

**JUMPING THE GUN:
LOCAL AGENCY AND EARLY EXPERIMENTS IN THE SOCIALIST
TRANSFORMATION OF RURAL SOCIETY IN REVOLUTIONARY CHINA**

A Dissertation

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This dissertation investigates why in the early 1950s the Chinese Communist Party launched the agricultural cooperative movement, a movement that in many crucial ways resembled earlier collectivization in the Soviet Union. Past research has treated China's cooperative movement as a campaign imposed from above by Mao Zedong. By refocusing scholarly attention from the center to the localities, this dissertation discovers that in its early stage this movement had a measure of strong social support from below. Not denying Mao's dominant role, this dissertation examines the roles of others who were not at the top of the party's hierarchy. It shows how certain cadres at the provincial and prefectural levels first provided Mao Zedong with inspiration, evidence, and even theories, and finally succeeded in convincing him to endorse their plans. Refuting the conventional wisdom that takes this movement as a pre-determined one, this dissertation contends that it was the outcome of a complex combination of ideology, circumstances, domestic politics, and personal ambitions.

In addition to highlighting institutional uncertainty and fluidity, this dissertation also studies the complex interplay between the state's central planning and peasants as agents. Peasants were not simply the receptacle of policies formulated at the highest levels of power: they were always seeking to adapt to local conditions the directives that higher authorities sent down. By studying the cooperative movement at a key experimental site - - Changzhi prefecture in Shanxi province from 1950 to 1953, this dissertation explores the process of mass mobilization in the province and villages.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

XIAOJIA HOU is a Ph.D candidate in History at Cornell University. She received her BA with honors in 1999 and MA in 2002, both from Peking University. Since 2002, she has studied at Cornell University, majoring in modern Chinese history and minoring in Russian history and political science. Her research interests include comparison of communist developments in China and Russia, the Chinese Communist Party's rural policies, and China in the 1950s.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------|--|
| CCP | The Chinese Communist Party (hereafter as the |
| CPSU | The Communist Party of the Soviet Union |
| CPPCC | Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference |
| PRC | The People's Republic of China |
| SPA | Shangxi Provincial Archive |
| JCA | Jincheng City Archive |

NOTE ON MEASURES AND TRANSLITERATION

1 mou = 1/15 hectares = 1/6 acre

1 cattie = 0.5 kilogram = 1.1 pounds

1 dan = 150 cattie = 165 pounds

Introduction

In late 1953 the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter as the CCP or as the party) launched a nation-wide cooperative movement (building agricultural producers' cooperatives), a movement that in many crucial respects resembled collectivization in the Soviet Union.¹ The cooperativization movement reached its "high tide" in 1955-56, was completed in 1956, and ultimately led to the utopian commune movement of 1958. The initial cooperativization movement began the process of putting an end to the customary private peasant economy that had lasted in China for thousands of years by promoting cooperative (semi-socialist) and then fully collective (socialist) ways of life for peasants. By the late 1950s the drive had ended with the most severe famine in human history. Surprisingly, however, the earliest origins of this calamity are poorly understood.

Research on China's cooperativization movement, in English, has mostly focused on its high tide of autumn 1955-spring 1956. In 1966, a ten-year retrospective on China's collectivization, commissioned by Roderick MacFarquhar, Kenneth Walker conducted a ten-year retrospective.² In the following decade, Thomas Bernstein published several important articles comparing the features of China's cooperativization and Soviet collectivization, with much attention given to the high tide.³ His overall evaluation of China's cooperativization might have been overly

1 Gao Huamin, *Nongye hezuoua yundong shimo* (The history of the agricultural collectivization movement) (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1999)

2 Kenneth R. Walker, "Collectivization in retrospect: the 'socialist high tide' of autumn 1955-spring 1956," *The China Quarterly*, no 26 (1966): 1-43.

3 Thomas Bernstein, "Keeping the revolution going: problems of village leadership after land reform," *The China Quarterly*, no 36 (1968): 1-22; "Stalinsim, famine, and Chinese peasants" *Theory and Society* no 13 (1984): 339-377; "Leadership and mass mobilization in the Soviet and Chinese collectivization campaigns of 1929-30 and 1955-56: a comparison," *The China Quarterly*, no 31 (1969): 1-47.

optimistic, judging by recently available sources, but it is remarkable how many of his sharp observations still stand today. In 1993, Frederick Teiwes published a documentary collection on the high tide.⁴ Most recently, in 2006, *The China Quarterly* published a special mini-section under the headline “high tide symposium” to reevaluate the high tide event in retrospect, with contributions by several prominent scholars.⁵

With almost exclusive focus on the high tide, most scholars assume that agricultural development between 1949-55 was a positive phase, that Chinese leaders planned and initiated the cooperativization movement from the center to serve industrialization and that the cooperativization went along smoothly until the turn of 1955-56. As Christopher Howe put it in 2006, “the judgment now is that the movement of co-operatives was a success, but that the accelerated shift in early 1956 to the higher level collectives was a huge mistake.”⁶ With few exceptions,⁷ from a long-term development perspective which the contemporary CCP leaders headed by Mao Zedong seemed to be lacking, western scholars have generally regarded the cooperativization as China’s primitive accumulation for industrialization which was “created to ease implementation the nationalization of grain market [Tonggou tongxiao].”⁸

In the study of China’s cooperativization, economists and political scientists, not historians, have made important contributions. Economists mostly focus on evaluating

4 Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun eds., *The Politics of Agricultural Cooperativization In China* (New York: An East Gate Book, 1993)

5 *The China Quarterly*, (Septmeber, 2006).

6 Christopher Howe, “China’s high tide of socialism of 1955: strategic choices and paths not taken, some changing perspectives ,” *The China Quarterly*, (September, 2006): 756.

7 Thomas Bernstein is one of them. Thirty years ago, he pointed out that primitive accumulation was not the CCP’s main aim of agricultural collectivization, he also underscored the fact that in the early 1950s the party was losing its control over local cadres.

8 Y. Y. Kueh, “Mao and agriculture in China’s industrialization: three antitheses in a 50-year perspective,” *The China Quarterly*, (Septmeber, 2006): 707.

China's cooperativization with respect to its contributions to China's industrialization and modernization; political scientists mainly try to explain the relative lack of resistance during China's cooperativization campaign.⁹ Consequently, the beginning of the cooperativization movement tends to be treated as a fact that should be taken for granted not a historical process in a specific context. Scholars ask and answer the question "why did the cooperativization go wrong in 1955 and what were its influences?" not the question, "how did it start in 1953?" Looking back they have placed the cooperativization movement under China's strategy of industrialization and analyzed it at a macroscopic level. In general, they have regarded the cooperativization as a predetermined development and adopted a top down approach with exclusive focus on central leaders, particularly Mao Zedong.

From the economic perspective, quite a few Chinese scholars hold similar views. Lin Yifu, a leading economist in China, explicitly regarded the cooperativization movement as China's primitive accumulation for industrialization.¹⁰ Wen Tiejun explained the cooperativization movement as the vehicle for the nationalization of the grain market policy of 1953, believing that the state grain department was incapable of forcing peasants to sell surplus grain to the state.¹¹ With more access to Chinese archives, Chinese historians have conducted major research on the course of the cooperativization movement.

In Chinese-language studies, five monographs are dedicated to China's agricultural cooperativization movement. With some special access to the party archives, Gao Huamin carefully examines this movement from the beginning to the

9 Thomas Bernstein; Yu Liu, "Why did it go so high? Political mobilization and agricultural collectivization in China," *The China Quarterly*, (Septmeber, 2006): 732-742.

