Chapter 2
Literature Review and Theoretical Setting

According to the extended case method used in the present study, method and theoretical foundation are inextricably intertwined (Star 1989). In particular, method is built on ‘pre-existing theory’ (Burawoy 1998). Therefore, before examining the particular case under consideration, it is necessary to introduce the theoretical foundation to the study, which itself flows out of the extant literature.

In general terms, discussions of the issues confronting Chinese farmers, and especially land-lost farmers, in the extant literature can be categorised as follows: (1) consideration of the relationship between land and farmers, which examines the significance of land for farmers; (2) consideration of land ownership in the process of urbanisation, which examines the difficulties with institutional arrangements; and (3) consideration of conflict between farmers and the authorities. The following discussion of the literature seeks as its principal aim to develop factual 1 and conceptual bases for the empirical analysis presented in later chapters. From reading this literature, one can begin to understand why and how farmers have become caught up in a struggle with the Chinese local authorities. Existing literature on land-lost farmers emphasises conflict and resistance, hence it uses conflict and resistance theories.

2.1 Conflict Theory

Social conflict has been a central subject of social research ever since Marx and Weber. From the perspective of the ownership of means of production, Marx (1971 [1859], etc.) established the theory of class conflict on the basis of historical materialism. Those who follow the line of Marx, such as the Frankfurt School analysts, ascribe conflict as economic, where different classes have incompatible

1Meaning the backdrop to extant literature and the research status quo in Chinese academia which is often limited to proscribed confines of set issues.
interests, thus they take criticism of existing social arrangements as their obligation. From a Marxist perspective, the main task for intellectuals is to engage in praxis, to combine political criticism and political practice, through which the society is bound to evolve into an ideal order where there is no conflict at all. However, I take the Weberian viewpoint that it is impossible for human society to evolve into perfect, conflict-free, and harmonious circumstances, which Weber thinks is a utopian fantasy. Conflict theorists deriving from Weber are against social analysis bearing value judgement, and among the different approaches that exist within conflict theory, Coser’s functional approach and Dahrendorf’s dialectical approach I see as offering most to my own analysis of the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government.

### 2.1.1 Coser’s Functional Approach to Conflict

First of all, Coser inherits Simmel’s emphasis on social forms, such that the society itself is a unified entity that accommodates contradictions of cooperation and conflict, inclusion and exclusion, and so on. In order to argue for his functional conflict approach, Coser (1965 [1956]: 7–8) advances the basic hypothesis that conflict does not bring down but reinforces the adaption and adjustment of particular social relations or social groups.

According to Coser (1965 [1956]), the cause of conflict can be categorised into material and non-material relations. The material causes of conflict refer to distributitional unevenness of power, status, and resources; and the non-material causes refer to inconsistency of value conceptions and beliefs. Coser thinks that the degree of seriousness of conflict depends on different degrees of interrelationship between social structure and emotions, values and beliefs.

In Coser’s point of view, conflict may cause strengthening of social control. But what he emphasises is the positive functions of conflict, from which stems his discussion about a social safety-valve system. On the one hand, conflict can stimulate social reformation and cause social changes; on the other, conflict promotes the establishment and maintenance of distinctive groups; thus in his opinion there is external conflict and internal conflict. This approach can be seen as providing one perspective from which to evaluate the causes and possible functions of conflict happening between land-lost farmers and local government.

### 2.1.2 Dahrendorf’s Dialectical Approach to Conflict

From Dahrendorf’s (1959, 1968) point of view, conflict is generated from social status structure, thus he uses social structure to explain conflict phenomena. He focuses on conflict between groups arising from the authority structure of social association.
Some important concepts underlie Dahrendorf’s dialectical conflict approach, including authority and authority structure, interests, quasi-groups and interest groups. He believes that such concepts can be used to describe and understand the specific social structure, and can also be used to explain the generation of conflicting groups, conflict forms and consequences. These concepts indeed play an important part in my evaluation of the conflict between the two sides.

Dahrendorf thinks that the study of the social structural elements that bring about conflict between groups should start with the concept of authority/domination, for which he draws upon Weber’s definition, which treats domination as ‘a special case of power’ (1978: 53). In Weber’s opinion (1978: 943), ‘domination’ does not only include ‘domination by virtue of authority’, that is, ‘the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons’; but also ‘domination by virtue of a constellation of interests’ which confers influence over others who may still be motivated by their own interests. Based on this, Dahrendorf thinks that the basic analysing unit of social structure is social status, which manifests as of two different types in most social associations. One is of dominant status, and the other is subordinate status. The association of these two types of statuses is the most prevalent structural element and contains the structural cause of social conflict. Dahrendorf refers to this kind of association—in his terms, imperatively coordinated association—between dominant status and subordinate status as authority structure.

Dahrendorf explicates the concept of interests or in other terms, role expectation, which he regards as a kind of social-status-related expectation of the action inclination of status holders. Since there are two basic types of authority status in every imperatively coordinated association, there are accordingly two types of basic interests. The interest of the dominant role is to maintain the original authority structure and authority distribution; conversely, since no one is willing to be always situated in a subordinate status, the interest of the subordinate role is to change the status quo that restricts their access to authority. Through the concept of interests, Dahrendorf reveals the dialectical nature of authority structure. On the one hand, the authority structure is the legitimate relationship between different authority statuses; meanwhile, its legitimacy is subject to potential threat. So the legitimacy of the authority relationship is unstable and variable.

Based on these concepts, he analyses the transformation from quasi-groups to interest groups. In theory, this will happen of necessity but is not always true in practice. Thus, he goes on to identify the conditions that affect the formation of interest groups. He also analyses the conditions that influence the form that conflict takes. To do this, he distinguishes two dimensions to conflict, the level of violence and intensity. These evaluate the energy consumed in conflict, the level of involvement in its various aspects, and the various means taken to express anger. The interrelationship between authority structure and other structures of social status also has implications for conflict form. Such conditions that influence conflict form would simultaneously influence structural change. Dahrendorf’s dialectical conflict approach provides a way to evaluate the causes and structure of conflict.
2.2 Land and Farmers

According to Coser’s (1965 [1956]) statement about the material causes of conflict, the status of farmers first of all depends on their tight connections to land.

2.2.1 Land as Property and Life Support System

Social scientists have long understood that all economic objects—whether land, machinery or finished goods—have what are known as ‘use values’. According to Marx (1974 [1867]), use value or value in use is the utility of consuming a good; the want-satisfying power of a good or service. Use values reflect a mix of social needs and requirements, personal idiosyncrasies, cultural habits, lifestyle, and the like, which is not to say that they are arbitrarily established through consumer sovereignty. At their most basic, use values are basically formed with respect to what might be called the ‘life support system’ of the individual (Harvey 1973: 157–60).

Land has been the focus of policy debates among scholars, politicians and policy makers, partly because it is a peculiar good and partly because there is increasing scarcity of land due to rapid population growth and urbanisation. This is particularly so in developing countries. Weber (1946) recognises that urban land, housing, and other forms of real estate could be more than just items of consumption. Not only is land considered essential to the life support system of farmers in particular, but it also becomes a principal source of wealth and power (Mattingly 1993).

Land has a fixed location. It cannot be moved around and this differentiates it from other commodities such as wheat, automobiles, and the like. Absolute location confers monopoly privileges upon the person who has the rights to determine use at that location. Moreover, land is something permanent. Land and the rights of use attached to it, therefore provide the opportunity to store wealth. Many capital goods have this quality to them, but land and structures have historically been the single most important repository of stored assets (Harvey 1973: 157–8). Land is peculiar in a separate respect, however, for it does not necessarily require upkeep in order to continue its potential for use; there is, as Ricardo (2005 [1817]: 67) points out, something ‘original and indestructible’ about it.

Combining the above two aspects, farmers who are definitely associated with land have fixed lifestyles. The traditional property-holding unit has been the family that either owned the land or occupied it as tenant (for the state) (Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987: 128), with family ownership in capitalist societies, and on behalf of the state in socialist societies, of which China is a typical example of a collective ownership model. In socialist societies, where property rights remain unclear, problems, especially those concerning distribution, tend to arise. Despite all attempts to maintain a relatively equitable type of agricultural organisation, the major systems of holdings—equal allotments and so forth—usually break down
because of poorly applied policies of centralised administrations and the rapacity of officials who want to extend their properties and privileges and are thus not eager to enforce laws limiting their prerogatives (Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987: 128, 129).

