernization and ability to actualize great national rejuvenation. An important experience that the Party learned from governing and rejuvenating the country is that China should be committed to solving the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” as a

¹ Xi, Jinping. *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. People’s Publishing House. 2017: 32.

top priority of the Party's work. This is what China should uphold for a long time without wavering.² China should not neglect agriculture, forget farmers and show indifference to rural areas at any time. China should continue strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers and raising rural living standards, advancing the building of a moderately prosperous society in the countryside, and build momentum in respect to heightening awareness, degree of attention and intensity of input.³

1.2 China's Food Security Is a Strategic Concern in National Economic Development

As a country with a population of more than 1.3 billion people, a major strategic task for China lies in feeding its people. The key focus of China's agricultural development is ensuring national food security. President Xi Jinping indicated in the report to the 19th CPC National Congress that, "We must ensure China's food security so that we always have control over our own food supply."⁴ Xi has repeatedly reminded the Party that, for a country with a population of more than 1.3 billion, no one can save China if there is a problem with food supply. Therefore, China should ensure that she has control over her own food supply at all times, so that Chinese people are self-sufficient. This fully reflects President Xi Jinping's strategic concept of having vision and being vigilant against possible threats in times of peace.

The family contract responsibility system adopted in the early 1980s ushered in rural reform. This system greatly liberated rural productivity, releasing the vitality of rural production and realizing the annual increase in grain output, helping to solve the problem of food and clothing shortage in a short time, thus laying a foundation for China to maintain rapid economic growth over an extended period of time. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Party Central Committee and State Council have paid more attention to China's food security instituting a series of supporting policies to boost grain production, which has contributed to an enormous increase in grain output increase for the twelfth consecutive year. National grain output increased from 431 million tons in 2003 to 621 million tons in 2015. By consistently maintaining food security in an important strategic position, China has provided a solid guarantee for the rapid growth of the national economy.

In the new era, China confronted two challenges: the restrictions from the environment and resources and increasing the cost of production. In this case,

² The Theory Learning Central Group of the Leading Party Group of the Ministry of Agriculture of CPC. "Create a New Realm in the Rural Reform and Development with Scientific Theoretical Thinking". *Qiushi*. 2015(11).

³ "Maintain Strategic Firmness, Enhance Development Confidence, and Persist in Seeking Innovation, Progress and Breakthroughs in Changes". *People's Daily*. 2015-7-19(1).

⁴ Xi, Jinping. *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. People's Publishing House. 2015: 32.

the Party Central Committee put forward a national food security strategy under new circumstances, i.e., domestic supply-based, guaranteed production capacity, moderate import, and science and technology support to achieve the goals that grain production is basically self-sufficient and that food is absolutely safe.

1.3 “If China Wants to Be Strong, Agriculture Must Be Strong”

Agriculture is fundamental to the survival of human society, which is the most basic material production sector that provides food and other major necessities in the national economy. As a large developing agricultural country, the basic position of agriculture in China’s economy is even more prominent. To realize modernization and the Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation, China must lay a solid foundation for agriculture.

In the Central Rural Work Conference held in December 2015, President Xi Jinping emphasized that attaching great importance to agriculture forms the foundation of social stability, and emphasized the need for relentless work in, and a high degree of concern about, the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. During the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016–2020), China should stay committed to placing top priority to addressing these issues on the work agenda of the Party, firmly establishing and implementing the development concepts of innovation, coordination, green development, opening-up and sharing; increase support for strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers and raising rural living standards; further advance all reforms in rural areas; surmount difficulties met in addressing the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”; strengthen innovation, cultivate development advantages; actively promote agricultural modernization; and deliver a solid performance in poverty alleviation and development. By doing the above, the possibility of the construction of a new socialist countryside will be improved, as both agriculture and rural areas could become important locations for people to make a difference.