10 Lin Yifu, Cai (Rifang) and Lizhou, *Zhongguo de qiji* (China's miracle) (Shanghai: Sanlian chubanshe, 1999).

11 Wen Tiejun, *Zhongguo nongcun jiben jingji zhidu yanjiu* (Research on the basic economic principles in Chinese countryside) (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji chubanshe, 2000).

end and compares China's agricultural cooperativization movement with Soviet collectivization. Acknowledging some differences in operations, he convincingly argues that in essence China's agricultural cooperativization movement was fundamentally the same as the Soviet collectivization. Gao Huamin also tries to evaluate the historical role of this movement and answer the question why it went wrong in 1955. Constrained by the limited extent to which the party history is allowed to be criticized, Gao Huamin justifies the movement as whole, especially how it began. He does not challenge the theory of cooperativization. Mainly concerned with high politics, this book is rather weak in narrating what happened to peasants and how peasants reacted to the policy.¹² Du Runsheng, a senior party official who had personally participated and for a while led the cooperativization movement, edited a huge volume on China's cooperativization movement in the 20th century. This volume is a thorough collection of abundant documents based on its authoritative access to the central party archives. However, this volume is even more constrained by political correctness and essentially aims to defend the cooperativization movement. While it serves as a wonderful sourcebook, it fails to analyze the documents it has collected.¹³ Xing Leqin focuses on the high politics and provides rather limited new analyses of the movement.¹⁴ Luo Pinghan pays more attention to the high tide and his research is relatively weak on how the cooperativization started.¹⁵ In 2006 Ye Yangbing published the latest monograph on the cooperativization movement. Based on a large number of local archives and newly published party documents, Ye presents in detail how this movement fluctuated over the years and how peasants reacted to it. This book so far is

12 Gao Huamin, *Nongye hezuoua yundong shimo*.

13 Du Runsheng, *Dangdai zhongguo de nongye hezuo zhi* (Contemporary China's agricultural cooperative system) (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo chubanshe, 2002).

14 Xing Leqin, *20 shiji 50 niandai zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu* (Research on China's Agricultural cooperativization movement in the 1950s) (Zhejiang: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2003).

15 Luo Pinghan, *Nongye hezuohua yundong shi* (History of agricultural cooperativization) (Fujian: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2004).

the most comprehensive study of the topic. With so diverse archives from different regions across China, Ye Yangbing includes an exhaustive study on peasants' reactions, but does not well grasp the rhythms of the movement. Moreover, solely focusing on the movement, Ye overlooks how this movement interacted with other major political issues in China. Like the above four scholars, Ye also had to justify the cooperativization as a whole as correct.¹⁶

Compared with western scholars, Chinese historians have provided much more details of the operation of the movement. However, in the 1980s the party's own interpretation, *Resolution on Certain Questions in The History of Our Party Since The Founding of The People's Republic of China* (hereafter as the *Resolution*), concluded that 1949-1952 was a good time, that in 1953 the party made a wise and careful decision of launching the cooperativization, and that prior to 1955 peasants supported the movement.¹⁷ Confined by China's domestic censorship and the conventional wisdom, Chinese scholars cannot cross the line set by the *Resolution* to critically analyze the beginning of the movement. They have to defend the policy as a whole and settle for the party's conclusions. As a result, although Chinese scholars approach the subject differently than western scholars do, they have reached a similar conclusion as the western scholars that the cooperativization movement was a well-planned policy and up to 1955 it was a success.

In summary, the beginning of China's cooperativization movement has not been as carefully examined as the high tide which is believed a dramatic turning point. Past research has mostly treated the beginning as a well planned policy which was imposed from above by Mao Zedong. However, a close reading of contemporary documents

16 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu* (Research on China's agricultural cooperativization movement) (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2006).

17 Central Committee of CCP, *Guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi* (Resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the People's Republic of China) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1983).

reveals that this movement was far from a central plan. It originated in 1950 with regional leaders who cared little about primitive accumulation for industrialization. As early as 1952, many rash tendencies that were observed in the high tide already occurred, but have escaped scholars' attention. By shifting our scholarly attention from the center to the locality, we can discover that in its early experimental stage this movement had a measure of strong social support from cadres of different levels and was far more complex than any imaginary central plan imposed by Mao. This dissertation examines the process of making cooperativization in the early 1950s, which I will argue was a complex combination of ideology, circumstances, contingencies, domestic politics, and personal ambitions. It also shows that from the very beginning this movement was not smooth. Peasants' reactions rarely tallied with the CCP's expectations; once the CCP tried to tune up, excesses occurred and peasants tended to resist passively.

The key question for this dissertation is why the CCP ultimately chose Stalin's model, which had taken Soviet peasants into decades of hunger and suffering. In addition to it, there are some "big" questions in my mind I like to explore through this project. This dissertation does not aim at answering those questions, rather it intends to raise them and hopefully to address some points.

Soviet models

The first question is to what degree the Soviet models had impacted China. The first generation of scholars in the United States depicted China as the Soviet Union's puppet, an argument that has been largely disproved by archival research. Reacting against such cold war ideology, revisionists have emphasized the uniqueness of China's history and downplayed the Soviet influence. However, many parallels between the Soviet Union and China should not be dismissed as coincidences. How

should we understand the Soviet influence on China? This dissertation will show the deep impact of the Soviet models as well as the subjective role of Chinese leaders in selecting and making use of the Soviet models. It will highlight the complexities of the various Soviet models and examine how foreign models of rural economic organization were introduced to the CCP. Contrary to conventional wisdom, my view is that Stalin's collectivization model was not the one favored in China in 1949. After several rounds of internal struggles and interactions between the center and the localities, Stalin's model did not become dominant in China until 1953

In the 1970s, Moshe Lewin made a breakthrough in research on Soviet collectivization and on Bukharin who in the 1920s raised what was later called "market socialism" as an alternative approach to the long path of transition to socialism (some vaguely considered, distant millennium).¹⁸ After it, this alternative model has been applied by other historians to other socialist countries. Peter Nolan, for example, used this model to analyze post-Mao China.¹⁹ Chapter 1 discovers that in China Bukharin's approach had been, indeed, valued and even implemented for a short period in the late 1940s and early 1950s. But it did not work out very well. This dissertation does not intend to explore the question of why Bukharin's approach failed in China, but merely to highlight the fact that it was applied in China, and as in the Soviet Union, it was abandoned rather quickly and was eventually replaced by Stalin's model.

Intra-party relations

In research on party history, scholars still dwell excessively on rigid hierarchies

18 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization* (New York. London: W W Norton & Company, 1975).

19 Peter Nolan, *The Political Economy of Collective Farms: Analysis of China's post-Mao rural reforms* (Boulder: Polity Press, 1988).

and strict control from above. However, at least the immediate aftermath of the founding of the People's Republic (1949-1953) was a time of uncertainty and fluidity. The CCP leaders, in the course of adapting to their new role as rulers of the nation, constantly asked themselves "Why should we adopt this kind of policy and not another?" The long term goal was a wealthy and powerful socialist nation, but no one possessed definitive knowledge of the exact nature of the first step. The only unchallengeable authority in the party, Mao Zedong, did not articulate his vision. The rest of party leaders discussed, debated and clashed on various policies, and worked tirelessly to woo Mao. Political luminaries at all levels sought to define their new political positions and fought with each other to demarcate their zones of influence, while the Central Committee struggled to establish its authority with respect to national issues and to extend its control down to the local level. Hierarchies were in the process of being reconfigured. Under such circumstances, specific policies could be rather easily cobbled together by local actors far from the party center in Beijing in order to deal with local realities. And individuals, even those of relatively low rank, could on occasion make a significant impact on the region and even the nation. This reality is not well understood in much of the scholarly literature.

Not denying Mao's dominant role, this dissertation explores the roles of others who were not at the top of the party's hierarchy. This dissertation will discuss a case in which a provincial politician not only challenged Liu Shaoqi, second only to Mao in the party's chain of command, but actually succeeded in having his agenda promoted across the entire nation. It will take a different angle by focusing on the interplay between the center and local, between the state and peasants. It was only after several rounds of interaction between the center and the localities that Stalin's model became dominant in China in 1953. All of this is closely connected to the difficulties that the CCP faced as it attempted to rule the countryside after 1949 and to the political strains

associated with the Korean War. This dissertation will analyze the interplay between the top leaders and local cadres. In the movement's early stage, Mao was pushed by lower-level officials. He did not do the pushing. Certain provincial and prefectural cadres provided Mao with inspiration, evidence, and sometimes even the theories that caused Mao to endorse the movement. Chapter 2 explores a political situation in which Mao Zedong was presented with well-documented reports that convinced him of the effectiveness and popularity of agricultural producers' cooperatives, reports that were manufactured and shaped to suggest that they were consistent with the voice and will of the peasants. Deeply influenced by cases at the provincial and local levels, in late 1951 Mao Zedong prepared to start the mutual aid and cooperation movement. This dissertation will probe how the truth was twisted step by step in the party reports.

