

Taiwan's Land Reform Revisited: From the Vantagepoint of Its Domestic Social Origins

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ABSTRACT

The discourse on Taiwan's successful land reform usually puts effort on the actors of external forces — the KMT-state and U.S. aid. However, the objective of this research is to re-examine Taiwan's land reform experiences from the vantagepoint of its domestic social origins. The agrarian class relations and cultural construction in and after the Japanese colonial period might have had some specific influences on the initiation of land reform in post-war Taiwan. This research would like to investigate what types of tenancy relations existed? Did these relations promote or prevent the emergence of a deprived consciousness of the tenant classes? Were these relations changing over the course of the pre-land reform period? This research tries to answer the above questions, and a perspective using collective behavior and social movement theory is developed to analyze the land reform experiences in Taiwan.

The research investigates two major policies in Taiwan's land reform: one is "the 37.5% Farm Land Rent Reduction Program in 1949;" the other is "the Sales of Public Farm Land in 1948 and 1951." The results related to the above questions are very different. Much discontent from the domestic social origin toward landlords could not be confirmed in the case of the Farm Land Rent Reduction Program. Authoritarian control from the government and the horrific "228 event" taking place in 1947 all played important roles in preventing Taiwanese landlords' opposition to the Farm Land Rent Reduction Program. However, the subsistence ethic seemingly had been violated in the other case. Many peasant movements emerged in 1947 and 1948, which were against the state-owned Taiwan Sugar Company. The authoritarian control used to justify the quiescence of landlords is not suitable to explain the emergence of those uprisings. This research maintains that those rebellions were the

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source for the policy of the Sales of Public Farm Land in 1948 and the policies that followed. Therefore, the assumption of this research can probably be vindicated. This paper then argues that the experience of Taiwan's land reform should be much more carefully examined.

Keywords: Land Reform, the 37.5% Farm Land Rent Reduction Program, the Sales of Public Farm Land, Tenancy Relations, The Taiwan Sugar Company