

### **03. PEASANTRIES**

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#### ***Research questions and research strategy***

We seek to make a comparative and global analysis of the position of peasant societies within the expanding capitalist world-system from 1500 to 2000, addressing the global questions of de-agrarianization, de-ruralization, and de-peasantization<sup>1</sup>. We try to understand the different roads of transition via a comparative research design, looking for similar or divergent processes of (de)peasantization, both in space (zoning within the world-economy) and over time (phases of incorporation). We focus on three cases: Northwestern Europe (North Sea Basin), the East coast of China (Yangzi River Delta) and Latin America (Central Andean Highlands). They are analyzed through four successive snapshots: circa 1600, 1800, 1900, and 2000. The choice of the three regions reflects the zoned division within the modern world-economy:

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<sup>1</sup> Our analysis is based on a larger project "*The end of peasant societies? A comparative and global research into the decline and disappearance of peasantries and its impact on social relations and inequality, 1500-2000*", a research project coordinated by Eric Vanhaute and funded by the Flemish National Science Foundation. The project is summarized in Vanhaute (2008) and Vanhaute (2011). Our analysis here sketches the general outline of the project.

- *North Sea Basin (England and the Low Countries)*: a core region from the late Middle Ages onwards within the northwestern European interstate system and the capitalist world-economy.
- *the east coast of China (Yangzi River Delta)*: from a core region in the East Asian world-system to a peripheral (late nineteenth century) and semiperipheral (late twentieth century) zone in the modern world-system.
- *Central Andean Highlands (south Peru and west Bolivia)*: from the core of an external world-system (Inca empire) to an incorporated and increasingly peripheralized region within the modern world-system since the sixteenth century.

Three interlocked dimensions constitute the trajectories of transformation of these rural zones: a) the (re)constitution of the peasant societies (household organization, village systems, regional networks); b) these rural zones' relations within broader societal structures (trade and commerce networks, fiscal systems, power and property relations); c) the transformation of these societies and the effects on social relationships and survival and income positions. To understand the interaction between these three dimensions, we gathered information on three thematic clusters:

1. Political and economic organization and social power relations (including extraction and control of surpluses);

2. Regulation of and access to land and natural resources, labor, markets, goods, and capital;
3. Households and the village community, including strategies related to reproduction, control, resistance, social groups and social (in)equality.

An integrated analysis of these themes allows us to address the following questions: What were the trajectories of incorporation of rural zones in the capitalist world-system? How did this incorporation affect the spaces and edges of peasant survival systems? Did and do these processes of peasant transformation create a more homogeneous world, or do they feed new trends of heterogenization?

### ***Hypotheses and definitions***

Understanding rural change in the modern world centers on the analysis of historical capitalism, which has been at the heart of the permanent (re)creation and marginalization of peasant societies. Different concepts have been utilized to define and understand these processes. In general, we define peasants as members of rural, agricultural households who control the land they work either as tenants or as smallholders. They are organized in family bonds and village communities that meet a large part of their subsistence needs (production, exchange, credit, protection) and they pool different forms of income (from land, labor, and exchange). They are ruled by other

social groups that extract a surplus either via rents, via (non-balanced) market transfers, or through control of state power (taxation). Key terms are (a degree of) household and local autonomy, flexible strategies of income-pooling, household-based village structures, and surplus extraction outside local control.

Within historical and sociological literature, the long-term trend of the decline of the centrality of rural zones has been framed within the interrelated set of concepts de-ruralization, de-agrarianization and de-peasantization. De-ruralization stands for the decline of rural spaces (and the growth of 'urbanized' zones). De-agrarianization refers to the decline of reliance on agriculture within the diversification of livelihood. De-peasantization refers to the erosion of the family basis of their livelihoods and the commodification of subsistence (See *inter alia* Bryceson 1999, Johnson 2004, Bernstein, 2010, Vanhaute, 2011). However, the common use of de-peasantization as a unilinear vector of modernization is misleading, ignoring the diversified effects of capitalist expansion on rural societies. Peasantries are a dynamic social process in themselves. They are "the historical outcome of an agrarian labor process which is constantly adjusting to surrounding conditions, be it fluctuations of climate, markets, state exactions, political regimes, as well as technical innovations, demographic trends, and environmental changes" (Bryceson et al., 2000, 2-3). Processes of de-