Party-peasant relations

The Chinese revolution led by the CCP is widely considered to have been a peasant revolution. The dazzling victory of the CCP over the Nationalist Party in 1949 is often regarded as evidence of how well the CCP knew Chinese peasants, how skilled it was in mobilizing them and of how extensively the peasants supported the party. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereafter as the CPSU), by contrast, is well known for its extraordinarily difficult relationship with the peasants. Yet, in the early 1950s knowing about the Soviet party's weakness on peasant issues, the CCP eventually chose to adopt the Soviet strategy in rural China. Have scholars overestimated the CCP's capacity for dealing with peasants? Have scholars overlooked certain characteristics of the CCP's relationships with peasants? Bearing those questions in mind, chapter 1 will briefly sort out CCP-peasant relations before 1949.

The Party's relationship with poor peasants is of particular interest to me. It has

been widely accepted, as the party has universally claimed, that the poor, especially poor peasants, were the most reliable ally of the party. However, such an alliance was often easily broken in the face of difficulties in the real world. At the outset of the CCP's revolution, the party was compelled to rely on the support of the elite and floating population, the upper and lower strata of the rural population. Later in the war the CCP deliberately appointed poor peasants as the ranks and files of civil and military cadres.²⁰

Generational rather than class cleavages appear to have been the most decisive criterion in accounting for individual decisions to join the party or the revolution.²¹ Landless laborers were neither more revolutionary nor more progressive than poor and middle peasants, mainly out of a concern for economic security. Likewise, poor peasants did not rush in greater proportion than middle peasants into wholehearted cooperation and activism. After 1949, peasants' genuine response to the party's policy exhibit striking continuities with their behavioral patterns of war time. For example, the youth tended to support the party's radical policies while the elderly were often the most skeptical group.²² My findings suggest that in the early 1950s in many issues poor peasants were far from being a reliable ally of the party. It was not rare that middle peasants, occasionally rich peasants and former landlord, better complied with the party's policies. For example, in organizing peasants into mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives, the party, both at the center and the local level, anticipated that poor peasants were the most sustained supporters. However, as the dissertation will show, when pursuing profits was allowed and remained possible,

20 Lucien Bianco, "Peasant responses to CCP Mobilization Policies, 1937 – 1945" in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (New York: M.E.Sharpe, Inc, 1995), 176.

21 Lucien Bianco, "Peasant responses to CCP Mobilization Policies, 1937 – 1945," 181.

22 Anita Chan, Richard Madsen and Jonathan Unger, *Chen Village under Mao and Deng* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)

middle peasants, instead of poor peasants, participated and took control of these organizations. Poor peasants rarely considered themselves as the ally of the party. When there was a sign of trouble in the mutual aid teams or cooperatives, poor peasants were the first ones who firmly claimed the right to withdraw.

Field investigations in five villages of Changzhi prefecture in 1952 showed to the CCP that, after land reform, (former) rich peasants possessed no more land than average, but their unit yields were the highest in their villages. When inspecting the development of “exploitative” usury, the party was appalled to learn that usurers were not rich peasants, but middle peasants, party members, families of soldiers and disabled people. With their economic capability rich peasants could have been the ally of the party.²³ However, the party was not ready to admit this fact. Instead, the party increasingly relied on the notion that ownership change would dramatically transform everything for the better. As Mao stated in 1954, “to solve the contradiction of agriculture’s backwardness, the first policy is to implement socialist revolution.”²⁴

Was the party’s incompetence in mobilizing poor peasants by moderate economic policies after 1949 an important factor that led it to employ more radical ones? When peasants maintained many of their old patterns, the role of the CCP switched from a challenger of the status quo to the status quo, a position a certain group of the party had not well accepted. For example, as Hartford convincingly shows, time after time, during the revolution, the party organizers found that the issue uniting a local community was a struggle against state authorities, likely state or quasi-state extraction from the countryside.²⁵ After 1949, the party organizers themselves became

23 “Changzhi 15 ge cun ziben zhuyi qingxiang kaocha baogao” (Investigation on the development of capitalism in 15 villages of Changzhi), Shangxi Provincial Archive (hereafter as SPA).

24 Christopher Howe, “China’s high tide of socialism of 1955: strategic choices and paths not taken, some changing perspectives,” 762.

25 Kathleen Hartford, “Fits and Starts: the Communist Party in Rural Hebei, 1921-1936,” in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, 166.

the state or quasi-state agents in the pursuit of extracting more resource from peasants. How could the party and its agents come to adopt to this new roles? Would peasants unite to resist the state extraction, as they did before 1949? Those were the imminent concerns for the policy-makers.

Meanwhile, peasants were not simply victims of policies formulated at the highest levels of power. This dissertation will give voices to those in lower levels of society. Unlike the CCP's ideal model of the peasantry, peasants were in fact a diverse social force - - people who had different ways of calculating life strategies, people who had various doubts about the state and its intentions. They often sought to adapt directives sent down from above. I offer a case study of early-stage coop formation at a key experimental site - - Changzhi prefecture, Shanxi province from 1950 to 1953. In doing so, I explore the process of mass mobilization from province to village, focusing on the complex interplay among the various levels of state organization.

Taking Changzhi prefecture as an example, chapters 3-5 explore the fluctuations of mutual aid and cooperation movement between 1951 and 1953, with special attention given to the interplay among different levels of the party and the interplay between the party and peasants. Chapter 3 shows that when the mutual aid and cooperation movement was defined as an economic event and was carried out with little intervention from the party, peasants responded and turned the policy to their advantages. Moreover, chapter 4 discusses how peasants' adaptations in turn caused the party to modify its plans. Chapter 4 shows when the mutual aid and cooperation movement was defined as a political event which aimed at constraining capitalism and was carried out under intense ideological pressures, how local cadres reacted and how peasants accommodated policies from above. Chapter 4 also exposes a variety of excesses that hurt peasants and severely reduced their incentives to farm the land. Chapter 5 shows how the center tried to remedy the situation by issuing the

rectification orders and how rural cadres tried to circumvent them. One point this chapter makes is that those rectification orders, undoubtedly made out of good intention, did not necessarily serve common peasants' interests. Then in late 1953 a dramatic twist occurred when Mao Zedong managed to resume the mutual aid and cooperation movement and press it further. In the end, the party formally deployed China's agricultural cooperativization campaign.

To a certain degree, the earliest agricultural cooperatives were what the peasants and local officials made of them. To some extent, local cadres were able to circumvent the central policy. Their experimental activities, in turn, reoriented the thinking of higher-ranking cadres.

Post-land reform

Land reform had been the central policy of the CCP's rural strategy. It had been indispensable for the party's ultimate victory against the Nationalist Party. However, for both peasants and the CCP, land reform was not the end of the story.

The CCP had universally announced that uneven distribution of land was the fundamental problem for Chinese peasants. Mao Zedong claimed that in China landlords and rich peasants together accounting for eight percent of the rural households, owning 70 to 80 percent of the land. This estimate was later made official by the party.²⁶ Today, many scholars have proved Mao's estimation of such uneven distribution was not the reality in most regions of China.²⁷ Having overestimated the tenancy rate, the CCP held a basic assumption that landlords and rich peasants in the village had enough land to make all poor villagers into middle peasants if land were

26 *Selected works of Mao Tse-tung IV*, (Peking, Foreign Language Press, 1965), 164.

27 For a research review on research of this subject, please refer to Liu Kexiang, "20 shiji 30 niandai tudi jieji fanpei zhuangkuang de zhengti kaocha he guji" (An overall investigation and estimation of the land and class distributions in the 1930s).

distributed to them. In this sense, the party believed, a successful land reform would make every peasant a middle peasant, owning sufficient means of production to support a household.²⁸ However, the fundamental problem for Chinese peasants was not the uneven distribution, but the extremely low land-population ratio. As Tanaka Kyoko points out, “the simple truth was that there did not exist sufficient resources to create prosperous proprietor-farmers in near 100 per cent proportion to the total peasant population. Equal distribution was no solution.”²⁹ In her calculation, in north China, if all the land owned by landlords and rich peasants were distributed, only about two-thirds of the total poor peasant families could become middle peasants. She provides us a formula that five mou per capita was agreed upon as necessary for a family’s self-sufficiency.