When it comes to China specifically, farmers as tenants cannot prevent the state if it wants to take the land from them. The appearance of land-lost farmers, particularly as set against the increasing trend to urbanisation in China, therefore ensues. However, the consequences of such land expropriation can be profound. The impacts on displaced households can be far-reaching and long-lasting (Syagga and Olima 1996). Given that land represents not just a major source of income but also a way of life full of cultural and symbolic value (Li et al. 2001: 206), land-lost farmers find it difficult, even impossible, to contemplate life without land. Furthermore, in a society with underdeveloped pension schemes and insurance provisions, land provides security when getting old and can be used by dependants in their turn. Mainstream research in China reveals the negative influences of land expropriation on land-lost farmers’ lives and livelihoods. In Liao’s (2005: 102–9) opinion, to farmers, losing land is acute, and it involves many losses: the sum of family wealth, a basic occupation, security, and the bases for both subsistence and the future.

### 2.2.2 Marginalisation of the Peasantry

According to Dahrendorf, farmers’ interests are interdependent with their status. The nature of small-holding land also represents a chronic barrier to the release of productive forces. Such is the state of underdevelopment that degrades people working the land and gradually, erodes away their productive potential, and fixes their lowly status in society. Underdevelopment excludes, and therefore marginalises, those men and women directly affected by it (Sahli 1981: 489).

First of all, in political terms, as Marx (2001 [1852]: 130–1) states:

> Each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient; it itself directly produces the major part of its consumption… In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name… They cannot represent themselves, they must be

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represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an
authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the
other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the
small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subor-
dinating society to itself.

Second, farming has undergone considerable socio-economic disintegration
(Sahli 1981: 490). The introduction of science and technology and the beginning of
economic development in most Third World countries have benefited only a
fraction of the total population, and those who benefit are urban populations, for, by
virtue of their role as ‘axes of development’, they are deemed suitable for providing
dynamic growth in the economy of the country. In addition, associated cultural
marginalisation thwarts social progress. The marginalised segments of the popu-
lation, unable to gain access to the technical progress of the country, and capable of
satisfying their wants only at a basic level, find themselves excluded from the
benefits of cultural progress too (Sahli 1981: 491, 496).

Take Chinese farmers as an example. Until relatively recently, China’s economy
was based for the most part around agriculture (Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987: 128).
In the process of colonising the subcontinent, the Chinese did not in fact regard the
city as the prime instrument of penetration into new territory: the expansion of
agriculture, centred on peasant villages, constituted the main vehicle for develop-
ment. And when establishing modern communist China, Mao Zedong disavowed
the Marxist-Leninist idea that the industrial proletariat should initiate the revolution
in favour of advocating that rural forces spearhead the communist movement in
China. In light of the fact that around 80% of the Chinese population in the 1930s
was either a tenant farmer or a poor peasant, Mao developed the tactic of using rural
forces led by the Red Army to encircle the country’s cities. In his article On New
Democracy (1940), Mao declared that the ‘Chinese revolution is an agrarian
movement’. The main activity of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prior to 1949
was to focus on the communisation of rural areas. However, after 1949, when the
People’s Republic of China (PRC) eventually became the sole political regime in
the subcontinent, it had to begin the socialisation of the urban population as well.
As early as March 1949, in the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central
Committee, which discussed post-liberation political and economic policies, the
importance of developing urban areas was declared. Mao pointed out that (Tien
1973: 28):

From the major defeat, in 1927, of the Chinese Revolution to the present…the focus of the
revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people was in rural villages. In the villages strength
was gathered, villages were used to ring and isolate the cities, and [we] then fought to
occupy the cities…. History has already proved this strategy as being completely necessary,
completely correct as well as completely successful. But the period during which this tenet
was considered appropriate for the execution of our task is now over. From this moment
onward… [we] are to enter an era… in which the city is to lead the rural villages…. The
focus of work must be centred in the cities…. [We] must endeavour to learn how to
administer the cities and how to develop the cities.
From then on, the situation of farmers in China has been largely ignored by the state, especially under the circumstances of urban-rural administrative distinctions. They possess nothing but the land they work, and even then, not in the sense of ownership on an individual basis. Working in the fields day after day and year on year has been the reality for Chinese farmers. Throughout the post-liberation era, the security offered by working the land has been paramount for Chinese farmers. They would be bound to resist where this right was jeopardised.

Developing into the contemporary fast urbanising era, the need to address social issues, such as equity and justice, and the question of who benefits exactly, is urgent and critical. When development is led by the state, as is often the case in developing countries, it is instructive to examine the effects created. When analysing the socio-economic and political implications of land acquisition in Zimbabwe in the 1990s, for example, Moyo (2000) claimed that the Zimbabwean case has been cast as an attempt to pursue a radical state-led approach to land redistribution through compulsory land acquisition, or as a failed bureaucratic and ‘non-transparent’ process. In contrast, as Moyo observed, the South African experience can be held up as a more democratic, transparent, community driven and less costly ‘market assisted’ approach. From Mukherji’s (1976) analysis too, we can see various laws were enacted by Bangladesh in order to reform the agrarian sector in the country, and the actual implementation of these reform programs did make some progress. Other studies of state-orchestrated development in the developing world show on the whole, it is through the course of counterbalancing effects caused by state direction and market direction that the state puts rural community on its path towards further development (Mellor et al. 1968; Barlett 1980; Rondinelli et al. 1989; Chisari et al. 1999; Ellis 2000, etc.). However, China may be a unique case because during the transformation from a planned economy to hybrid socialist market economy, it is by no means easy for the Chinese state to accommodate distinct needs for development and interests pursued by various sections and groups; the situation, especially that faced by farmers, may become more complicated, when government at regional/local levels also brings their own self-interests into the process of rural development, particularly through rural land expropriation.

In China, two processes are underway at the same time (Watson 1989). On the one hand, institutional changes have introduced greater flexibility at the household and local government levels, with many investment decisions taken by individual producers. This has enabled a shift of labour out of agriculture, a diversification of rural production and an improvement in rural incomes. Nevertheless, the policies have also led, on the other hand, to a decline in investment in agricultural production. In the Chinese context, the question is thus whether the current investment priorities of producers and of the government conflict with the longer-term needs of agricultural development and, as a consequence, will have implications for overall economic growth. According to Watson, the state not only has to find ways of sustaining infrastructural investment in regions focused on agriculture, but also find ways to counteract the negative economic and social consequences of wide variations in regional development, and growing income disparities, and of ensuring that the farmers who remain within agriculture are able to maintain and improve
their living standards. At the same time, the state has to play a role in promoting and improving technical skills and educational levels in the countryside.

Within the existing development process, farmers’ dependence on the land has led to their marginalised status; and in turn such marginalisation aggravates dependence on land; thus a vicious cycle is presented. Faced with a situation of rapid transition, the state has kept command by requiring that local authorities oversee development within a legislative framework stipulated at the national level, where the alternative would be to relax the state’s institutionalised controls over farmers’ access to land markets, land prices, and land tenure security. The situation provides an important instance of the socialist market economy in operation throughout the country, with the extraction of capital in the form of land expropriation at the local level by means of legitimate central state mechanisms as applied by local government at the expense of Chinese rural society in order to finance urban development at the local level. Additionally, by products are, profits for developers, based on borrowings on high-interest loans from state-owned banks in order to finance such ‘private’ development projects, and profits for corrupt local administrators too.

2.3 Land Ownership and Urbanisation

According to Coser’s and Dahrendorf’s accounts, the uneven arrangement of land ownership and the associated distribution of resources and interests during urbanisation can be seen to constitute the material causes of conflict.

2.3.1 Land Ownership

‘Land ownership’ is a key idea which plays a fundamental role in explaining the gap among various ideologies, and also, the legitimisation of modernisation. The right to property is always a right against other people. Ownership confers rights: rights of exclusion, rights to decide who should or should not have access, rights to revenue and to capital accumulation (Elliot and McCrone 1982: 98). Furthermore, there was, and is, more to the ownership of property than material interest. Acquiring property, even on the most modest scale, represents an avenue of social mobility (Thernstrom 1974). It represents a stake in the wider system of property ownership and serves, in the context of local status systems, as an indicator of moral and social worth. Marshall (1963: 239) identifies its sociological relevance when he writes:

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3Some of the most acute observations on the institution of private property are found in the work of Macpherson (1975).
The significance of property in determining social attitudes is enormous, not because of the income it yields, but because it is a guarantee of the right to enjoy the blessings of civilisation… it shows that we are solid and to be trusted to fulfil our obligations.