peasantization and re-peasantization are the outcome of changing strategies of peasant livelihood diversification. As Van der Ploeg has argued, the re-emergence of twenty-first century peasantries follows the same patterns of survival ('self-provisioning') and autonomy ('distantiation') though in different societal settings: "Today's peasantries are actively responding to the processes that otherwise would destroy, bypass and/or entrap them" (van der Ploeg 2010, 2, 21).

The long-term process of capitalist expansion has both widened (expansion) and deepened (intensification) relations of commodification. Commodification is the process through which the elements of production and social reproduction are produced for, and obtained from, external market exchange and subjected to its disciplines. However, the central tendency of capitalism towards generalized commodity production does not imply that all elements of social existence are necessarily and comprehensively commodified (Bernstein, 2010). Over time, uneven incorporation has been creating new frontier zones, in which the commodification of subsistence is followed by an increasing social and spatial differentiation.

The gradual incorporation of vast rural zones has subjugated, transformed, and sometimes (re)created peasantries. It has put increasing pressure on their base of existence through the alteration of peasant access to their essential means of production, land, labor, and capital. In general, the survival margins of the former majority of small-

scale, diversified, community-based agricultural systems have significantly decreased. However, we cannot understand the position of the rural zones in the modern world-system in a singular manner. Peasantries over the world have followed different trajectories of change and have developed divergent repertoires of adaptation and resistance. The expansion of the capitalist world-system has been fueled by the creation of new social and ecological frontier zones (Hall 2000, Moore 2010). Peasantries have always been a vital frontier zone. The process of incorporation created flows of surplus extraction, without necessarily dispossessing rural producers of their land and other means of production. These dynamic zones of uneven commodification led to new forms of struggle and resistance. That is why trends of homogenization on a macro level can generate new forms of heterogenization on the micro level. The expansion of the global division of labor triggered different paths of de-peasantization and re-peasantization. A central parameter to understand the differences in the trajectories of change is the balance between internal dynamics (processes of internal change) and external pressure (changes caused by actors outside local society), and/or between peasant modes of extraction (exploiting family labor) versus capitalist production modes (creating capitalist labor relations) (McMichael 2009).

The three cases illustrate the three basic models of the transformation of peasantries in the last five centuries: as

internal frontier zones in the core of the modern world-system (core processes of incorporation), as newly incorporated frontier zones in the periphery of the modern world-system (peripheral processes of incorporation), and as external zones to the modern world-system (hybrid processes of incorporation). In the North Sea region the expansion of zones of capitalist agriculture initiated strong processes of regional and social differentiation. The violent incorporation of the Andes peoples created new intra-regional and inter-regional relationships as part of a process of peripheralization. In the highly commercialized Yangzi River Delta, the trend of growing differentiation was slowed down by the redistributive state system and the persistence of kinship and clan networks.

### ***Sixteenth century: regional incorporations***

The sixteenth century marked the beginning of fundamental divergences in the development paths. On the eve of the sixteenth century we find a polycentric world with thriving agrarian civilizations all around the world - from East Asia, India, the Middle East and Europe to West Africa and Central and South America (Marks 2007). Most of these regional world-systems were interconnected in supra-regional networks. For thousands of years all these regions were characterized by cyclical changes in climate and population, linked to long-

term transformations in political and social organization, economic production, and living standards. This "biological ancien régime" was organic, it depended on solar energy to grow crops and on wood for fuel. Overall progress was limited due to the physical constraints on such solar energy-based agrarian societies. That is why agrarian empires all over the world lived at more or less the same level. This world of about 450 million people was overwhelmingly rural. 80-90% of the population lived as peasants, nearly all of them in a handful of civilizations occupying only a small proportion of the earth's surface. These civilizations or empires, and above all the ruling elites, survived on the extraction of surpluses from those who worked the land, mostly via rents (to landowners) and taxes (to the states).

