

Decentralization and Cooperation--Case Study of Water Resource Governance in Three Northern Rural Villages in China

CHAI Ling

Introduction

As a kind of important recourse, water is far more than a clear, colorless, odorless, and tasteless liquid. It is essential to any society's survival and development. People believe the water recourse could determine the social regime in some degree, on the other hand, the utilization of water recourse could always reflect the principles by which a society is organized. The shift of water recourse governance corresponds to the social transformation.

During the last century, china has experienced the most poignant revolutions in its history to seek for the Mr. Democrat. The past thirty-years socioeconomic development made the society richer and brought about some severe social problems including the water recourse scarcity. Both the economic development and the new appearing problems demand a more decentralized therefore a more moderate political regime. China has made some steps on this way and nowadays people have got more fundamental rights and freedoms to express their own interests and negotiate with each other.

However, the cooperation on the governance of water recourse met with many obstacles, which revealed the problems of the namely decentralization in China. This article will focus on the process of the decentralization and cooperation reflecting by the water recourse governance in three Chinese rural northern villages. Through the case study, this article would make a preliminary effort to tackle several issues: What has been the nature of the water recourse governance in Chinese history, centralization or uncentralization? How the water recourse has been governed in a highly centralized regime after 1949 and how the decentralization took place after 1979? How about the situation of the cooperation and what problems have it encountered? What course should the water recourse governance follow?

The Nature of Water Resource Government before 1949: Centralization or Uncentralization?

As the necessary background knowledge, first of all, we need to discuss a little bit on the nature of the water resource government in Chinese history. Actually, this issue is concerned with the nature of Chinese society in history: China is a highly centralized country or it has some degree of local autonomy? As china is a huge agricultural state and the water is so important to the agriculture that the association between the two topics is reasonable.

There are evidences proving that the water resource government is highly centralized in Chinese history. The central government functioned on the water recourse management mainly in three aspects. First, the central government was in charge of the waterproof and water control projects. Second, In order to develop irrigation, the central government sponsored or offered financial support to build up hydraulic engineering. Third, the

central government built up and executed water legislation to regulate the joint water using (Wang, 1999). The great rivers (such as the Yellow River, the Yangtze River) traverse nearly all the territory. The rivers normally moisten the river coast soil, while they lick up everything by flood sometimes. While the individual peasant households were not able to afford the water projects and only the state could make the peasants cooperate. The central government built up special branch and relevant rules to manage the water recourse. All the large-scale water conservancy projects were organized by the state.

Accordingly, some thinkers like Marx, Weber and Wittfogel believe that the need for flood control and irrigation require the central coordination and a specialized bureaucracy. According to Wittfogel's analysis, the hydraulic empire maintains the power and control through exclusive control over access to water. The central control gave rise to social classes and social and economic specialization, while it also gave the government power of life and death over its population. Thus, a particularly extreme despotism is typical of hydraulic empires (Wittfogel, 1967).

Although the hydraulic despotism is criticized for its ignorance of basic Chinese history, it pointed out the centralization nature of the water recourse government in Chinese history. The central government justified the centralization by associate it with the state unification. As Pye has commented, "political issues have usually emanated from the center; but if pressing concerns are raised in one part of the country, they are either quickly suppressed or are taken over by the central authorities and made into national concerns, relevant for the whole country." (Pye, 1985). The catastrophic flood happening in one province will get the central government's attention and thus get the financial, material help from the other parts of the country through the reallocation. The Yellow River, together with the Great Wall, symbolizes the national unity until today (Kang, 2003). The famous Chinese saying that the Yellow River will become limpid only if the sage man would like to serve for the government(sheng ren chu er huang he qing), the achievement of the Yellow River harnessing even became a sign of good central government.

While at the same time, the water recourse government in ancient China has some degree of local autonomy. Logically speaking, there was no formal government below the county level in traditional China and the county government was relatively small, composed of a magistrate and a handful of clerks and runners. Due to the rule of avoidance, the magistrate was not from his jurisdiction. Thus, the government could not directly administer the rural affairs including the water recourse issues. Instead, the government had to rely on the local elites and gentry who were well acquainted with local conditions and usually respected by local people.