The case study of Shanxi province that this dissertation will present is an example of the point. Shanxi province is located in north China. As statistics of 1888 show, peasant land owners (most of whom were considered middle peasants by the CCP) were the predominant majority of rural population. “The peasants who had no land were extremely rare; most farmers were small-land owners.” Among landlords, an average household planted 20-30 mou, and those who owned 50-100 mou were considered big businesses.³⁰ Rural surveys in the 1930s suggest that owner-farmers who were able to live on their own land composed 57.67 percent of the total rural households; only 11.36 per cent of the total rural household had no land and were tenants.³¹ A survey of Taihang mountain area of 1942 suggests that in 1930s landlords and rich peasants owned 23 percent of arable land, while middle peasants owned 37 per cent. After the “rent reduction and interest reduction” movement in 1941-42,

28 Tanaka Kyoko, “Mao and Liu in 1947 land reform: Allies or disputants?” *The China Quarterly*, no 75 (1979): 590.

29 Tanaka Kyoko, “Mao and Liu in 1947 land reform: Allies or disputants?”

30 *Shanxi tongzhi* (History of Shanxi), 85.

31 *Shanxi tongzhi*, 86.

landlords' land proportion fell to 3.6 percent middle peasants' land proportion rose to 54.8 percent. Between 1946 and 1948, a radical land reform was conducted in the area³² in which land was nearly equally distributed among peasants. As investigations of Taihang mountain area show, on average, after the land reform, a middle peasant owned 3.5 mou land, a poor peasant owned 3.3 mou, while former landlord and rich peasant owned around 3 mou. According to Tanaka's estimation, after land reform many peasants in Shanxi province could not make their livings merely on their land's output. Income from sideline work was a significant portion needed for peasants' survival. Local archives in Shanxi confirm this point. For example, a survey of Yaozizheng village of Changzhi prefecture of Shanxi suggests that after the land reform, average land per capita was 4.1 mou and average land output was 3.6 dan per capita, by which peasants could barely make ends meet.³³

Meanwhile, land reform anticipated a static state of equal distribution of land, which could not continue perpetually. After land reform, changes did arise, many of which were regarded as threats by the party, as chapter 2 will discuss. On the other hand, theoretically land reform departed from the then-popular theory advocating large-scale production in agriculture. Between 1945-49, the idea of industrialization of agriculture and building cooperatives had become the main trend in agricultural theory, both within and outside the party, although it was only sporadically put into practice.³⁴ Ironically, it was anti-CCP contemporaries who were acutely conscious of the fact that land reform was not the end of the party's rural policy.³⁵ Having not given careful

32 Tanaka argues that one reason for the land reform getting more and more radical between 1946-48 was that the party overestimated land owned by landlords and rich peasants so the party kept pushing them when they actually did not have any extra land. Cheng Yung-fa well examines the role of war mobilization during this movement, as will be discussed in chapter 1.

33 "Changzhi diweiqu jieshu tugai qingkuang" (Situations of Changzhi prefecture's completion of land reform), JCA.

34 Miao Xinyu, *Jianguo qian 30 nian zhongguo nongye fazhan sixiang* (China's agricultural development thoughts 1919 – 1949) (unpublished dissertation, 1997, Fudan University).

35 Dong Shijin, *Lun gongchandang de tudi gaige* (On the CCP's land reform) (Hong Kong: Ziyou

thought to post-land reform and having made no preventive plans, the party had to face quite a few unpleasant facts and make quick, often not so thoughtful, decisions to remedy the situations. In this process, Shanxi province played important roles, partly because of its leaders' political ambitions and the agenda for socialism, partly because of the fact that it was a region which did not fit the party's high tenancy estimation, yet first completed land reform and so first faced the post-land reform rural problems.

Sources and Methodology

In the research for this dissertation, besides consulting readily available published materials such as collections of documents, memoirs, biographies and old newspapers, I have relied on two key sets of sources. One set is *Neibu cankao* (Internal reference), a multivolume collection of reports written by Xinhua wire-service reporters from 1950 to the 1960s. These reporters were instructed to describe the real conditions in the country at the time and produced candid studies that were read only by high-ranking CCP leaders. The CCP leaders in Beijing relied heavily on these reports to find out what happened in various regions of China. For example, Mao Zedong frequently read them and occasionally made comments on them. Scholars agree that prior to 1956 the reports published in *Neibu cankao* generally were accurate. The value of these reports lies not only in their reflections of social reality but also in their indication of what the CCP leaders had as a basis for their understanding of China at the time. For these reasons, these documents are invaluable for historians.

The other important set of sources comes from archival materials in local archives of various levels, especially in Shanxi province. In local archives, materials are usually categorized and filed as either published or unpublished documents. The published documents generally were locally published, internally circulated, and made

chubanshe, 1950).

available only to select groups of leaders at the time. A good example is *Zhonggong zhongyang Huabei ju zhongyao wenjian huibian* (Collections of important documents of the North China Bureau of the CCP). Those published documents are readily accessible to the public now.

The unpublished documents in archives consist of original materials, handwritten or typed, and were filed by topic. Some of them discuss sensitive cases involving deaths and personal information, and these are labeled “nei kong” (internally controlled) and are not accessible at all. The other non- “nei kong” archives are supposedly accessible to scholars, yet in reality access ultimately depends on archivists’ moods.

In my research, four types of archival materials are important. One type is statistics and registrations; one is cables and directives exchanged among different levels of local government; one is bottom-up reports from “insiders” in villages, districts, counties, prefectures, and provinces; one is top-down investigation reports prepared by investigation teams, whose members often came from outside the places that they were investigating. As the dissertation will demonstrate, reports did not always reflect social realities. But in general, the lower the level at which documents were drafted, the more reliable they were. Of course, local cadres tended to exaggerate their successes and present their accomplishment in a positive light. But in the subject under examination, for years the North China Bureau did not passively accept these reports at the face value in Shanxi Province and Changzhi prefecture, and routinely sent work teams to conduct investigations. Occasional the Bureau’s investigators went to the opposite extreme by concentrating exclusively on mistakes and mismanagement. Nevertheless, when read in conjunction with local government’s own reports, those materials in local archives provide a comprehensive basis for documenting the interplay between state officials and peasants.

This dissertation is based entirely on documentary sources, it does not rely on oral history. Undoubtedly, interviewing peasants and contemporary officials would be a healthy supplement to the research, and I hope I will have the opportunity to conduct such interviews in the future.³⁶ For this reason, peasants' voices, as quoted and discussed in this dissertation, should be understood as coming from official documents where they were recorded by officials for presentation to the decision makers of the party.

This dissertation heavily draws on a case study of Changzhi prefecture in Shanxi. As chapter 2 will discuss, certain Shanxi provincial leaders and Changzhi prefects played decisive roles in steering the party towards cooperativization. Changzhi prefecture was the pioneer of the cooperativization movement. China's first ten experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives were built in Changzhi; rules set by Changzhi prefects later became the standard practices across the nation; certain cooperatives in Changzhi were widely regarded as national models. More importantly, before Changzhi started the experiments, no one knew what an agricultural producers' cooperative was and how to operate it. To a certain degree, the earliest agricultural producers' cooperatives were what the peasants and local officials made of them. Their experimental activities, in turn, reoriented the thinking of higher-ranking cadres. But after late 1952, when the political pressure was getting more intense and regulations getting more fixed, the institutional fluidity of the early experimental stage faded away. In this sense, the case of Changzhi shows the process of how fluid policies became solidified.

³⁶ Rural investigations by Philip Huang and Wu Yi show that peasants had very vague memories of the cooperativization movement. Sun Liping also confirms that, in doing oral history, "land reform is easy (for peasants) to talk about, cooperativization is quite difficult to talk about." Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 23. Sun Liping, "Guocheng-shijian fenxi yu dangdai zhongguo-nongmin guanxi" (Analysis on process-event and contemporary China's state-peasant relations), online <http://www.sociology.cass.cn>.