Three of the most important regional systems were the (western) European state-system, and the Inca and Chinese world-empires. The core areas in these regional systems (North Sea Basin, Central Andean Highlands, Yangzi River Delta) experienced on the eve of the sixteenth century a structural process of economic and demographic growth and of increasing supra-regional interconnectedness. In all three regions, regional autonomy was combined with a continuing integration in broader commercial networks. The core-status coincided with the development of complex societies, elaborate city-networks, advanced levels of intensive agriculture, and the expansion of commercial networks.



In the North Sea Basin this expansion was related to accelerated processes of market integration and state formation (Dyer 2005, Hoppenbrouwers & Van Zanden 2001, Thoen 2001, Van Bavel 2010, Van Bavel & Holy 2010, Vanhaute *et al.* 2011). Historically, England and the Low Countries constituted the core area of the North Sea Basin. From the twelfth to thirteenth centuries onwards they formed the central area of structural transformations in economy (commercialization), demography (urbanization), and politics (state-building).

These comparatively densely populated and highly urbanized regions initiated a strongly commercialized agriculture, stood at the origin of an interregional and intercontinental trade system, and developed intensive industrial production systems. These processes triggered transformations in the rural societies, generating strong regional differentiation. Zones with capitalist agriculture, dominated by commercial farms and wage labor, developed in the regions bordering the North Sea. These zones were bound by two types of peasant societies. The first combined small-scale family farming with an expanding proto-industry, thus creating a commercial subsistence economy. More distant, but still integrated in a regional division of labor, we find more autarchic peasant zones with a significant labor surplus.

At the time the Spanish arrived, the (relatively) densely populated highlands and intermountain valleys of the Central Andes constituted the core region of the expansive Inca world-

empire. Intensive agriculture, a centralized administration, and a redistributive division of labor reflected the organizational efficiency of a complex society and the responsiveness to regional differences (Andrien 2001, Murra 1975, Mayer 2002). In the sixteenth century the region moved to a peripheral zone in the new European-Atlantic system. This formation of a new rural zone in the capitalist world-economy caused a new regional and sectoral differentiation. Local peasant regions were increasingly penetrated by resource-accumulating landowners of European descent, and converted into an interregional silver export economy (Aylwin 2002). Serving as the economic backbone of the Spanish metropolis, the silver mining in Potosí gave rise to new regional markets and trade circuits (Larson & Harris 1995, Assadourian 1982). In response to the drastic decline of the native population and in order to facilitate efficient evangelization and labor and tribute extraction, the scattered native communities were concentrated into Spanish-style villages under local control of the traditional chiefs. Although the shift from an auto-sufficient society marked by reciprocity and redistribution into a tributary and mercantile society deeply affected local community life, the process of integration was one of dynamic encounters rather than unidirectional imposition (Hoberman & Socolow 1996).

Since the beginning of the second millennium the Yangzi River Delta has been one of the most developed and densely

populated regions in East Asia, becoming the agricultural and industrial center in China (Shiba 2000, Fan 2008). For this region, the final phase of the Ming Dynasty in the sixteenth century was a period of economic and commercial growth based on a well integrated commodity economy with high land productivity, cash crops, and livestock farming (Liang 1980, Li 1998, Pomeranz 2000, Fan 2005). Cities grew and rural industries flourished. Regional differences were caused by ecological factors (plains, mountains) and reflected a differentiated agricultural output (grains, rice, cotton, mulberry, etc.) (Feng 2002). The international trade network, lubricated by increasing silver imported from Japan and America, increased inland commerce and led to a diversified industrial production around Taihu Lake, the Grand Canal, and the Yangzi River (Atwell 1982, Qian & Zheng 1998).

