1. China’s current rural urbanisation and historical context

This study is positioned at the intersection of China’s current rural urbanisation and the social mobilisation mechanism that has been used by the governments at different levels in China to encourage and facilitate urbanisation in China’s vast rural areas. This perspective aims to seek a better understanding of social mobilisation as an important socioeconomic and socio-political mechanism and how it has been employed in present-day China.

From an historical point of view, since the early 1950s at least, rural urbanisation has been regarded as the most difficult aspect of China’s modernisation. It is widely known that many Chinese people have spent decades dreaming of having ‘two-story brick houses, electric light, and telephones’, which are commonly known in Chinese as loushang louxia, dian-deng dianhua (Link, 2013, p. 103; Eyferth, 2015, p. 131). These expressions emerged in the 1950s as a Chinese, but much more convincing, version of Lenin’s well-known slogan about communism, which was first summarised by Lenin himself in 1920 as being ‘Soviet power plus the electrification of the entire country’ (Clark, 2000, p. 93; see a slightly different translation in Shanin, 1985, p. 178). However, such an advanced stage of socioeconomic development can only be achieved after decades of effort. Therefore, this study is historically positioned at a unique point in Chinese history, where its modernisation has reached a new and advanced stage that is characterised by the actual and dedicated pursuit of rural urbanisation.

Over the past decades, there have been many studies examining and theorising about various aspects of the transformations occurring not only in Chinese villages and cities, but also in China’s party-state governance system and its policy-making and implementation. However, there has hardly been any real recent effort to methodically look at the intersection of rural urbanisation and social mobilisation. This chapter is the start of a new effort, but begins with background information of this book. The first section of the chapter gives more background information on China’s current rural urbanisation, which is also considered a continuation of the early urbanisation effort in post-Mao China. This is followed by a section examining key theoretical issues concerning social mobilisation in China and reviewing what has previously been published in English on the topic.
This section will also clarify how Chinese research publications and the research literature on related topics – from changing central–local government relations in China, a series of taxation reforms and land finance, to rural elections – are to be used in this book. The third section is a brief outline of the organisation of the book.

CHINA’S CURRENT RURAL URBANISATION

The phrases ‘China’s urbanisation’ and ‘urbanisation in China’ have been used differently in slightly different manners, depending largely on different definitions and understandings of urbanisation and which period of China’s contemporary history is being considered. The term ‘rural urbanisation’ used in the heading above, however, might sound redundant as the basic meaning of ‘urbanisation’ already refers to the process of movement of people from rural to urban areas (Ley, 2010, p. 9; Fox and Goodfellow, 2016, p. 5). When first hearing the expression, many people feel that there is no any need to use the word ‘rural’ to modify ‘urbanisation’. However, as the contemporary cliché goes, this is a typical new concept with Chinese characteristics. Examples of such special terms include ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ (Deng, 1985, p.17), ‘capitalism with Chinese characteristics’ (Huang, 2008, p.233) and ‘imperialism with Chinese characteristics’ (Metcalf, 2011, p.32). The cliché aside, the notion of rural urbanisation emerged, or more precisely, was further clarified, several years ago, as the latest shared understanding and tactic that China had adopted in dealing with its rural development issue.

Because of the intricacy of urbanisation in such a populous country and the long process of reaching the current policy understanding and strategy, this section focuses on two main stages of China’s urbanisation since the late 1970s, when it began its economic reforms, namely before and after the formation of the current rural urbanisation approach.

Before the current urbanisation strategy was formed, China’s rural population policy in the immediate post-1978 period was largely guided by a set of ideas known as letting surplus rural labourers litu bu lixiang (leave the land, but not the village) and jinchang bu jincheng (enter the factory, but not the city) (Naughton, 1999, p.40; Guo, 2013, p.188; Yeh and Yang, 2013, p.174). In the 1980s, numerous estimates were made of the number of surplus rural labourers and the numbers vary widely from as low as 60 million to as high as 156 million (Taylor and Banister, 1989, p.2). These figures are significantly lower than the number calculated by one of the authors of this book in the 1980s, which was as high as about 390 million rural workers aged between 15 and 64 (Gao, 1987, p.396).
Although some researchers have argued that urbanisation in post-1949 China started in the 1950s and continued in the 1960s, China’s rate of urbanisation was as low as about 11 per cent in 1950 and lower than 18 per cent in 1978, which are all lower than what several OECD reports have documented (Wu, 2003, p. 90; Li and Tan, 2011, p. 107; OECD, 2015, p. 30). In fact, the latter increase can be partially accounted for by the urban population growth, because China finalised and implemented its household registration system (hukuo zhidu) in 1958, when its economy started running into trouble and practically stopped rural people from moving to cities. The Chinese economy collapsed in 1959, resulting in severe famines into the early 1960s (Yang, 1996; Perkins, 2013). All this clearly indicates that China was largely an agrarian society in the late 1970s when it entered the reform era, and that its leaders were very cautious about rural–urban migration as they still remembered that the rise in the urban population of less than 8 per cent in 1958 of the Great Leap Forward resulted in an increase in grain procurement by more than 23 per cent (Mao et al., 2013, p. 149; see also Lardy, 1987).

China’s economic reform started in rural villages in the late 1970s through a series of policy measures to encourage rural people to work harder than before and yield more than before, for themselves and the country. However, several years after the start of reform, there was not any policy to allow them to move to cities, though the phenomenon of the so-called ‘floating population’ (liudong renkou) took place all over the country because of new political circumstances (Zhang, 1998, p. 68; Wu, 2010, p. 57). The hukou or household registration system was then used as a crucial institutional barrier to prevent rural people from migrating to cities and to cope with the pressure generated by irregular internal migration.

The demand for a high level of rural–urban migration increased in the early 1980s because of rapid economic development, which has since added a different, but crucial, dimension to China’s rural–urban migration and urbanisation issues. Since then, there has always been a real but often hidden tension between the state control of urbanisation and the demand for labour by new industries and production lines. As migrants were spreading further, becoming a regular part of the labour supply in China, the small-town strategy as a policy solution to this emerging problem was put forward by researchers and policy analysts (Tang and Jenkins, 1990; Morgan, 1994). Among them was Fei Xiaotong, formerly spelled as Fei Hsiao-Tung, who promoted the development of township and village enterprises (TVEs) through revisiting his early study in southern Jiangsu province. He widened the scope of his original 1930s study to explore the role of township and small urban centres in China’s urbanisation. His article, ‘Small towns, big issues’, published in 1983, especially his advice of
litu bu lixiang (leave the land, but not the village) and jinchang bu jincheng (enter the factory, but not the city), were of great help to China’s decision-makers as many of them simply knew how to correct Maoist mistakes through decollectivising rural production, but lacked experience in managing a rural economy, especially rural industrialisation (Gao, 2013a, p. 81).

While the small-town strategy helped China with a new approach to the problems of the surplus rural population and the lack of economic alternatives, reducing the burden from the ‘floating population’, it was soon also identified by more analysts as ‘a unique road to urbanization’ (Morgan, 1994, p. 215). Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, China has been influenced by various socioeconomic and sociopolitical forces. TVEs already employed nearly 24 per cent of the rural labour force in 1988 (Yang, 1996, p. 215; White, 1998, p. 150) and in 1994, the number of TVEs had increased to around 25 million (Cooney et al., 2013, p. 35). The demand by new factory managers and owners for stable supplies of labour has once again emerged as a more influential force than many other criticisms of rural–urban inequalities.