Philip Huang distinguished the north China and the Yangzi Delta on the water engineering. The north China is relatively arid so that people laid particular stress on the irrigation engineering, which was composed of the large-scale preventing flood projects organized by the state and the wells belonging to the individual peasant households. The Yangzi Delta was comparatively humid, and therefore abundant in water recourse. People living in this region developed the irrigation and drainage engineering whose typical size lay between the large-scale dams and the small-size wells so that this kind of engineering

could be coped with by a normal clan organization (Huang, 2000).

According to Huang, it seemed that the peasants in Yangzi Delta were more organized by the clan than the ones in northern China. Actually, there were some steams and fountains in a great many northern villages. The local gentry or the leader of the clans were in charge of the distribution of the water recourse in common (Zhang 2001, Xing 2005, Dong 2004). The towns and their villages sharing the same drainage area formed a regional community (Xing 2005, Duara 1988). The leaders of big clans and the gentry built up unofficial organizations and rules (often carved in the monuments) to deal with the water issues. The organization charged the ordinary villagers for its service in order to make it function normally. When slumped into intractable situation, the leaders would ask for the local government to judge who was right, but they would obey the custom on the whole. Normally speaking, the normal villagers had no right to take part in the decision-making, but they got the chance to experience the solidarity during the ceremony of rain praying. It is worthy to mention that the female villagers could participate in the ceremony too, despite their slave-girls character in it (Yuan, 2003).

As we have discussed above, the water recourse government in ancient China has the dual nature of centralization and uncentralization. The state was in charge of the building and maintenance of the large-scale water engineering, it promulgated the Water Law and supervised its implementation. Below the county level, where the state wasn't able to penetrate at that time, the gentry and the leaders of the clans took care of the local water recourse management through unofficial institutions like clans, folk beliefs and even some associations. However, we should be prudential to describe it as uncentralization due to two reasons. The first is that not all the villagers concerned could participate in the decision-making and it was always controlled by the influential persons. Secondly, the rural society enjoyed some kind of autonomy not because the government intended to give it something like self-government, but because the authorities were unable completely to control or supervise its activities. Such "autonomy", in other words, was a result of incomplete centralization; the government never hesitated to interfere with village life whenever it deemed it necessary or desirable (Hsiao, 1960).

Respecting the later reason, it has been proved by the twentieth-century politics of China. As Kuhn (2002) put it, the twentieth-century politics of China is "a story about the relentless march of the central state." If the imperial state had physical difficulties in penetrating villages, the state under the Nationalist Party took advantage of any modern improvements to reach local society. In particular, the rapid development of mass communication and transportation in the early twentieth century made the state much easier to interfere with local affairs. The efforts to build a strong and modern state greatly transformed rural areas, and the state began to penetrate local society more deeply and moved toward bureaucratization, rationalization, and administrative extension (Duara, 1988).

Extreme Centralization on Water Recourse Government from 1950s to 1970s

The process of centralization on water recourse government was actually a part of the extreme centralization nearly in all aspects in China from 1950s to 1970s. For the first time in Chinese history, the central government succeeded in penetrating the rural society root and branch. The town came into the official political system and at the same time,

the communist party set its party branch in each “administrative village” or brigade, which is still the case at present. The Party branch became the governing body in villages, with the Party Secretary at the top and having the final say. Since the Party Secretary was usually appointed directly or approved by superior officials, he identified himself with the official interests rather than village interests. The Party branch in villages became the basic level of the hierarchical bureaucracy by following the order and directives of the township government.

From 1958, in order to support the Great Leap Forward and improve the productivity of the agriculture, the state began to collectivize farming and rural life by building up the system of People’s Commune. From then on to 1982-85, the people’s commune was the highest of three administrative levels in rural areas which had governmental, political and economic functions. Communes, the largest collective units, were divided in turn into production brigades, and each brigade included several production teams. The produce of peasants was gathered more firmly than ever into the hand of the state (Kuhn, 2002).

The institution of the People’s commune has two essential characters: this institution is a combination of government and society; the production team is the basic accounting unit (Luo, 2005). First, the commune is a combination of government and society, which means the commune, is not just a political organization, but some kind of institution in charge of production, construction, finance, civil administration, education, health, public security, cultural causes, etc. That is to say, the commune controlled nearly all of the aspects in peasant’s life so that there were no affairs left to be deal with by the traditional clan or religious organizations. Second, the production team is the basic accounting unit. It means that the production team was the lowest level of collective ownership. Everything originally owned by the households, private animals, stored grains and other food items were contributed to the collective units. They were put to different uses as assigned by the collective units too. All farming activities were to be centrally assigned by cadres every morning. Every corporation member worked to the best of his ability and acquired his distribution according to his service. A work point system was used to calculate rewards. The production team took the place of the household to organize people’s work and life. The clan lost its economic foundation, saying nothing of being forbidden officially due to its feudalistic nature. With the collective economy as the basis and the administrative control as the instrument, the state got unprecedented capability to mobilize the individual peasants, which is called the rural mobilization of centralization by Yu Jianrong (Yu, 2001). Thousands of villages and peasants turned into the screws of the huge machine of the state.