Changzhi is an old liberated region where the party had deep roots at the village level. As pioneers of the mutual aid and cooperation movement, cadres of Shanxi province, from the provincial level to the county level of certain areas, might have contributed more to the movement than did most other counties and provinces in China. To this extent, the case of Shanxi was not typical. To supplement it, I briefly introduce some examples from Sichuan province, a region liberated in 1950 where the party's control over villages was relative weak, to demonstrate the differences as well as similarities in the implementations of the policies in a newly liberated area compared to Shanxi. It is difficult to present a comprehensive description of the movement across the entire nation and this dissertation does not intend to do so. Instead of providing wide geographical coverage, this dissertation concentrates on probing deeply into all levels of the state within a limited area, and it shows how easily breakdowns in communications occurred at every level.

Chapter 1 Choosing from Soviet models

To begin the exploration of the decision making of China's agricultural cooperativization movement between 1949-53. This chapter will introduce the settings in 1949, with the focus given to how Soviet ideas on the peasant economy were conceptualized and used in China.

To comprehend the CCP's peasant policy after 1949, it is essential to examine the nature of the CCP's relationship with peasants before 1949, a relationship I argue ended up restricting the CCP's ability to cope with peasant issues. Scholars are challenging conventional ideas that assume the CCP's unconditional success among peasants before 1949 and that accept the CCP's claim of always caring about peasants' interests.¹ Acknowledging the continuity of peasants' behavior patterns and the CCP's perceptions of peasants, this chapter first examines certain characteristics of the CCP which, in my view, made it fairly receptive to Stalin's collectivization model.

Considering Mao Zedong's paramount role in Chinese revolution and later his dominance on peasant issues, this chapter starts with a reexamination of his relationship with peasants.

Mao Zedong, the CCP and the rural economy in the early years

Mao Zedong was a man of controversy, and so was his relationship with peasants.

¹ New research finds that the CCP-peasant wartime alliance was unequal. In addition of voluntary support a minority of peasants, the CCP obtained a grudging acquiescence from the majority. Benton argues that Chinese peasants' capacity for endurance was striking in prewar time and during war time, and to a large degree it continued after 1949. CCP's deep penetration of rural society after 1949 made it even harder for peasants to resist. See Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934-1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Lucien Bianco, "Peasant Responses to CCP Mobilization Policies, 1937-1945" in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven eds., *New Perspectives on The Chinese Communist Revolution* (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 1995).

In terms of identity, although he frequently claimed to be of his peasant origin and maintained many peasant habits through his life, consistently elaborating on his deep affinity with peasants, Mao never identified himself as a farmer and never wanted to be one. In his early years, as with many other educated young people, he considered peasants to represent the most backward and benighted part of Chinese society.² In terms of knowledge, Mao clearly regarded himself as an authority on peasant issues and believed he knew peasants well, probably even better than peasants knew themselves. However, this kind of authority should be qualified. Mao was born and raised in a peasant family, but he did not learn to be a farmer and never aimed to be. He nearly spent almost no time in acquiring farming skill. As Mao matured, he came to loathe the life of rural drudgery and fought for a chance to advance his education in a nearby city. In the writings of his early years, he concerned himself with urban issues.³

After being converted to Marxism in 1921--as Mao himself claimed so--Mao mainly focused on organizing urban workers. As with other comrades, for years he had ignored the Comintern's directions encouraging the CCP to forge a strong relationship with peasants. Mao had no strong faith in peasants' potential for a revolution since he considered peasant revolts only capable of producing a new emperor but never a new system.⁴ Only when he retreated to Shaoshan in 1925 did Mao first note the revolutionary power of the peasantry. Mao started to convince himself and his comrades that a Chinese revolution could only succeed when "it was able to mobilize the huge, untapped reservoir of peasant discontent against the classes which oppressed them."⁵ But he did not explain why and how, at this time, Chinese peasants were

2 Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Zaoqi Wengao* (Collections of Mao's Writings in Early years) (Hunan: Hunan Renmin chubanshe, 1990).

3 Jung Chang and Jon Hallidays, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 9.

4 Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Herry Holt and Company, LLC, 1999), 152.

5 Philip Short, *Mao: A Life*, 155.

suddenly capable of creating something more than an emperor. It is important to note that at the same time Mao was lamenting the loss of his “glorious years” as a passionate student who believed he could solve all of China’s problems. He now was aware that he had to think and act as a pragmatic adult. Does this mean that by then, Mao had given up the ideal of “helping the people” and turned to the practice of “leading the people?” Mao did not provide us a straightforward answer. But what is clear is that from this point on, what concerned him most was how to find a way to lead the people.

In the next two years, while residing in urban areas, Mao devoted himself to training peasant organizers. He began to theorize about the significance of peasants to the Chinese revolution by “weaving together the principle of working-class leadership and his conviction that the fate of the Chinese revolution ultimately depended on what happened in the countryside.”⁶ He was regarded as a specialist on peasant issues in both the CCP and the Nationalist Party. In January and early February 1927 Mao embarked on one month-long journey across five rural counties in Hunan province to survey peasant movements. This trip resulted with his landmark “Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan.” The superficial experience in Hunan countryside would accompany Mao Zedong all his life and laid the groundwork for Mao’s diagnosis of the problems of Chinese peasants.⁷ To a certain degree, Mao imagined what a Chinese peasant should be like based on what he saw during this investigation. Here it is necessary to observe one of Mao’s methodologies. He always preferred to investigate one place in depth rather than to make superficial studies of large areas.⁸ From a specific case study he would draw lessons and find solutions, then tended to apply them to much broader areas, even to the whole country. This method could be

6 Stuart Schram, *The Thought Of Mao Tse-Tung* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 41.

7 Short, *Mao: A Life*, 174.

8 Short, *Mao: A Life*, 304.

dangerous because conditions varied dramatically in different areas of China: there was hardly a solution that could fit all areas.

Moreover, the lessons Mao learned in Hunan were twisted. Mao commenced this investigation with a specific purpose: to locate peasants in the center of the Chinese revolution. This purpose predisposed him to interpret the turbulence caused by the ongoing North Expedition War as the revolutionary nature of the peasants.⁹ Because of this purpose, the only standard in Mao's analysis was how revolutionary a certain group could be and Mao concluded that the vanguard and heroes in the coming revolution were poor peasants who were "the most responsive to the Communist Party leadership."¹⁰ To what degree Mao's assertion reflected the reality is a subject of debate. Latest research finds that "Revolutionary seeds were not found in greater proportion among poorer than among better-off peasants."¹¹

Because of Mao's self-identity and his deep devotion to the Chinese revolution, Mao never saw peasants just as farmers who were of diverse personalities and entitled to their own lives, but as a part of the Chinese revolution. Further, the issues Mao focused on in any given period were quite selective in accordance with the practical needs of that time. Thus, in respects that Mao was less interested in, his knowledge was considerably limited. The peasant economy was one of them.

With newly-obtained Marxist knowledge, Mao's analysis of the peasant economy was rather simple. He only regarded planting crops as the productive labor and categorized management of a farm and trading as exploitation which should be eliminated. Mao seemed unable or unwilling to appreciate the dynamic of rural

9 John Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker eds., *The Cambridge History of China Cambridge* vol. 13 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 301-306.

10 Mao Zedong, "Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao" (Report on an investigation of the peasant movement in Hunan), online, retrieve from http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_2.htm

11 Lucien Bianco, "Peasant responses to CCP Mobilization Policies, 1937 – 1945," 176.

prosperity. He took a hostile attitude towards debt and credit relations. In his mind, debts were mostly the exploitation of usury. Prior to 1948, Mao even insisted that all debts among peasants should be abolished.¹² Partly because of Mao's aspiration for the "Great Harmony" (Da Tong), partly because of the communism ideology, Mao held antipathy against rich people and chose to downplay their roles in the rural economy. Mao Zedong was not alone in applying such kind of narrow calculations. Many other CCP leaders held quite the similar criteria. Thus, Mao and his colleagues, who did not fully comprehend the dynamic of rural prosperity were easily tempted to pursue an easy and short way to control the rural economy. Such a position left them receptive to straightforward yet extremely simplified theories such as collectivization. Sadly, for a long time the CCP needed not to ponder on rural economy issues: its special method of extracting resources allowed it to overlook rural productivity in its peasant mobilization plan and tended to treat the rural economy as simply as possible. As a result, the CCP leaders did not possess adequate experience to sense the damages collectivization might generate.

