Villains, victims and aspiring proprietors: Framing ‘land-losing villagers’ in China's strategies of accumulation.

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Abstract
This paper examines how debates in China’s media are providing the discursive conditions for, and thereby giving impetus to diverse strategies of ‘so-called primitive accumulation’. Taking as its empirical referent Chinese news and journal articles on land enclosure, the paper analyses three frames in which policy entrepreneurs craft varying class positions for land-losing villagers. Grounded in different ontological premises, problem diagnoses, and recommendations centering on the adoption of either a statist, neo-collective, or liberal rural land regime, and backed up by evaluations of local policy experiments, the frames illustrate the diversity of ideational, political and institutional configurations that could facilitate the separation of peasant producers from the land, place land-losing villagers in different relationships with the state and capital, and sustain accumulation. In foregrounding these debates over land losing villagers’ future class positioning, the paper aims to offer a corrective to the historical determinism implicit in contemporary analyses that characterize enclosure in China as simply one national manifestation of homogenous, global neo-liberal projects of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ or ‘gangster capitalism’.

Speaker
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