

## Chapter 12

# On Hangzhou: “We” Is a Kind of Ideological Emancipation and Social Reconstruction

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I’m much honored to attend this forum again. This is the third time for me to attend such a forum themed social construction and “we”. I really appreciate Hangzhou municipal Party committee and government for their continuous concern for social construction, and for their renewed efforts to elevate ideological and theoretical discussions on social construction to such a height. I myself have been conducting in research into NGOs, and have turned my attention to social management innovations only in recent two years. I believe that the ongoing 18th National Congress of the CPC will also include social management innovations as a crucial topic.

Since the beginning of last year, I have begun to use a new concept—social management innovations. Just now I have noted that the report of the 18th National Congress of the CPC continues to use this concept but in a different perspective —“strengthening social construction”. Although both versions involve social management innovations, while, in my opinion, focusing on social construction and strengthening social construction through innovating management modes is very close to my research and focus of attention.

Since the first half of last year, I have been making investigations on social management innovations in all parts of the country including Hangzhou and have gained a general picture of these issues in terms of either territory or hierarchy. The central authorities have mentioned that social management innovations shall feature Party committee leadership, government responsibility, social coordination and public participation. In promoting social management innovations, either the central or local governments have made some explorations and innovations in terms of Party leadership, in a bid to build a new system. For example, a unified coordinating agency is to be established nationwide. In institutional arrangements, some regions set up the Social Work Committee, some the Masses Work Department, and

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still some attempt innovations through the Organization Department. The Party Committee is a crucial subject in promoting management innovations.

Then, we have to promote reform of and innovation in the management system. Social management innovation, once fully implemented, will concern more with issues in social construction. Hangzhou has built many platforms for negotiation and dialogue, which are actually boosting social construction and social restructuring. Talking about the concept of “we”, I am reminded of “Pan Xiao”, a household name in mainland China some thirty years ago. He then came up with the concept of “I”, and the concept of “I” in social reconstruction. Such social reconstruction had caused many problems. Now Hangzhou puts forward a new concept of “we”. This concept is mainly meant to intervene from the perspective of “citizens”. Reviewing the past 30 years since reform and opening up, we would find that there was a wave of ideological emancipation movements at the initial period of reform and opening up. Actually, Pan Xiao’s concept of “I” was part of such ideological emancipation movement. He was awakening a kind of new force in the whole society, a force whose core is “I”. Now the introduction of the concept of “we” is also part of the new ideological emancipation and theoretical innovation. However, at present, “we” are still in lack of a consensus. What’s the ideological significance of the concept of “we”? Do “we” really have the basis for co-existence? In the next period, what can we share with each other? Just now Professor Wen has mentioned China’s economic territory, but I think no prospect of sharing can be seen from such an aspect alone. We are now in urgent need of discussions on ideology and theories. I think that such a forum with the theme of “we” in Hangzhou is actually an event spearheading the trend of ideological emancipation. I sincerely hope that it becomes a starting point in our new round of ideological emancipation.

At present, community-level local governments concern more about social construction, particularly public participation and social coordination. One of my findings during my preliminary investigations is that many places have given consideration to their own features in their explorations. Logical conversion between these two kinds of issues can be seen in some relatively successful explorations. In the face of some major problems in social field, or political and social issues concerning social management innovations, it is necessary to have such logical conversion between these two kinds of issues. I would rather call such logical conversion as two kinds of wisdom.

The first kind of wisdom is to deal with issues of stability maintenance in a rule-of-law mindset, and deal with legal issues through proper governance. Issues of stability maintenance, whether for the central or local authorities, are causes of social issues, and are posing pressures to the authorities. In a traditional society, such issues could easily be taken as political issues, while some local governments now try to resort to rule of law when faced with issues that can easily be politicized, and then solve legal issues through proper governance, so as to resolve conflicts and contradictions between the Party and the masses through consultation and dialogue.