The increasing tension between the state control of urbanisation and the new market force gave rise to some localised urbanisation policies and schemes, such as ‘blue-stamp’ and ‘green card’ interim residence permits in some cities (Fan, 2008, p. 50). According to a policy analyst who was involved in developing rural policies, the food-coupon system attached to the hukou or household registration was terminated in 1993, making it easier for rural people to leave villages (Bai, 2010, p. 159). In other words, alongside the implementation of the small-town development strategy, or while intensifying the rural industrialisation, there was a parallel process of transferring some rural labourers to small towns and county-level cities. This quiet process has been called nongzhuanfei (to covert one’s hukou or household registration category from agricultural to non-agricultural) (Young, 2011, p. 141; Chan, 2015, p. 28), which was in fact the real start of China’s urbanisation, though many critics simply regarded these people as the ‘floating population’. As an effect of the early efforts, ‘a total of 286 new cities appeared in China’ in the decade between 1979 and 1991, and China’s urbanisation rate reached about 27 per cent in 1991, almost 10 per cent higher than it had been in 1978 (CDRF, 2013, p. 13; W. Wu, 2014, p. 88). Another vital turning point was reached in 1998 and 1999, by which time about one-third of China’s total population had become urbanised, 33.4 per cent and 34.8 per cent respectively (Fang and Yu, 2016, p. 286).

China’s current push for rural urbanisation has, therefore, happened in the context of further urbanisation from one-third of its population to one-half of it. However, it has been considered from different points of view. From a long-term development perspective, the current push
has been regarded as a strategy to address a series of imbalances in socioeconomic development, especially urban–rural inequality, which has been overlooked in the policies of both the rural industrialisation and the local urbanisation. From a narrow economic perspective, it has also been utilised as a national strategy to sustain, if not fuel, China’s high economic growth. These different views have resulted from the complexity of economic activities in China over the past two decades. While the other forms of urbanisation, as briefly outlined previously, are still going on, the strategy of rural urbanisation is partly based on the experiences of implementing the small-town rural industrialisation strategy and various local urbanisation schemes, and emphasises an integrated but in situ development of villages and small towns in rural areas (Garcia, 2011; p. 46; Kipnis, 2013; Zhu et al., 2013; X. Chen, 2015, p. 210).

It is over the past two decades or so that the process of forming and enacting political decisions and policies in China has also become more sophisticated, systematic and innovative than ever before. Such a complex process would become even more complicated if it took into consideration other key changes in Chinese politics, especially central–local, state–market and state–society relations and the new political power structure and process of what is nowadays frequently called the era of boyi. As explained in the Preface, this boyi era is full of political conflicts and bargaining between different social forces and groups. Because all these new changes will be discussed more fully in later chapters, this section will briefly introduce some basic ideas and facts related to the current rural urbanisation push.

More specifically, in addition to the growing influence of different industries and the market in general, there has also been an increasing demand for greater rural social and economic development, including a relaxation of the traditional control over rural–urban migration. Since the second half of the 1980s, many rural problems, or agriculture- and peasant-related issues, have been summarised by some Chinese researchers as sannong wenti (three rural problems), including nongye (agriculture), nongcun (rural villages) and nongmin (peasants) (Lu, 2008, p. 14). All these problems have become more apparent and serious than they were over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s, as many cities, big and small, have clearly been transformed and the urban standard of living has improved for a high proportion of the population. The growing urban–rural divide in the late 1990s gave rise to major debate among Chinese academic and policy researchers, which is well represented in English publications (Zhong, 2004; Murphy, 2011; Day, 2013). What has not been appropriately emphasised is that the debate generated so much pressure that the rural issue once again became the top priority of China’s development strategy from the early 2000s.
In the first five or so years of the new millennium, some important national policy decisions were made to deal with the rural issues. The policy on peasant burden reduction, or on control of ‘local extraction’, that was contemplated by the Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji leadership was finally legislated under the new leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao in 2003 (Li, 2012, p. 91). Unprecedented growth in these years meant increased tax revenue, which led China to make a few important decisions in 2005 to implement its new rural development strategy. The most eye-catching policy was the abolition of agricultural taxes, which became effective from 1 January 2006 (Luo and Sicul, 2013, p. 218). Another strategic decision was part of China’s Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006–2010), by far the most significant part of which was ‘the stated objective of creating a more harmonious socialist countryside’ (USITC, 2011, pp. 4–15). While this plan was put forward, in a general sense, to advance the economic welfare of the rural population and reduce the rural–urban disparity, it has since the beginning been defined differently by different sectoral interests. It has been simply called ‘the new socialist countryside’ for publicity purpose (Raman, 2012, p. 213), but various business sectors and local governments have regarded it as ‘the construction drive’ in rural areas (Lin, 2012, pp. 243–4).

Despite these tags, especially the label of socialist, which has made it not only less attention-grabbing than the complete abolition of agricultural taxes, but also difficult to understand its significance, the plan to build ‘the new socialist countryside’ is of great importance for rural development in China (Ahlers and Schubert, 2009; Schubert and Ahlers, 2011, 2012; Ahlers, 2014). This policy initiative has then been theorised by many researchers, as well as some industries, to be a new top-down push for rural urbanisation. However, as pointed out earlier, the decision-making process in China is rather complex; it is regularly influenced by various interest groups, meaning that many decisions are reversed and policies are regularly modified to echo the results of numerous negotiations. In the case of rural urbanisation, discussions have focused on how this new strategy has been financed and the central concept for understanding the debate is *tudi caizheng* (land finance), revenues from selling land (Hu, 2016, p. 124). In fact, since China started its transition to a decentralised market economy, it has experienced numerous difficulties regarding public finance (Wong, 2009, 2013). The decision to initiate and implement ‘the new socialist countryside’ plan has further authorised the use of land as a source of finance (Hu, 2016, p. 127).

What has happened in China since the mid-2000s is that although the abolition of agricultural taxes has been welcomed, and although this tax policy is not believed to ‘have significantly affected the tax revenue
China's current rural urbanisation and historical context

of the government’ (Cai, 2010, p. 172), local governments in agriculture-dependent regions have suffered the loss of local revenue, making it very difficult for them to deliver some basic services (Wong, 2007; Smith, 2015). At the same time, the tudi caizheng or land finance mechanism apparently became so overused that the central government decided to put more restrictions on land use in 2006, almost immediately after the new countryside strategy was put in place. One of the restrictions is the so-called zengjian guagou of the land use, which simply means ‘linking urban and rural construction land’ (Looney, 2012, p. 276), an ‘idea of bounding up addition of urban land with sayings from peasant housing sites’ (Han and Wei, 2015, p. 280). This restriction aims to ensure that ‘the total amount of arable land within an administrative jurisdiction is not reduced’ (Cai, 2010, p. 64). The new push for rural urbanisation is, therefore, not only related to the land finance practice, but also to the ‘recent policy of striking a balance between farmland acquisition and reclamation’ (Y. Zhao, 2013, p. 59).

All these new policies and mechanisms have indicated that the earlier tension between the population control in cities and the plan for rapid industrialisation has slowly been replaced by new demands for a better environment and resources for economic growth. However, even with the widespread dislike of the old policy of not allowing rural people to move to cities and its related hukou household registration system, the size of China’s population has meant that control over the expansion of megacities is needed. The approach to urbanisation has been diversified to include the above-mentioned initiative of nongmin shanglou, a new form of localised urbanisation to let rural households live in new apartment buildings, but on the condition that they ‘give up their individual housing plots’ (M. Cai, 2015, p. 72). This policy has been implemented nationally since the mid-2000s, during which time China has not only been guided by many ideas put forward by researchers and policy analysts, but has also been influenced by various other local and sectoral interests and agendas. The utilisation of social mobilisation under such specific circumstances, which is defined in this volume as the transition to the post-industrial stage of Chinese modernisation, is rather different from what it was a few decades ago, and its main changes and new characteristics are the focus of this book.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As introduced already, this book seeks to develop an understanding of how social mobilisation is being used in China as an important socioeconomic and socio-political mechanism, in a context of competing perspectives of whether China’s state capacity has declined and how meaningful mass
social-political participation can be, as often asked by China analysts and observers (Saich, 2011). As broadly defined by UNICEF, social mobilisation is a concept referring to a course of action that ‘motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective’ (UNICEF, 2015, p.1). To locate this analysis in the context of scholarly debates concerning social mobilisation in China, this section reviews the research literature, published in English in recent decades, on the utilisation of social mobilisation in China. This section is comprised of three parts. The first part is a critical review of studies focused on social mobilisation undertaken in post-revolution China. The second part looks at the research on factors and features of social mobilisation, and courses of action from other perspectives and for other purposes. The last part of this review will suggest some possible areas for further examination of the social mobilisation mechanism as it is used in China.