At the Party’s 18th National Congress, the goal of harmonized development of four modernizations in China was put forward, in which agricultural modernization was prioritized. However, China should know that agricultural modernization is an especially difficult task. In the Central Rural Work Conference held in 2013, President Xi Jinping stated, “We must know clearly that agriculture remains the weak part in the synchronic development of four modernizations, and countryside is still the short stave of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.”⁵ He also reminded the whole Party that China should pay more attention to the development

⁵ Xi, Jinping. *Speech at the Central Rural Work Conference*, contained in *Selection of Important Literature Since the 18th National Congress* (Volume I), edited by Party Literature Research Centre of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Central Party Literature Press. 2014: 658.

of agriculture in terms of thinking and political stance, as well as to the realization of agricultural modernization. Therefore, more efforts would be made to strengthen this weak part. Only by achieving agricultural modernization can China make the goal of balanced development of these four modernizations come true in China; and thus, the Chinese dream of great national rejuvenation would be realized.

1.4 “If China Wants to Be Beautiful, the Countryside Must Be Beautiful”

The countryside is where the majority of the rural population in China lives, an area which maintains the local culture of the Chinese people. To speed up the construction of the new countryside, better the conditions in the countryside, and build a beautiful new countryside is the concretization of a prosperous society in rural areas where the construction of rural economies, politics, culture, social development will be harmoniously and coordinatedly integrated into the construction of ecological civilization and Party building. President Xi Jinping has set up requirements for the construction of new countryside, especially, that is, “Countryside should never be a place which is desolated, full of left behind people, and a home town merely in our memory”.⁶ And that, “If China wants to be beautiful, the countryside must be beautiful,” means that only if the vast rural areas become beautiful can harmonious development between human beings and the environment be real, allowing us to make China more beautiful.

To build a socialist new countryside, China needs to keep Chinese characteristics and be clear about the reality in China. During an inspection to Yunnan Province, South China, on January 20, 2015, President Xi Jinping emphasized that the new rural construction should conform to the reality and law of development in rural areas. The rural flavor and landscape should be retained, and the natural environment and local culture should be protected.⁷

1.5 “If Countryside Wants to Be Improved, the Key Lies in Hundreds of Millions of Farmers”

China is a large agricultural country with the largest number of rural people in the world. At the end of 2016, the total rural population in China was 589.73 million,

⁶ Xi, Jinping. *Speech at the Central Rural Work Conference*, contained in *Selection of Important Literature Since the 18th National Congress* (Volume I), edited by Party Literature Research Centre of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Central Party Literature Press. 2014: 682.

⁷ “Strive to Win the Battle Against Poverty and Speed Up Social and Economic Development in Ethnic Minority Areas”. *People’s Daily*. 2015-1-22(1).

accounting for 42.65% of the total population. China's affluence is closely connected with that of rural areas. As such, President Xi Jinping said that, "If China wants to be stronger, then rural people must be richer". As an important segment of the Chinese population, farmers are an critical part of the labor force, as the producers of wealth, they cannot be ignored. When presiding over the 22nd session of collective learning by the members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC, President Xi Jinping stressed that if the countryside wants to be improved, the key lies in hundreds of millions of farmers. China should constantly promote reform and institutional innovation in rural areas, giving a leading role to the initiative of hundreds of millions of farmers, along with continuously liberating and developing rural social productivity, and thus stimulating the vitality of rural areas.⁸

First, more importance shall be attached to making farmers richer to ensure that no farmer is left behind. Since the reform and opening up, China has seen sustained and rapid economic growth, and people's income has increased substantially. However, as it is difficult to change long-standing differences between urban and rural areas in a short time, there is still a relatively large gap between the incomes of rural and urban residents. To achieve the goal of building a prosperous society in a holistic way, the solutions, along with the challenges, have to do with rural areas in China. As President Xi Jinping said, "To achieve initial prosperity in the country, it is crucial to raise the rural living standard." In December 2014, President Xi emphasized in his investigation in Jiangsu Province, South China, that the Chinese government should give more weight to increasing the income of farmers, so that all farmers could enjoy a happy life, with no single farmer or household neglected.⁹ Since 2010, although farmers' income has grown more rapidly than that of urban residents for seven consecutive years, building a moderately prosperous society in all aspects remains a formidable task. Thus, more efforts by the Chinese government need to be put into raising the income of farmers—and it must be considered whether the income level of the majority of farmers has been improved, rather than simply concerning their average income.