As it was for all of its rivals, extracting resources was indispensable for its survival. Unlike most of them, however, the CCP did not rely on regular extraction methods such as taxes. For a while, there were no such concepts as taxation in the CCP's idea of a "good government." As a CCP directive explicitly stated, "The financial source of Chinese Soviet is fundamentally different from landlords and capitalists. We place the burden upon those 'exploiters.' In the revolutionary era, the main financial source should be the confiscation of the property of exploiters and enemies."¹³

12 Wen Rui, *Mao Zedong shiye zhong de zhongguo nongmin wenti* (The problems of Chinese peasants in Mao Zedong's view) (Nanchang: Jiangxi Renmin Chubanshe, 2004), 47-51.

13 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi (1937-1945)* (Social and economic history of the Shan-Gan-Ning base area (1937-1945)) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), 185.

At the early stage of the revolution, quite a few of measures of Soviet war communism were adopted. For example, collective farms were built up. In 1928, in a small base area in east Hunan, a semi-commune was established, “all land is to be collectivized, cattle, pigs, sheep, ducks, fertilizers and ploughs are all collectively used.”¹⁴ A farming committee was set up to arrange production and living affairs, a working sheet was scheduled in details for peasants from 6 am to 5 pm. Before this commune bred any fruit (or aftermath), the CCP was driven out of the area by the Nationalist Party. The practice of building communes continued in newly acquired base areas. By the end of 1929, the harm of this practice had been so apparent and disturbing, one prefecture head Wang Shoudao suggested the Central Committee of the CCP to abolish it. He said, “At the present stage, peasants’ preoccupation with the private ownership was unbreakable. Adopting the collective farming often led to sabotage,” “led to the production reduction and the waste of land,” and “drove middle peasants and small capitalist to flee.”¹⁵ In 1930, in Huang’an county, another collective farm was established, land and all production materials were collectivized, wages and rations were issued. In the end, “peasants were hurt, property were damaged.”¹⁶ Aware of precedent failures, in 1931, the CCP formally prohibited building collective farms; peasants’ private ownership of land was acknowledged, land reform was carried out as the main form to “liberate” peasants.¹⁷ However, the party made it clear that “the key purpose of land reform is not to develop agricultural

14 *Di er'ci guonei geming zhanzheng shiqi tudi geming wenxian xuanbian* (Document Collections on the land revolution during the second civil war period) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1987), 68-69.

15 Cao Jiansheng, “Tudi geming chuqi de ‘nongye jitihua’ wenti zaitan” (Comments on the agricultural collectivization issue in the outset of land revolution period), *Zhongguo nongye hezuoshi ziliao*, no 1 (1992).

16 Wang Xinguang, “Tudi geming chu qi de ‘nongye jitihua’ qingkuang” (Situation of the agricultural collectivization in the outset of land revolution period), *Zhongguo nongye hezuoshi ziliao*, no 2 (1990).

17 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 107-108.

production, but to ‘get’ people.’”¹⁸ In the 1930s, upon arriving in a new area, the CCP initiated land reform to reallocate land of the class enemies, including landlords and rich peasants, among the poor,¹⁹ confiscated class enemies’ surplus property and abolished old taxes.

As for the material supply of the party and its army – the Red Army, since the late 1920s, battle captures and confiscation from class enemies had been the main source.²⁰ After April 1930, economic conditions in the base areas deteriorated. To meet the need, on the one hand the party instructed the Red Army to expand outwards to collect more money; on the other hand it issued directives to levy taxes on land. But in practice the tax burden was redirected to merchants and rich people,²¹ and only accounted for a very minor portion of the CCP’s total revenue.²² Luckily, when base areas were expanding, there were always available enemies’ property to be confiscated.

In 1932 the Nationalist Party intensified its attack on the CCP’s base areas, the party had to relieve the Red Army from the commission of “collecting money” to fully concentrating on the battle ground. Immediately, the CCP government encountered with a revenue crisis. It decided to raise land tax rate, but revenue from taxation remained small. So the party issued “revolutionary war bonds” and launched “uncovering unregistered land movement” [Chatian yundong] to squeeze landlords and rich peasants.²³ The needs were met temporarily, but in the long term, the economy

18 Wang Zhangling, *Gongdang wenti yanjiu*, Taiwan, vol. 9, no 8.

19 The CCP’s land reform policies varied in different periods and in different regions. Very roughly speaking, the party confiscated the land of landlords and rich peasants, often together with grain, livestock, and other property, then redistributed the land among the poor.

20 Short, *Mao: A Life*, 231.

21 *Zhongguo nongmin fudan shi* 3 ce (the History of Chinese Peasant Burden, vol 3) (Beijing: Zhongguo caizheng jingrong chubanshe, 1990), 71.

22 *Zhongguo nongmin fudan shi*, 72.

23 Chen Yung-fa, “Civil War, Mao Zedong and Land Revolution – Misjudgment or Political Strategy? Part 1,” in *Ta Lu*, series 92: 9-19.

was devastated. Running away became peasants' popular response. When virtually no landlords and only a few rich peasants were left, common peasants had to undertake the burden of supplying the CCP. In the summer and fall 1934, the party "borrowed" grain and collected land taxes, twice, mainly from poor peasants. CCP officials then noticed that bandits immediately spread over the "red" areas.²⁴ In the same year, the CCP launched the Long March – a legendary escape. Chinese scholar Li Ming points out that the Red Army had to leave base areas not mainly because of the military defeat against the Nationalist Party, but because of the economic collapse within the areas. The CCP's economy was in nature an expansionist economy. When the Red Army was unable to keep extracting resources from the outside, it started to exhaust its own economy inside. Soon the economy crashed.²⁵

In 1935, Mao and his followers arrived in northwest China and established the Shan-Gan-Ning base area. Again, "the party depended almost completely on fines, confiscations and the extralegal method of 'attacking local gentry' for revenue and left the 'emancipated peasants' largely to themselves."²⁶ When local confiscation failed to meet the needs, the party had to extend to neighboring areas. In 1936, presumably because of the supply crisis, the party was considering an expedition to southern Shanxi. Fortunately, Xi'an accident in 1936 saved the CCP from a relocation and the CCP started to negotiate with the Nationalist Party to build the Second United front against Japan. The CCP promised to cease confiscating landlords' property and not to implement land reform under the condition that the Nationalists provided the CCP a subsidy.²⁷ Eventually the Nationalist Party agreed to provide the CCP a subsidy which

24 *Zhongguo nongmin fudan shi*.

25 Xiaojia Hou's interview with Li Ming in Hong Kong, October 2005, and in Beijing, September 2007.

26 Chen Yung-fa, "The Blooming Poppy under the Red Sun: The Yan'an Way and the Opium Trade," in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, 265.

27 Gu Longsheng, *Mao Zedong Jingji Nianpu* (Economic Chronicle of Mao Zedong) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993), 98.

by no means was insignificant. As a matter of fact, in 1939, 89.66 per cent of the CCP government revenue was from the Nationalist Party's subsidy.²⁸

Supplied by the outside funds, the CCP showed little interest in levying taxes. For years there was even no formal agricultural tax. The CCP requested the "Grain to Save the Nation" [jiuguo gongliang] from peasants. Such taxation was informal and the rate was not fixed. Each year the central government decided the amount and sent quotas down to each level. Despite of regulations, local cadres had plenty room for manipulation and commonly had middle peasants and rich peasants to shoulder the burden. Before 1939, the quotas were very light. For example, in 1937, the party asked for 14000 dan of grain which accounted only for 1.28 percent of peasants' total output.²⁹ Without a fair taxation system, local production did not have a direct effect on the CCP. The Party's supervision on agriculture was loose. Although radical land reform was not carried out, "revolution by installment"³⁰ or "silent revolution" as was called by Mark Selden,³¹ took place, middle peasants became the majority of the rural population. In general, common peasants' livelihoods were improved. But there was no breakthrough in agricultural productivity. Quite the contrary, as Chen Yung-fa points out that, from 1937 to 1943 unit yield dropped each year. After years of land reform, the CCP had to face the fact that peasants still did not produce more grain, not to mention turning over more to the state.³²

28 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi (1937-1945)*, 189.