**Focused Studies of pre-1978 Social Mobilisation**

Since the 1960s, there have been many studies on various forms and major aspects of social mobilisation in China, providing this analysis with a strong theoretical foundation. The 1960s was a time of unprecedented socio-cultural change, characterised by several waves of socio-political movement and mass mobilisation in the United States, China and several European countries. Karl Deutsch is widely acknowledged as one of the first scholars to respond to the changes of the time and make social mobilisation a focus of research, by defining it as a process of social change that ‘happens to substantial parts of the population in countries which are moving from traditional to modern ways of life’ (Deutsch, 1961, p.493). Though China closed its door to the West at the time, it became a subject of academic research shortly after the definition was put forward. Scholars are correct that modern Chinese history is clearly characterised by frequent nationwide social mobilisations, making many scholars believe that Chinese history, or China’s development in several decades of the twentieth century, can only be analysed from the perspective of mobilisation (Schenk-Sandbergen, 1973; Bennett, 1976). This shared understanding has resulted in the wide acceptance of social mobilisation as an analytical construct. Analytically speaking, however, studies focused on social mobilisation in the 1960s and 1970s were conducted in two contexts. The first was a broad theoretical context, in which many debates in the 1960s and 1970s centred on Deutsch’s definition of social mobilisation. Chalmers Johnson studied the Chinese resistance movement during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) from the mobilisation perspective,
China’s current rural urbanisation and historical context

and defined it as a term that is ‘used to describe the dynamic process . . .
that causes populations to form political community’ (Johnson, 1962,
p. 22). David Apter, a political scientist, and Amitai Etzioni, a sociologist,
considered Deutsch’s concept from each of their perspectives.

From his modernisation perspective, Apter (1965) believes that there are
two models of modernisation: the mobilisation system and the reconcili-
ation system. Many parts of his argument have been proven to be hypo-
thetical, such as the point that mobilisations are likely to be short-lived and
ineffective. However, he did expand his viewpoint to include more factors,
such as ideology, goals and values, individuals and hierarchical power. His
attention on centralised power has laid the foundation for the top-down
perspective on the issue.

The new concept of social mobilisation also attracted the attention of
a group of sociologists, who tried the notion in sociological studies and
identified important links between the state structure and the nature of
political opportunities (Nettl, 1967). Just like some other sociologists,
Amitai Etzioni does not accept that social mobilisation is the same as
modernisation, but believes it to be both a macro-sociological concept and
a process in which a quick control of resources can be achieved. He also
argues that mobilisation, as a social process, can be applied to the control
of other resources, such as social, economic, political and psychological
resources. Because of his structural-functionalist view, however, Etzioni
(1968) seems to be more interested in the question of where the dynamism
of social units comes from, and prefers the ideas that pay attention to
emergent properties of collectives than those of individuals. In his concep-
tion, social mobilisations are different in their features, but no further
explanations on them are given.

Among many analyses of the Deutschian theory of mobilisation,
David Cameron’s rational approach identified several key inadequacies
(Cameron, 1974). Cameron summarises three main problems: the failure
to explain the process of mobilisation; the false connection between mobi-
lication and modernisation; and the assumption of social determinism.
His critical analysis is partly based on Samuel Huntington’s argument that
macro socioeconomic and socio-political changes need to be considered
along with the changes in attitudes, aspirations, values and behaviours of
individuals and groups (Huntington, 1968). Cameron takes the idea a step
further, challenging the view that individuals are passive in mobilisation,
and calling for more attention to the organisation and behavioural patterns
into which individuals are inducted. Research attention has since also been
given to the mobilisation process, activities of mobilising agents and the
direction of mobilisation efforts.

The second context was a narrow theoretical context, in which social
Social mobilisation was applied to explain the rise of the Chinese Community Party (CCP). Among early efforts, Chalmers Johnson applies the concept to China for the period of the Anti-Japanese War, arguing that the CCP’s victory was the outcome of its ability and the process by which a people become a nation, instead of the appeals of communism. The evidence used by Johnson is that the CCP failed to gain local support during the Jiangxi Soviet period (1927–34), but achieved it when the Japanese invasion presented the peasantry with a real threat to its life (Johnson, 1962; Zhao, 2004). Franz Schurmann finds Johnson’s theory problematic as it lacks the consideration of actual conditions in villages, resulting in the overlooking of the dynamics that underlay the success of the CCP in social mobilisation. Schurmann (1968) notices that the CCP did not only use many strategies to penetrate local structures, but also adapted its ideology to China’s political and economic conditions of the time. Of course, David Cameron (1974) believes that these early studies overlook the role of mobilising agents in favour of social conditions, and Charles Cell maintains that it was before the Jiangxi Soviet period that ‘the Communist strategy of socialist transformation through mass mobilization was forged, tested and developed’ (Cell, 1977, p. 13), the argument of which is shared by other analysts in the field of contemporary China studies (Townsend, 1967, p. 45).

It is within such theoretical contexts that more China analysts have turned their attention to how mobilisation has been employed in post-1949 China and a range of new mobilisation efforts in its post-revolution transition. Although both the revolutionary and the post-revolution periods are characterised by different forms of social mobilisation (Goodman, 1994), the study of its utilisation in what is formally called the socialist transformation period, or the post-revolution phase, is constrained by the era in which researchers live. In the immediate post-revolution period, Chinese researchers were isolated from international academic discussions and non-Chinese researchers were unable to conduct research in China except via organised visits (Richman, 1969; Wheelwright and McFarlane, 1970). Consequently, many analyses are made along the ‘art and prospects of mass mobilization’ that the CCP learnt and used before 1949 (Townsend, 1967, p. 45), though mobilisation was ‘increasingly seen as relics of an earlier and simpler era’ (Harding, 1981, p. 82). All these constraints have made the analyses rather abstract, often simply emphasising top-down processes without much detail.

However, what has been proven with certainty is that there was a series of political campaigns in post-1949 China. Prior to the Cultural Revolution launched in 1966, China went through a period of frequent countrywide political campaigns, starting with the land reform and the
counter-revolutionaries from the late 1940s until the ‘Four Cleanups’ (Siqing), or the Socialist Education Campaign, which was initiated in 1963 (Baum and Teiwes, 1968; Harding, 1981). In urban centres the CCP also learnt from its experiences in rural China, and mobilised the whole party and its followers to participate in campaigns one after another not only in the early years, when the CCP first took over political power, but also in the late stages (Gaulton, 1981; Whyte and Parish, 1984). Researchers have analysed all these campaigns, but the statist top-down perspective influences many analyses.