As Mao has said at the commune time, “Water conservancy is the lifeblood of the agriculture”(in Chinese is: shui li shi nong ye de ming mai), constructing water conservancy projects was a crucial task for the government. It should be emphasized again that the government at this time included the commune, besides the county and the above. There were two kinds of most important water conservancy projects built during this period of time. The first was that the government launched and organized the large and medium reservoir which had the functions of flood control, irrigation, aquaculture and the others. The second one was that the Chinese people began to adopt the water-lifting technologies and thus built thousands of water-lifting projects (Wen, 2001). Due to the

latter kind of project, the peasants could make use of the groundwater or rivers with low water level. Therefore many farms could be irrigated and the productivity got improved rapidly.

At this period, the cooperation of peasants actually depended on the organization of the government. For example, the state would offer the material and fiscal supports to the large and medium water projects, while the work was finished by the peasants in the way of the Obligation Labor. The small-scale water projects organized by the commune or the production brigade, such as the small reservoir (nearly every production brigade responded the governmental call to build water conservancy and dug a small reservoir in the village), the channels, were finished by the free labors in the same way. The state did not pay for the Obligation Labor. The peasant who worked at the water project construction site would get the same work point (in Chinese: gong fen) as the ones in farms. Therefore it was the production team who paid for the peasant's Labor, whether the peasant worked for his own commune or for the others. It was hard to construct a systematic water engineering in with such a low cost without the public ownership (Huang, 2000).

The collective ownership helped to resolve the problem of property right. As we have known, the distribution of water recourse is not consistent with the administrative divisions on most occasions. The facilities of the large or medium scale water projects often need to cross the boundary of communes, counties even provinces. And it is common that the Village B will benefit more from the engineering situated at the village A. While under the regime of commune, the water recourse belongs to the state and nobody has the right to criticize the decision of the state. Actually, the corporation members have been infused with the ideology of communism. They were ready to devote anything they could give to the state, including their lives.

The task of the government of the water recourse was relatively simple. It relied on the governments at all levels. Take the irrigation for example, if two communes benefited from the same water-lift station, the county government would government the station by setting an official unit at the station. The official unit commissioned by the county government would contact with the beneficiary production brigades to arrange the irrigation order, water quantity, water rate, etc. The irrigation was so important, that every beneficiary production brigade would assign a cadre to manage the irrigation issues. Similarly, the production brigades would contact with the production teams to communicate the messages from the water-lift station and get the water fee. During the slack farming season, the production team would organize the peasants to dig or repair the channels and other facilities.

The most serious problem maybe was the excessive way of exploiting the water recourse. As the water recourse belongs to the state and the water fee was very cheap (Usually the station just charged the electric cost for lifting the water), people cared little about the waste behaviors. Another hidden trouble was the property right. The conflicts would emerge when the water recourse get scarce and the commune system get dismissed.

Decentralization on Water Recourse Government since the Reform

Even the Chinese peasants built up millions of water recourse projects during the period of

People's Commune; the yield of agriculture hasn't made much progress due to the centralization and ceaseless political movements. Soon after Mao's death in 1976, the government under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping began to implement the "open and reform" policy. In order to promote local initiatives, the center was committed to certain degree of decentralization. In fact, there was a shift from the requirement of universal conformity to the principle of efficiency and utility. The cadres should carry out the wishes of the centre; meanwhile they found it increasingly necessary to take into account local interests. Along with the economic growth and the political decentralization, the local governments and the individuals were empowered more rights to take part in the government of the water recourse.