29 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi (1937-1945)*, 197-199.

30 Tsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front* (Berkeley: University of California, 1974).

31 Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven & London: Yale University, 1991).

32 Chen Yung-fa, "Reconsidering Yan'an, Again," *Xin Shixue* (New History), Taiwan, no 3 (1997): 146.

Yan'an: learning from the Soviet

As the anti-Japanese war approached a stalemate in 1939, conflicts between the CCP and the Nationalist Party intensified. The CCP began to worry about the possibility of diminishing Nationalist subsidies and consider extracting more within the CCP's base areas. It established a taxation system in 1940. It also increased the quota of "Grain to Save the Nation" to 90,000 dan in 1940 and to over 200,000 dan in 1941. Peasants were furious. When pressed too hard, peasants put their anger into action. Revolts were reported. For example, in December 1939, Huan County was assigned a quota of 8500 dan by the Shan-Gan-Ning government. Local cadres were planning to collect even more. A revolt immediately occurred in January 1940. Peasants from 17 townships and 2,500 self-defense army soldiers joined the revolt.³³

In 1941, situations turned to worse. The Nationalist Party completely terminated the subsidy and further launched an economic embargo against the Shan-Gan-Ning base area. The Japanese army began its "three-all" offensive against the CCP. The CCP base areas shrank and the population dropped. The base area economy was on the verge of collapse. The CCP-peasants relations were under stress. A widely circulated story was that, in a storm, a CCP cadre was "struck" by lightning and killed. Hearing the news, peasants wondered why the lightning did not strike Chairman Mao.³⁴ To the CCP the most urgent issue was economic development, among which agricultural production was of foremost importance.³⁵

Facing the enormous hardship, in 1941 the CCP sent an investigation group, head by the CCP Propaganda Minister Zhang Wentian, to Shanxi province to "explore how to increase agricultural production and improve peasants' livelihood."³⁶ Spending

33 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi*, 201.

34 Jin Chongji and Chen Qun edit., *Chen Yun zhuan* (The biography of Chen Yun) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian Chubanshe, 2005).

35 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi*, 241.

36 *Zhang Wentian Nianpu 2 ce* (Zhang Wentian Chronicle, vol. 2) (Beijing: Zhongyang dangshi

nearly a year in Shanxi, Zhang Wentian observed that land reform itself did not increase p agricultural production. He concluded that “it is wrong to rely on redistributing other people’s property to improve peasants’ life; it’s better to develop production and increase social wealth to improve people’s livelihood.” He suggested to encourage new capitalism.³⁷ To bolster the economy, the CCP promised peasants the ownership of their property, provided economic incentives and encouraged trading.

Mao Zedong was also thinking about the agricultural issue. But he took a different orientation. Although he believed small peasants were the main force to improve rural production, he placed more efforts on reorganizing laborers rather than offering economic incentives.³⁸

In the late 1930s, a large number of refugees and immigrants moved to the base areas. If managed well, they could be of great help. In 1940, Yan’an county organized mutual aid organizations in order to reclaim 80,000 mou wasteland. Mao was very impressed by the achievement. As the CCP raised its extraction quota, more peasants fled or simply worked less assiduously. It was important to exert certain control over peasants. Everyone, including the elderly, women and “lazy” ones, should be participating in rural production. So Mao recommended organizing mutual aid teams in the entire base areas. Under the party’s leadership, mutual aid organizations mushroomed. In many cases, explicit working regulations were drafted and peasants were required to work for long hours each day. Through those forms the party was able to “persuade” peasants to plant the kinds of crops the party was in need of. In addition, those organizations were coordinated with wartime service.

Reorganizing peasants was not only an economic issue, but a political one.³⁹ Mao

Chubanshe, 2000), 665. There might be some political reasons for Zhang Wentian to be sent to conduct this one-year-long research.

37 *Zhang Wentian Nianpu*, 693.

38 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi*, 260-261.

39 Huang Zhenglin, *Shan-Gan-Ning bianqu shehui jingji shi*, 293-300.

was eager to explore new forms of organizing peasants. Meanwhile, inspired by Soviet experience, Mao endowed them with greater meaningfulness. Years of intense study of Soviet work in Yan'an now came to fruition.

As Schram notes, one of the indispensable qualifications for the leadership of a communist movement was a reputation as a Marxist theoretician. Claiming the authority of interpreting Marxist classics would bring practical power. In the Long March, Mao had established his reputation as a prominent military leader, but he remained weak in Marxist theories. So in the late 1930s, Mao devoted himself to the study of Marxist philosophy. It turned out that in terms of Marxist classics, Mao was unable to compete with his rivals, the “returned Student faction” [Liusu Pai], who were trained in the Soviet Union and headed by Wang Ming. Mao then came to disfavor Marxist classics.⁴⁰

Without the classics, what else could Mao learn? *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* (hereafter as *Short Course*) provided Mao with a timely theoretical instrument. *Short Course* was composed under Stalin's direct command. Stalin himself even wrote one section. After the World War II, Stalin claimed sole authorship of the entire work and the Chinese communists believed that Stalin himself had written the book.⁴¹ By narrating and fabricating Bolshevik history, this book reinterpreted Marxist theory, legitimized Stalin's leadership, and told a story of successfully building socialism in the Soviet Union. This book was published in the Soviet Union in 1938. Then Stalin imposed it on the communist world as the official interpretation of the Soviet party's history.⁴² The CCP

40 Gao Hua, “Zai dao yu shi zhijian” (Between ‘Tao’ and ‘Circumstance’) *Chinese Social Science Quarterly* (Hong Kong), no 5 (1993).

41 Hua-yu Li, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 96.

42 Hua-yu Li, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 96-97.

members in Moscow translated it from Russian into Chinese. Ren Bishi, one of Mao's most trusted comrades, played an important role in getting this translation published in Moscow and sent it back to Yan'an in the same year. The book became a "crash-course" to teach CCP cadres at the party schools. Li Wenhan, who had taught *Short Course* in Yan'an, recalled that in the 1930s and 1940s the CCP leaders learned Marxism and Leninism through the *Short Course*.⁴³

Mao Zedong himself was particularly fond of this book. In the Yan'an Rectification Movement of 1941-43, the book was called "the encyclopedia of Marxism" and was listed as the No.1 "must-read" text for high-level CCP cadres.⁴⁴ It maintained this privilege up to 1955. As Mao stated,

In studying Marxism-Leninism, we should use the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* as the principal material. It is the best synthesis and summing-up of the world communist movement of the past hundred years, a model of the integration of theory and practice, and so far the only comprehensive model in the whole world.⁴⁵

Mao used this book to criticize those comrades who "studied Marxism-Leninism not to meet the needs of revolutionary practice, but purely for the sake of study" and who were unable to "apply the viewpoint and method of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin to the concrete study of China's present conditions."⁴⁶ This book provided Mao with a new model of studying Marxist theory and demonstrated to him new methods of acquiring authority. For example, inspired by the creation of *Short Course*, Mao Zedong ordered the composition and the publication of a documentary book *From the Sixth Congress – the CCP's Internal Secretary Documents*, which was aimed at reconstructing the CCP's past so as to legitimize Mao's leadership as well as to lay the

43 Hua-yu Li, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 98.

44 Chen Jin ed., *Mao Zedong dushu biji* (Reading Notes of Mao Zedong) (Guangdong: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1996). 304-307.