The top-down approach has been in use for decades. On the surface, social mobilisation was still considered from a perspective of mass participation in the state structure. Some efforts were made in the 1960s, including Townsend’s study of ‘how the workers, peasants and housewives of Communist China participate in politics’ (1967, p. 2), however, too much attention has been paid to how the techniques used by the CCP are developed and how support for the regime has been created. Precisely, although the role of mass participation in the public life of post-1949 China is known, attention is narrowly focused on how to mobilise the masses for support of national objectives. Therefore, the roles and actions of lower-level establishments are not only often seen from the top-down position, but also subject to higher-level authorities (Townsend, 1967, pp. 103, 144). From the top-down perspective, also based on the study of earlier campaigns, Julia Strauss believes that the campaigns in China are always characterised by ‘control from above, mobilization from below, harsh terror’ (2002, p. 89). The literature on Chinese political campaigns has a gap when it comes to the dynamics and institutional process. For decades, many China analysts have simply believed that China’s authoritarian system restrains mass participation in political life (Moore, 2014).

Comparative studies have helped to expand the analytical scope of the study of social mobilisation in China. Having compared the Soviet and Chinese collectivisation campaigns, Thomas Bernstein identifies several special aspects for analysing mobilisation in rural China in the 1950s. Both the Soviet Union and China were in need of breakthroughs in agriculture, but their campaigns were found to have achieved different outcomes because of ‘the forces and pressures that each regime had set in motion’ (Bernstein, 1967, p. 1). In addition to creating an optimistic climate, competitive pressures were also created within the party-state system, and different groups were also mobilised. The awareness of such complexities has given rise to the inclusion of more factors and subordinate processes in the analysis, such as lower-level leaderships, their experiences, training and performance, policy continuity, the interplay of local and state interests, and work teams. More importantly, the comparative viewpoint
also regards mobilisation as a process. Despite the lack of details on the collectivevisation, and despite the disastrous end of the campaign (Lin, 1990), our understanding of social mobilisation has been broadened as more China observers have since recognised social mobilisation in China as a complex process.

For a range of reasons, China’s rural collectivisation in the 1950s has been the main topic of many scholarly efforts, while efforts have also been made to analyse some social mobilisations during the Cultural Revolution (Bernstein, 1977; Andreas, 2007). Leaving the latter aside because of its intricacy, Franz Schurmann even considers the commune organisation in rural China in the 1950s as a category of mobilisation, while revealing the link between material incentives and mobilisation (Schurmann, 1968). Barry Richman observes that like every country in postwar years, China focused its efforts on economic growth through industrialisation, which mainly ‘involves the coordination of human effort and material resources’ for achieving the plan (Richman, 1969, p.21). Social mobilisation and distribution of resources are, therefore, mentioned in several studies, but its theoretic importance has not been further studied. This is partially because the CCP relied unduly on its ability to organise campaigns when the rural collectivisation started to run into trouble. Therefore, various aspects of resource mobilisation have remained unexplored or underexplored.

What happened in China from the late 1950s onwards gave rise to a narrow focus on various forms of political mobilisation. Based on the understanding that all mobilisations are politically determined, Schenk-Sandbergen identifies the role of two factors: the population base and resistance, such as clan groups, in political mobilisation (1973, p.684). Unlike Schurmann’s focus on the ideological adaption to China’s local conditions, Schenk-Sandbergen (1973) emphasises the importance of ideology as a means for political mobilisation and considers class-consciousness, the CCP’s ‘mass-line’ and people’s adaptability as three ideological starting points in mobilisation. Although other scholars consider ideology just as fundamental as economic and administrative means (Hsiao, 1960; Pye, 1968), the focus on it has drawn too much attention to political and ideological aspects of social mobilisation.

Researchers have gained a fuller understanding of mobilisations in China since from the mid-1970s, shortly before and after Mao’s death, but China has since also been used as an experimental ground for testing existing theories. One such effort is Charles Cell’s study of dozens of campaigns from an apparently functionalist viewpoint (Cell, 1977, p.3). Despite being imperfect, Cell’s analysis has challenged popular understanding, believing that frequent and large-scale campaigns are often counterproductive (Baum, 1978). From his sociological point of view, Cell argues
that campaigns seem to flow from the problems or contradictions at hand and can be divided into three types: struggle, ideological and economic. Measuring campaigns by the mobilisation level, achievements and shortcomings, Cell also argues that different kinds of social mobilisations are in fact an effective tool for promoting social change in China. A conflict perspective has also been used and tested in the Chinese context, including the relation between China’s internal mobilisation and articulated hostility to foreign powers (Liao, 1976).

Since the start of China’s reform in the late 1970s, researchers have turned their attention to new data accessible since the open-door policy was introduced, allowing some foreign scholars to do fieldwork in certain Chinese regions. As will be discussed in the next section, Lynn White’s study of the Shanghai delta region benefits from the change, allowing it to include an innovative focus on the role of ‘local leaders, social groups and individuals seizing the initiatives from the weakening grip of the state’, as commented by Young (2000, p. 169). Over the same period, some other China specialists have also identified ‘the consequences of unrestricted mass mobilization’ (Harding, 1981, p. 233), which became apparent in the Siqing Campaign and worsened in the early Cultural Revolution. Such mobilisation once made China’s Party leadership dysfunctional, resulting from the wholesale denunciation of lower-level bureaucrats.

China’s decades-long reform since the late 1970s has also added many new topics and issues to the field of China studies. Research on China has become further diversified beyond existing viewpoints and knowledge, including the outdated and partial understanding of social mobilisation. More researchers have given attention to the issues that have emerged from China’s reforms. Among the new issues, the birth-control campaign after 1979 is a reminder that mobilisation is still an active part of the post-revolution Chinese political process (White, 1990). As Tyrene White reveals in her study, the only change in using the social mobilisation mechanism is the use of new language, such as modernisation. Also emerging are in-depth analyses of the mobilisation of emotions in China (Perry, 2002; Y. Liu, 2010), filling a gap left by the overemphasis on the roles of social structure, political crisis, ideology and other factors in mass campaigns.

Despite these research efforts, which have resulted in a small body of literature and better understanding, the changes in post-1978 China have, as already noted, drawn research attention away from what we have called the focused studies of post-revolution mobilisation. However, these focused studies have revealed the importance of mobilisation both during the revolution and in the post-revolution era, and the various manners in which this mechanism has operated. Of course, these studies have paid more attention to the top-down process than to the bottom-up process.
and the involvement of individuals, groups and local bureaucrats in social mobilisations. Importantly, many still view various forms of mobilisation in China from the post-revolution point of view or the perspective of conflict, not as a normal part of social life, which has prevented them from having a better understanding.

Other Mobilisation-Related Studies in the Reform Period

As previously pointed out, the shifting research interests and perspectives that have taken place in China since the late 1970s and early 1980s have made studies of mobilisations highly diversified. The shift initially reflected not only the rapid changes resulting from the early rural reform of the late 1970s, but also the view believing that there was a ‘decentralized, demobilized thrust of the post-Mao reforms’ (White, 1990, p. 53). The thrust is believed to herald the start of China’s post-revolution phase and adaptive governance, although some disagree with this assessment. Such understandings have even led some analysts to believe in the possibility of political normalisation, regularised decision-making and institutionalised rule in China, while many others have accepted the emergence of the adaptive governance that is characterised by guerrilla policy style (Heilmann and Perry, 2011, p. 7). All these perspectives have broadened the scope of research on social mobilisation, giving rise to debates on many issues related to the complex picture of China’s continuing reforms. This has not only gone far beyond what was initially predicted, but also appears to be more comprehensive than a guerrilla policy style.

Because of a vast amount of literature on the new topics, this part of the review is selective by necessity, focusing on three areas: rural reforms; public policy and public administration reforms; and mass politics and media.