The second kind of wisdom is to address political issues through institutional adjustments, and solve institutional issues from a perspective of society. Political issues can be understood as issues of Party governance and is a mode in which the

Party acts as the central leader to unite and govern the society. How can such issues be solved in reality? If elevated to a higher level, they can be considered as political issues, in which you either advocate or oppose the Party. And if brought to a lower level, they can be considered as social issues. Social issues can be solved through social mechanisms and institutions, and then be converted to issues of social construction.

One typical case is Wukan in Guangdong Province. Last year, I toured dozens of cities for investigations, with the focus on Wukan and Wuxi. I have been to Wukan for three times. With respect to the issues of Wukan, I have published many papers, totaling around more than 100,000 characters. In addition to systematic review of and reflection on Wukan incident, I also made analysis from such different angles as ethnology and religion. Although Wukan, with a population of 13,000 only, is so small that you may not locate it on a Chinese map, it received attentions from all over the world last year. As a matter of fact, the issues as observed in Wukan are also occurring in many other places in China. The solution to Wukan issues has changed many people’s views on the Chinese political pattern.

What experience can we gain from the solution to Wukan issues? One is a conversion of mindset, that is, to deal with stability maintenance issues in a rule-of-law mindset, and solve legal issues through proper governance. The major problem involved at that time was land-related disputes, which further led to petitions and collisions between the police and the civilian. To deal with this problem, you might have many options. For a period, the prevailing option was to discriminate conflicts between “I” and “you” or “I” and “enemies”. In other words, some are hostile forces and some are opposing forces. Then how to deal with them? I think the method of class-based analysis or conventional political approaches will only lead to conflicts and blood-shedding. Of course, there was blood-shedding in Wukan, but the solution offered in Wukan was relatively satisfactory, with minimum blood-shedding.

Wang Yang, Secretary of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, has made a pointed remark when talking about Wukan during the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. He said that we had not made much innovation in addressing Wukan incident and we were only fully implementing the provisions in our laws and regulations. To do or implement what we are supposed to is a significant transition. It is not that we didn’t have such law in the past. We did have laws there but we did not implement them. Now they are fully implemented and have been brought onto the track of rule of law.

The second experience is to communicate and negotiate fully with each other. In Wukan, there are a dozen of different channels. Some channels are open and are enabled via the media; some are half-concealed and still some are concealed. In our visit to Wukan, we had worked out three plans, and finally we entered it through the internal channel. This channel is easy to get through. In Wukan, the communication channels not only come from the government, but also from the media, the civilians and the villagers. Why can the issues of Wukan be solved in a peaceful way? Basically, I think because there are many “pipelines” and “vent valves” in Wukan. Therefore, with so many “vent valves” in operation, no matter how big the balloon is inflated, it will not get exploded. This has provided many revelations for the

solution of other similar mass incidents. To solve mass incidents, we have to find the “vent valves” and explore any potential channel and mechanism. Wukan’s experience is that, as long as the Party staunchly stands with the masses, the masses will resolutely uphold the Party. When I was in Wukan, I noticed there was a Hutou Mountain, and a Party flag was planted on its top. I took a picture under the Party flag. I would say that democracy in Wukan is democracy under the Party flag. Why? This is because the Party flag was erected by the Ardent Youth League, not by the CPC. In the past, the Ardent Youth League had been always against the Party, and had been opting for democracy. Now they have made the choice with their actions. This proves that as long as the Communist Party stands on the same side with the masses, the masses will undoubtedly uphold the Party.

Wukan gives an important revelation for administrators and governors. Conventional views held that there must be distinctions between the enemy and “I” and between different classes. In addressing the Wukan incident, Wang Yang made it clear to unswervingly take the side of the masses, rather than of the lawbreakers. He insisted on that we should adopt the thinking of rule of law, rather than adhering to the old mindset of distinguishing between enemies and “I”. There is only the distinction between law followers and law breakers, but no distinction between the enemies and “I”. This is a major ideological conversion. We have noticed similar practices in other places as well. The nuts will be easier to crack if the masses are finally won over to our side. This is the first case.

