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The state-market-society nexus: Agrarian changes of the BRICS countries

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Zhanping Hu

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of the agrarian changes of BRICS countries—Brazil, Russian, India, China and South Africa since their agrarian reforms two to three decades ago. It first reviews, in a brief manner, the agrarian changes that have occurred in BRICS countries. The five countries demonstrate both successful and failing stories regarding agrarian development. Then, both convergences and divergences of the agrarian changes of the five countries are summarized and discussed. An important lesson drawn from the comparative analysis is that the benign interaction and cooperation among state, market and society regarding agrarian reforms is the secret ‘formula’ for successful stories, which should be learned by some of the five countries and other developing countries that are experiencing agrarian transitions.

Keywords: *BRICS; state; market; society; agrarian change; neoliberal reform*

1 Introduction

BRICS is a recently emerged buzzword in the sphere of international economics and politics, representing five developing or newly industrialized countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Originally, the group were comprised by four countries (noted as BRIC) without South Africa, which was included in the end of 2010. By 2013, BRICS had nearly 3 billion people, representing 40% of the world population, and held an aggregate GDP of 16 trillion US \$, reaching approximately 20% of the world economy. BRICS were at first noted by their extraordinary economic performance in recent decades, and the world was surprised by their fast-growing market economies. In recent years, BRICS have started to pursue further political influences towards regional and global affairs, and every year, the five countries host a leader summit to consult cooperation in various spheres.

Notwithstanding the conspicuous and increasing influences on global arena, literature on the comparison of BRICS countries is surprisingly rare. People often challenge the solidarity and categorization of this group because of their dramatically different situations on facets of socio-economic structure, culture, political institution and development trajectory (Armijo, 2007; Sidway, 2012). Most attention, if any, has focused either on selected countries, rather than all together, or on aspects of national economic growth and strategic investments (e.g. Goldman Sachs, 2007) and international relations (e.g. Flandes, 2009; Taylor, 2014). This paper contributes to the literature by revealing the agrarian development stories of BRICS through a comparative perspective.

The booming national economies have substantially enhanced the per capita income in BRICS, which has triggered significant changes in the agrarian sectors in terms of both production and consumption (Lawson, Dragusanu and Ahmed, 2007; Brink, Orden, and Datz, 2013). Furthermore, after Russia acceded to WTO in 2012, all BRICS countries have participated in the international market, and the situations of agrarian sectors in the five countries are tightly connected with the rest of the world (Haq & Meilke, 2010). Especially, Russia and China are top agro-food importers (Liefert and Liefert, 2012), and Brazil is the largest agricultural exporters among BRICS (Lawson, Dragusanu and Ahmed, 2007). Yet, rural poverty is another part of the picture. Agrarian crisis with regard to the smallholder agriculture and landless poor are prevailing in five countries, albeit in various degrees, deriving from the penetration of domestic industrial accumulation and neoliberal globalization. Agrarian population have been the dominant group of national poverty in the five countries.

This paper does not discuss the positive or negative roles of BRICS in terms of international relations. Rather, it concentrates on their development stories, particularly on agrarian changes in the course of modernization. For the sake of comparison, the time period is set from last two or three decades, when the five countries started national-level agrarian neoliberal reform. This paper attempts to response to the research questions about: how about the agrarian development in BRICS in the course of building market economy and industrial accumulation? What lessons can be drawn from the agrarian development stories from BRICS?

This article is organized as following. Next section briefly introduces different vantage points of agrarian change and agrarian reform, and outlines the contexts of BRICS countries since their neoliberal agrarian reform. Section 3 summarizes the convergences and divergences of agrarian changes in the five countries. Section 4 discusses the roles of state, market and society in shaping the agrarian changes of BRICS since their neoliberal reforms. Section 5 concludes the paper.

2 Agrarian Change and BRICS Contexts

(a) Agrarian change and agrarian reform: setting the scene

Agrarian change (or agrarian transformation) signifies multi-faceted dynamic processes of changes in broadly agrarian spheres, which has been mostly used in political economic analysis (Bernstein, 2001).

Agrarian change has been approached and interpreted in varied vantage points by researchers and development practitioners (Rigg, Salamanca & Parnwell, 2012). In a narrower sense, agrarian transition signifies the process that agrarian-based society evolves towards an industrialized and urbanized society via agrarian capitalism development (Byres, 2009). In this sense, agrarian transition is largely synchronized the national transition towards industrialization and urbanization in the name of modernization. As emerging market economies, BRICS countries all are proceeding to industrial accumulation and capitalization of agrarian sectors. Therefore, this research uses agrarian change and agrarian transition interchangeably. To achieve agrarian development, agrarian reform has historically and globally been adopted as the prime means to modernize agriculture, reduce rural poverty and promote marketization and commercialization (Borras, Kay & Akram-Lodhi, 2007). At present, a market-oriented approach agrarian reform where free market is deemed as the decisive force to determine the agrarian resource allocation has dominated agrarian reform (especially land reform) worldwide (see Deininger & Binswanger, 1999; World Bank, 2003). This neoliberal approach has been sweeping the developing world in last two to three decades, and created substantial but rather controversial outcomes (see Borras, Kay & Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Akram-Lodhi, 2007). The main purpose and content of neoliberal agrarian reform, roughly from the 1990s onwards, is to use free market mechanism to redistribute land from large-scale agrohholdings to the poor and landless and secure the property right of land toward the new beneficiaries via privatization and individualization of land property right (Deininger & Binswanger, 1999; Borras, Kay & Akram-Lodhi, 2007). In the process of implementing agrarian reform, various actors including state, market and society, are involved and interact to shape the agrarian trajectories. Therefore, in practices, different countries adopted different approaches and produced varied outcomes. Although this paper attempts to interpret the agrarian change of the five countries, agrarian reform will be a primary focus due to its central importance to agrarian development in the process of industrial accumulation and globalization. Hence, the brief sketch of the agrarian change of BRICS in the following section sets the starting time from their neoliberal agrarian reform.

(b) Brief contexts of BRICS agrarian change since the neoliberal agrarian reform

Limited space does not allow a full review of agrarian changes in BRICS; therefore, an overview is outlined here via the prism of agrarian reform, which has been the core of agrarian changes across the world (Borras, Kay & Akram-Lodhi, 2007).