Real estate property, especially the notion of land ownership, is the core concept differentiating the socialist state from capitalist state. In practice, the legacy of Confucianism still has influence over contemporary China. Thus, the issue of land ownership in the Chinese context involves traditional as well as socialist elements. For centuries, a centralised bureaucracy, acting on behalf of powerful elite, exercised control over the production and flow of resources in China (Eisenstadt and Shachar 1987: 126); but that control was mediated more or less successfully through its local representatives, within a hierarchy of layers of government.

In modern times, China has chosen its own path to land reform: a centralised, state-owned and controlled land market that prohibits private ownership yet with the ideological compromise of paid lease and transfer of land use rights, administered through the state’s local representatives. Thus, when considering land ownership titles in the Chinese legal and political setting, rather than taking Demsetz’s (1967) notion of property as a ‘bundle of rights’, it is more appropriate to talk about ownership as an absolute and supreme right, but of the state and not the individual, as set out below:

Ownership is the supreme right, there can be no rights which would not be contained in ownership. Ownership is abstract: its content cannot be described by enumerating single powers, and none of these powers needs to be legitimised specifically, or related to an acceptable social purpose. Ownership is absolute: apart from what the law expressly forbids the owner may do whatever he likes, he can exclude everybody else from influencing the goods, everybody else is obliged to abstain from breaching his ownership rights, the owner is the supreme ruler over his goods (Van den Bergh 1996: 172).

Even under the state-in-transition, the fundamental principle of land rights in China is based on the state and the collective as the absolute owner. All other rights derive from this basic legal principle. Moreover, the ownership of collective land can be changed into state ownership if the proper legal procedures for land expropriation are followed. Indeed, the most complicated and debated issue concerns not state ownership but the notion and legal status of collective ownership. A concern for the Chinese authorities and academics is the powerful control of the lessor (the rural collective) over land rights. Specific household responsibility contracts of members of the collective are often but a ‘paper

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4For an excellent introduction on land ownership in China from 1950s until the early 1990s, see Selden and Lu (1993).
5For example, a systematic study by Ho and Lin (2003) investigates the evolution of land use system in China, from socialist era to current market economy.
7For the theoretical background of Chinese state and collective ownership, see Hu (1998), pp. 211–40.
agreement’ because collectives can appropriate and redistribute leased land whenever deemed necessary (Ho 2001: 397).

The current format of collective ownership is the direct heritage of collectivisation and the commune system. The former people’s commune consisted of three echelons: the commune, the production brigade and the production team (Ho 2001: 404). Although land ownership was vested in the lowest collective level (the production team) during the period of the people’s communes, land ownership of its successor (the natural village or villagers’ group) is no longer self-evident in the era of reforms, which can be seen in the Revised *Land Administration Law* (LAL) as follows:8

In lands collectively owned by farmers those that have been allocated to villagers for collective ownership according to law shall be operated and managed by village collective economic organisations9 or the villagers’ committee10 and those that have been allocated to two or more farmers’ collective economic organisations of a village, shall be operated and managed jointly by the collective economic organisations of the village or villagers’ groups11; and those that have been allocated to township (town) farmer collectives shall be operated and managed by the rural collective economic organisations of the township (town).

It is unclear which collective level (natural village, administrative village, or town) actually holds the titles to land. In Ho’s opinion (2001: 400–1), leaders at collective level are appointed and paid by local government, and so, they are not really independent and behave more in the interests of local government than farmers. Thus, in the course of shifts in land ownership, there is a real danger that the collective ownership rights of villagers may be ignored to a large extent. In addition, owing to low legal awareness, villagers are unclear about the rights they enjoy to land property, which further complicates the issue.

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9This term is not defined in law. The Villagers’ Committee Organic Law only states that ‘The villagers committee shall respect and support the decision-making power of the collective economic organisations in conducting their economic activities independently according to law.’ Art. 8 (3), Organic Law of the Villagers’ Committees of the People’s Republic of China (2010), http://vip.chinalawinfo.com/newlaw2002/slc/slc.asp?db=chl&gid=139685, accessed 7 May 2011.
10The Organic Law stipulates that ‘Villagers committees shall be established on the basis of the distribution of the villagers and the size of the population and on the principles of facilitating self-government by the masses, and making for economic development and social administration. The establishment or dissolution of a villagers committee or a readjustment in the area governed by it shall be proposed by the people’s government of a township, a nationality township or a town and submitted to a people’s government at the county level for approval after it is discussed and agreed to by a villagers assembly’. Art. 3 (1 and 2), ibid.
11‘A villagers committee may, on the basis of the residential areas of the villagers and the collective land ownership relations etc., establish a number of villagers groups.’ Art. 3 (3), ibid.
2.3.2 Urbanisation and Urban Development

The study of cities was a subject that had already appeared in the second part of the 19th century in early classical sociology with its celebrated dichotomies between the nature of the countryside and the nature of cities, such as Maine’s distinction between status and contract (1883 [1861]) and Morgan’s (1877) contrast between savagery, barbarism, and civilisation. It was further developed by Tönnies (1957 [1887]), who contrasted ‘*Gemeinschaft*’ (traditional community with strong bonds) and ‘*Gesellschaft*’ (a society of individuals with weak bonds), and by Durkheim (1984 [1893]), who distinguished between ‘mechanical’ and ‘organic’ solidarity, and by Wirth (1938), who described the replacement of primary relationships with secondary ones. Tönnies and Durkheim stressed the uniqueness of each of their described social forms and the difficulties individuals face when moving from one form to the other, especially going from a rural to urban dweller. Other than these, Simmel (1950) outlined the psychological characteristic of ‘metropolitan man’ and explained the blasé attitude as a defence mechanism against the threat of nervous exhaustion.

More recently, researchers were more inclined to analyse the demarcation of the rural and urban and the process of transformation from rural to urban using a structural-functional approach, focused on the problem of how the dimension of power is institutionalised in the construction (or production) of the social order. In economic terms, the policies of post-colonial governments attempted to stimulate urban growth by further enhancing the attractiveness of towns and cities at the expense of the countryside and agriculture. As Auty (1995) points out, this is usually accomplished in three ways. One way is through the exaggerated bias of government expenditures on infrastructure and services in favour of urban areas and modern cities. Another is improved working conditions, higher wage rates and better employment protection that exist in cities, for example because urban workers are organised into trade unions, and which attract rural workers to the cities in the hope they too might share in these perceived benefits in contrast to their own increasingly impoverished circumstances in the countryside. A third way is the decline in the demand for locally-produced traditional staples as urban consumers develop a taste for seemingly more cosmopolitan imported food items. As a result, a highly ambivalent attitude toward urbanisation is found: on the one hand appreciation of all the power, wealth, and potential creativity stored up within the city, and on the other hand fear of its corrupting influence contrasting with the supposedly simple virtue of the countryside. In political terms, among urban studies since 1970s, there has been no shortage of political economic and political sociological studies showing how capital and power get involved in spatial production and shape urban spatial patterning, as well as critical cultural studies, showing the relationship between space and society (Harvey 1973; Lefebvre 1974; Castells 1977, 1983).

Specifically in the Chinese context, the ways in which local administrative power allies with capital to form a local power bloc is an important element of urban political-sociological studies (Chen 2003). In the multiple relationship among power, capital, bureaucrats and citizens, the reasons for the fact that developmental
capital can make such deep incursions into the operations of the local administration to generate spectacular profits in present-day China (Hu and Peng 2005) do not lie only in the central state’s institutional arrangements, which promote such practices within the socialist ‘marketplace’ nor in the ambiguity of the state’s legal framework underpinning land transactions, but also farmers’ lack of access to political, economic or legal process. Underscoring the state’s central role in the process, development capital is often in the form of high-interest loans from state-controlled banks in order for developers to lease land use rights from local government for commercial development projects.