In the late 1970s, some peasants pioneered to experiment family farming by allocating their collective land to each household. The success of the experiment made the central government accept it and spread it to other rural areas in the next few years until the "household responsibility system" was established. The individual households took back their decision-making power over farming, although land is still collective ownership (Kelliher 1992; Zhou 1996). After handing the quota demanded in the government, the peasants could reserve the rest of the agricultural products. As the peasants could make decision themselves on farming, the commune system played less and less important role in rural region. The village governing structure changed bit by bit; some villages organized Villagers' Committee and elected the members of the committee. As the government recognized that election might be an effective way to mitigate the tension between peasants and cadres, it sanctioned or partly supported villages' elections. In 1987, the government passed the Organic Law on Villagers' Committee (experimental) and the Villagers' Self-government (in Chinese: cunmin zizhi). Village elections became legitimized and thousands of villages hold village elections every few years.

The decentralization had some positive influences on village governance and decision-making over public affairs (Manion 1996; Li and O'Brien 1999; O'Brien and Li 2000; O'Brien 2001), while the local governments at all levels had to bear more fiscal burden than before. As the peasants didn't have to turn in all their products to the local government and the central government ordered the local governments to resolve the fiscal problems themselves, the local governments had nothing to do but charge the peasants more and more fees and taxes in the name of public service. The conflicts between the villagers and the rural cadres were so fierce that the central government had to take some measures to lighten peasant's burden by the way of the Tax and Fee Reform in countryside of China. From 2002, the government began to reduce the agricultural tax until totally cancelled it in 2005. The reform cancelled also the compulsory labor of peasants originally designed for the public welfare, including afforestation, flood control, fundamental construction of farmland and irrigation, road building and school house building. From then on, the village didn't charge the peasants fees for public welfare, but hold a meeting to discuss each project and made a decision every time. The reform of fees and taxed has lightened the peasants' burden, but it would take more time and procedures to make a decision on a matter of public welfare. The reform of Tax and Fee influenced the water recourse government in rural region a lot, which we will discuss in the paper later.

Generally speaking, the decentralization of water recourse government is socialization and

market orientated. Concerning to the water conservancy project management system in rural region, we could prove this opinion from the two aspects of basic level governments and the peasants under Self-government.

First of all, the government reduced the financial support to the water recourse administrative departments so that some organizations originally belonging to the government had to be cut or make their own lives. Take the township water management station (in Chinese: xiang shuilizhan) for example, it was after 1949 that the official organization was set at the town level. During the period of people's commune, nearly every commune has set a water conservancy commission (in Chinese: shuili weiyuanhui), hydropower branch (shuidianzu) or the head-quarter of capital construction of farmland (in Chinese: nongtian jiben jianshe zhihibu) as the competent authority of water conservancy construction through all over the town. In 1985, after the commune has been replaced by the town, the state set the township water management station as a detached agency of the county in charge of the water conservancy, small hydropower projects, soil and water conservancy and the others at the town level. The station was mainly under the leadership of the county and thus was belonging to the fiscal system of county. While the good time of the water and soil conservancy station hasn't lasted long time when the central government decided to transfer the administration right of the labor recourse, finance and material from the county to the lower level of town. As the town government had the financial problems, it began to encourage the peasant household or the union of households to build water conservancy projects; the station of water and soil conservancy could offer the peasants guidance and some technologies. Actually, the station was left unused, thus in many towns the station got cut or downsized (Zhai, 2005).

Similarly, most of the hydraulic project management units have experienced the process from an administrative unit to a corporation or semi-corporation unit. In rural region, the traditional water conservancy projects were relatively small-scaled and thus were managed by the individual peasant or the folk organizations. There were no official hydraulic project management unit until 1949 and from then on this kind of management unit took over all the large and medium-scale water projects. Along with the carrying out of the household responsibility system in rural region, the government decided to spread it to the other areas and put the contracted responsibility system into practice of the hydraulic project management units. On condition of admitting the public property right, the management units transfer the operational right through many kinds of contract form. The contract responsibility system stimulated the comprehensive management and improved the income of the hydraulic project management units, while it led to many kinds short term actions so that the water recourse was exploited excessively. At the end of the 1990s, according to whether and how much the unit operating earnings (such as offered the water to the city and electricity power), the hydraulic project management units were assorted into three kinds of units (public institution, semi-public institution and corporation). The more operating earnings the unit got, the less financial support from the government would it receive. Although most of the semi-public institutions had very few operating earnings, they were regarded as a semi-corporation so that they got less and less fiscal support. On the other hand, the hydraulic project management units have to obey the administrative orders from the governments so that they could not fix a price on

their service according to the supply and demand of the market.