Brazil

Brazil initiated market-oriented agrarian reform in the late 1980s, since when an array of neoliberal policies have been implemented in the country. The agrarian sector in the prior reform period (roughly between the mid-1960s and early 1980s) had seen dominant state intervention through massive subsidies and price support towards agriculture, and the agrarian structure was characterized by the stark division between a small quantity of large-scale commercial agribusinesses and a huge amount of small family peasant farming and landless workers (Chaddad & Jank, 2006; Medeiros, 2007). The overall aim of the agrarian policy then was to pursue food security in the context of rapid rural-urban migration and urbanization (Chaddad & Jank, 2006). The debt crisis in the 1980s enforced Brazilian government to implement neoliberal economic reforms, which substantially eliminated the supportive subsidies and deregulate the market in the agrarian sectors. According to Chaddad and Jank (2006), disbursements of Brazilian governments on agrarian programs have been reduced from 5.6% in Sarney period (1985-1989) to 1.8% in Lula period (2003-2005) of total government expenditures. The market-oriented reform has helped to stabilize the economy and create a more liberal policy regime favourable to agricultural investment, production and exports (Schnepf *et al.*, 2001; Valdes, 2006). Also, Brazilian agriculture gained impressive progress, especially on the export sectors of sugarcane, soybean and beef, which are predominantly produced by large-scale agribusinesses (Martinelli *et al.*, 2010). One prominent character of Brazilian agrarian sector is the highly skewed distribution of land ownership, which derives from the colonial period (Medeiros, 2007; Ludewigs *et al.*, 2009). To alleviate the pronounced unequal land ownership and rural poverty, agrarian priority has been shifted to land reform and small family farming since the Cardoso administration (1995-2002) (Pereira, 2003; Chaddad and Jank, 2006). The land reform adopted a neoliberal economic approach, using market as

the central mechanism to redistribute land from large land owners to the rural poor and landless (Ludewigs, et al., 2009; Pacheco, 2009). The principle was that once the necessary market institutions were established, the market itself would select the most appropriate and efficient farmers and 'determine the most efficient size of agricultural property' (Ludewigs, et al., 2009: 1349). In practices, however, it has been a consensus that Brazilian neoliberal agrarian reform has largely failed to significantly change the highly skewed land ownership distribution (Borras, 2003; Pereira, 2003; Medeiros, 2007; Pacheco, 2009). Consequently, contemporary rural Brazil is constituted by a saliently contrasting division: on the one side are a small number of successful, large-scale, export-oriented, and high-profit commercial agribusinesses, and on the other side are millions of small, subsistence-oriented family farmers and landless workers. Furthermore, family farms have also been differentiated by the market-oriented reform, as according to Guanziroli, Buainain and Sabbato (2013), 39% family farms under 5 ha only took 3% total area while the 10% over 100 ha took 43% of total land in 2006. Yet, small farms can hardly provide sufficient income for rural poor, livelihoods diversification thus has become increasingly dominant trend in rural Brazil (Silva & Grossi, 2001; Chase, 2010). Another prominent feature of Brazilian agrarian change is, paralleled to the first one, long-standing and widespread peasant movements by millions of landless workers and small peasants that fight for land title (Borras, 2008). One fundamental reason underlying is that the state does not really intend to change the unequal agrarian structure; rather, they are preoccupied by the ideology of conventional modernization agrarian regime, which favours for sure the large-scale commercial agribusinesses, instead of small subsistent family farms (Pereira, 2003; Guanziroli, Buainain & Sabbato, 2013). Numerous challenges await Brazil government to deal with in the future including poor agrarian infrastructure, poor performance of land redistribution reforms and environment issues caused by the colonization of Amazon (Pacheco, 2009) and the large-scale commercial agricultural system (Martinelli et al., 2010).

Russia

Contemporary Russian agrarian transition originated from the disintegration of Soviet collectivization in the early 1990s, and since then Russian agrarian sector has experienced dramatic restructuring in the momentous transition from a planned economy to a market-oriented economy (Brooks, 1991). Russian agrarian reforms can be summarized into four facets: '(1) the legalization of private property; (2) the destatization of rural land and the issuance of land shares to individuals within large farms, and the transfer physical property and land deeds to those who departed a large farm; (3) the creation of a stratum of independent private farmers...and (4) the reorganization and reformation of large farming enterprises, that is, former state and collective farms.' (Wegren, 2004: 368). However, the first decade of the reform has witnessed severe regression in Russian agrarian sectors, as Ioffe (2005:180) found, 'in 1998 the output of crop farming was 56% of that in 1990 (calculated in stable prices), and the output of animal husbandry was only 49.7%...', which was further described by him as 'the sinking of the Titanic' (Ioffe, 2005:202). The major underlying reason was that the state withdrew from the agrarian sector so abruptly (stopping all the subsidies and supportive policies towards agriculture overnight) that the farmers especially the peasants failed to adapt to the mechanism of free markets and were reluctant to depart from the collective farms as the latter provided irreplaceable social welfare for them (Ioffe, 2005; Wegren, 2008; Herrold-Menzies, 2009). Since the 2000s, with Putin 'bringing the state back in' to the agrarian sectors, Russian agriculture has started to revive (Wegren, 2005, 2007; Liefert and Liefert, 2012). Contemporary Russian agriculture is constituted by three major types of farms: corporate farms, household plots and private peasant farms (Lerman and Shagaida, 2007), with different types of farms specialised in different crops or livestock sectors (Liefert and Liefert, 2012). Large corporate farms still dominate agricultural production in transition Russia and, especially in the 2000s, the growth of Russian agricultural outputs were driven by large agroholdings (Liefert and Liefert, 2012). Small-scale family farms have never prospered in Russia for various institutional, historical, socio-economic and political reasons (Wegren, 2008). Land markets in Russia have been largely circumscribed by the inefficiencies of the administrative and technological infrastructure (Lerman and Shagaida, 2007), although most agricultural land has been privatized officially. As Wegren (2008) predicted, the difficult situation of land markets of Russia is likely to continue, which means that Russian agriculture in the future will continue to be dominated by large agribusinesses rather than thousands of individual peasant families. Therefore, albeit with two decades

of neoliberal agrarian reform, the basic structure of the agrarian system in Russia has been, if not remained the same with prior one, 'marked more by continuity than change' (Liefert and Liefert, 2012: 37). With the penetration of free market and agrarian capitalism development, another significant change in rural Russia is the livelihood diversification of peasant farmers, for whom agriculture is no longer the mainstay of household income (Lerman, Serova & Zvyagintsev, 2008; Wegren, 2011).

The slow development of Russia agriculture since the reform has made it become the second largest agricultural importer in the global market, and the contemporary plan for the state is to promote large-scale commercial agrarian system. Recently emerged agrohholdings (Liefert and Liefert, 2012) was considered having the potential to compete in the global markets, especially after Russian accession to WTO in the end of 2012.