As in most rural societies, families in these regions were organized in small households, knit together in kinship/clan/village systems. These rural and peasant families pooled the fruits of their land with income from a wide range of labor activities. In the North Sea Basin a growing part of this income came from commodified labor, either in the form of proto-industrial activities or as wage labor outside the farm and village (including migrant labor). Village communities acted predominantly as (informal) credit networks. The integration in broader economic systems put these networks under growing constraints. This was first felt in the North

Sea Region, and resulted in more unequal economic and power relations. Along with a gradual decrease of the commons, land rights became more individualistic (family-based). Proletarianization promoted polarization, with the concentration of village power (and the control over village institutions such as poor relief) in the hands of land-based oligarchies.

The growth of a flexible and extra-village labor market was much more limited in the Inca and Chinese world-empires. In the Andes, the import of the Spanish village system after the *Conquista* cut through inter-ecological and intra-community solidarity systems. Although increasingly under pressure, communitarian support systems still relied primarily on pre-colonial mechanisms in the hands of rotating village leadership. Clan loyalties remained strong in the Yangzi River Delta. In periods of social unrest they replaced failing state engagements (Huang 1990, Fuma 2005, Li & Jiang 2000).

In the sixteenth century all three rural zones encountered processes of political and economic incorporation, albeit of a fundamentally different type. In the North Sea Region the direct impact of (internal) integration in an expanding inter-state and capitalist system was translated into a growing commodification of land, labor, and capital. This accelerated a process of regional and social differentiation. These regional zones and social groups with different production and labor regimes were interconnected through unequal power

relations. The North Sea Basin is a typical example of transformation via the formation of new internal frontiers, frontiers that fed the expanding capitalist world-system. In the Andes, the (external) process of incorporation was much more sudden and violent. Processes of commodification were inserted in a village and kin-based rural society. This was accompanied by a regional reorganization of the rural economies, which created a new, external frontier zone. In both western Europe and the Andes, new flows of commodities, capital, and labor reorganized the rural zones with new spatial and social boundaries. The Yangzi River Delta encountered successive processes of increasing and decreasing political incorporation, mainly within the context of the Chinese world-empire. The sixteenth century was marked by processes of agricultural and commercial expansion in combination with the dissolution of Ming state structures and a strengthening of local clan systems (Hillman 2004). Structural transformations remained limited.

### ***1800: Global incorporation***

In the three centuries after 1500, world population doubled and tensions between peasant producers and ruling elites increased. Shifting power relations sharpened regional differentiation. In general, peasants became more subordinate to landlords or the growing power of governments (Tauger

2011). This coincided with an unprecedented expansion of international markets, creating a remarkable differentiation in labor relations - from tributary labor (slave and indentured labor) to different forms of commodified labor (from sharecropping to self-employed market production) (Van der Linden 2008).

In Europe, increasing pressures of commodification spurred social differentiation in peasant societies. In the Americas, Western explorers, rulers, and investors created a strongly polarized "plantation complex." Chinese Manchurian rulers tried to soften tensions by protecting peasant rights (Goldstone 2009).

In the North Sea Basin agrarian capitalism was firmly established by the early nineteenth century (Allen 2009, Hoppenbrouwers & Van Zanden 2001, Overton 1996 Van Bavel & Hoyle 2010, Vanhaute *et al.* 2011). The combination of labor-employing capitalist farmers and wage laborers was widespread in much of England and in some parts of the Continent. In other regions, peasant market-economies based on household farm work and proto-industrial activities remained predominant. They were based on local credit networks that linked the logic of survival farming with the logic of external market production. The structural economic transformations accompanying industrialization resulted in a massive contraction in the proportion of the workforce employed in agriculture, and in a sharp rise in agricultural