China’s post-1978 rural reforms have been the topic of numerous studies of social mobilisation, while the one-child policy has been attracting the attention of many other researchers. The rural reforms were caused by strong grassroots pressure when China’s state capacity was weakened by the Cultural Revolution (White, 1998, 1999), towards the end of which there was growing power among the peasants (Kelliher, 1992; Ash, 2001). Such strong pressure once posed a serious challenge to Maoist rural policies, but theoretically, it also gave rise to ideas that differed from the established top-down perspective. Among many studies of the changes caused by the rural reform (Goldman and MacFarquhar, 1999), Lynn White’s (1998, 1999) study of the Shanghai region pays attention to the issues of when China’s reform started, who initiated it and how it was carried out, from a local perspective. Though her study appears to be...
descriptive, it undoubtedly identifies local causes of the reform in several areas, especially many causes that were never taken into consideration in earlier debates, including the roles of local groups and interests in forming policies and actual reform programmes. Some of these factors are, in fact, an alternative way of mobilising resources and people behind a common cause. All these findings are still helpful to current discussions as they contest ‘deeply engrained understandings’ about the top-down nature of the Chinese state and society (Fewsmith, 2001).

While the above type of studies has broadened understanding of contemporary China, giving rise to an awareness that social processes, forces and mobilisation in China are complex, multi-dimensional and multi-directional, many analysts have still been influenced by a deterministic view of Chinese political economy and culture (Shi, 2000). Analysts are often divided, taking either a top-down or a bottom-up approach to issues, and the interactions of local and central politics are frequently overlooked, which has been one of the most unfortunate omissions in contemporary China studies. Having identified the importance of local forces, more studies have focused on a range of issues at lower levels. However, partly because of the complexity, in later reform programs, especially rural industrialisation, the issues related to social mobilisation have drawn insufficient attention compared with the efforts of economists. Even those interested in the bottom-up point of view have continued to give more attention to top-level politics and ideology than to other issues (Burns, 1988).

The complexities of politics at a grassroots level are a vital part of understanding post-1978 rural China, but many efforts are made in line with the theoretical views that are inadequately related to China’s changing socio-political circumstances. This has meant that less attention is paid to how local groups and interests are involved in local economic programmes, which are vital to the restructuring of rural China, and that more attention is given to social and political forms of rural transformation. Other than rural mass protests, which will be briefly discussed later, village elections are the topic on which many studies have been conducted in the past decades (Goldman and MacFarquhar, 1999; Schubert and Ahlers, 2012). Overshadowed by such theoretical problems are rural social and demographical structures and other local factors, as well as social mobilisations in response to rural industrialisation (He, 2015). The latter has become a far more critical step in rural poverty reduction and economic growth than introducing political changes, and it has mobilised far more participants across the country than the push for democracy in rural China. Even when the CCP decided to recruit private entrepreneurs into the Party, there were few researchers devoting attention to the local responses and activities that were related to such new circumstances (Zheng, 2010). In other words,
though many agree that mass mobilisation has been a key feature of Chinese political life since the Maoist era (Perry, 2002), the persistent habit of seeing China as an authoritarian regime has prevented attention being paid to new forms of social mobilisation and participation in the process of Chinese rural industrialisation.

China’s recent push to urbanise rural areas, which is, as introduced earlier, called ‘the new socialist countryside’ campaign, has renewed research interest in social mobilisation activities since the mid-2000s (Bislev and Thogersen, 2012; Harwood, 2014). Less attention is now being paid to the political meaning of the word ‘socialist’ in the name of this nationwide campaign, but more efforts have been made to study how the rural urbanisation campaign is operated and how rural regions are modernised by the initiative. Recent studies have identified several key factors that can shape the campaign, including ‘the strength of bureaucratic mobilization, the weakness of rural organizations, and shifting national policy priorities’ (Looney, 2015, p. 911), while some other studies have focused on the implementation and effectiveness of social mobilisations in present-day China (Perry, 2011; Ahlers, 2014). Because many other changes have occurred to China’s decision-making and rural society has not been systematically studied, especially the nature of new social mobilisations, some recent studies appear to further establish that ‘mobilization has remained an integral, active part of the post-revolutionary Chinese political process’ (White, 1990, p. 55). The conventional narrow focus on the form, content and intensity of social mobilisation seems to have prevented analysts from forming a new explanation of the mechanism in present-day China.

The second main research area in which a range of key aspects of social mobilisation has been identified and studied relates closely to studies of public policy and administration, many of which were first conducted by economists.

China’s reforms were expanded from villages to cities in the early 1980s, and the complexities of urban society made it very difficult to repeat what was learnt from rural reforms. One of the main problems was from the party-state system, a situation that has long been called zhonggengzu (literally ‘intermediary obstacles’), which refers to different types of bureaucratic obstacles at the middle levels of China’s party-state system. Officials or bureaucrats working within the system were reluctant in the mid-1980s to implement reform policies, which forced the top CCP leadership to launch administrative reform to remove some obstacles and to make the system efficient in mobilising active participations in reforms (Goldman, 1994).

Because it was impossible at the time, just a few years after Mao’s disastrous Cultural Revolution, to launch a full-scale administrative or
political reform, the intermediary obstruction issue of the system was dealt with in numerous ways. These small-step administrative reform measures included some changes to central–local relations to encourage lower-level bureaucracies to implement economic reform policies and the introduction of market mechanisms into economic management to deliberately bypass parts of middle-level bureaucracies (Breslin, 1996; Li, 1998). All these measures in early stages of China’s urban reform greatly improved the institutional environment for implementing new reform strategies and broadened channels suitable for mobilising mass participation in different reform programmes. Local participation in rural industrialisation became possible as an effect of these changes, which reveals an interesting aspect of new social mobilisations in China.

In addition to the issue of problematic bureaucracies, attention has also been paid to the ways in which resources as a vital component of central–local relations could be better mobilised and deployed. At first sight, China’s one-party rule ensures its ability to assert its power for resource mobilisation, but the concentrated political power is also found to be a problem when it comes to mobilising individuals to participate in reforms. Fiscal decentralisation has been one of the CCP’s strategies since the 1980s to deal with political challenges of economic reform, especially with the central–local relations and bureaucratic obstacles. Trials on a new revenue-sharing mechanism were conducted as early as 1977 and the new mechanism was introduced nationwide in 1980 (Shirk, 1993). Though the fiscal decentralisation policy does not always work (Shue and Wong, 2007), it has been tried and modified repeatedly as both an incentive and a mechanism to encourage local participation in reform programmes, including the recent rural urbanisation scheme (Kung et al., 2013). There has been a clear transition from political mobilisation to resource mobilisation, in which the political and economic dynamics between the mobilisers and the mobilised have been transformed over time, while the position and role of bureaucratic agencies at different levels in governance have also been transformed, becoming as important as central decision-makers. Therefore, some observers believe that there has been a trend to rectify the statist tactic in China, and that pervasive localism that emerged in the late Maoist era has further evolved into a dynamic force (Whiting, 2000).

Some political economists have also considered the issue of social mobilisation based on various policy changes, and attention has been devoted to China’s state capacity and the sustainability of its growth. Economic reforms in China have always been subject to the fluctuations of economic cycles, producing numerous ups and downs over the past few decades. However, the state’s ability to ‘mobilize all sorts of society’s resources, to unite all forces in society’, as well as to form a consensus and to maintain
the solidarity of the nation, has been regarded as an essential mechanism for driving modernisation (Wang and Hu, 2001, p.3). Though some observers believe that there is an erosion of ‘the ruling regime’s ability to mobilise political support’ (Pei, 2008, p.168), the CCP is still believed to have the ‘organizational capacity to launch Mao-style political campaign’ (Zeng, 2013, p.126). Of course, there are few analysts who still believe that recent campaigns in China are characterised by the Maoist style, but social mobilisation has been found to be an effective means of implementing new policy initiatives and driving the economy out of a downturn, through mobilising human and material resources at a societal scale. Recently, the state capacity viewpoint has given rise to a perspective of dynamic interaction, which emphasises that new policy initiatives are not based on a one-sided national strategy, but decided ‘by day-to-day interactions between state agents of various levels and different social groups in multiple arenas’ (Zeng, 2013, p.24).