Second, to enrich farmers, the integration of urban and rural areas must be promoted. To eliminate the seemingly oppositional duality of the urban–rural structure, and to promote urban–rural integration, all farmers should have the opportunity to share the fruits of economic development. The 18th National Congress set forth that the goal of achieving synchronic development of four modernizations in China was to make development between cities and the countryside more coordinated and comprehensive. President Xi Jinping stated that: China needs to develop industrialization, information technology and urbanization as well as develop agriculture modernization and new rural areas construction. The development of these two aspects should be conducted simultaneously. With the duality of the urban–rural structure eliminated and urban–rural integration advanced, China can construct

⁸ "Improve Mechanisms and Institutions for Integrated Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Enable Farmers to Share Fruits of Reform and Development". *People's Daily*. 2015-5-2(1).

⁹ "Seize and Adapt to the New Normal of Economic Development, Push Reform and Opening-up and Modernization drive into a New Stage". *People's Daily*. 2014-12-15(1).

vast rural areas into beautiful homesteads in which all farmers live happily.¹⁰ Focus should be put on establishing a viable system, with mechanisms for promoting integrated urban–rural development: establishing a new type of relationship between both industry and agriculture, and urban and rural areas, in which industry promotes agriculture, urban areas support rural development, industry and agriculture reinforce each other, and urban development and rural development are integrated. The targets are to equalize urban and rural residents’ access to basic rights and interests, and public services; to make urban and rural personal income equitable; and to allocate resources equitably between urban and rural areas; and to integrate industrial development between urban and rural areas.¹¹ As China’s comprehensive national strength continues to grow, China can realize industry nurturing agriculture and cities supporting the countryside with the preferable policy of strengthening agriculture and benefiting farmers while increasing state financial support to the work of the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. President Xi Jinping stressed that China should construct the model where industry nurtures agriculture and cities support the countryside as a long-term policy, committing to and implementing the policy of strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers, and raising rural living standards as an effective framework, mobilizing all social forces to provide greater support to the work of the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers,” and striving to form a new model of integrated urban and rural development.¹²

Third, China should improve the education of rural areas and train professional rural service personnel who have a good knowledge of agriculture, love the rural areas, and care about rural people. The rural–urban development divide is also reflected in the education field, and rural education in China remains underdeveloped. Providing quality education and working hard to improve education levels in rural areas are urgent needs in building a new socialist countryside and a prosperous society in a holistic way. President Xi Jinping showed much interest in rural education courses and stressed that China should make a marked improvement in rural compulsory education, giving access to higher levels of education, along with access to the acquisition and development of new knowledge and skills, for the next generation of the rural population.¹³ Furthermore, education development in poverty-stricken areas is of great significance. As there exists a relatively large gap in situations of education and talents between poverty-stricken areas and developed regions, a low level of education will have a great impact on economic growth. Corresponding to the situation that rural areas have experienced a large gap in both quantity and quality

¹⁰ *Selection of Xi Jinping’s Statements on Promoting the Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy in a Balanced Way*, edited by Party Literature Research Centre of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Central Party Literature Press. 2015: 32.

¹¹ “Improve Mechanisms and Institutions for Integrated Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Enable Farmers to Share Fruits of Reform and Development”. *People’s Daily*. 2015-5-2(1).

¹² “Improve Mechanisms and Institutions for Integrated Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Enable Farmers to Share Fruits of Reform and Development”. *People’s Daily*. 2015-5-2(1).

¹³ “Deepen Reform and Opening-up and Promote Innovation-driven Development Strategy to Achieve the Year-round Economic and Social Development Goals”. *People’s Daily*. 2013-11-6(1).

of resources and positive development, supports will be strengthened for vocational education development in rural areas, ethnic minority areas, and poor areas to make everyone there have access to better vocational education, said President Xi Jinping.¹⁴ Poor areas have lagged behind in compulsory education and are unable to attract the high-end talents to work there; therefore, China will promote vocational education in the rural areas, cultivating knowledge, skills, and expertise in the operation and development of technology. This will be conducive to expanding employment and promoting the transfer of the labor force.