India

India initiated neoliberal economic reform in the early 1990s, which started with urban and industrial sectors before agrarian reform. Since then India begun to shift from a national state-led development strategy towards a neoliberal economic regulation and global integration. India's urban-led reform has had extremely different repercussions on the agrarian sector compared to the countries that started with agrarian sectors, like China (Gulati & Fan, 2008; Binswanger-Mkhize, 2013). As Gulati and Fan amply illustrated, the urban-led neoliberal reform has substantially constrained agricultural growth, which 'fluctuated and remained around the same levels of the 1980s, if not marginally lower' (Gulati & Fan, 2008:138), and which 'fell to an all time low of 0.6% per year during 1994/5-2004/5' (Lerche, 2011: 104). In addition, the prospering urban economies only created limited opportunities for rural labourers, and thus rural-urban migration has never been widespread in India. Consequently, there are a large amount of rural poor that are still dependent on agriculture or emerging rural non-farm sectors for their livelihood (Binswanger-Mkhize, 2013). In the subsequent neoliberal agrarian reforms, the government eliminated the supportive system toward agrarian sector including various seeds, irrigation and credit subsidies on the one hand, and deregulated and liberalized the agrifood market, to further integrate with the global market on the other (Lerche, 2011). Contemporary Indian agriculture is constituted by three groups: a small number of large-scale capitalist farmers who however accumulate primarily from non-agricultural economy rather than from agriculture; an emerging small group of capitalist peasants who can invest and accumulate from agriculture; and a major proportion of poor, marginal peasants (63%) that are unable to invest in agriculture and thus largely dependent on non-agriculture income streams (Reddy & Mishra, 2009). It has been widely found that a medium-scale capitalist farmer group are emerging in India in the process of agrarian transition, which however face great structural constraints to further expand (Lerche, 2013). In addition, unsuccessful land reform has led to a large number of landless agricultural workers in India, around 42% of rural population (Lerche, 2013). The rural landless often largely remain unemployed or become part-time agricultural workers with meagre wages (Lerche, 2011), and for them non-farm rural economy and migration are more important than agricultural activities (Harris, 2013). Overall, the agrarian reform in Indian has promoted agrarian capitalist development and created a sharp disparity between the rich landlords, capitalist farmers, rich peasants and the rural poor marginal peasants, and landless workers (Lerche, 2013). To relieve the severe agrarian crises (evident in for example poverty and farmers' suicides), agribusinesses, especially in the form of contract farming, have made great progress in some states of India (Singh, 2004; Kumar, 2006).

China

China, as the largest socialist country in the world, embarked on market-oriented agrarian reform in the end of 1970s. The major content of the reform is to replace collective farming with a household-based system, which is now known as the household responsibility system (HRS). The Chinese HRS is essentially an equalitarian land reform, through which every Chinese rural individual is distributed same amount of land from the collective and can cultivate the land autonomously (Lin, 1992). Yet, Chinese land tenure is distinct with its characteristic of 'two-tier' track system (Dong, 1996), with the ownership of farming land belonging to rural communities/collective, rather than peasant households who only have the right of contract and cultivation, which left the foreshadowing for the subsequent agrarian changes of China (Yao, 2000; He, 2010). China's market-oriented agrarian reform has been

considered successful in terms of agricultural growth and poverty reduction (Gulati & Fan, 2008). Through the series of reforms in aid of vast technological progress and agricultural mechanization, Chinese agriculture has not only basically realized self-sufficiency, but has also achieved great growth in quantities of production, being ranked first in the world for cereal production (FAOSTAT, 2013). The poverty rate has also reduced from more than 60% prior reform to less than 10% in 2004, attributed to impressive agrarian development (Ravallion, 2009). Alongside China's remarkable economic growth and industrialization progress, Chinese agrarian economy has been greatly transformed, with steadily decreasing contribution to the national GDP. In the course, the livelihoods of Chinese peasants have been dramatically diversified through undertaking non-farm economic activities and high level of rural-urban motilities. Smallholder farming, albeit still dominating the landscape of Chinese agriculture, has been never the mainstay of Chinese rural household income sources. The marginal position of smallholder agriculture in household income pattern at the micro level and in national economic growth at the macro level has proposed great challenge for China's food production in the context of rapid urbanization (Huang, 2010). Consequently, the government has launched an array of favourable agrarian policies to encourage farmers' incentives of agricultural production since 2004. An immature land transfer market has emerged in rural China to deal with the labour shortage of some migrant households and the crisis of smallholder agriculture. Also, the government also started a new round of neoliberal agrarian reform to promote large-scale commercial capitals to participate in land transfer markets for the sake of food security. By the end of 2013, 26% of total arable land has been transferred from smallholders to large-scale commercial farms (Economic Information Daily, 14 Jan, 2014), however, many hold sceptical viewpoints towards this agrarian capitalism approach which may harm the interests of Chinese peasants and threaten the well circulated household diverse livelihoods (He, 2010; Huang, 2010; Zhang and Donaldson, 2013). Therefore, it has been widely recognized both in policy and academic spheres that contemporary Chinese agriculture has arrived at a crossroad towards agrarian transition, choosing between promoting large-scale commercial agrarian system and sustaining smallholder agriculture or upgrading smallholder agriculture into medium-scale family farms (He, 2014; Hu, 2014). In addition, with her accession to WTO in 2001, China has actively participated in international agricultural markets. With the increasing income per capita and rapid urbanization, China has been experiencing 'nutrition transition' towards animal protein and fat (Zhai, et al., 2009), which has made China the largest agrifood importer (especially livestock-related product) in the international market (Goldman Sachs, 2007).

South Africa

South Africa started agrarian reform, or more particularly land distributive reform in 1994 when the country ended the notorious apartheid system. Prior to the 1994 reform, South Africa's agriculture was featured by a striking dualistic division, with 'a highly developed and generally large-scale commercial sector coexisting with large numbers of small-scale farmers on communal lands' (Lahiff, 2007:1578). The major goal of South African agrarian reform is to redistribute land from large-scale white farmers to poor, landless black people, through three mechanisms: restitution, land tenure reform and land redistribution, which are largely based on free market principle (Borras, 2003). However, the progress of land redistribution has been extremely unsuccessful. The initial target was to transfer 30% of white-owned land to rural poor African by 1999, however, only 7.2% has been distributed successfully by 2011 (O'Laughlin, et al., 2013). However, in contrast, large-scale commercial agriculture has kept expanding in the post-apartheid era (Bernstein, 2013). The market-led agrarian reform in South Africa therefore is widely considered a failure (Borras, 2003; Lahiff, 2007; O'Laughlin, et al., 2013; Bernstein, 2013). As Aliber and Cousins (2013:142) wrote, 'The main thrust of agricultural policy after 1994 was deregulation and liberalization, which appears to have facilitated higher levels of concentration of land ownership rather than opening up space for smallholders...'. The sharp 'dualist' agrarian structure has been reproduced in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. While researchers have argued that the primary reason for the continued sharp division of agrarian structure is attributed to the state that deliberately and stubbornly maintained the large-scale commercial farming (LSCF), 'notwithstanding the rhetorical embrace of smallholder agriculture in some policy documents' (Aliber and Cousins, 2013: 141). The basic agrarian structure of South African is constituted by 'around 35,000 large-scale, mostly with-owned commercial farms, occupying the majority of the country's agricultural land and producing almost all marketed output, and a much