By the 1990s, large-scale urban construction had begun all over China, raising the issue of social unfairness, as priority was given to pursuing economic reform from the end of 1970s. The consequences of such growth have been a major issue for the Chinese public and the intelligentsia, inside and outside the country. Furthermore, paradoxically, when Chinese academics have looked to developed countries in search of concepts, theories, and experiences about ‘advanced cities’, they often encounter critical theories, neo-Marxism, neo-urbanism produced in the ‘post-urban era’ in the West. Within only a few years, neo-Marxist urban theories have come to the fore that highlight spatial production mechanisms and spatial resource competition in cities, such as Castells’ (1977, 1983), Harvey’s (1973, 1990, 1992), and Soja’s (2000) spatial theories, and their symbolic concepts such as ‘urban justice’, ‘spatial justice’, and so on.

Chinese scholars have started to reflect on the problem of spatial fairness which accompanies the large-scale ‘urban extension’ programs (Gu and Kerstrode 1997; Li et al. 2004; Yang 2006). The existing system in which the government both monopolises development and receives the benefits from development is criticised. The government’s role of ‘referee as well as player’ and its practices in working with development partners often financed by state-banks in order to accumulate huge profits are viewed as principal reasons for injustice and a corrupt administration (Xie and Niu 2005; Hu and Peng 2005). Evidence of social and economic injustice resulting from the rural land expropriation and compensation process is well documented (e.g. Cartier 2001; Li 2003; Tan and Wang 2003; Ding and Knaap 2005: 32).

2.3.3 Urbanisation and Land Ownership

What is the dividing line between state-owned land and collectively-owned land? According to the Constitution, suburban and rural land (including privately farmed plots of cropland and hilly land) is collectively owned, unless state ownership has been established. Urban land is state-owned,12 there can be no urban land owned by

the collective. There are also associated differences of administration between urban and rural land. At present, urban land is administered by state institutions under the direction of municipal government, called the Land Administrative Agency or Real Estate Administrative Agency. Rural land falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Land and Resources, administered by its agencies. This all seems clear in principle: urban land is state-owned and administered municipally, while suburban and rural land is collectively owned and administered by central government’s local agencies.

In practice, economic reforms have exposed many weaknesses in this legal and administrative structure. The one that most concerns us here is: what happens to the ownership of rural land included within expanding cities (Ho 2001: 403)? The revised LAL stipulates that land of the ‘city’s urban area’ (chengshi shiqu)\(^\text{13}\) is state-owned, while land of the ‘city’s suburbs’ (chengshi jiaoqu) belongs to the collective. This is not fixed in stone and due to continuous urban expansion, much of the former collective land has been subsumed within the limits of the city. Rapid urbanisation and the frenzy for development have led to a boom in the value of land. Practices within the real estate sector mean that land and improvements are frequently valued at their highest price rather than by reference to their use value. The implications of this for the determination of land values as well as for investment opportunities are well documented in the land economics literature (see, for example, Ratcliffe 1949; Bell et al. 2006). Given the potential risks, as well as the rewards involved, local government welcomes the legitimisation of its own practices through the state’s legal framework: removing ownership from the village collective at low cost to feed demand for land at high returns, where the risks are passed on to developers, and ultimately, the state-owned banks who lend to developers in order to finance development projects. Institutional ambiguities over land ownership often allow local government the space for manoeuvre it requires within the development process (Ho 2001: 421).

### 2.4 Conflicting Relationship Between Farmers and Authorities

Such institutional and cultural shortcomings have given rise to increasing social tensions between local governments and farmers. From a conflict perspective, the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government should begin with

\(^{13}\)There is confusion about the distinction between the terms ‘city’ and ‘urban area’. According to the interpretations of the Legal Committee, ‘city’ must be read as the ‘municipality directly under the central government, city or town according to the administrative and organisational setup by the state’. In contrast, ‘urban area’ must be understood as the built-up area rather than the planned construction area. See ‘Bufen Zhuanjia, Xuezhe, Lûshi he Keyan Renyuan Laixin dui Tudi Guanlifa de Yijian (Remarks on the “Land Administration Law (Revised Edition)” in Letters Sent by Some Experts, Scholars, Lawyers, and Researchers)’, in Bian (1998: 395).
Dahrendorf’s concept of authority structure, where there is a superordination-subordination antithesis within the imperatively coordinated association. Touraine (1981) claims that at present the principal form of domination is the state apparatus over citizens and that this domination is perhaps greatest in Marxist states. Government officials in the name of one ideology or another are gathering control over people’s lives.

Huang (1990 [1988]: 134) defined the Chinese world as ‘dominated by a large and undifferentiated peasantry governed by a large and undifferentiated bureaucracy’, which indicates the paramount relationship between authorities and farmers within the state system. Nevertheless, as Li and his colleagues state (2001: 201), ‘this was hitherto obscured by the scale of China, its political upheavals and a political philosophy that prioritised the interests of the state’. Farmers still interact with the state through local Party and government cadres and thus are effectively bound to their intermediaries (Zhou 1996: 28), who are called tuhuangdi, or local emperors (Zhou 1996: 33). This explains why the anger and upset of land-lost farmers is often so intensively focused on these local officials.

2.4.1 On the Part of Farmers

2.4.1.1 Resistance Studies

Though I do not wish to elaborate on the idea of resistance in my study of land-lost farmers partly because I do not wish to import into the study at the outset uncritical connotations such as ‘rightful resistance’, I cannot neglect the existence of a debate concerning the role of resistance in the discussion of power. So the part of farmers first needs to be considered within the paradigm of resistance studies.

As Barbalet (1985) argues, in Weber’s definition of power, the over-coming of resistance is a necessary feature of power, thus he gives an irreducible role to resistance in the analysis of power. In distinguishing power and resistance as qualitatively distinct contributions to power relations, it follows that power and resistance are based on different aspects of the social structure of power relations, or of the social system. Therefore, in Barbalet’s point of view, there can be no adequate understanding of power and power relations without the concept of ‘resistance’; resistance is presented as a function of power.

With roots in agrarian studies and Marxist historiography, research of resistance is the field concerned with the struggles of ‘subordinate’, ‘subaltern’, ‘oppressed’ or ‘marginal’ populations to combat ‘domination’ at the hands of powerful ‘elites’. Fundamentally, resistance studies are concerned with the struggle for equality, the fight to end exploitation, and the desire to achieve a more just and humane society (Fletcher 2001: 43–4).

Early resistance studies employed a classical Marxist conception of power. ‘Power’ for them was something ‘held’ by one class of people (the ‘elites’) and used to ‘repress’ or ‘deny’ the interests of another (the ‘subalterns’). Its function,
in this sense, was primarily negative. However, it is now well known that, even in dictatorships, the seemingly powerless turn out in fact to have a certain amount of power. Barbalet’s (1985) theoretical analysis holds that, the exercise of power over others draws upon resources not available to subordinate agents. Nevertheless, those subordinate agents can mobilise other social resources in contributing to power relations through resistance. In limiting power, resistance influences the outcome of power relations. The scholarly contributions of Scott (1977, 1985, 1990) also establish this.

Other literature also discusses the ways in which the less powerful can resist policies designed by elites in a more overt manner, thus for example, the possibility for the existence of countervailing power, which is used by Galbraith (1980) to describe one aspect of the power system in a mature capitalist democracy. In the theory of pluralism, powerful groups and interests maintain a rough balance, none being strong enough to dominate all the others. Galbraith proposes a similar balance of powers in mixed economies to produce better functioning societies. For example, trade unions function as a countervailing power to the corporate community’s control of the economy in liberal democracies. However, in the present study, land-lost farmers in China lack formal institutions of countervailing power for reason discussed below.

In this regard, it is useful to consider briefly instances of subordinate groups that exert countervailing power. Starting in the 1960s, Piven and Cloward elaborated their own distinctive analysis of political change in the United States. From their early work (1977) to their more recent work (2000, 2005; Piven 2006), they reflect upon the relatively rare occasions when the lower classes and the poor mobilise, agitate, organise, and win reforms. They identify a powerful counter force that lies behind the successful reform movements in modern US history, namely, ‘interdependent power’ when popular movements break the rules and disrupt the status quo. Thus, in their point of view, the only fruitful strategy for the emancipation of the lower classes entails escalating disruptive protest when possible by ‘pushing turbulence to its outer limits’ (1977: 91). The fact that China’s land-lost farmers lack institutional ‘interdependent power’ to invoke this type of protest may not necessarily mean that they cannot squeeze a way out to exert counter force.