labor productivity. Around 1800, one agricultural laborer in England and the Low Countries produced enough to support two workers in manufacturing and services. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the share of non-agricultural population rose to 60-65%, followed by a fast urbanization. This process of de-agrarianization started around the maritime ports of the North Sea Area and, from 1800 onwards, followed the spread of industrialization. By the early nineteenth century, population pressure and economic transformations increasingly affected the fundamentals of the rural economy in Western Europe (subsistence farming, commons, village autonomy). This coincided with a deepening social polarization. After 1800, ever larger portions of the rural population could only secure their survival via a deeper exploitation of family labor on small pieces of land, in old and new putting out industries (such as the clothing and lace industries), and by seasonal agricultural and industrial activities.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Central Andean region experienced sharp processes of peripheralization. Since the sixteenth century the silver economy organized around Potosí was the centerpiece of the Central Andes' peripheral connection to the core and the main shaping force of the Andean peasant space (Assadourian 1982). Colonial reforms initiated a major reconfiguration of the Central Andean rural space towards an incomplete and uneven model of capitalist organization. Peasants were subjected to

tribute payments (in money, species, and labor), and evangelization. This paved the way for erosion of the village community. Indigenous tribute and labor extraction instigated market participation, shaping the space for new community survival systems (Larson & Harris 1995). The declining silver economy and the chaotic transition from colonial rule to the installation of independent republics shifted the position of the Central Andes towards a periphery of the periphery. The peasant economies faced an increased level of surplus extraction and access to markets for indigenous groups deteriorated (Tandeter 1995). The national treasury almost exclusively depended on peasant contributions (Larson 2004). In response to local asymmetric power relations and the disturbance of market-oriented circuits and purchasing power, peasants relied more heavily on auto-controlled exchange relations and communal auto-consumption (Jacobsen 1993). The instability of the hacienda institution resulted in a process of fragmentation and a multiplication of small-scale farms, farmers, and owners (Klein 1993). Increasing demographic pressure on land and natural resources contributed to rising social instability, intra-community conflicts, and differentiation by groups of well-off peasants (Serulnikov 2008).

Since the Ming Dynasty the peasants in the Yangzi River Delta strongly increased agricultural outputs by reclaiming new land, planting new crops and adapting labor-intensive



techniques (Huang 1990, Pomeranz 2000). After 1644, Manchu rulers promoted a massive change in class structure and power relations, followed by rapid economic and demographic growth (Ho 2000, Gao 2005, Goldstone 2009). Many peasants acquired property rights, strengthening the Qing's autocratic rule. This agricultural and demographic expansion increased pressure on the use of public goods, such as water and commons management, market infrastructure, public relief, social safety, and education. The local clan elites played an important role in safeguarding village credit networks, in preserving the environment, and in land redistribution. This did not prevent the decay of rural institutions in the nineteenth century, leading to peasant bankruptcies and to the dismantlement of village communities. The local gentry left for the cities and rural common interests were neglected (Qian & Zheng 1998). This implosion of Chinese peasant societies preceded the process of the incomplete incorporation and peripheralization of China.

### ***1900: Imperialist intensification***

Around 1900 only about 15% of the world's population lived in urban areas. Twelve cities had more than one million inhabitants. By 1950 the ratio of urban population has doubled to 30% and the number of cities with over one million people had grown to 83. This overall trend is the outcome of

divergent paths of transformation. From the 1870's, a "first global food regime" based on a settler-colonial model created a new global division of agricultural labor (McMichael 2009). The colonial/imperialist project implied the control over labor in the rural zones in the South. This required a direct intervention in the rural institutions and practices of land allocation and use, sometimes destroying them, sometimes modifying them. Rural regions specialized either in grain and meat production (settler economies), or in tropical export crops (colonial Asia and Africa, and former colonies in Latin and South America), both via plantations and via (forced) peasant production. This imposed the commodification of peasant and settler farming and facilitated the creation of industrial plantations. In Latin America's process of brutal peripheralization, peasantries envisaged and adapted encroaching processes of commodification, while in China the implosion of rural societies foreshadowed the painful process of hybrid incorporation. In the western European core, peasant societies crumbled and were absorbed by "modernized" economic and political structures.

