

Preface

Author's Introduction to the English Edition

My doctoral dissertation *An Analysis of Non-Institutional Political Participation of Chinese Peasants During the Transformation Period* written at the end of 1998 was first published in Chinese under the title of *Non-Institutional Political Participation—A Case Study of Chinese Peasants during the Transformation Period* 15 years ago in 2000 after its oral defense was completed.

During the past 15 years, despite the fact that the book received positive response both in and outside the academia and was highly cited, which greatly encouraged me, I have remained modestly aware that modernization, institutional changes, transformation period, peasants (Chinese peasants), political participation and reforms of governance (the decentralization of social governing power) were all hot topics easily arousing public interest in China over the past 20 years or so. What I have done is simply, by using the opportunity of working on my doctoral thesis, to propose the concept of “non-institutional political participation” with its analytical framework and conduct a comprehensive research on these topics.

The past 15 years have witnessed great changes not only in Chinese society, but also in research subjects and methodologies in social sciences. It was out of my expectation when I learned from my academia friends that this book had also influenced researches in a range of related areas including sociology, law, and history, and even the emerging Internet studies. After I was told that the international publisher Springer was planning to publish an English edition of this book as a classic on Chinese political science, I started reading through this book from the perspective of a reader. After all, reading a book as the author and as a reader inevitably renders different expectations and emotional feelings.

From the author's perspective, the expectation is that what is written needs to be put into use, and what is used needs to fit appropriate practical conditions. Every scholar hopes that his/her studies are recognized and put into practical use, and used appropriately, creating a good unity of learning, practice, and reality. When I was writing my doctoral thesis, I was not sure whether my rationality in

discussing the old yet realistic, complicated, and sensitive issues of Chinese rural areas and peasants would be affected by my personal attachment toward the countryside and peasants. This question has now been satisfactorily answered by the positive comments my work has received since its publication—I am pleased that my work has proved to be a rational study inspired by emotions.

From a reader's perspective, however, one believes that truth is simple, as advocated by traditional Chinese philosophers, which simply means that even profound truth can be interpreted in simple words. This belief also largely coincides with the laudation of the beauty of simplicity and concision in modern theoretical studies including social science studies. This does not mean, of course, that simplicity is all that matters in discussing social theories. It is also essential to describe and discuss the nature of human behavior. Pursuing simplicity and conciseness does not exclude provision of accurate, specific, and sometimes detailed descriptions of empirical phenomena. As a matter of fact, abstract conceptualization of theories does not work without concrete and accurate description of empirical phenomena.

Abstract conceptualization of theories and accurate description of empirical phenomena both need to be supported by generally meaningful concepts. In social science studies, a series of key concepts have inspired different perspectives and approaches for examining social reality, and regulated applicable methodologies and procedures of research. Precise and normative concepts provide a foundation for the formation of academic systems, and important tools for analyzing many empirical phenomena in daily life. These are all major tasks for social scientists. In social science research, the proposal and verification of a concept is also beneficial to accomplishing tasks and objectives in other aspects. In other words, social science studies involve many other tasks and objectives, such as nurturing new thinking models and reforming old models, and exploring and innovating methodologies. Outstanding social science studies show a high level of consistency toward all these tasks and objectives.

When I was writing this introduction, the song *You Raise Me Up* in the form of chorus and piano renditions keeps ringing around me. It arouses my inner feeling of gratitude—my heartfelt thanks go to everyone, wherever you are, who has generously encouraged me throughout the process and, in particular, to you who are reading this book—with you I feel greatly honored to communicate, and from you I appreciate all comments and feedbacks you may have.

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