Another typical case is Wuxi, an impoverished county in northeast Chongqing. It has not only underdeveloped economy, but multitudes of social problems. About four years ago, Wuxi began to experiment with the construction of a “Harmonious Homeland”. Here a logical conversion is involved in their attitudes to the problems. In the past, it was considered to be problems with Party governance. The relationship between the cadres and the masses was much intense, and there were urgent problems with petitions. As it were, the masses had come to resent the community-level administrations. Under such a situation, how to improve the relationship? Administrators in Wuxi first turned their eyes to problems in their institutions. Instead of passively dealing with petitions, they themselves went to the community to hear and address grievances of the masses. The Party secretary himself took the lead in setting up the “Masses’ Work Department” and established a system for grid-patterned services.

The grid-patterned system in Wuxi is different from those in other places. It requires units directly under the county government to deliver their services to the villagers. Each unit should take advantage of resources on hand, or even donations from themselves, to provide services for the villagers. Measures were to be taken to ensure that all villages are covered. The aim was to establish a series of institutional measures to resolve political crises and conflicts. Behind the system underlie their attempts at a kind of social construction, which they call “Harmonious Homeland”. The core of “Harmonious Homeland” is to allow the people to get involved in the construction of their own communities. They also set up a Harmonious Association and invited the famous environmental protection organization “Global Village” to engage in the efforts to train, mobilize, organize and coordinate the locals. People

there have developed recognition for their homeland through participation in such a process, including cultural regression and interaction. Also, a platform is established for the Party and the masses to have dialogue and communications. In this way, the issue with Party governance is solved through institutional reforms and the institutional issues are solved through social means. The local people’s confidence in the Communist Party is restored. From this case, we can understand that, we must have full confidence in the masses’ ability to construct their own beautiful society, even in impoverished areas or areas with sharp conflicts.

These two cases perhaps are still individual cases in China. But I feel that actually we have found two approaches to social management innovations. One approach is to convert political and stability maintenance issues into governance issues through social coordination and to foster public domain through social consultation, so as to explore the way to establish a civil society on the basis of mature public domain. The other approach is to find social subjects through social construction. Here the social subjects refer to NGOs, organizations of the masses themselves. It is expected to develop a civil society through such NGOs.

I still prefer to use the concept of “civil society” to interpret the ongoing social construction in China. Some aspects need to be promoted by the Party and government, such as the building of a rule-of-law country, the construction of political democracy, and the transformation of government functions; while some aspects are spontaneously realized during the respective development of market economy and social construction. A civil society is composed of three aspects: the first is the social organism with NGOs as its core; the second is the value system formed on the basis of social organism, which we call the value system of a “good society”. It includes such concepts as “making our life better” in Hangzhou and Happy Guangdong; the third is the public consultation system, which is the principal part of a civil society. It means that, in public domain, citizens form forces among themselves through consultation and dialogues, so as to influence public processes and counterbalance the market forces.

In building a civil society, who is the dominant party, the Party, the government, NGOs or individuals? To my understanding, for the Party committee, its main responsibility is to provide overall objectives and development strategies for the civil society through top-level designs, so as to promote construction of a rule-of-law country and construction of political democracy; for the government, its responsibility is to provide institutional supports to the civil society; and for the market, its responsibility is to further improve the market economy so as to provide economic base and material guarantee for the civil society. Therefore, the dominant party in the construction of such a social system is neither the Party, nor the government or the market; it is NGOs and their participants—citizens. Only through such a process, can we reconstruct a new social system centered on “us”. I think the practices in Hangzhou are just a process of exploring the reconstruction of a civil society centered on “us”. We will pay constant attention to any positive practices by Hangzhou in social construction. Thank you!