The third key area in which the social mobilisation mechanism has been actively studied is relatively new, which is its utilisation in mass politics and mass media.

China’s ongoing reforms since the late 1970s and early 1980s have resulted in several rounds of administrative decentralisation and many new forms of mass politics, such as rural resistance and urban labour protests. Some student protests, especially the one in 1989, have attracted the interest of China analysts (D. Zhao, 1998). Recently, social mobilisation has been seen in efforts to encourage ‘people to take action and prepare themselves for the future’ (Chapin, 2014, p.519). At the same time, the dynamics of various social movements as a category of mobilisation have also changed significantly, and the participants, if not the facilitators, are no longer those left behind by China’s rapid economic growth, but members of the so-called new middle class (Wasserstrom, 2009). Many popular protests, including those by middle-class groups, are still political, but previously common approaches of politicising protests are no longer widely used, as protests are now found to be set off by specific events, rather than ideology (Bruun, 2013). All these non-institutional mobilisations or social activism are now considered to be part of new social mobilisations in China, but they often take the form of popular discontent and protests, bottom-up modes of mobilisation (Cai, 2010). Therefore, the trend of divergence in studying them as a phenomenon, and as a social mechanism, not only remains, but has also reached the extent that many correlated issues need to be reconsidered theoretically.

Different from the above-mentioned forms of social mobilisation, mass-protest mobilisations have been so widespread or routinised that they are now considered a crucial sign of the emergence of new models
China’s current rural urbanisation and historical context

of state–society relations or new categories of authoritarianism (X. Chen, 2012). These new models or forms seem to suggest that a mass perspective, a different type of bottom-up perspective, of Chinese socio-political life has been further developed and adopted as a way of looking at present-day Chinese society and politics. However, analysts have different views about how to explain, or theorise, the bottom-up mass mobilisations, and some still see them from the conflict perspective, tending to separate challengers or protests from not only state- or elite-led mobilisations, but, more importantly, also from other normal socio-political activities. Although the dynamics of contention perspective have been introduced to the discussion (O’Brien, 2008; Liu, 2015), interactions between the state and other challenging agencies are still considered disconnected by some, and the paradigms of high democratisation and activism or popular riot are so dominant that they seem to have slowed the process of forming a more sophisticated, understanding of social mobilisation and movement. To explain why individuals can be easily mobilised to participate in mass protests when the state encounters problems in mobilising the nation behind its goals, the concept of the ‘microfoundations’ of the macro-phenomena is introduced to emphasise the importance of both the micro–macro link and the new elite–mass relations (Zha, 2015, pp. 1–2).

Despite many theoretical distractions, the studies of mass protests since the 1990s have formed some shared understandings. While more researchers now accept that the routinisation of protests as the repetition of such social mobilisations has not destabilised China’s political system and process as predicted, other researchers agree that protests and other forms of activism as a disruptive force are becoming a vital form of political participation (Cai, 2010). Such viewpoints imply that social mobilisation has not only become part of normal political life in China, but has also been expressed in different ways. With more analysts accepting social mobilisations as part of everyday Chinese life, many have turned their research attention to different forms of activism and mobilisation, especially those that mainstream the elite still refuse to accept. However, politics in China is now highly polarised, and political elites still do not recognise certain forms of activism and mobilisation as a way of socio-political participation. This remains a big challenge to China’s post-industrial phase of development. At the same time, some studies of rural activism are guided by urban-biased concepts or imported theories, and some inherent factors, such as clan networks, are overlooked (Shih, 1995; Ma, 2006).

Fortunately, modern China has never stagnated for lack of change and diversity. In the past decades, while more local and global factors have been closely intertwined to cause changes, new communication technologies, including new media, as a type of disruptive force have also played a crucial
role in political participation and mass activism. The Chinese media started its partial commercialisation in the 1980s, and it has continued while being controlled by the party-state. The role of the media in mobilising socio-political participation from both top-down and bottom-up directions has been disrupted and accelerated by the internet and various other new communication and media technologies. Because of the changes, dichotomies of ‘freedom versus control’, ‘democracy versus authoritarianism’, ‘regime versus resistance’, and ‘coevolution’ of the new media environment and civil society, are all believed to be no longer sufficient to explain what has taken place in China (deLisle et al., 2016, p. 3). While the new media environments, including media liberalisation, eventually created more chances for mass activism and mobilisation, researchers are still unable to identify a new holistic or integrated approach, rather they create other dichotomies based on the theoretical separation of society and state. What looks promising now, however, is that various viewpoints have been put forward to analyse the Chinese state, such as responsive authoritarianism (Reilly, 2012; Heurlin, 2016) and the nature of mass protests, such as the notion of political contestation (Fewsmith, 2001; Xia, 2008). What is needed now is to consider various forms of social activism and mobilisation as a normal part of socio-political life in post-industrial China.

Towards a Holistic-Dynamic Approach

The previous two sections have reviewed the existing literature on social mobilisation in China, focusing on various issues crucial to the understanding of social mobilisation as a key socioeconomic and socio-political mechanism in China. Since its introduction, the concept of social mobilisation has been applied beyond what Deutsch originally considered as an overall process of moving from traditional to modern ways of life, and it has since been used to study not only various campaigns, but also various China-related issues. As indicated, the latter efforts were made in two different stages, and have prepared the ground for further inquiry into social mobilisation in post-industrial China. Based on this review, there is an obvious need to update our understanding of the social mobilisation mechanism in present-day China, especially its use at the current post-industrial stage of Chinese development. There is also a need to consider this mechanism not only from a holistic point of view of taking more factors of the whole reality into account, but also from a dynamic perspective to treat it as active interactions of multiple institutional and individual forces and agencies.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, this review aims to clarify how Chinese research publications are used in this book before a new analytical perspective is further discussed. A reason for this is that there has been
a large volume of research publications, mostly articles in journals, published in China in the past 15 or so years. These publications have not only covered what has been explored by research publications in English, but also include the many emerging issues and topics that Chinese analysts have identified from their direct involvement in everyday life. While the former fact has not been fully explained to non-Chinese readers, which means many of them still believe that Western ideas are strange to Chinese minds, the latter has offered far more research outputs in the field than other researchers could produce. Since the Chinese publications have had a much smaller readership, they will be used as documentary or textual sources along with other secondary sources, such as policy documents, policy analyses and media coverage of related issues.

Theoretically, these Chinese publications are helpful in examining social mobilisation in present-day China in at least two different ways. First, they tend to relate their analyses of social mobilisation to many other issues, ranging from changing central–local relations in China, a series of taxation reforms and land finance, to rural elections. Second, such broad perspectives have already revealed a new understanding of the nature of present-day Chinese politics, according to which China’s domestic politics, political structure and power relationships have been transformed considerably, and have entered what Chinese analysts have often called the era of *boyi*, ‘strategic game playing’ (Lee and Zhang, 2013, p. 1486). This current era is no longer guided or dominated by any rigid ideology or political doctrine, as some analysts have wrongly assumed. Instead, it is clearly characterised by a post-Deng, if not post-revolution, political order that has brought almost all social classes and sectors of Chinese society into the national political equation, turning China into a country that is full of political tensions and negotiations among different social forces and groups (Liang, 2014, p. 119; Tang, 2014, p. 124). It is under such circumstances that China started its current round of rural urbanisation and has since implemented it in many regions.