By the 1870s markets in the North Sea Region were liberalized. Large-scale grain and food imports provoked a fall in market prices, and the number of farmers started to decline (Overton 1996, Van Bavel & Hoyle 2010, Vanhaute et al. 2011). Surviving family farms were reoriented towards

commercial crops and raising livestock. In these farming households, family labor was more and more restricted to the nuclear household, gradually excluding all forms of labor exchange with other family and non-family relations. Ever more inputs came from outside the farm and the village, making farmers more dependent on external factors. New types of farmers' organizations succeeded in filling the gap, via cooperatives for the purchase of fertilizers and livestock feed, savings and loan cooperatives, cooperative dairy farms, and mutual insurances. The farmers' unions presented themselves as the political representatives of the farmers, and efficiently supported their members through the process of modernization. Non-agricultural alternatives, such as subcontracting production, commuting, and new industrial activities relieved the growing tension between labor and income. Expelled surplus labor could largely be absorbed by urban and rural industrialization and by the new service sectors. Rural society separated into a smaller fraction of market-oriented specialized family farmers and a growing number of households pooling their income outside agriculture and outside the village economy. Villages in these regions suburbanized, becoming part of bigger systems of employment, transport, and provisioning. Regional differences were gradually blotted out in favor of a much more uniform "sub-rural/sub-urban" society. In the longer run, the fact that the majority of rural households broke their ties with agriculture

paved the way to a continuous rise in economic welfare in the twentieth century.

In the post-independence Andean Highlands, colonial power relations were reproduced at the local level by new rural provincial elites, at the national level by oligarchic and new capitalist elites basing their power on land and mining, and at the international level by foreign capitalist entrepreneurs. The liberal reforms of the late nineteenth century abolished the community as a juridical, taxpaying, and landholding unit and adopted a free trade policy (Platt 1982). This was followed by a brutal process of enclosure, displacement, and absorption of peasant communities by the world market and its local agents (Larson 2004). Despite these aggressive commodification projects, the indigenous community was able to reorganize and recover as a vital socioeconomic and cultural force (Grieshaber 1980, Langer 1989, Klein 1993).

After the 1840s, the process of hybrid incorporation confined China to a peripheral position in the capitalist world-economy. Agricultural and industrial performances deteriorated in the Yangzi River Delta. In the early twentieth century, a new wave of innovation started the modernization of China's agriculture. A cooperative rural reconstruction movement filled the gap left by failing state power. This could not stop rising social vulnerability and polarization (Wang 2003). The rural areas were not able to absorb the

growing supply of labor, social differences in the villages increased, and a rural exodus loosened the community ties.

### ***2000: Neo-liberal intensification***

In 2000 almost half of the earth's population resided in urbanized settings. Only 42% still lived predominantly from agricultural labor. One is tempted to see this as a central vector of convergence in the contemporary world, incorporated in a single capitalist world-system. However, beneath the overall trend of contraction of rural/peasant zones, one discerns striking regional differences. Between 1950 and 2000 the disparity in agricultural population ratios between "highest income" and "lowest income" countries increased from 1-4.1 in 1960 (19% and 78%) to 1-19.7 in 2000 (3% and 59%). This goes with opposite trends in land/labor intensity. While in the North the long-term trend is one of labor saving, in the South more agricultural workers are employed per unit of farmland in 2000 than in 1950. These divergences are part of a shared experience of a more global and more entangled corporate food regime, shrinking the margins for peasant and family farming. While peasant farming in the North has virtually disappeared, in the South large parts of rural and urban populations cling to small-scale agricultural production. Neoliberal globalization included a shift towards a corporate regulation of the global food economy, with an

increasing concentration of global corporations in both agri-input and agri-food industries, and an ongoing and deepening commodification of peasant subsistence in the global South.

In the North Sea area, the development of a European agricultural policy in the 1950s sealed the breakthrough of a highly commercialized, industrialized, and interconnected agricultural sector (Van Bavel & Hoyle 2010, Vanhaute *et al.* 2011). The remaining small farmers were pushed out, unless they switched to producing high-value, capital-intensive crops and livestock. Labor was replaced by machinery. Increasing farm sizes required farmers to have more capital resources at their disposal.