The hydraulic project management units are supposed to contact with the organized peasants, due to the characters of huge water quantity and the long channels of the large or medium size water conservancy projects. At the same time the peasants could benefit from the relatively large-size projects only on the condition of cooperation. As we have mentioned before, the individual peasants were organized tightly so that they could cooperate easily with each other during the period of collectivization, although the ordinary villagers could say nothing on the decision-making. Logically speaking, within the system of the Villagers' Self-government, villagers could take part in decision-making on public issues through voting their leaders to constitute the Villagers' Committee, which provides the public service to the villagers. However, studies showed that the the system of villagers' self-government could not realized actually due to complex reasons, one of which was that the committee could only provide the peasants with relatively no significant public service. The village is a namely autonomous organization without key public issues and the Committee's main task is to implement the administrative instruction from the country government and above (Shen, 2003). Among few public services that the Committee provide is to organize the peasant households' irrigation and collect the water fees for the hydraulic project management unit. The Committee of the village played a very similar role comparing with what the production brigade has done during the commune period. The difference between the two periods lies in that the former production team is a dependent accounting unit and its corresponding villagers' group is no more than a name. The chief of the villagers' group visits the peasant households for collecting water fees, which is more difficult and complex than before. This seemingly troublesome task could get paid from the peasants and the allowance from the hydraulic project management unit.

The households responsibility system made the peasants get the self-decision right on farming, including choosing the sorts of the crops, work time and irrigate the crops when necessary. Comparing with the period of commune, the peasants got the right to dispose their product, which means they could consume a part of it themselves and sell the rest in the market. Actually, the peasants got to sell a part of their product in order to buy the necessary goods from the market, including the water for irrigation. The experience of market fosters the peasants' capacity to negotiate with the others. Some peasant households turned much richer than the others because of their labor recourse, the assiduity or their abilities. The economical differentiation fostered different peasant classes or groups with different demand to water recourse. The peasants with the similar demand have the rights to form a temporary organization for irrigation and contact with the hydraulic project management units directly. That is a new type of civil organization comparing to the traditional one or the official organization in nowadays (we will discuss this topic in details later in the part of the case study). On the other hand, there are some peasants who could not make use of the large-scale water recourse projects because of the expensive water fee or the damaged facilities such as the common channels. The decentralization empowers the peasants more rights to take part in the decision-making, while the social differentiation leads the outcome that some poor peasants couldn't afford the irrigation.

Although the decentralization is normally regarded as a sign of the democracy and it

brought out the remarkable economic development, it achieved much less than expected on the water recourse government. First, even the local governments get more powers to organize the water recourse government, the fiscal and judicial matters are still controlled by the superior governments. Budgeting and expending of local governments, including salaries and operational costs, also decided by the superior governments. It leaves actually little space for the local government to carry out the principle of subsidiarity. The centre is unable to obtain “the knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place” (Hayek, 1945), while the principle prefers to making policies at the locus closest to the citizen, and as local as possible. Second, the hydraulic project management unit is reorganized toward the direction of corporation, but it is still governed by the administrative department in charge of water conservancy and has to obey its instruction. Thus the hydraulic project management unit could not act as a dependent market subject. Third, the central government spread the villagers’ self-government in rural areas in order to foster the democracy from the basic level. However, the villagers could hardly take part in the significant policies-making taking place at the superior level. The Committee of the village could provide very limited public services. Therefore, it is widely agreed that the water recourse government in china is still highly centralized; the localities, without autonomous and self-governing status, are subject to the tight control of the centre. Now, the water recourse government is confronted with enormous challenges that are closely related to the centralized nature of the government. To face the challenges and resolve the problems, political reforms and institutionalized decentralization is indispensable.

Case Study of three villages: Situation and Problems

The three villages analyzed here namely Village F, S and X, are located in the Shanxi Province, which is situated at the north of the Yellow River and thus belonging to the north of China. A characteristic of the northern China is the arid climate, which is just like the famous saying that in north China, there is often drought of nine years out of ten. Before 1950s, as there isn’t river (except a big spring of the Village F) flowing across the three villages, the crop from the upland farms depended highly on the natural rainfall and the yield per mu of wheat was approximate 150 kg then.