2.4.1.2 Farmers’ Resistance

Drawing on the perspective developed by Oberschall (1973), Tilly (1975) and Gamson (1975), Jenkins and Perrow (1977) analyse the political process centred round farm worker insurgencies. They argue that the important variables to account for either the rise or outcome of insurgency pertain to social resources—in their case, sponsorship by established organisations. Farm workers themselves are powerless; as an excluded group, their demands tend to be systematically ignored. But powerlessness may be overridden if the official response is neutral and political elites sponsor insurgent challenges by contributing resources. Jenkins’ later study (1982) concludes that research on the sources of 20th-century peasant rebellions
have centred on two basic theories: a structural theory of class relations that points to the greater political volatility of smallholder tenancy and a historical theory pointing to the strength of traditional village institutions in the midst of the increasing economic insecurity of the peasantry. After analysis, he corroborates the basic propositions of the historical theory: peasants rebel because of threats to their access to economic subsistence, not because of the particular form of class relations in which they are enmeshed.

In the Chinese context, there are basically two perspectives on contemporary farmers’ resistance. The first holds that farmers’ rights-safeguarding \((\text{weiquan})\) activities are based on development of their rights’ consciousness and thus tend to be politicised. The dominant interpretative frameworks flowing from this perspective include ‘policy-based resistance’ (Li and O’Brien 1996) or ‘rightful resistance’ (O’Brien and Li 2006) and ‘struggle by law’ (Yu 2004). ‘Rightful resistance’ analyses the farmers’ utilisation of state law and policies at the national level in order to safeguard their own political and economic rights and interests from the encroachment of local governments and officials by the basic form of appeal. While in Yu’s opinion ‘struggle by law’ which is grounded on ‘policy-based resistance’, farmers’ rights-safeguarding activities have developed from resistance for rights and interests to resistance for political rights, resisters becoming organised to some extent, forming rudimentary institutionalised decision-making mechanisms, and working towards progressive agendas for reform.

Nonetheless, the other perspective holds that present farmers’ resistance is still unorganised. In a state that concentrates and centralises extraordinary power, resistance engendered from those who suffer at the hands of such power can at best be presented as ‘an aggregation of large numbers of spontaneous individual behaviours’ (Zhou 1993: 54). There is a view that (Zhou 1996: 14):

The farmers resemble Mao’s guerrillas more than modern ‘Westernized’ protesters: they strike where they expect the fewest casualties and retreat from confrontation. Unlike Mao’s movement, though, the contemporary farmers’ movement is not organized. There is no Mao in their movement.

Given the fact that the state has never at any point tolerated organised confrontation, any action that challenges the state must remain unorganised if it is to be effective. This acts to limit formal institutions of countervailing power. As Zhou (1993: 57) points out: ‘In the Chinese context, on the one hand, if interests are organized, they are basically state organizational apparatuses and hence not autonomous; if interests are independent of the state, they are often unorganized.’ By comparing Chinese farmers’ expressions of their interests with Western social movements, and the South-Asian paradigm provided in subaltern studies, Ying (2007b) analyses Chinese farmers’ expression of interests from the perspective of ‘grass-roots mobilisation’. In his point of view, such grass-roots mobilisation makes the means of farmers’ expression of group interest expedient, its organisation dualistic, and its political nature vague. Mass resettlement of land-lost farmers has become much more complex than previously, as Li and colleagues (2001: 202) observe, ‘unlike past relocates who could be easily mobilised in response to
government calls, current migrants are more aware of their economic interests and political rights; many expect to benefit from the process.

Studies on resistance among Chinese farmers—including land-lost farmers—have pointed to the main form of resistance which they adopt, appeal (shangfang), or its institutionalised name, the system of letters and visits (xinfang). Zhang and Zhang’s (2009: 77–80) investigation found that land disputes due to urbanisation constituted the main source of appeals. Chinese academia tends to highlight appellants’ rights-safeguarding determinedness and consciousness (Ye 2002; Yu 2004), while government agencies tend to emphasise the antagonism and destructiveness of their behaviour (Tan 2002; Yang 2002). Though there are legal stipulations for the system of letters and visits, Regulations on Letters and Visits, which were promulgated in 1995, and revised in 2005, there are few constraints on activities undertaken and the officials visited in the course of appeals within the system. From the ordinary people’s point of view, the advantage of the letters and visits system is that it is not bound by rules and regulations; as long as there are problems that need to be resolved, appellants can immediately go to any place that they regard as likely to resolve such problems and in order to complain about the injustices visited upon them by officials of the state (Zhang and Zhang 2009: 3).

2.4.2 On the Part of Authorities

2.4.2.1 Authorities’ Response

The response of the authorities needs to be considered hierarchically. As Wallace and Wolf (2006: 94) argue, according to Marx, ‘the state, with its legal authority, bureaucracies, law enforcement agents, and armed forces’ provides stability, under which government officials ‘may be seen as a separate group with independent interests, and not merely as part of the ruling class’. In analysing a ‘seemingly’ natural disaster in Chicago, Klinenberg (2002) also implies that government tends to withhold people’s deserved rights unless those people discover and strive for the rights by themselves. Djilas (1966: 44–5) goes even further in arguing that the self-interested use of power in socialist societies has formed a ‘new class’:

The Communist political bureaucracy uses, enjoys, and disposes of nationalized property… In practice, the ownership privilege of the new class manifests itself as an exclusive right, as a party monopoly, for the political bureaucracy to distribute the national income, to set wages, direct economic development, and dispose of nationalized and other property. This is the way it appears to the ordinary man who considers the Communist functionary as being very rich and as a man who does not have to work.

In the Chinese context, roles respectively played out by central and local authorities manifest in an even more complicated manner. Theoretically, the central state, which is the seat of the law, and is the source of the legitimate use of force to
ensure the effectiveness of law, holds the highest position. Schram (1985: back cover) has described the state’s major concern:

The state was the central power in Chinese society from the start, and exemplary behaviour, rites, morality, and indoctrinations have always been considered in China as means of government. The continuity between this tradition and the principles and practices of the Chinese People’s Republic is evident. … Neither in the realm of organisation nor in that of ideology and culture would Mao and his successors have striven so hard to promote uniformity if the unitary nature of state and society had not been accepted, for the past two thousand years, as both natural and right.

When analysing the political development of China, Yu (2008: 21–2) believes that as far as the operation of state power is concerned, the present political system in China is developing as a ‘corporate authoritarian system’, and there also exists transition of social control during political development. In the era of centrally planned authoritarianism before 1978, the state completely controlled the movement of people and their position in society. However, since the inception of the reform and openness policy, there has been large-scale movement of people to the cities prompted by increased economic development, outside direct central state control, which has greatly changed the social fabric of Chinese society, which originally had its basis in the imposition of political identities, tied to pre-specified positions and state functions. In consequence, the established methods of mobilising the people by means of mass movement and ideology are no longer viable. Now the Party proposes to rule the country by law as it must resort to new methods in order to secure legitimacy and exercise political authority.

Nevertheless, there is a common view that with the decentralisation of the fiscal system and the development of regionally-based economies, local interests have begun to come to the fore in terms of political development (Yu 2008: 20). However, that process of state decentralisation has had the consequence that local government is more easily influenced by interests, especially monied interests.14 Local bureaucrats and officials can now employ the model of the professional in order to win for themselves considerable autonomy from the central state, and the capacity to sustain and recreate occupational niches. Formal, legitimate power has been extended to produce new, and in Chinese terms, essentially illegitimate forms of domination on the part of local bureaucrats (Elliot and McCrone 1982: 95). Observing these developments from the viewpoint of the traditional Confucian model of administration, as Huang (1990 [1988]: 143) notes, ‘bureaucratic management of the Chinese tradition was cumbersome and wasteful, and sometimes perfunctory and hypocritical’.

Yu and Cai (2009: 60) also sum up the obvious paradox of power now located at the local level within the Chinese political system. On the one hand, political leaders of the local Party and government are liable to use the power they command to expropriate farmers’ land, remove farmers’ houses and to use the judiciary as an instrument in order to manage the populace and media when criticisms and

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14On this point, see Schattschneider (1942), especially Chaps. 5 and 6.
complaints are raised, even applying controls, such as blocking appeals (*jiefang*), detentions, and so on. On the other hand, local officials also claim they lack the capacity to deal with ensuing confrontation at the grass-roots level nationwide in consequence of their actions since departments are administered vertically, and therefore, that the local authorities are not in the position to regulate and control confrontation. In short, the local Party and government complain they now have to bear limitless responsibilities while possessing only limited power.