The development of modern agriculture cannot happen without well-qualified farmers. In moving toward modern agriculture, China now needs new farmers who are different from traditional farmers, to meet the requirements of modern agriculture. President Xi Jinping said in the report to the 19th CPC National Congress that the aim of training professional rural service personnel, who have a good knowledge of agriculture, love our rural areas, and care about rural people,¹⁵ is to meet the need for creating a group of highly qualified farmers in the modernization of agriculture and rural areas. Early in 2013 at the Central Rural Work Conference, President Xi Jinping pointed out that: "...we should improve the quality of farmers, and cultivate a new type of farmers...the cultivation of young farmers will be covered in a national plan for training practical personnel, ensuring that the agriculture does have qualified agriculture..., we will take accelerating the development of new agricultural operating entities as a major strategy, focus on attracting young people to be engaged in agriculture, and fostering professional farmers, establish special policies and mechanisms, and build professional farmer teams..., so as to provide solid foundation of human resources and support for agricultural modernization and sound, sustainable development of agriculture."¹⁶ With the increasing development of urbanization, the number of people leaving the countryside continues to rise; the new agricultural operating entities will gradually replace household operation of production to become a major mode of agriculture operation in China. Changed mode of operation demands professional operation and technical talent, so cultivating and building new and professional farmer teams are requirements of agricultural modernization.

Fourth, to enrich farmers, one important thing that needs to be done is improving infrastructure conditions. Rural infrastructure is an important material basis for economic development. Speeding up infrastructure construction and providing more rural public goods are obligatory duties of the government. For poverty-stricken areas, investment in infrastructure will bring about especially high

¹⁴ "Better Support and Help Development of Vocational Education to Train Talents for Realizing Two Centenary Goals". *People's Daily*. 2014-6-24(1).

¹⁵ Xi, Jinping. *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—A Report Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China*. People's Publishing House. 2017: 32.

¹⁶ Xi, Jinping. *Speech at the Central Rural Work Conference*, contained in *Selection of Important Literature Since the 18th National Congress (Volume I)* edited by Party Literature Research Centre of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Central Party Literature Press. 2014: 679-680.

marginal benefits and achieve remarkable positive success in promoting economic development and increasing farmers' income. President Xi Jinping noted in an inspection visit to Hunan Province, South China, that if poor areas want to alleviate poverty and become prosperous, it will be important for the areas to improve infrastructure conditions such as transportation. China should work hard to provide further support in the areas.¹⁷ President Xi Jinping made comments in the report on countryside road development and emphasized that, especially for some poverty-stricken areas, upgrading a zip line or repairing a section of highway can create an opportunity to become prosperous.¹⁸ With regard to the questions of how to increase infrastructure investment and improve institutional mechanisms for investment in infrastructure in poor areas, President Xi Jinping provided clear instructions at the 22nd session of collective learning by the members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC that China should improve mechanisms for building the rural infrastructure, promote the connectivity, co-construction and co-sharing of infrastructure in urban and rural areas, develop new mechanisms of making decisions, investment, construction, operation, and protection of infrastructure and public service facilities in rural areas, and actively guide the private capital to be involved in the construction of public infrastructure in rural areas.¹⁹

1.6 “To Achieve Initial Prosperity in the Country, It Is Crucial to Raise the Rural Living Standard”

Society can never be counted as prosperous in a well-rounded way without prosperity in rural areas. Additionally, the difficulty in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects lies in the countryside. Thus, President Xi Jinping reminds the whole Party that China should not leave the countryside behind in the endeavor to achieve the goal of building a prosperous, well-balanced society. The building of a prosperous, well-balanced society can only be successfully completed when it is actualized in the rural areas, since this is an area that presents challenges to the building of a moderately prosperous society in well-rounded way.

President Xi Jinping has reminded the whole Party many times that, “To achieve initial prosperity in the country, it is crucial to raise the rural living standard.” This is because Xi desires that Party members understand the key points and difficulties in the process of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, as well as to understand that the totality of this prosperous society cannot be achieved without the

¹⁷ “Deepen Reform and Opening-up and Promote Innovation-driven Development Strategy to Achieve the Year-round Economic and Social Development Goals”. *People's Daily*. 2013-11-6(1).