During the 1950s, along with the industrialization and the cooperative transformation of agriculture, there was a high tide to construct the water recourse projects in China. In 1956, the Village F was chosen as the site of a water-lift station, which was supposed to provide water to meet the demand of irrigation in seven villages respectively belonging to three towns. They planned to draw the water mainly from the big spring located in the Village F and excavate the subsurface flow from the nearby mountain when necessary. As the water lift station would provide the irrigation service to three towns in the same county, it ranks the forth class in the system of Chinese water recourse projects administrative management and it should be governed by the county government directly.¹

¹ according to Luo, for the water recourse, there are six levels of management from up to down as following: The central government manages directly the main stream and water projects crossing different provinces, which rank the first class river or engineering; The province government manages the river or water projects crossing different counties, which rank the second class; The canal links the first and the second class rivers or engineering ranks the third class and it is managed together by the central and local government; the river or water project located within the same county meanwhile crossing the different towns rank the forth and it is

The county government set an agency of administration to manage the water lift station so that the station could contact with the communes and their production brigades as their superior. The state afforded the building materials and the necessary facilities of the water lift station, while the whole engineering was finished free of charge by the peasants from the three relative communes. The communism ideal encouraged the peasants to dig small conservancy and canals in their own production brigade with simple and crude tools.

Even the labor was compulsory, the peasants felt they worked for themselves so that they worked in full swing with singing all day long; they even carried out the labor emulation between production brigades or teams.

As the state has made a clear plan on the agriculture production and emitted administrative orders in details, nearly all the production teams planted the same crops and had the same irrigating need. When the irrigation season came, the water lift station called in the heads of the production brigades to dispose the irrigation task. The heads of the production brigades would hold a meeting with the heads of the production teams to communicate the commands from the superior. After that, the head of the production team organized the peasants to dredge the channels and calculated the irrigating time limit for every piece of land. The head of the production team would take the water fee from the account of the team and hand in it to the head of the brigade, who would collect the water fee and hand in it to the water lift station. As the water fee was very cheap and abundant at that time, the farming lands could get irrigated adequately. In the case of severe drought, there were conflicts between production teams and brigades, but the problems could always be handled by the superior.

In the beginning of 1980s, Shanxi Province began to carry out the household responsibility system in rural region and the people's commune was replaced by the "town administration and village autonomy", which means the town government was the lowest level of the state power and the village was a mass autonomy organization.

Although the autonomy is far more than successful until now, the village finds and insists its local interests gradually. At the same time, the unit charge of the water lift station was reorganized as a semi-corporation and it began to sell water to some factories to make money (the electricity price of the industry is much higher than the one of agriculture).

As we have mentioned before, in order to make use of the water lift station, people need to cooperate with each other. The cooperation during the commune period was realized through the impelling governmental organization. The peasants, the commune system and the water-lift station, they all acted as a component of a huge machine, which we could call a kind of "mechanical solidarity". On the contrary, the "organic solidarity" is based on the fact that individuals or organizations with their own interests could cooperate by the way of negotiating or bargaining. The organic solidarity is the outcome of the decentralization and it will promote decentralization vice versa. In the three villages that we choose as the case, the peasants cooperate with each other mainly through the village and village group, while they form some loose and temporary association when needed; the peasants need not only to cooperate with each other, but also negotiate with the government and the corporation. We will see the present

managed by the county government; the branch of the fifth river ranks the six class and it is normally managed by the production brigade.

situation and problems in the following analysis.

The commune system had a deep and far reaching influence on the peasants' life. It fostered the obedience to the cadre, whose authority came not only from his ability, but also from the state's power behind him. Even in nowadays the Committee of the Village is still called production brigade, and the head of the committee is called the head of the production brigade by the peasants. In some degree, the committee of the village functions like the former production brigade, especially concerning the water recourse matters. The three villages, without reference to their size, economical condition and social differentiation degree, their water recourse issues are mainly handled by the Committee of the village. The committee would assign a cadre to take charge of the water conservancy, which turns mainly to collect the water fees for the water lift station. The villagers' group would assign a member of the group to distribute the water in details, whose key is controlling well the irrigation time for each household. As this work needs exact calculation and a lot of time, the peasants pay for it and the water-lift station provide allowance to the person in charge. When it becomes into a lucrative post, it will be possibly occupied by the person with power, and actually it does happen in the Village S. However, if the person with power works awfully, the villages could reject him in a negative way. Normally speaking, it is the assigned person who organizes the large-scale irrigation in winter and spring, but the villages could elect somebody else to take charge in the relatively small-scale irrigation in summer and autumn. The latter is not "officially assigned", he is different from the traditional gentry too-- this kind of person could be regarded as the achievement of the decentralization.