The use of the social mobilisation mechanism in China’s new *boyi* era, therefore, is one of the main research questions of this book. It is also worth pointing out that the concept of social mobilisation, as it is used in this book, is based on a few earlier definitions, including those by Deutsch (1961) and UNICEF (2015), but the concept is used here to specifically refer to the large-scale advocacy of a series of actions proposed by high-level, decision-making institutions, and supported by other stakeholders, to achieve a long-term strategic goal of national, subnational or regional socioeconomic development. Since social mobilisation is a complex process, this book is based on what has been defined as a holistic-dynamic approach to focus on the following points.
First, social mobilisation as a crucial mechanism is not only still in use in China, but is also playing a more pivotal role in organising and directing China’s social, economic and political life than before, especially because of China’s high level of economic activity and socio-political participation by the public. As mentioned, there has been a debate on whether social mobilisation still plays a role in China now, and there are analyses that dispute the idea that post-revolution regimes ‘lose capacity and desire to use mobilizational means’ and emphasise that ‘mobilization remained an essential instrument’ in present-day China (White, 1990, pp. 54–5). However, some analysts have challenged the latter part of the argument, because there is a lack of in-depth studies to support the explanation.

While the confusion over the mobilisation mechanism is a result of numerous changes in China, especially those connected to party-state bureaucracies, governance and social control practices, the emergence and diversification of many studies of the issue have blurred our understanding. Since the late 1970s, there have been numerous efforts made by Chinese reformers to identify new mechanisms to replace or supplement old governance practices. Since the responsibility system was tried in rural China, it has been widely regarded as a practical and efficient way of connecting national interests with individual benefits. The complexity of urban reforms, however, has resulted in the lack of focused attention on the use of the social mobilisation mechanism, and the fragmented understanding of all these issues by some analysts has been reduced to the dilution of political power and social mobilisation in China. Therefore, what requires research attention is not only how this mechanism has evolved into what it is now, but also how it has lately been used and its nature and new characteristics. The first step of such new research efforts is to identify and analyse both the existence and importance of the mechanism in this rapidly changing society.

Second, the key issue in forming a new understanding of the social mobilisation mechanism in China is not only to go beyond the current understanding of both top-down and bottom-up processes, but also to examine and define the basis on which social mobilisation functions and is used, as well as its political and economic nature. In the 1960s, Chalmers Johnson defined social mobilisation in China as a dynamic process, a definition that has since been shared by many analysts. However, the meaning of ‘dynamic’ has not yet been fully unfolded. Some analysts have paid attention to its temporal dimension, while others have emphasised the role of different forces or actors in the process. Lately, because of the rapid and far-reaching changes, it has now become even more difficult than before to clearly tell what forces and motivations are involved in any mobilisation process. Without such understanding, mobilisation in
this rapidly changing country is no longer a known process, and now there is hardly anyone who can explain how each part of the system is mobilised and its role in the process. What has happened since the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s is a far more complex process than earlier studies revealed. Social mobilisations are found to involve not only sharing ideas and aspirations, employing institutional resources and symbolic powers, but also distributing and channelling material resources and benefits, in which bargaining for the interests of the mobilisers and the mobilised, and negotiations and even protests, have taken place at all levels.

As mentioned, the new rural household responsibility system was expanded to other sectors in Chinese cities, and one of the many new practices in non-agricultural sectors has been called the performance-based assessment system. Having been directed by the pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping, the new system fitted China’s need to reform its economy at the time. However, it has further weakened the ideology-based rule, and social mobilisations have since displayed a clear trend, moving towards a new politics based on shared needs, and material interests and benefits. While some analysts are still using the outdated top-down approach, more have realised that grassroots groups, lower-level officials and citizens have played a crucial role in initiating and driving various forms of social mobilisation. These new forms can be defined as the bottom-up process, but social mobilisation is no longer operating along the top-down and bottom-up dichotomy. In fact, even the interactive approach is no longer reliable for explaining how the two processes have interacted. All these should be further explored, especially the new nature of common interest-based social mobilisations.

Third, the process of developing new explanations about the use of mobilisation in China has been particularly challenged by the issue of how to define many forms of mass popular protests and activism. This has been a difficult issue because such protests in China are normally directed against government policies and institutions. That is, they are frequently considered from the conflict perspective. Similar actions in some other countries are seen as part of normal social life, but those taking place in China are regarded as not only conflicts, but also as abnormal ones that cannot be resolved simply. Such a theoretical orientation has, of course, been challenged by the relatively stable development that China has achieved so far, but various theories based on such orientations remain influential, preventing researchers from seeing socioeconomic and socio-political life in present-day China as normal. There is ample evidence indicating that conflicts have accompanied China’s transition to an industrial society, and that parties on both sides of a conflict should be considered as participants in societal-level negotiations. Evidence from a
few less-politicised fields also suggests that there has been a general trend called *minjin guotui*, showing that private sectors have been advancing while the state has been retreating (Lardy, 2014, pp. 89–93). The trend is not limited to economic activities, but has also spread to other areas. Social mobilisation has, to some extent, played a role of compensating the managerial decentralisation through allowing grassroots groups and citizens to seek what they require. However, these emerging relationships between the state and society, especially numerous forms of social mobilisation, can only be clearly understood by looking beyond the paradigm of irresolvable conflict.

Finally, the holistic-dynamic approach employed in this book will be of great help in addressing a special age-old problem in studying social mobilisation: the overemphasis on authoritarianism. It was since the work of Deutsch that political scientists’ involvement in the study has led to more attention being paid to authoritarian regimes and the top-down process. This review has revealed that researchers have seen and analysed new and complex forms of social mobilisation in China from viewpoints of different disciplines. Such interdisciplinary efforts have made it clear that the mobilisation mechanism has not only been applied in non-political contexts, but has also often been involved in multi-step, multi-directional and multi-faceted processes or interactions. Because dogmatic beliefs are often influential, many previous studies have separated out not only certain categories of social mobilisation from the others, but they have also separated research in one discipline from research in other fields, making it difficult to reach a fuller and clearer understanding of how social mobilisation is utilised in present-day China, and therefore resulting in the academic tendency to ‘know more and more about less and less’ (Shambaugh, 2013, pp. ix–x). The holistic-dynamic approach suggested by this literature review emphasises that analysts should go beyond disciplinary and political boundaries, and take into consideration more factors or issues than those already known to make qualified analyses of social mobilisation in contemporary China.

Methodologically, this book is primarily based on the data collected through the joint efforts of the two authors. As noted in the Preface, co-author Yuanyuan Su spent a few months in Shandong province, which is one of China’s eastern provinces in north China, southeast of Beijing, and she did her fieldwork in the region in 2012–13 after being accepted as a PhD candidate in sociology at the School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Nanjing University. By employing the research skills that she learnt as a BA and MA student from the same school, she conducted a series of interviews, both structured and unstructured, with village residents and leaders, as well as officials from a few local government offices.
Observations were also made in a village-turned-town in a central region of the province, where local households at the time were all in the process of deciding whether shanglou, to move elsewhere or to accept the offer to move into new apartment buildings. A wide range of regulatory documents and historical archives about the policy and the region was also collected.

Co-author Jia Gao also interviewed many people, mainly officials and bureaucrats, policy analysts, academic researchers, business operators and owners in a few cities in Shandong and Beijing. Such face-to-face meetings are helpful for understanding local activities in executing this new countryside strategy and local responses to the campaign, but the focus is largely on the roles of each stakeholder in the process. Similar interviews were also conducted in Australia, where many hundreds of new migrants come from China’s Shandong province. Many of them have witnessed the changes and activities in association with the new socialist countryside campaign in their home regions. Jia Gao also did numerous rounds of online search for more publicly available information, especially openly published documents, from the websites of concerned authorities and institutions. The online search identified many government documents and media coverage of the campaign in many regions in China, including some in Shandong, revealing a clear picture of how the new countryside campaign is organised.

ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK

What has been introduced up to this point is the general background, both historical and theoretical, to this analysis. This book is about the use of social mobilisation in China in a new era that is largely characterised by both the new political reality, which is widely called the era of political boyi, and the post-industrial stage of Chinese socioeconomic development. To systematically and credibly explain and theorise how the social mobilisation mechanism has been deployed recently in China, and how the mechanism has evolved into its current form and state, this book has six discussion chapters detailing and examining the main findings, plus a concluding chapter.

Chapter 2 builds on background information provided in this first chapter and considers the evolving role of China’s central decision-makers in launching new policy initiatives. Many issues at this level of Chinese politics and governance have been considered by researchers, giving rise to various ideas, such as ‘the retreating of totalitarianism’ (Frenkiel, 2015, p. 123), ‘the decline in the Chinese state’s political capacity’ (Misra, 2016, p. 149), and even the optimistic consideration of the CCP as a transformed...
Social mobilisation in post-industrial China

‘organizational emperor’ (Zheng, 2010, p. 16). However, there are not many studies dedicated to the consideration of the central decision-makers’ recent role in developing and implementing a major policy initiative, in the context of which the dynamics of the process can be fully unfolded. To illustrate the whole process, both historically and spatially, Chapter 2 begins with a section that analyses the new political reality of post-Mao China. The second section looks at the reformist responses to the political reality, especially various multifaceted transformations of China’s centralised, authoritarian political power, which have been going on since the early 1980s. The third section turns attention back to the central question of this book, which is why the mobilisation mechanism is still seen as the core of state capacity in China while it has been decentralising power. The fourth and last section details the circumstances under which the current rural urbanisation strategy is initiated as the CCP’s legitimacy-seeking efforts in China’s transition to a post-industrial economy.

Chapter 3 focuses on the politics of social mobilisation at the provincial level, the example of which is based on China’s eastern province of Shandong. The role of Chinese provinces in the country’s socioeconomic development has drawn the attention of many researchers and because of the general recognition of the increasing importance of the party-state systems at the provincial level, some even believe that there has been a development of ‘local state corporatism’ (Oi, 1992, p. 99) or an apparent ‘emergence of local state corporatism’ (Goodman, 2015, p. 4). After several rounds and forms of decentralisation, it now seems impossible to understand China without adequate knowledge of provinces (Bo, 2015). Because of the vertical complexity of China’s party-state systems and the sizes of provincial population and economy, the analysis of current uses of social mobilisation in China also requires more attention to be shown to the province level than previous studies have done. This chapter examines how social mobilisation is implemented, especially how it is eventually translated into political power, action and, therefore, a new form of local politics in Shandong. The first section briefly introduces some background information about Shandong province, especially its past involvement and role in the formation of various rural polices in China. The second section looks at the routine efforts by provincial bureaucracies to implement the new rural strategy, with special attention devoted to their role as shaped by their position, which is not only vertically positioned between the central government and lower-tier governments, but also horizontally positioned among different parallel government agencies. The third section focusses on the creative implementation, as well as decision-making, by provincial bureaucracies, which have generated the various types of dynamics that have been powerfully directing and driving the implementation of the strategy in the province.
Chapter 4 looks at a newly emerging dimension of the use of the social mobilisation mechanism in China in recent years, which is the function of the market, or market forces, in social mobilisation. The market as an important driver of socioeconomic progress has gradually emerged in China since the 1990s because of China’s ongoing reforms in the economy and public administration, if not politics. Nowadays, market forces are playing an increasingly important role in governing economic activities and shaping socio-political conditions of present-day China. However, this is an area of research that has rarely been studied along with the function of formal party-state bureaucracies or beyond political-economic debates of market liberalisation. The discussion in this chapter is a preliminary attempt to include this main aspect in the discussion of social mobilisation in contemporary China. This chapter starts with a review of China’s market liberalisation that has taken place since the early years of its reform. This historical background section is followed by two discussion sections. The first discusses the role of market forces in driving the new rural building scheme in Shandong at provincial and prefectural levels. The second section looks in detail at how local companies had acted as the mobilisers at county and township levels in Laiwu.

Chapter 5 examines the function of the prefectural level of China’s middle bureaucracy in social mobilisation. Theoretically, many earlier studies have focused attention on two obvious ends of the mobilisation process, which are the central leadership and the grassroots reactions. What has not been adequately examined is the role of bureaucracies at both the prefectural level and the county level, which may perhaps be defined as China’s middle bureaucracy. This chapter pays attention to the prefectural level of the bureaucracy. Because this is still an under-researched area, this chapter will start with an analysis of how the zhonggengzu (intermediary obstacles) issue has been debated and handled from the viewpoint of central–local relations. This is followed by three sections looking specifically at how social mobilisation for the new rural plan has been undertaken in Laiwu, the smallest prefectural-level city in Shandong. The first section is an introduction of Laiwu and the second section is the discussion of how the tasks of mobilising local participation in the new plan are prioritised by Laiwu’s leadership and bureaucracies. The third section looks at the project-driven approach that Laiwu has adopted to implement its prioritised projects, with the aim of showing how the rural construction scheme is being put into operation and how the land finance (tudi caizheng) is used at the prefectural level.

Chapter 6 deals with the awkward roles of the county and township governments in the rural urbanisation campaign. There are some studies of what has been happening at the county or the township levels from the
Social mobilisation in post-industrial China

policy implementation perspective, but few studies have considered these in the context of implementing a national strategic policy. Consequently, the roles of these two lowest levels of bureaucracy have hardly been studied in a broader context or in a systematic manner. The roles of the county and township governments were found to be awkward when this analysis placed them in the context of both the entire bureaucratic system and the whole process of policy implementation. Their awkward roles are in fact a pointer to a unique feature of social mobilisation in contemporary China, which is the frequent change in its bureaucratic management and the goal-oriented performance tied to the specific objectives of different reform programmes. This chapter will start with an explanation of why the governments at these two levels have become awkward in the new rural urbanisation campaign. Despite the awkwardness of their roles, the governments at these two levels still have their roles to play in executing the new rural strategy, which is the focus of the second and third discussion sections of this chapter.

Chapter 7 extends the discussion to grassroots reactions to the new rural urbanisation scheme, with an aim to show the entire process of social mobilisation in contemporary China. As indicated in the heading of this chapter, this discussion considers various forms of reactions or protests from a participatory perspective to offer a new explanation of the nature of grassroots discontent, resistance and protests in China in recent years. The latter has been a popular subject among researchers, China specialists and journalists for a few decades, which has even resulted in an impression that China may collapse at any moment because of widespread protests. What these analysts and commentators have overlooked is the close correlation between social reactions and government initiatives, and the individual interests and motives behind social actions, as well as strategic games played out for achieving their goals. This chapter challenges the inadequately explained nature of grassroots reactions to the new rural construction and details how some forms of social reactions have been used to influence the decision-making process and obtain material benefit. This chapter has three sections. The first introduces some basic information about the villages on which our analysis is based. The second and third sections examine two main aspects of the grassroots reactions to the implementation of the new countryside scheme in Laiwu.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of this book, where we look at the two important remaining issues of this project. First, this chapter further summarises the main theoretical points that can be derived from this study. The chapter aims to offer theoretical insights into how the social mobilisation mechanism in China could be better considered. Second, this chapter also puts forward some suggestions for future research directions on this topic.
Social mobilisation is not only a very important mechanism in socioeconomic and political life and a key aspect of state capacity, but it offers a unique perspective to understand a social system and process. Based on the experience gained conducting this study, this concluding chapter offers advice for further research on the topic.