larger number of small-scale, black farmers, largely confined to the ex-Bantustans (approximately 4 million, located in around 2 million households...)' (Aliber and Cousins, 2013: 141-142). Consequently, the degree of rural poverty have been sustained and reproduced in the post-apartheid reform era (Aliber, 2003), and one remarkable characteristic of rural livelihoods of South Africa is that agriculture has never been the main livelihood for the rural poor, who are dependent on informal non-agrarian economies and state transfer (Bryceson, 2002; Lahiff & Cousins, 2005; Neves and Du Toit, 2013). The crises of social reproduction of the rural poor in South Africa 'remain grounded in the inheritances of racialized inequality' (Bernstein, 2013:23). The persistent lack of land and economic opportunities for the rural poor has led to long-standing and continuous social movements fighting for a redistribution of wealth and power in South Africa (Baletti, Johnson, & Wolford, 2008; Friedman, 2012). As South Africa has entered into WTO since 1995, most of the exports of agrifood are provided by large-scale, commercial, and white-owned farms.

3 Comparison of BRICS: Convergences and Divergences

The brief review of agrarian change in BRICS above has demonstrated that the agrarian pathways have considerably varied and been contextually specific. Comparative analysis among countries such as BRICS is difficult due to huge diversities in historical, socio-economic and political spheres. Notwithstanding, convergences can still be discovered, which precisely illustrates that albeit with vast differences in specific situations, there are shared processes that feature agrarian transitions in general. It is worthy to mention that the convergences and divergences identified here are just a tentative summary based on the topic of this article, and other possible comparisons may well exist according to different criteria.

(a) Convergences

First, the five countries have been experiencing structural transformation from an agrarian and rural based society towards an industrial and urban based one. In the process of industrial accumulation and urbanization, agriculture in the five countries has been contributing less and less to national economy, and labour force in agricultural sectors have largely declined albeit with different paces (See Figure 1). Rural society has been experiencing an overarching process of de-agrarianization, which denotes a '...long-term process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwelling away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihoods' (Bryceson, 2002: 726). Rural economy has been gradually diversified by non-farm economic activities, with non-farm income constituting an increased or even dominant proportion in household income structure. That is to say, livelihood diversification has become the norm in rural societies in the five countries, and agriculture or land-based activities have been increasingly marginalised in terms of either income or socio-cultural norms in the five countries, albeit with different degrees. Rural-urban linkages have been critical to enhance rural livelihood diversification. Internal temporary migration has been a major characteristic in the five countries. These agrarian changes have taken place in the context of national industrial accumulation, urbanization and agricultural modernization.

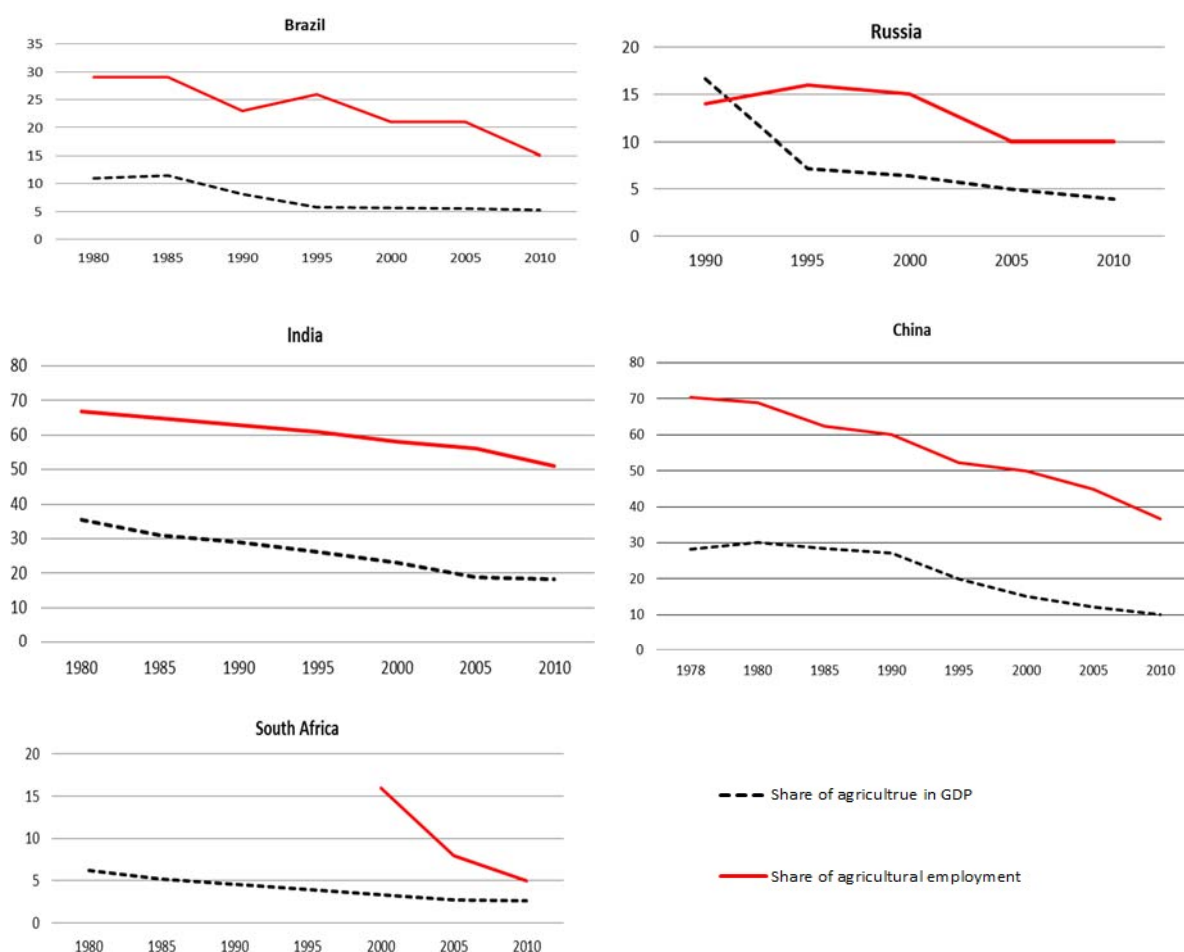


Figure 1 Agrarian structural transformation of BRICS (1980-2010)

Source: Data of Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa from World Bank Data (1980-2010); China data from Chinese Statistical Yearbook (1978-2010).