¹⁸ “Building a Section of Highway Brings About a Window of Opportunity for Prosperity-Record of President Xi Jinping's Concerns about Rural Highway Development”. *People's Daily* (overseas edition). 2014-4-29(1).

¹⁹ “Improve Mechanisms and Institutions for Integrated Development of Urban and Rural Areas and Enable Farmers to Share Fruits of Reform and Development”. *People's Daily*. 2015-5-2(1).

participation of the rural areas. In the course toward modernization, the countryside should never be left behind. Additionally, in the process of pursuing the Chinese Dream with concerted effort, the dreams and efforts of nearly 600 million farmers are essential.

The understanding that it is crucial to raise the rural living standard means that the success of China's effort to build a prosperous society depends on whether farmers have become prosperous or not. Therefore, China should endeavor to promote agricultural modernization and the integrated development of primary, secondary, and tertiary industries in rural areas. More channels will be opened up, new potential explored, and new growth fostered to increase rural incomes, strengthen agriculture sector, and realize the consolidation of agriculture, simultaneously raising farmers' income and developing the countryside. It is crucial to raise the rural living standard to determine whether farmers are satisfied with their conditions. The degree of farmers' satisfaction is a measure of the Party's work. The initiative of building a prosperous society can only be a success when farmers feel satisfied. It is crucial to raise the rural living standard—this also means that the whole Party should be fully aware of the difficult challenge of finishing the construction of a prosperous society in the countryside, ready to face and overcome these challenges.

The building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020 is the first centenary goal of the Party, while the difficulty of realizing this goal lies in the countryside. President Xi Jinping stated that “We have sounded the trumpet to finish the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects. The key to this mission is that we should build up our confidence in overcoming difficulties firmly, create a mighty force for advancing causes, and rely on the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, so that one victory after another will be secured in the cause of the Party and the country.”²⁰ The building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects is a difficult job with many challenges, which requires the whole Party to make concerted efforts to overcome jointly. As President Xi Jinping said, “To build a moderately prosperous society in all respects, the most difficult and arduous tasks can be seen in the countryside, especially in the poor areas. However, to finish the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, a well-off society in the countryside, especially in poverty-stricken areas, is indispensable. Everyone needs to have a deep understanding of the meaning of this sentence.”²¹ President Xi Jinping further stated in “Instructions on ‘Recommendations for the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development’” that, “We will take the 13th Five-Year Plan as an endgame plan of the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, focus on the weak points in the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and put more efforts in the areas. For example, one of prominent weak points is how to help the rural poor population. To build a prosperous society in a

²⁰ Xi, Jinping. “Speech on National Committee of the Chinese New Year Tea Party”. *People's Daily*. 2013-1-2(2).

²¹ Xi, Jinping. *Speech on Investigating Work of Poverty Alleviation in Fuping County, Hebei Province*, cited from *Be A County Party Committee Secretary like Jiao Yulu*. Central Party Literature Press. 2015: 16.

well-rounded way, rural areas as a weak point should be strengthened. China should make great efforts to improve rural infrastructure and basic public service and tackle ecological and environmental problems so as to eliminate regional imbalance and rural poverty.”²²

The first weak point is the development of infrastructure and basic public services. Due to historical reasons, the gap in infrastructure and basic public services between urban and rural areas in China is still very large. Disparities still exist between urban and rural areas in transportation, communication, public education, sanitation, culture, social insurance, and other spheres. Therefore, No. 1 Document of the Party Central Committee in 2016 indicated that China should make rural areas a priority in the infrastructure construction with state fiscal support, rural areas and the towns to which large agricultural populations have migrated a priority in the development of social undertakings. By investing financially, China will speed up the improvement of production and living conditions such as water, electricity, roads, natural gas and networks, take significant steps to develop rural education, culture, sanitation, social insurance, and other social affairs, and steadily promote equal access to basic public services in urban and rural areas. China will implement a project for strengthening and improving drinking water safety in rural areas, make tarmac and cement roads and shuttle buses accessible to all towns, townships and administrative villages that meet the criteria, and help villages with certain population sizes to build highways. In terms of public service, China will put more efforts into improving preschool education in rural areas, make senior secondary education universally available, implement a system of serious disease insurance for rural and nonworking urban residents, and put in place a system for rescuing and protecting minors, as well as a welfare and protection system for children living in difficulty. To achieve the goals mentioned above, on the one hand, China can improve the degree of connectivity and co-sharing in infrastructure between urban and rural areas by extending urban infrastructure to the countryside and establishing a unified security system for infrastructure and public service; on the other hand, China will provide some preferential financial policies supporting rural areas ahead of urban areas. For example, policies such as waiving tuition and miscellaneous fees for students in senior high education can be carried out first in rural areas. By introducing preferential policies, the gap between urban and rural areas will be narrowed.