Moreover, the law in China remains bound tightly to the state regime of the Communist Party, at the national level, which maintains the tradition of mutual-cooperation between politics, the Party and its organs, and the legal institutions of the state. As the only party, the CCP plays the decisive role in enacting, applying and revising the Constitution and the laws. Consistent with the orthodox Marxism-Leninism doctrine, the state and the Party act as one in building communist society (David and Brierley 1978: 187). As Wang (1997: 18) claims:

> No important statute has been passed without discussion or scrutiny by the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party. Therefore, the comprehension and interpretation of legal rules should be done in line with the Party’s policy and instructions.

The intervention of the Party in every aspect of legislation had been institutionalised in ‘Several Opinions as to Strengthening the Leadership of National Legislative Work’ issued by the Central Committee of the CCP in 1991 (Cai 1999: 165–6). Law is frequently explained by reference to a certain policy. Suffice it to say that law is the instrument of policy (Cai 1999: 259). For example, the maintenance of stability, as central to Party and state policy, has a higher priority level than any other factor in the settlement of legal disputes. In conjunction with regionalism, judgments may be amended for the purposes of protecting the local economy (Wang 1997: 25). Under the constitutional principle of ‘Democratic Centralism’, the People’s Congresses have the general authority to ‘supervise the government, court and procuratorate at the corresponding level’ pursuant to the Constitution and Organic Law.

The state institution that fully reveals the combination of political and legal power is *zhengfawei* (the Political and Legislative Affairs Committee of the Party). It is one of the institutions belonging to the CCP, which is responsible for information-gathering, public security, re-education through labour, judicature, and prosecution. There are corresponding committees in four levels from the CCP Central Committee to province (region), city, and county. Based on the prerogative of the Party, the mechanism of handling legal cases through *xietsiao ban’an zhidu*...
(the system of coordination by zhengfawei to deal with cases) is instituted. The court should report to zhengfawei and request their instructions when they hear especially important cases or when there are serious disagreements between law enforcement agencies. Thus zhengfawei plays a crucial role as the final decision-maker, or as coordinator in resolving disputes.

The system of one party has a crucial impact on the present functioning of the socialist legal system, contributing to what has been termed ‘politicised law’ (Mattei 1997: 5; Lubman 1991: 294) or less bluntly as ‘policy law’ (Lubman 1999: 135) or as the ‘political-legal system’ (Zeng and Sun 2009). Though legality is increasingly emphasised in socialist Chinese law, from Ying’s (2007a: 69) study, many problems that should be dealt with in the courts are not, which further adds to conflict within society.

It is currently arranged that local judicial power belongs to the locality, thus the operation of law follows the operation of the Party and government’s power at the local level. As regards the problem, Yu (2008: 25) suggests the centralisation and vertical administration of trial powers. The separation of national judicature from local political power might be able to more effectively balance the uniformity of central politics and specificity of local politics.

Existing literature examines the issue of land-lost farmers and their relationship with government from the perspective of conflict and resistance. But this does not capture the complexities of the ‘game’ that both land-lost farmers and government officials are engaged in. Conflict theory implies too dichotomous and static a conception of this conflict, so the present study adds structuration theory to conflict theory to show the game that both groups of land-lost farmers and local government officials are engaged in, which constitutes a complex relationship consisting of integration and conflict, as well as dynamic interplay, is being reproduced over time and being altered by the ongoing actions of individuals on both sides.

2.5 Structuration Theory

In Giddens’ (1979, 1984 etc.) structuration theory, social life is seen as a system of structured practices. Social structures do not only shape human conduct or practices, but human conduct and practices also constitute and transform social structures. Here structure is the matrix of rules and resources that people draw on to enable their actions, but these same structures also constrain people’s actions as well. We can find structure by looking for the regularities that make interaction meaningful and consequential. Its enabling and constraining characteristics function as a ‘duality’, according to Giddens. Several types of ‘dualisms’, including that of static from dynamic analysis, can be addressed. Some structurational sub-concepts of special relevance to my topic are highlighted here.
2.5.1 Social Integration and System Integration

According to Giddens (1979: 76–7), social integration yields ‘systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction’, and system integration yields ‘systemness on the level of relations between social systems’. ‘The systemness of social integration is fundamental to the systemness of society as a whole’. These two concepts are useful for discussing integration at the local and national levels of Chinese society.

2.5.2 Modalities

The rules and resources that agents can draw on include: interpretative schemes or the meaning and interpretation agents place on their behaviour (the dimension of signification); facilities, or the exercise of power via mobilising allocative (material) and authoritative (non-material) resources (the dimension of domination); and also, norms or the rules that decide the nature of the structure (the dimension of legitimation). Importantly, these dimensions are separable only analytically (Giddens 1984: 33), as they tend to occur simultaneously and in a compounded fashion in social practices—thus it is hard to consider norms without considering their interpretation—a matter of meaning—and the process by which they are ‘made to count’—a matter of power. One theoretic construct that enables an analytical separation is ‘modalities’. Giddens categorises modalities as such (1979: 81):

When institutional analysis is bracketed, the modalities are treated as stocks of knowledge and resources employed by actors in the constitution of interaction as a skilled and knowledgeable accomplishment, within bounded conditions of the rationalisation of action. When strategic conduct is placed under an epoché, the modalities represent rules and resources considered as institutional features of systems of social interaction. The level of modality thus provides the coupling elements whereby the bracketing of strategic or institutional analysis is dissolved in favour of an acknowledgement of their interrelation.

Giddens explicitly holds that the general link between structure and interactive reproduction holds in the case of these three elements. So, involving normative judgements, social acts imply and reproduce an order of legitimation—an institutional dimension that in turn suggests general, basic, and valid social value judgements. All actions, embodying meaning, imply and reproduce an ‘order of signification’. And all acts involve power—the capacity to alter a course of events by the very nature of action, then, a distinctive type of institution—an order of domination—exists and is reproduced.

The concept of modalities is of much use for investigating the construction of relationships. Specifically, I will consider the construction of the three dimensions in the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government: first, the operation of the norms—meaning policies and laws; second, the use of interpretative schemes—interpretation of situations on both sides; and third, the facility of power—the structural mobilisation of resources and strategic behaviour by both sides.
2.5.3 Stratification Model of Social Behaviour

Action as a continuous process of behaviour is explained by Giddens by means of three components of social behaviour, in what he terms as the stratification model, which is predicated on the judgement that actors are ‘knowledgeable’ people, who know what they are doing and how to do it. First, actors show their knowledge by describing in words what they do and their reasons for doing it. Giddens refers to this first component of social behaviour as discursive consciousness, a terminology used to explain what actors are able to say, or to give verbal expression to the circumstances of their own actions and those of others; awareness which has a discursive form. Second, their knowledgeability as actors is more than just what they can say about what they do. Giddens refers this second component of social behaviour as practical consciousness. Finally, the third unconscious motivational component of social behaviour includes ‘those forms of cognition or impulsion which are either wholly repressed from consciousness or appear in consciousness only in distorted form’ (1984: 4). Therefore, knowledge can cast light on preferences and perceived options; knowledge can also bring forth salient solutions to problems under negotiation, helping parties coordinate their behaviour in a mutually beneficial way.

Accordingly, the subjective processes sustained by an actor include the following: motivation (purposive or intentional character of behaviour), rationalisation (giving reasons to their conduct), and reflexivity (planning and monitoring their conduct, and its context and results). Through reflexive monitoring of conduct they make conduct able to be accountable. Of course, accountability involves three senses that correspond to the three modalities of interpretation, norm and facility: an account can signify the meaning of someone’s action, how they describe what they are doing; it can also relate the action to norms and values for positive judgement; finally, it can cast light on the agent’s power over outcomes. Also power-revealing, accounts can show what kinds of reasons ‘count’ in the social system: ‘[t]he reflexive elaboration of frames of meaning is characteristically imbalanced in relation to the possession of power, whether this be a result of … the possession of relevant types of “technical knowledge”; the mobilisation or authority or “force”, etc.’ (1976: 113). In sum, Giddens’ stratification model is useful in assessing the behaviour of parties concerned, land-lost farmers and local officials, and in assessing whether their behaviour contributes to the force of integration.