Second, all five countries have embarked market-oriented agrarian reforms to address agrarian crises since the last two or three decades, although due to different reasons according to specific national socio-historical situations. China and Russia initiated their agrarian reforms from planned economy to market-based economy, involving overarching socio-economic transformations. Brazil and South Africa promoted agrarian reforms to resolve the deep contrasting land inequality in rural society, predominantly targeting land redistribution towards the poor and landless through a market-based approach, and largely confining within agrarian domain. Indian agrarian reform was driven by its economic reform in urban sectors, and aimed to introduce free market into agrarian sectors and withdrawal related state interventions. Consequently, in the last two to three decades, market as an overwhelming force has become the fundamental mechanism in production and distribution in agrarian sectors of the five countries.

Third, the market-oriented agrarian reforms in the five countries have all been remarkably distorted by various political-economic and socio-cultural factors. For instance, in Brazil and Russia, elite capturing and governmental corruption have severely impeded the progress of reform. In China, socio-political institutions such as Hukou registration system, differentiated urban-rural social welfare and education policies have casted huge challenges to agrarian transition from rural society to urban

society. In India, the deep-rooted caste system, and in South Africa, the notorious ethnic prejudice, have significant negative impacts on agrarian reforms. With these distortions, in the reform era, those who have strong connections with governments or politics and in higher levels of social status frequently become the biggest beneficiaries from the reform, thus creating a class of super winners. The majority poor peasants and landless, often without much social, economic, and political capitals, are deprived of the opportunities of ameliorating their livelihoods through the market reform, and thus stay in the poverty trap. Given all five countries have not completely accomplished the transition from agrarian society towards industrialized society, agrarian sectors still face enormous institutional obstacles. In addition, although with decades' proceeding, market systems are still underdeveloped to some degrees. These institutional barriers create both winners and losers, and thus huge inequalities in agrarian society, especially in Brazil, India and South Africa, featured by highly skewed land ownership structure.

Fourth, in the agrarian transition of BRICS, the dynamic tension between large-scale, highly commercialized farms (or agribusiness model) and small-scale, largely subsistent farms (or smallholder family farm model) has become a most prominent process, and has formed the most fundamental agricultural development scenario in all the five countries. Within the overarching process of industrialization and agricultural modernization, the states of all the five countries have long had strong preference to, and thus political support of, large-scale, modernized, commercial agrarian system, rather than smallholder agriculture, although China has just in recent started to explicitly promote large-scale agriculture due to the so called agrarian crises driven by dramatic agricultural depopulation. In addition, agrarian reforms have facilitated the agribusiness model via marketization and commercialization, and further squeezed space for smallholder agriculture, and thus perpetuated the poor situation of rural peasants and landless. The persistent and enlarging social stratification driven by the sharp contrast of large-scale, rich famers and small-scale poor farmers has become a shared experience in the agrarian transition in BRICS. Notable is that although in China the circumstances have not been as serious as the other four because of its equalitarian land system, large-scale agriculture have gained impressive progress in recent years, and therefore this issue may well emerge in the foreseeable future in China.

(b) Divergences

First, different development stages. Obviously, although all have been taken as emerging market economies and experiencing similar process of de-agrarianization, BRICS countries have been situated at different development stages as Table 1 roughly shows. In the process of de-agrarianization, Brazil, Russia and South Africa have much higher per capita GDP and urbanization rates and more developed tertiary industry than India and China, which suggests that these three countries are more urbanized, and thus have gone much further in the de-agrarianization process than India and China, who are still experiencing rapid industrialization and urbanization. Even for India and China, differences are obvious. India has higher proportions of primary and tertiary sectors in GDP than China, who however has stronger industry contribution in GDP than India. Also, India has the most severe poverty ratio in the five countries, while South Africa is the most unequal country in terms of income distribution gauged by Gini coefficient. Certainly, many more indicators can be added to show the divergences among BRICS countries; however, here it just showcases that the five countries are situated in remarkable different development stages, which sets vastly different backdrops for agrarian changes occurring in the five countries.

Table 1. Selected development indicators of BRICS (2010)

Selected Indicators	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
GDP (100 million dollar)	21420	15254	17070	59312	3630
GDP growth rate compared with 2009 (%)	7.5	4.5	18.7	7.4	3.1
Per capita GDP (dollar)	10959	10678	1439	4434	7114
Per capita GDP growth rate (%)	6.5	4.5	8.3	9.7	1.5
Primary sector as percentage of GDP (%)	5.3	3.8	21.0	10.1	11.8
Secondary sector as percentage of GDP (%)	28.1	34.8	24.3	46.7	20.6
Tertiary sector as percentage of GDP (%)	66.6	61.4	54.6	43.2	67.6
Gini coefficient	0.5	0.42	0.34	0.48	0.64 ^a
Urbanisation rate (%)^b	84	74	31	49	62 ^c
National poverty rate (%)^b	4.5 ^c	-	32.7	9.2	9.4 ^c

Source: BRICS statistical collection (2014); ^b from World Bank data; ^a and ^c refer to the data of 2009 and 2011 respectively.

Note: poverty rate set at 1.25 dollar a day at 2005 international prices.

Second, different agrarian reform targets and approaches. Brazil and South Africa mainly targeted to redistributing land to peasants and the landless through national agrarian reforms. Russia and China aimed to transform the whole national economy from planned system to market-based system, through transferring the collective farms to individual peasants. Indian agrarian reform stemmed from its urban neoliberal reform, and the main target was to bring Indian agriculture into a market-based system through cutting off state support system. With different targets, different countries adopted different approaches. Brazil and South Africa adopted a market-led approach sponsored by the World Bank, which advocated a pathway of redistributing land through a free market mechanisms guided by the principle of ‘willing seller, and willing buyer’, in which the state has largely retreated (Borras, 2003). China and Russia adopted a state-led approach to promote land reforms; however, the state of Russia has afterwards retreated and left the reform to the under-developed market system, and the Chinese state has kept its strong intervention in the whole reform process. India took a similar market-led approach, with the state withdrawing from the agrarian development process.