There is the case that the minority peasants in a village could not make use of the water-lift station, which happens in Village X. This Village is relatively far from the water-lift station and the channel passes through the Village S until it arrives at Village X. When the water flows through the Village S, the peasants of S would withhold water with all kinds of containers. So the water would leave little when it arrives at Village X. However, there is only about 10% of peasant households could benefit from the water-lift station. These peasants wished their villagers' committee to provide financial support to reconstruct the channel so that the Village S could not steal water easily. As the proposal involves public welfare, it should be discussed by the villagers. And of course the proposal was rejected because it could only benefit a small number of the villagers. So the channel is abandoned and the farming land nearby could not get irrigated. The countermeasures that the peasants figured out is to cultivate medical plants, as these plants need very less water.

In the Village F, we could find the conflict between the village, the government and the corporation. The water-lift station is sited at the Village F and it drew water from the village's big spring at beginning. Along with the running of the water pumps, the spring dried up so that the station dug several deep wells in the village. According the Article 3 of Water Law in 1988, the water recourse belongs to the state, while the water recourse in the pond, conservancy possessed by the agricultural collective economic organization belongs to the collective. Even the villagers admit that the water recourse belongs to the state; they still feel discontent that the station has worsened the village's water conditions and the villagers have to pay for the water recourse service as the peasants in other villagers. When they heard the news that the station sold the water to a factory, the

villagers got outraged. They agreed not to pay for the tap water fee anymore. The station felt chagrined because as a semi-corporation, it had to make a living by itself. But the station did nothing but reported this situation to its department in charge, namely the Bureau of County's Water Affairs. The bureau has discussed this problem with the head of the village, but it didn't make any progress until September in 2007.

Conclusion

This paper examined the relationship between decentralization and cooperation within the water recourse government in rural north china. The water recourse government was highly centralized in Chinese history, as the government controlled the access to water by the following measures: taking in charge of the flood control, sponsoring or offering financial support to build up hydraulic engineering, building up and executing water legislation to regulate the joint water using. On the other hand, there was some degree of autonomy in the ancient water recourse government, since there wasn't formal government below the county level and the water issues were actually handled by the local gentry or elites. In the latter half of the 20th century, the government spread its power deeply into the village life by setting up the people's commune system. The government planned and organized all the water issues for the peasants so that the peasants could cooperate without dissidence; even the cooperation was mechanical and exploited the water recourse excessively. China began the process of decentralization from the end of 1980. The household responsibility system and the construction of "town administration and village autonomy" empowered the peasants with more consciousness of rights on the water recourse issues, however, the case study of the three villages shows that even the peasants have formed a loose temporary association to make use of the water recourse, the cooperation between peasants was mainly in a way of centralization; when encountered with the state, the peasants and the corporation were still vulnerable, since they got no access to negotiating with the government.

To achieve the organic solidarity, it seems there is long rung to go for the Chinese people. We are supposed to learn from our wise ancestors and the developed west people. With regard to our ancestors, the Chinese culture has a tradition of rural gentry, who was normally the head of the big clan and the adherent of the Confucius. However, the class of gentry has been perished after 1949 as the dreg of old China. At the same time, the status of the peasant class has been lowered as the pariah, since the peasant got no lands, social insurance, endowment insurance and they had to hand in all the product to the state. So the peasants try hard to leave rural areas when possible and do not go back to live in their homeland when they get old. It is the centralization that peels off the elites from their village and produces the possibly most numerous vulnerable people, the Chinese peasants. When we talk about the experience of the west people, the federalism of Switzerland regarded as a model worthy learning. As we have known, Switzerland has never been a centralized state and the localities possessed of highly autonomy from long ago; the straight voting system could only be realized in small-size state with highly developed economy and technologies. Of course, we should learn from others, even it will be very hard and time taking. It is argued that only the namely villagers' self-government in rural region could not empower the peasants with enough power to

express their different interests and negotiate with the government on the significant issues. By promoting the decentralization, the central government should allocate more powers to the local government and the citizens should get more rights to form associations. Only in this way, we could probably realize a reasonable and sustainable way to use the water resource so that we could achieve the harmony between the nature and the society as we have been expected long ago.

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