Making Red Billionaire Villages: 'Line Struggle' in Post-Mao China

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Conference presentation on 28 January 2017

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Abstract of paper:

Many have observed that post-Mao Chinese politics has been depoliticized: the role of ideology has declined significantly since the adoption of market reform, and technocratic managerialism has taken its place. However, the persistence of China's "red billionaire villages" suggests that politics at the rural grassroots may well have survived the process of "ossification" of the Party-state structures described by Wang Hui and others. Such villages either preserved or revived collectivised ownership and distribution; others go so far as to maintain the political iconography and discursive conventions characteristic of the Mao era. Such villages—estimated at one point by Li Changping to number in the tens of thousands—have garnered the enthusiastic support of a burgeoning network of "red communists" that includes high-ranking civilian leaders, veteran military officers, the "second red generation," Maoists, left-leaning organizations at the grassroots. On the one hand, such villages serve as counter-models to the increasing marketization and privatisation of Chinese agriculture; on the other hand, some appear to have enjoyed privileged access to enormous bank loans, generous funding programmes, and technical assistance, all of which call into question the economic viability of "red" rural development today. Based on original data collected during fieldwork in Henan, this paper critically examines four of the province's best-known "red billionaire villages" (Nanjie Village, Beixu Zhuang Village, Longtang Village and Liu Zhuang Village). We conclude that model-making serves as a factional tool for waging "line struggle" in the post-Mao era.