The second weak point lies in the ways the environment and ecosystem have been used in the past and the critical need to radically alter the ways China approaches using them in the future. With 10 percent of the world’s total farmland and approximately 6 percent of the world’s total freshwater, China feeds twenty percent of the world’s population to which agriculture has made great contributions. However, agricultural production is highly dependent on chemical fertilizers, which cause heavy nonpoint source pollution, while the overuse of cultivated land has led to a decline in soil fertility. All of this has destroyed the sustainability of agriculture. Agricultural development now faces two constraints from resources and

²² Xi, Jinping. “Explanations on the ‘Proposals on the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development’”. *People’s Daily*. 2015-11-4(2).

the ecological environment. Therefore, it is essential for China to transform agricultural development models, and to take to the path of resource-conserving and environmentally-friendly agricultural modernization.

The third weak point lies in uneven regional development and existing rural poverty. The imbalance in regional development is mainly reflected in the large disparity existing in the economic development between the eastern and western regions. Since the reform and opening up in 1978, China has seen rapid and sustained economic growth. Moreover, the income and living standards of the majority of Chinese farmers have rapidly improved, and the number of impoverished people in rural areas has been considerably reduced. From 1987 to 2015, the number of poor rural people decreased by 715 million; the annual average number of people lifted out of poverty was 19.31 million; the poverty incidence fell by 91.8%; and the annual average poverty rate was reduced by 6.9%. Especially since 2010, rural poverty in China has dropped significantly. In 2010, the rural poverty incidence was 17.2 percent, and the number of poor people was 165.67 million. From 2011 to 2015, the total number of people living in rural poverty was reduced by 109.92 million; the annual average number of people lifted out of poverty was 21.98 million; the poverty incidence fell by 11.5%; and the annual average poverty rate was decreased by 19.6%.²³ However, there is still a long way to go for alleviating China's poverty. According to the current rural poverty standard, by the end of 2016, there were 43.35 million poor rural people across the country, and these people were mainly in the central and western regions. Among them, rural poverty in the central region accounted for 15.94 million, with a poverty incidence of 4.9 percent, and in the western region, it accounted for 22.51 million, with a poverty incidence of 7.8 percent.²⁴ Especially for contiguous areas of extreme poverty and poor counties, the large number of poor people and high poverty incidence have made it difficult to lift people out of poverty. In 2015, poverty incidence in poor counties across the country was above 13.3%, and in contiguous areas of extreme poverty, it was above 10%, including 8 contiguous areas that were beyond 15%.²⁵ As such, China's poverty reduction has come to a sprint period with hard nuts to crack.

President Xi Jinping said that "We cannot declare that we have finished the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects while letting tens of millions of people live below the poverty alleviation standard. This will not only affect people's satisfaction with the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, but the international community's recognition of it."²⁶ In the Central Conference on Poverty Alleviation Work held in December 2015, a bugle call of the battle against poverty was sounded. A poverty alleviation strategy with principles

²³ Li, Peiling & Wei, Houkai. *Annual Report on Poverty Reduction of China 2016*. Social Sciences Academic Press. 2016: 50.

²⁴ Wei, Houkai & Huang, Bingxin. *Analysis and Forecast on China's Rural Economy (2016–2017)*. Social Sciences Academic Press. 2017: 43.

²⁵ Li, Peiling & Wei, Houkai. *Annual Report on Poverty Reduction of China 2016*. Social Sciences Academic Press. 2016: 58.