Third, different agrarian structures. The agrarian structure of the five countries has been significantly different before and after their agrarian reforms. By and large, Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa have a similar sharp, contrasting, bifurcated agrarian structure: a small number of large-scale, modernized, commercial farmers taking the majority of national land area against a large number of small-scale, traditional, largely subsistent peasants and landless taking a minority of land area. Interestingly, this bifurcated agrarian structure has persisted after decades of agrarian reforms, which has led researchers to consider agrarian reforms in the three countries largely disappointing, if not a failure (Table 2). Noteworthy is that the Russian reform has intended to transfer large-scale collective farms into individualized farms; while most of the peasant decided to stay in the collective cooperatives, which have much better farming conditions than private farms. In Brazil, India and South Africa, the bifurcated agrarian structure has been maintained and reproduced through the agrarian reforms, which proposes serious challenges to their future agrarian reform in order to improve the land ownership and broadly livelihoods of poor peasants and landless in the rural area. In contrast, despite large-scale commercial agriculture has emerged in recent years, with promotion from the state, China have still been dominated by smallholder agriculture.

Table 2. Agrarian structure changes before and after agrarian reform in BRICS

Country	Agrarian structure before reform	Agrarian structure during/after reform
Brazil	Dominated by large-scale capitalist farm, high skewed land distribution	A small number of large-scale, export-oriented farms take most of land areas, with large number of small-scale, family-based, peasant farms and landless
Russia	Dominated by large-scale collective farms, with small portion of household plots and peasant farms	Collective farms still dominate overall agricultural sectors, a class of rich peasants emerged, with the majority of peasants staying poor
India	Landlordism, rich, and capitalist farms coexisted and took the majority of land areas, with large numbers of small-scale peasants taking the majority	A small number of large-scale, capitalist farms, with the vast majority of small-scale, subsistent, marginal farmers
China	Collective farms	Dominated by equalitarian smallholder farms, with a small fraction of large-, medium-scale capitalism farms emerging
South Africa	Dominated by large-scale, highly commercial, white owned farms; black people did not have land	A small number of large-scale, highly commercial farms (35 thousand); with a large number of small-scale, subsistent peasant farms (four million)

Fourth, different outcomes of agrarian reforms. The neoliberal agrarian reforms in the five countries have resulted in divergent outcomes. The land redistribution reforms in Brazil and South Africa have experienced extremely slow progress, and were considered widely as reform failure. Social movements in the two countries have kept emerging and consolidating to challenge the slow progress and inappropriate approaches. The gap between large-scale farm owners and small family farmers and landless have increased ever since. Large-scale, commercial agriculture is the dominant player in their agriculture output, and also very internationally competitive. The Russian reform has produced complex outcomes, which cannot be defined neatly as success or failure. However, the fact is that the Russia reform produced and perpetuated the dominance of large-scale collective cooperatives, and further marginalized small-scale private farmers, which obviously was not the expected result of the

reformers at the beginning. The Indian neoliberal agrarian reform has not really changed the situations of peasants and landless, and led to a 'poverty trap' for them, although on the successful aspects, large-scale, commercial agriculture has gained significant development in the reform period. Comparatively, as widely agreed, the Chinese agrarian reform has been a successful story by and large. In the more than three decades, China has made remarkable progress in poverty reduction, income enhancement and national economic growth, although it also faces great challenges in addressing the deep-rooted divide between rural and urban. Overall, agrarian reforms of BRICS have demonstrated both successful and frustrated stories, which are caused by many complex reasons according to specific national contexts. Next section will discuss the implication from the agrarian reform experiences of BRICS countries.

4 Implications: The State-Market-Society Nexus In Agrarian Changes

Agrarian reforms are essentially a process that the state initiates a series of reforming measures in response of crisis from the agrarian society. As a consequence, the main actors in the reform are primarily state, market and society, which three have really shaped the consequences of agrarian reforms. The aforementioned convergent and divergent experiences in BRICS countries are largely defined by the dynamics and matrix of state, market and society. This section therefore elaborates the nexus of state-market-society in the agrarian changes of BRICS countries, to draw important lessons for successful agrarian reforms.

(a)The state-market-society nexus in development studies

The triad of state, market and society nexus, often simplified into binary nexuses of state-society, state-market, has been a classic subject in development debates in recent decades. Forces from the three spheres constitute the main drivers of development, and the dynamic relationships among them determine the development consequences, either successful or disappointing. Temporarily, significant paradigmatic shifts in terms of the state-market nexus have occurred in the history of world development, from free market model (classic liberalism), to embedded liberalism, to neoliberalism, with varied roles played by the market and the state respectively. Spatially, there are different modes of state, market and society modes coexistent across the globe. For instance, the big society, big market and small government model in USA, the dominant state, intermediate market and small society in China, balanced state-market-society model in Germany, strong welfare state and weak market and society in North European countries, among others. Different state-market-society models in different nations have forged significantly different development stories.

Particularly, the role of state in national development or economic transformation has been heatedly debated since the neoliberal shifts in the 1980s (Evans, 1995). The relationship between state and market was often thought as a zero-sum game, conceptualized as two complete irreconcilable forces. In recent debates, the developmental miracle of East Asia countries and regions, such as Asia tigers, and China, has led researchers to rethink the role of the state in economic transformation (Wade, 1990; Evans, 1995; Kay, 2002). As Evans (1995) amply demonstrated, the dynamic and interactive, or more accurately, embedded relationship between the state and society has helped Korea successfully accomplished economic transformation. With the rise of social organizations and movements globally in the past decades, civil society has been taken into account for the driving forces that shape developmental trajectories. Overall, the debates of the nexus have been extremely spatially and temporarily dynamic; yet, a consensus seems to have been reached that a reconciled, benign, and interactive relationship between the three actors has been a key for successful economic transformation. Next section will narrow the debate down to the sphere of agrarian reforms, which provides great arena for the state-market-society dynamics to unfold.

(b)The state-market-society nexus in agrarian reforms

Agrarian reforms are an essential procedure of agrarian development and agrarian transition. In the process of economic industrialization and urbanization, agrarian sectors often face tremendous difficulties in synchronizing with national developmental pace. Especially, in general national development worldwide, agrarian sectors have been frequently downplayed or significantly ignored comparative to the industrial and urban counterparts (Bezemer and Headey, 2008), which has therefore necessitated initiatives (or reforms) to facilitate the transitional progress and address agrarian crises, such as highly skewed land distribution, rural poverty and sharp inequality, among others. The various agrarian reforms worldwide, the matrix formed by the state, market and society has fundamentally decided agrarian reform approaches, processes, progresses, and outcomes. According to different national socio-historical and political economic contexts, different countries have experienced different agrarian reforms, with consequently different outcomes, which are largely generated by the dynamics of the triad of state, market and society nexus.