2.5.4 Dialectic of Control

Reflexive self-regulation may make it appears that individuals are under control in a ‘one-dimensional’ society. At this point Giddens takes into consideration the dialectic of control as involving a countervailing process. In all social systems there is a dialectic of control. The capacity to resist gives actors ‘some degree of control
over the conditions of reproduction of the system’ (1982: 32). This concept is fundamental to including the force of conflict in the relationship between farmers and authorities, and the generation of a dynamic process in that relationship.

2.6 Structurational Relationship Between Farmers and Authorities

Xiao (2004) observes that farmers’ acts of protest would become institutionalised within a Western democratic political system, such opposition becoming incorporated into the political process, whereas there would be a relationship of resistance and suppression within an authoritarian system. He contends that neither the democratic model nor the autocratic model can adequately represent the Chinese position, where the country’s social and economic structures and institutions are undergoing rapid change, and to which the political system must respond. I will explain in the remainder of the chapter why the approach is well-suited to the Chinese case. To introduce a structurational approach is to incorporate both forces of integration and conflict into the analysis of the relationship between land-lost farmers and Chinese local government, as well as the dynamic nature of their interrelationship.

2.6.1 Within a Structure

The first step is to situate the structure. According to Giddens, ‘[t]he problem of order in social theory is how form occurs in social relations’ (1981: 4). In seeking this, he puts a premium on the ‘situatedness’ of social relations and interactions (1984: 110). Giddens (1984: 118–119) makes a key distinction between social integration and system integration and he explains how they come to be connected through locale and presence availability. In his terminology, locales ‘provide the settings of interaction, the settings of interaction in turn being essential to specifying its contextuality’. By the same token, the distinctive relationship between land-lost farmers and Chinese local government, as described by Xiao (2004), must be considered within the ‘field’ (Bourdieu 1996 [1992]) in which it takes place. According to Bourdieu, a basic definition of the notion of field is (2005 [1995]: 30):

[A] field of forces within which the agents occupy positions that statistically determine the positions they take with respect to the field, these position-takings being aimed either at conserving or transforming the structure of relations of forces that is constitutive of the field.

[I]t is the site of actions and reactions performed by social agents endowed with permanent dispositions, partly acquired in their experience of these social fields. The agents react to these relations of forces, to these structures; they construct them, perceive them, form an idea of them, represent them to themselves, and so on. And, while being, therefore,
constrained by the forces inscribed in these fields and being determined by these forces as regards their permanent dispositions, they are able to act upon these fields, in ways that are partially preconstrained, but with a margin of freedom.

A field defines a set of roles and relationships within given sets of social domains. These fields are relatively autonomous social spaces which socialise humans into roles. With these theoretical considerations in mind, the analysis of the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government is undertaken as a kind of ‘situational analysis’ (Van Velsen 1967).

Following Brass and Burkhardt (1993: 444), there are two kinds of structural positions that serve as a basis for the exercise of power: formal (hierarchical level) and informal (network position). The power associated with the hierarchical level is often referred to as authority or legitimate power (Astley and Sachdeva 1984). Because of the socially shared, institutionalised nature of hierarchical position, it is one of the strongest sources of potential power and one of the most immutable structural constraints on the exercise of power. However, in addition to the formal structural position, there is still an informal social network as including interactions around social relations and economic interests. Developing as time passes, these interactions become relatively stable and thus take on an institutionalised-like quality too. They mirror the formal, prescribed authority relationship and as stable patterns they represent a constraint on agents’ behaviour. Thus, the interests of social agents are often seen as proceeding from or caused by structures. In other words, even when we attribute power to individuals we can see the source of that power lies within structures; and further, recognise the structural influence upon individuals’ interests.

Put in the specific Chinese context, the Confucian idea of li uses relationships as its yardstick, whereby li can be understood as codes of conduct (Bodde and Morris 1973 [1967]: 19). From that viewpoint, the relationship between ruler and subject is one of the relationships thought of as universal to men and women’s condition and essential for a stable social order. Indeed, most of the literature, sociological or not, depicts Confucianism as a social force that has traditionally moulded the Chinese into socially dependent beings (Solomon 1971). Especially on the urban-rural fringe of land-lost farmers’ resettlement communities, which is the field for the present study, and derived from rural society where there are inextricably intertwined social relations—the usually-called society of ‘acquaintances’ (Fei 2005 [1948]) or ‘semi-acquaintances’ (He 2000)—it is argued that there exists a ‘network of power-interests structure’ in this field, which takes into account both formal and informal elements, and which involves every actor within it. This specific structure is theoretically predicated on the ‘structure’ in Giddens’ sense in which agents find themselves. Agents in this study include land-lost farmers and local government institutions, while the specific roles concerned are those of land-lost farmers and local government officials, for example it is officials that carry out the decisions

17 Regarding collective institutions as agents, I borrow that insight from methodological individualists, which will be further clarified in Chap. 5.
made by the state’s institutions. Land-lost farmers are involved in this structure as taking informal positions while local government assumes the formal position.

The existence of the network of power-interests structure also finds its theoretical basis in power-dependence theory (Blau 1964; Emerson 1962), which itself is based on the principle of social exchange (Blau 1964). Within power-dependence theory, power is viewed as the inverse of dependence; and dependence, in turn, is based on two dimensions: (1) it is directly proportional to the value attributed to the outcome at stake, and (2) it is inversely proportional to the possibility of achieving that outcome through alternative sources or means. Thus, A’s power over B is directly related to the degree to which B is dependent on A, and vice versa. Such relationships of interdependency are especially prevalent in Chinese rural society. In the network of power-interests structure, it can be argued that webs of interdependency are of direct relevance to understanding power and dependence, and that they promote forces of integration within the structure.

### 2.6.2 Forces of Integration and Conflict

Within the framework of structuration, with the existence and reproduction of structure, as well as the dialectic of control, there is the potential for the concurrent analyses of forces of integration and conflict. As regards the force of integration, the ideas of Durkheim should be drawn on in the first place. He (1984 [1893]: 105–6) represents the penetration of collective conscience into the individual’s conscience and personality as a conformity-producing mechanism. This conformity, in his opinion, is constructed through two formulations: every society is ‘despotic’, and this ‘despotism’ is both natural and necessary (1992 [1957]: 61); men and women in society have a basic ‘need to be constrained, bounded, [and] restricted’ (1961: 113).

Such forces of integration are especially emphasised in the Chinese case. Traditionally, Confucian social theory was concerned with the question of how to establish a harmonious secular order in the ‘man-centred’ world (King 1991: 65). Further, according to Liang Shuming, who was a Confucian social reformer of the modern era, in the 1920s and 30s, Chinese society is neither individually-based nor institutionally-based but rather relationship-based (King 1985: 63; Alitto 1986; King 1991: 65). King (1991: 63) explains, no one who has had firsthand experience with Chinese society could fail to note that Chinese people are extremely sensitive to mianzi (face) and renqing (obligation) in their interpersonal relationships. Likewise, no one who has lived in Chinese society could be totally unaware of the social phenomenon called guanxi (personal relationship). There is a general impression, correct or not, as observed by Butterfield (1983) and others, that the Chinese are hopelessly interlocked in renqing wang (a web of personal obligations) or guanxi wang (a web of personal relationships). It is no exaggeration to say that guanxi, renqing, and mianzi are key socio-cultural concepts to the understanding of Chinese social structure.
Such a structure provides the particular setting for interactions between land-lost farmers and local government officials. According to Giddens (1984: 142), ‘[s]ocial integration has to do with interaction in contexts of co-presence’. It is the structurational emphasis on actor-structure interplay that provides the theoretical foundation for social integration within the structure. The structure functions as the context for actors to obtain and operate power. Structure represents both form and process. Structure represents relatively stable patterns of interpretation and action. These institutionalised patterns emerge as routine interaction over time. People then behave within these institutionalised patterns. Agents may ‘draw on’ structure strategically in acting. And the meaningful accountability of agents’ conduct—as the agents can produce a certain extent of ‘reflexive self-regulation’ grounded in ‘self-knowledge and in knowledge of the social and material worlds which are the environment of the acting self’ (Giddens 1976: 85)—in turn means that social structure is reproduced in conduct, and thus social integration is maintained. In the particular context of resettlement communities, and in view of the long-established nature of official-populace relations, there can be seen to be mutually reinforcing and constraining roles at play in the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government.