²⁶ Xi, Jinping. "Explanations on the 'Proposals on the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development'". *People's Daily*. 2015-11-4(2).

of targeted poverty reduction and alleviation was put forward, which demanded that every party committee in all departments and governments at all levels should see poverty alleviation as the top priority, and the first people's livelihood project during the implementation of the 13th Five-Year Plan. Under the current standards, the goal of lifting rural people out of poverty across the board by 2020 will be fulfilled in accordance with the general deployment of the Five-channel Project.

No. 1 Document of the Party Central Committee in 2016 indicated that by 2020, significant progress will be made in agricultural modernization, grain production capacity will be further improved, national food security and the supply of important agricultural products will be guaranteed, and a remarkable increase will be seen in the quality and efficiency of the agricultural product supply system. Farmers will live a high quality life, the per capita income of rural residents will be doubled in comparison with 2010, and the income disparity between urban and rural residents will continue to decrease. It must be ensured that all the rural residents living below current poverty line will be lifted out of poverty, and region-wide poverty is eliminated in all poverty-stricken counties and regions. With these changes, the quality of farmers and the level of social civilization in rural areas have been significantly improved, and the construction level of the new socialist countryside has been further upgraded. Further improvements can be envisioned in the basic rural economic system, the system for supporting and protecting agriculture, the rural social governance system, and the mechanisms and institutions for integrated development of urban and rural areas.

2 President Xi Jinping's Exploration and Practice in the Field Concerning Issues Relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers

President Xi Jinping's important views on the "Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers" have taken shape during his long-term practice of rural work and political career, and the views are all based on a summary of the experience and theoretical generalization from the practice of the "Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers" in China. In President Xi Jinping's political career over the past decades, he has held deep feelings about the "Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers" since the time he was a young person in school and the Party secretary of the production team of Lingjiahe Village. He has always envisioned this dream of modernizing agriculture to achieve prosperity in rural areas by developing agriculture, bringing benefit to the countryside and enriching farmers. Before the 18th National Congress of CPC, most of the academic works he wrote when he was in leading posts at different levels were all about the "Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers". After that, from the point of view of governance, President Xi Jinping made a host of comments on and indications for the work related to the "Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers", thus forming a

complete set of theoretical systems concerning the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”.

2.1 Learning More About China from the Personal Experience Related to the “Issues Relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”

President Xi Jinping started his time of “educated youth” when he went to live and work on a production team in Liangjiahe Village, Wenanyi Commune, Yanchuan County, Yan’an City, Shaanxi Province in China during his youth, which was the beginning of his experience with China’s “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. During the seven years on the production team in Liangjiahe Village, he worked as an ordinary commune member with other members of the production team in Liangjiahe Village, doing work that included uncultivated land reclamation, farming, chopping fodder, herding sheep, hauling coal, damming, carrying excrement, etc. According to villagers in Liangjiahe Village, Xi was always a hardworking young man, and while doing this work, barely rested. The experience of working as an educated youth in rural areas helped him strengthen ties of flesh-and-blood with the people of rural China, deepening his sincere feelings toward farmers. The important views of President Xi Jinping on the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” are rooted in the forefront of China’s agricultural production activities; and his experience of working with farmers enables President Xi Jinping to understand better the needs and situations of farmers, rural areas and agriculture.

In his political career that followed, Xi Jinping was in charge of agriculture successively in Hebei, Fujian, Zhejiang, Shanghai and other places. When he was the secretary of the Party committee of a county and the secretary of a provincial Party committee, his main concern was the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”, which contributed to a strong bond between him and the work of the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. It is his personal participation, bold innovation and in-depth exploration in the work related to the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers” when he was at different positions in different historical periods, that have helped him accumulate much practical experience, which he then made into a systematic and theoretical summary. Before the 18th CPC National Congress, most of his academic works, speeches, comments and instructions on work were all about the “Issues relating to Agriculture, Rural Areas and the Wellbeing of Farmers”. For example, he had a book named *Up and Out of Poverty* published in his early years. He edited the *Theory and Practice of Modern Agriculture* and finished a monograph named *A Tentative Study on China’s Rural Marketization* during his tenure as Deputy Secretary of the Fujian provincial CPC Committee. When he was first the governor of