Agrarian reforms may take different pathways in different contexts, which indicates different nexuses of state, market and society (Borras, et al. 2007). In general, the state-led agrarian reform refers to a reform process that is dominated by the state, policy elites and the bureaucracy, assuming that the state is highly autonomous and superior to the society. Market-led agrarian reform denotes an approach that prioritize free market mechanism, which is taken as the determining forces in allocating various resources, with the state and society playing a minimum role. Society-led agrarian reform denotes a reform process that is initiated by social movements or organizations, such as peasant and landless movements, emphasizing the political negotiation between the society and the state regarding agrarian crises. The three distinct approaches have been widely adopted across the world, and each has implied different nexuses of state-market-society, which thus generated different outcomes. Next section will show that BRICS adopted different approaches in agrarian reforms, with different roles played by the state, market and society respectively, and generated different consequences in the end.

(c)Different modes of the nexus in BRICS

Different modes of state-market-society nexus in BRICS countries have forged different pathways of agrarian reforms and therefore different trajectories of agrarian changes.

Brazil has adopted a market-led approach sponsored by World Bank in agrarian reform from the 1990s. This approach meant that market as the determinant principle has been the dominant force in land distribution. The role of the state was significantly weakened, or even minimised. The process of land (re)distribution was based on the principle of 'willing sellers, willing buyers', and the World Bank financially supported peasants and the landless to purchase land from large-scale land owners at the prices determined by the uncertain markets (Sauer, 2009). In consequence, the progress of land redistribution was extremely slow, always far behind the set reform targets. On the other hand, social movements initiated by poor peasants and the landless have flourished and swept the whole countries since the 1980s. Poor peasants and the landless asked for land, while the market-led reform failed to do so (Borras, 2003; Sauer, 2009). In general, in the Brazilian agrarian reform, market takes domination, resonated with strong civil society, while the state does not effectively interact with the society and the market. One remarkable reason why the market-led approach failed is that the approach cannot solve the political processes embedded in the land (re)distribution, as Borras (2003) amply demonstrated. The highly skewed land distribution was created politically, rather than merely due to lack of purchase power. Poor peasants and the landless were caught in the subordinate position in the political structure dominated by rich, commercial rural elites. That is also why the social movements were so prevalent and long-lasting in Brazil, suggesting that land redistribution ought to be solved by a politically-powerful actor such as the state, instead of free market. Even worse is that the contemporary Brazilian government has maintained the market-led approach, without any intension of participation from the state. Obviously, the failed interaction between the state and the society has rendered the long-term domination and also consistent inefficiency of the market-led

approach, which instead of granting peasants with land has transformed peasants' dream of assessing land into 'a nightmare of indebtedness' (Sauer, 2009: 127).

The Russian agrarian reform was an integral part of the overarching transition from a planned economy to a market economy. At the beginning, the state totally withdrew from the agrarian economy, leaving the choice to the peasants to stay in the collective farm cooperatives, or take their land proportions to start individual enterprises. In consequence, the majority of peasant chose to stay in the collective cooperatives, rather than distributing the land into small pieces as expected by the reformers. Moreover, thanks to the total withdrawal of the state, public services and welfare systems in the agrarian sectors were significantly cut down, and at the same time, the market system was not established maturely. In consequence, Russian agriculture experienced severe downwards during most of the 1990s (Wegren, 2005). In the 2000s, particularly since the administration of Putin, the state has realized that the neoliberal model of free market reform had largely failed, and thus started to be more interventionist comparative to the total retreat in the 1990s, entering into the period of 'bring the state back in' (Wegren, 2007). In response to the poor performance of agrarian sectors in the market reform in the 1990s, the Russia state started to readjust its role in economic transition, and initiated quite a few of supportive policies towards agriculture, such as purchase price support, grain export quota, trade protections, among others (Wegren, 2005). In consequence, the return of the state in the market reform has significantly triggered the growth of Russian agrarian sectors. Yet, one point to be noted is that for the sake of food security, Russia state has been supporting large-scale agrarian cooperatives, largely downplaying the private, small-scale, peasant farming. This brought about alarming social inequality within the agrarian society. The change trajectories of state-market interactions in Russian agrarian reform clearly implied that the state can play an extremely vital part in the market agrarian reform, to provide supportive political and socio-economic environments for the transition.

The Indian agrarian reform commenced after its economic neoliberal reform in the industrial and urban sectors since 1991. In the reform, the state promoted marketization in agrarian sectors, and removed the supportive instruments such as subsidies, public investments, and in turn diminished its own role in the economic growth. In addition, the state has largely stopped implementing land distribution reform in the neoliberal reform era, which furthered the skewed land distribution structure in India. Moreover, India is a 'debating society', which creates diverse political groups and negotiation processes in national decision making, and this in consequence significantly constrains the capability of that state in the reform process (Gulati and Fan, 2008). In addition, these diverse political groups or parties have different political appeals and different viewpoints on the role of the state on economic reform, which therefore has make the Indian state play changeable role in the reform in response to different political appeals (Bhattacharyya, 2014). In general, India's neoliberal reform has indeed promoted the national economic growth expressly; however, the benefits have largely bypassed the agrarian poor. In fact, taking advantage of the opportunities brought by the market reform, small number of rich farmers in rural India have taken most of the benefits of the reform, leaving little room for poor peasants and the landless. The trade liberalization has generated an increasingly large-scale, commercial, export-oriented agribusiness, in sharp contrast with the persistently small-scale, subsistence-oriented, peasant agriculture and numerous landless poor. As a result, various social movements mobilised primarily by rural poor and landless have arisen across India sine the 1970s, to which however the state has not responded properly. Poor performance of the state in the reform has generated a disappointing outcome in poverty reduction and equality mitigation, and the reform period has been consistently accompanied by severe agrarian crises (Lerche, 2011).