While in Europe farmers as a social group disappeared from the social radar on both village and national levels, in the Andes the socioeconomic and political emancipation of (indigenous) peasants gained major impetus (Stern 1987, Larson 2004, Gotkowitz 2007). Peasant mobilization was triggered by servile labor relations, extreme land concentration, and syndical organization around the middle of the twentieth century. Land and constitutional reforms enhanced formal and individualizing land and civil rights, but failed to halt land fragmentation, extreme poverty, and marginalization, and generally favored capitalist production (Kay 1998, Mayer *et al.* 2009 for Peru; Urioste *et al.* 2007 for Bolivia). Although the majority of the Andean population still lives in indigenous peasant communities in the Altiplano and valleys,

demographic pressures in combination with large-scale mining and small-scale agriculture prohibits further expansion of the agricultural frontier. This leads to de-ruralization, intra/inter community conflicts, and massive migration towards the lowlands, coastal and urban areas, and abroad. Environmental degradation, climate change, and migration are changing the face of the Andean countryside. There is a widening socio-economic gap, particularly between the rural and the urban zones. Social conflicts mark the enduring processes of peripheralization.

After 1950 the Communist state apparatus tried to speed up the processes of de-ruralization and de-peasantization in the Yangzi River Delta (MacFarquhar 1997). The household-based peasant system was replaced by a collective production system. Landlords were eliminated after a process of mass collectivization. Through highly centralized social institutions, the rural cadres of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) controlled social and economic resources, which greatly strengthened the state's social mobilization capacity. After the 1980s, peasants gradually privatized the land use rights in practice, and an agricultural marketing system was gradually rebuilt (Carter et al. 1996). The people's communes were replaced by a "town-level government plus village-autonomy". However, social and economic stress on the rural society increased heavily during the last decades. Local governments have been trying to raise land-based revenues by

enlarging farms and increasing mechanization. This fuelled the process of de-ruralization. This imbalanced rural/urban growth fundamentally undermines the basis of social order in rural areas, increasing social inequality and social protest.

### ***Trajectories of peasant transformation***

The incorporation of rural zones in the capitalist world-economy has thoroughly redefined and recreated the spaces and boundaries of peasant survival systems. The decline of both its agrarian organization as its family and village basis has fundamentally altered the strategies of livelihood diversification. The uneven nature of the processes of incorporation and commodification has fuelled divergent trajectories of peasant transformation and created new social and ecological frontier zones. All world regions encountered between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries new and more intensive forms of social and geographical polarization, albeit in strongly different manners.

Core processes of incorporation such as in the North Sea Area could eventually absorb the impact of uneven economic and social growth. Peasant zones differentiated in a small fraction of commercial farmers and a large non-agricultural labor force. Peripheral processes of incorporation such as in the Andean Highlands had a disastrous impact on the regional rural systems, brutally redirecting them towards the needs of



the metropolis. This process was not unilinear and equal, gradually diminishing the capacity of peasant livelihood diversification, but also creating new frontiers of interaction and survival. The long-term transformation of peasant communities in the Yangzi River Delta had a more hybrid character, through the "protective" policies of both the Chinese empires and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese state. This could not prevent new forms of social tension, leaving open the question how this will affect the edges of peasant production and survival systems.

The "long twentieth century" corporate food regime globalized through waves of imperialist and neo-liberal intensification the North Sea geo-model of a core of capital intensive market production with peasant-based export cum survival zones at the edges. This restructuring and intensification of core-periphery relations created new divergences both in the rural economy as in peasant societies. The disappearance of peasantries in Europe, the reconfiguration of rural societies in China, and the struggle to formulate new peasant responses to peripheral positions in Latin America are all part of the changing global geo-system of the early twenty-first century. This has greatly strengthened global inequality. Contrary to the (semi-)urbanized labor force in the North, the rural workers of the global South have to pursue their reproduction through increasingly insecure, oppressive, and scarce wage employment

and/or a range of precarious small scale and "informal economy" survival activities, including marginal farming. Peasant livelihoods strategies remain a central part of 21th century global capitalism, both as means of survival, and as hotbeds for resistance.