It would however be a mistake to think that every individual has an equal ability to contribute to or modify structures. A person’s ability to intervene in the social process depends upon his/her position in the social structure. Accroding to Dahrendorf, the basic analysing unit of social structure is social status. Within the structure under consideration here, local officials hold the dominant status in their relationship with land-lost farmers. From a conflict perspective, the relationship between the two sides can be seen as kind of imperatively coordinated association breeding conflict (Dahrendorf 1959). Specifically, local government represents the power of the regime, and land-lost farmers represent the power of the grass roots. Local bureaucracies are the institutions that people confront in their everyday lives, the bodies whose decisions affect them, and the structures they can hope to change. In its most basic form, intimate closeness implies the possibilities for hatred of local bureaucrats (Coser 1965 [1956]). Local bureaucracies become the targets of petitioners and demonstrators. According to the neo-Simmelian schema (cited from Levine 1991: 1107), the enmity that exists between land-lost farmers and local government underlies a process of conflict.

Herein lies a fundamental question that needs to be addressed at the outset: whether conflict is a necessary aspect of power. There are two distinct perspectives. On the one hand, Weber’s definition of power has been understood to hold that conflict is essential to power relations (Wrong 1970: 54–5; Lukes 1974: 23) and the conflict theory perspective is based on the proposition that power necessarily implies conflict (Dahrendorf 1968: 227). On the other hand, from the perspective of structuration theory, power implies conflict only when resistance has to be conquered. And according to Parsons’ discussion of the common-sense meaning of power, the ‘problem of coping with resistance’ ‘leads into the question of the role of coercive measures, including the use of physical force’ (1969: 252). This latter perspective allows for the possibility that power which overcomes resistance does
not necessarily lead to conflict; it depends on the form which power takes in coping with resistance.

In the event, detailed considerations of the interrelationships between power, resistance, and conflict are not taken into my analysis of the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government, but I still have to clarify my basic point of view. First, actually, I intentionally avoid the concept of resistance while inclining to the idea of ‘two-way’ power relations.18 Second, since land-lost farmers and local government are respectively situated in low and high hierarchical positions, such a power relation between them may be very unequal, but I hold to the standpoint that conflict between the two sides can be contained within the network of power-interests structure in the local setting, in occasional situations it can also manifest itself as explicit conflict which would disrupt that structure. Therefore, when I subscribe to the conclusion drawn by Barbalet (1985) that resistance can take different forms, none of which are necessarily associated with conflict, I understand Barbalet to mean explicit conflict. I will look at the manifestation of conflict by looking at respective expressed interests of both sides concerned; and their interests would be reconstructed from their behaviour (including discourse) given the strategic situation. Third, power relations can be characterised as being both asymmetrical and reciprocal (Barbalet 1985: 541). In this sense, when analysing conflict, my principal focus will be on those conflicting elements involved in the processes of structuration. The key question, though, is how expressions of the asymmetry of power and reciprocity on the part of each side can be integrated (Barbalet 1985: 542). I believe the utilisation of both structuration theory and conflict theory can fulfil this task in my own research.

2.6.3 Dynamic Interplay

It is through the reaction of agents to the presence of the field (structure) that motivates the dynamic process of interplay among agents as well as between agents and the field (structure). Specifically in a relationship-based society, according to the Confucian human-centred philosophy, as Hu (1996 [1919]: 116) states: ‘all action must be in a form of interaction between man and man’; man (and woman) is defined as a social or interactive being (Moore 1967). It is also important to bear in mind that the Confucian individual is more than a role player mechanically performing the role-related behaviour prescribed by the social structure; the Confucian individual is the initiator of social communication (King 1991: 67). People in a relationship-based society are not only dependent upon the structure within which they find themselves, but more importantly, they are also interdependent upon each other and actively interact with each other to reproduce or even change the structure.

18In this approach, as Barbalet (1985: 542) argues, the concept of resistance would be redundant.
Therefore, at any given time, the networks provide access to valued resources, while behaviours to acquire and strategically use resources are actively developed within networks. Land-lost farmers disadvantaged otherwise by current structural constraints can still act to change them (Zeitz 1980) by such means. At this point in the framework of structuration, Giddens treats interaction as a power relation. He speaks of a countervailing process, the ‘dialectic of control’, which plays its part. Power relations are always two-way. The domination of one agent by another might derive from a direct relation between them. This is the obvious sense of one having power over another (Barbalet 1985: 544); but ‘however subordinate an actor may be in a social relationship, the very fact of involvement in that relationship gives him or her a certain amount of power over the other’ (Giddens 1979: 6). In other words, the capacity to resist gives them ‘some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system’ (Giddens 1982: 32). While agents respond to their context, their actions might consolidate existing structures or, at crucial or critical junctures lead to changes in those structures. These can be reasonably regarded as moves in the dialectic of control.

Following this line of reasoning, in a structurational relationship, people act, but they act as constrained and enabled by others. Their views, interests, beliefs, and desires are formed through their interaction with others. And in the mobilisation of resources, it is important to take into account the two-way character of power (power as control). It is in this way that the structuration theory will be used to analyse the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government which takes place within the ‘network of power-interests structure’. The empirical chapters will deal with the norms determined by the structure, the interpretative scheme generated by agents, as well as the facility of power that actualises the effects of interaction, which function to construct that relationship.

2.7 Combination of Conflict and Structuration Theories

Given the specific context of the present study, it is clear that conflict is inherent in the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government due to the subordinate position of land-lost farmers. I consider elements of conflict theory, especially the functional conflict approach and dialectical conflict approach, which converge with structuration theory at some points. Structuration contributes to examining the habitual action (structural constraint) and the chances provided by structural facilitation (the ability of exercise of power). By adopting structuration theory, the emphasis will be on how the use of particular system elements, as rules and resources, reproduce or transform structural features.

It may seem the concurrent use of conflict and structuration theory is problematic. How and what bridges them? The bases for the combined use of the two perspectives can be outlined as follows. First, there is a shared concern with
structure. Second, my choice of a Weberian perspective on conflict, especially the point made by Dahrendorf’s dialectical approach to conflict that roles situating in different statuses will strive for their particular interests, is compatible with structuration theory in that it allows for the possibility of variable or ‘two-way’ power relations. Third, that perspective on conflict theory admits non-material causes, namely, the inconformity of value conceptions and beliefs, and of actors’ wills as well as their self-interests to situate themselves in a favourable place, which implies that conflict theory from a Weberian perspective acknowledges the importance of actors’ knowledge and consciousness in shaping and transforming the structure within which they find themselves.

A central concern here is the conceptualisation of ‘power’ that both distinguishes and connects the two theoretical perspectives. The concept of ‘power’ and ‘power relations’ should be by any means invoked when discussing the particular kind of relationship, which is analysed in the present study. Studies of power are about the definitions of three key concepts: interests, consciousness and consensus (Gaventa 1980: 28). Thus, the key to understanding power relations is to figure out what interests are sought for by each side, what thoughts and consciousness they respectively have, and whether there is any consensus between the two sides, as well as whether each side has arrived at some kind of consensus within their own group. The present study uses both conflictual and structurational language to understand the manifestation of interests, consciousness, and consensus within the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government.

Whereas conflict theory tends to see power as negative, structuration theory sees power as positive. In this regard, nevertheless, the present study stitches them together and holds a view of power as: not only negative, in that it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’ and ‘censors’; but also as positive, in that it produces domains of objects and reality (Foucault 1995 [1977]: 194). The latter aspect of power means that the relations between superordinates and subordinates can be complementary, by taking into account how the less powerful manage the resources available to them in a way so as to exert influence over the more powerful within an established power relationship.

All in all, the existing literature provides the factual and conceptual foundation for further analysis. Land holds exclusive meaning to farmers economically, socially, politically, and culturally. In the process of urbanisation and urban development of China which in itself bears a certain extent of awkwardness, the obscure nature of land ownership especially collective land ownership makes things more complicated. Such background information will be involved later at some points. Confrontation between farmers and the local authorities in China as manifested in the review of the existing literature is inadequate for a full and detailed understanding of the relationship between the two sides. Thus, the theories of structuration and conflict act together as the theoretical framework for the present study. They will be used together to discuss the relationship between land-lost farmers and local government which involves integration, conflict, and interplay.
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