China embarked on its market-oriented agrarian reform in the end of the 1970s. Although the reform was about to transform the planned socio-economic system into a market-based system indicating a minimum role of the state, Chinese state has consistently and actively participated in the socio-economic transformation (Wu, 2007; Huang, 2015). In other words, the market system in China has, instead of being free, been relentlessly regulated and guided by the state, in sharp contrast with the case of Russia agrarian reform at the beginning. In China, the market system developed gradually and tentatively, with full supervision by the strong socialist political system. In land distribution from collective system to the household responsibly system, the state initiated the reform in response to

severe poverty and famine in rural society and soaring peasant appeals for land reform. In the implementation process, the state led the distribution process through its bureaucracy. In the market system development, the state on one hand removed planned regulations to promote market autonomy gradually, and on the other hand actively participated in the development process by means of extending modern agricultural technologies, providing market information, setting specific development strategies (such as cash crops), and facilitating rural-urban migration, among others. This strong state invention model in agrarian reform has proved to be a remarkable success. The Chinese economy as a whole has kept growing at double digits since the reform; the agricultural production has been kept expanded; and the poverty rate in the agrarian society has been significantly reduced. Comparatively, as discussed above, at the beginning of Russian reform, the state did not actively participated in the market system and therefore did not provide supportive measures to the agrarian sectors, which in consequence resulted in severe fall of agricultural production. The Chinese model signifies two aspects: an increasingly developed and opened market system on the hand and a persistent and strong state intervention tradition on the other. In the sense of economic growth, the Chinese model is a success; however, it also has resulted in tremendous social inequality in terms of wealth and alarming environmental crisis (Huang, 2015). Lastly, due to the strong political system in China, civil society has been poorly developed, although social protests have been observed across the country. China still faces tremendous challenge in building a more equal, democratic, and environmentally-friendly society. The Chinese case showcased that the active interaction between state and market has generated a remarkable growth story, but the poor interaction between state and the society has rendered severe social and environmental injustice.

South Africa adopted a similar approach, the market-led approach, as Brazil did, following the guidance from World Bank. Given the most prominent agrarian issue in South Africa is the vast majority of landless black residents, the main content of the reform was to grant land access to the landless black via a free market mechanism. The state largely retreated in the land distribution process. As a consequence, the distribution progress has been extremely slow, and the vast majority of black residents in rural areas remain landless and poor, with only a small number of 'beneficiaries' that really improved their livelihood situation. The free market approach did not work as its own in acquiring a more equal land distribution pattern. In addition, the state has consistently applied the large-scale commercial farming model, which remarkably slowed the progress of land distribution towards the poor and landless (Aliber and Cousins, 2013). Social movements constituted by rural poor and landless emerged across the country to challenge the failed land distribution scheme, which however was poorly responded by the state. On the other side, the large-scale commercial white farmers have much more political power and therefore stronger influence on the state's decision making. Again, in the case of South Africa, the free market model failed to resolve the intricate political process involved in land distribution and agrarian development broadly. Besides, reasons that the rural poor remain poor for a long period rest on the failure of the state to provide public services and investments towards the rural society. In consequence, South African agriculture is featured by a highly specialized, well commercialized, export-oriented, large-scale, white-owned agribusiness model accompanied by a majority of small-scale, subsistent, livelihood-diversified peasants and landless. South African agrarian reform is another example of poor corporation and coordination between state and the society. The state did not play a due role in the overall reform process, thus resulting in a persistent dual agrarian structure.

(d) Building a coordinated nexus of state-market-society

From the experiences of BRICS's agrarian reforms and broadly agrarian changes, it can be observed that although with vastly different backgrounds, the five countries share some general experiences and provide some general implications regarding the nexus of state-market-society, which largely shaped their trajectories of agrarian reform and changes. Some implications can be drawn from the five cases as follows.

First, the neoliberal agrarian reforms generated vastly different outcomes in the five countries, due to the different interaction patterns between state, market, and society. Market alone cannot address the

land issue, which is not just an economic issue, but more a socio-cultural and political issue intrinsically embedded in the agrarian society. Simply put, market is just an instrument that can be employed and taken advantage by any individuals, and in reality by economically, or politically powerful individuals. Therefore, free market creates inequality, stratification rather than equal, shared growth, as witnessed by the increasing social inequalities in the five countries.

Second, the state is extremely critical in agrarian reforms. The state is assumed to have superior political and mandatory forces to exert its wills over society and market. Agrarian reform must involve changing political and socio-economic relations within rural society, and in most case favouring the poor and landless. However, without the participation from the state, free market cannot solve the political elements involved. The Chinese case demonstrates that mandatory implementation from the state is extremely important to land reform at the beginning. The highly skewed land distribution in countries such as Brazil, India and South Africa was gradually built in long-term history, and once the land ownership was established, it proved to be extremely difficult to change, as in the long-standing process, various interests and power have been crystalized and institutionalized firmly. That is why the state ought to involve in the distribution process.

Besides the land distribution, the state can also promote agrarian development in cooperation with the market mechanism. In general, peasants and the poor have many obstacles in benefiting from market participation. The state should follow up in the market reform, and continue to provide public services to rural society, which will facilitate peasants and the poor to better build their livelihoods and participate in the market system. The case of Russia vividly demonstrates the necessity of the state in providing supportive policies and services to the agrarian sectors. Overall, a consensus in development debates has been increasingly reached that facing the penetration of neoliberalism, the role of state in developing countries needs to be strengthened, rather than loosened (Masuka, 2013).

Third, the state needs to cooperate with the society. There have been long-lasting and massive social movements initiated by peasants and rural landless in most of the five countries, although in China and Russia they are not as remarkable as the other three. This clearly indicates that the neoliberal model of agrarian reform has been rejected by the society, and a change is urgently needed. The states of the five countries however have failed to cooperate with the society and thus missed a critical moments to ameliorate the agrarian crises. An actively interactive relationship between state and society is critically important in agrarian reform (Borras, 2001).

Lastly, the biggest implication from the experiences of the five countries may be not that all three actors are critical to agrarian reform, but rather, the exact role and boundary of the three actors should be well reconciled and coordinated. Overemphasizing any single one or blur the boundaries would render disappointing outcomes. Undoubtedly, market has its own advantages in promoting growth, while state and society have more powers to tackle political issues (Borras, 2003; Lahiff, Borras, & Kay, 2007). Therefore, a dynamic, corporative, coordinated relationship between state, market and society will be particularly desirable in not only agrarian reforms, but also other development agendas as well. Especially in an era of globalization, how to reconcile the relations between state and free market has become a critical imperative for many countries.

5 Concluding remarks

The agrarian development stories of BRICS indicate that there is no thoroughly successful approach or trajectories in agrarian reforms. Rather, any agrarian reform pathway is moulded and remoulded by the interactions between the state, market and the society in historically-situated contexts. Still, there are convergences can be identified in the five very different countries. Neoliberalism approach indeed as a sweeping force has exerted profound influences worldwide, irrespective of the specialties of the nations. Society has agency to respond the external force, defend for their interests. The state has played various roles in shaping the trajectories of agrarian transition. Market creates both winners and

losers in the five countries, an origin of agrarian crises for smallholders/peasants. The most important implication from the agrarian reforms of BRICS is that a dynamic, corporative, coordinated relationship between state, market and society is extremely essential in agrarian reforms as well as in broader development agendas.

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