45 Mao Zedong, "Reform Our Study."

46 Mao Zedong, "Reform Our Study", in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 3 (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 24.

groundwork for Mao's role as a leading theorist.⁴⁷

Short Course also served as Mao's road map for building socialism in China. Benjamin Schwartz notes that Mao uncritically accepted the image of "socialism" as described in *Short Course*. Li Hua-yu goes further arguing that Mao had closely followed the steps outlined by Stalin in the *Short Course* and created a Stalinist economic structure after 1949.⁴⁸ In the early 1940s, when Mao was concerned with the economic crisis in the base areas and searched for a method to effectively reorganize peasants, *Short Course* provided Mao with an ideal formula that could link the current mutual aid teams with a socialist future. *Short Course* told Mao that Lenin "regarded co-operative societies in general, and agricultural cooperative societies in particular, as a means of transition – a means within the reach and understanding of the peasant millions – from small, individual farming to large-scale producing associations, or collective farms."⁴⁹ *Short Course* book also demonstrated to Mao the effectiveness and popularity of collective farms among Soviet peasants. Deeply impressed by the glorious Soviet history thus depicted, in 1943, Mao Zedong came to portray the socialist future for Chinese peasants,

Among the peasant masses a system of individual economy has prevailed for thousands of years, with each family or household forming a productive unit. This scattered, individual form of production is the economic foundation of feudal rule and keeps the peasants in perpetual poverty. The only way to change it is gradual collectivization, and the only way to bring about collectivization, according to Lenin, is through cooperatives.⁵⁰

Mao now came to see individual peasant farming as a backward phenomenon, regarding collective labor as progress in production and a better way of "liberating"

47 Tony Saich, "Writing or Rewriting History? The Construction of the Maoist Resolution on Party History," in *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, 302.

48 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 95-96.

49 *Lian gong (bu) dangshi jianming jiaocheng* (History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) (Beijing: Shidai chubanshe, 1949), 322. Its English translation see *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1960), 261-262.

50 Mao Zedong, "Get Organized," (November 19, 1943) *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), vol. 3, 156.

the productive forces. When Mao Zedong utilized *Short Course* to establish his authority in interpreting Marxist theory, he was at the same time inoculated with its concepts. From this book, Mao not only acquired an authoritative history of the Soviet Union but also became familiar with Marxist theories as interpreted by Stalin and the revolutionary language of the Bolsheviks. Evidently he absorbed the language and the concepts of *Short Course* in his own work. Here I quote one paragraph of *Short Course* from which Mao Zedong seemed to have drawn images and terms for his well-known declaration mentioned above,

Scattered and disunited, each on his tiny, even dwarf individually-run farm, destitute of anything like serviceable implements or traction, having no way of breaking up large tracts of virgin soil, without prospect of any improvement on their farms, crushed by poverty, isolated and left to their own devices, now the peasants had at last found a way out, a way to a better life, in the amalgamation of their small farms into cooperative undertakings, collective farms; in tractors, which are able to break up any 'hard ground,' any virgin soil.⁵¹

Armed with Stalinist theory and Stalinist language, Mao Zedong believed that he found a way to liberate Chinese peasants. He now would not only allocate poor peasants land, but also teach them how to produce, transform them into new laborers and lead them into a stage of socialism.

It all started with mutual aid teams. Mutual aid teams were a traditional practice among Chinese peasants. There were many types of mutual aid teams and most were temporary and aimed at overcoming labor shortage and livestock shortage. The fundamental principle was reciprocity.⁵² They had nothing to do with collective ownership. But after Mao released his article entitled "Get Organized," mutual aid teams evolved into "a renovation of the production system, a revolution of relations among the people."⁵³ Even though in 1943, mutual aid teams were built on the ground

51 *Lian gong (bu) dangshi jianming jiaocheng*, 365-366.

52 Chen Yung-fa, *Making Revolution- the Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 215-219.

53 Mao Zedong, "On Cooperatives," in *Jianguo Yilai Nongye Hezuohua Shiliao Huibian* (Collection of Historical Materials on Agricultural Cooperativization History Since the Found of the People's Republic)

of private ownership, Mao portrayed them as possessing a more progressive aspect and a necessary means in the transition to collective farms. As he said, “At present they are only of a rudimentary type and must go through several stages of development before they can become cooperatives of the Soviet type known as collective farms.”⁵⁴ Mao frequently used the term cooperative, partly because Lenin had used this term, partly because cooperative was a very popular term in China in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁵ It would become clearer that Mao mainly referred to mutual aid teams. “Getting peasants organized” meant to organize peasants into mutual aid teams.⁵⁶ Nevertheless at this point, Mao did not know how the stages through which mutual aid teams should transit to collective farms.

Another factor that drove Mao to pay a tribute to collectivization at this moment was Mao’s desire to improve his relationship with Stalin. In the early 1940s, the CCP’s relationship with the CPSU reached a low point. Nazi Germany had attacked the Soviet Union, coming close to defeat. Stalin, fearing an attack by Japan, asked Mao for help, which Mao, more than once, denied, thereby infuriating Stalin and Soviet comrades.⁵⁷ The CCP showed little respect for Soviet delegates in Yan’an.⁵⁸ Meanwhile Mao used this chance to carry out the rectification campaign against the “returned student faction.” Not surprisingly, the CPSU was not pleased with this movement. However, after Stalingrad, 1943, it became clear that the Soviet Union would eventually defeat Germany. In Yan’an, Mao won the battle against his rivals. It

(Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi Chubanshe, 1992).

54 Mao Zedong, “Get Organized.”

55 Miao Xinyu, *Jianguo qian 30 nian zhongguo nongye fazhan sixiang*.

56 Mao Zedong, “Qieshi zhixing shida zhengce” (Faithfully employ the ten policies) (October 14, 1943), Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi ed., *Mao Zedong wenji* (Collected writings of Mao Zedong) (Beijing, Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), 70-71.

57 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 23.

58 Peter Vladimirov, *Yan’an riji* (Dairy in Yan’an) (Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe, 2004). Vladimirov, the Comintern delegate to Yan’an from 1942 to 1945, held a bitter memory of his time in Yan’an. He felt he and his Soviet colleague were isolated by the CCP and were treated coldly.

was time to improve connections with the CPSU. Suddenly, Soviet delegates in Yan'an were treated warmly and were later invited to attend the CCP core meetings. It was now to Mao's advantage to voice his admiration of Soviet achievements.

No matter what was Mao's main intention, Mao's articles on mutual aid teams and collectivization were widely circulated among the party members. The slogan "Get Organized" was unquestioned. The idea that in addition to the improvement of agricultural technology, the organization of production was the determining factor in increasing productivity was disseminated. In 1943, nearly all base areas launched a mutual aid movement, planning to organize 50 percent of peasants. Nevertheless, "Get Organized" was not a great success. Its effectiveness in improving the productivity was extremely limited, perhaps even, serving as a hindrance to productivity. But the influence should not be underestimated.

Most rank and file members knew the term "get organized." However, they rarely understood its socialist feature or appreciated the supposed significance. To their knowledge, common peasants knew how to farm their land. Most of them treated the call as a political movement that had to be fulfilled, either by employing administrative methods or by lip service. In 1944, severe commandism and formalism spread in the Shan-Gan-Ning base area. Quite a few rural cadres, without consulting with any peasant, sometimes even without propagating the virtues of "getting organized," sit in their offices to manufacture a list by copying names. As a result, a large number of mutual aid teams of no validity mushroomed. Take Qingyang city as an example. In 1944, 417 mutual aid teams were established among which 416 mutual aid teams were fakes. When mutual aid teams were imposed on peasants by local agents, cases of sabotage were reported, mutual aid teams easily fell apart.⁵⁹ In 1945,

59 Shi Jingtang ed., *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong shiliao* 1 ce (Historical documents on China's agricultural cooperativization movement, vol 1) (Beijing: Sanlian chubanshe, 1957), 264.

other base areas decided to help peasants “get organized”, similar patterns occurred.

During the upsurge of “getting organized,” agricultural cooperative farms appeared, sporadically. One well known case was “Jia Baozhi land and conveyance cooperative” in Baijiagou village of Shanxi province. Baijiagou village was nearly devastated by Japanese troop’s attack in 1943. In 1944, in the face of tremendous difficulties, four party members recruited four poor peasants to form a land and conveyance cooperative. Of the eight members, one took care of war services for all others, six took care of land, and Jia Baozhi himself started a trading business. The cooperative was extremely successful and attracted more members. Jia Baozhi was later rewarded the first-degree model laborer and his cooperative kept expanding, especially on its sideline work. A textile mill and a coal mine were added to the cooperative.⁶⁰ Another good case was Geng Changsuo cooperative in Wugong village in Hebei province, as *Chinese Village, Socialist State* has vividly presented.⁶¹

However, cases of success were rare. There were much more cases of failures. Although there is no statistic on the rate, the fact that in the 1950s when the party tried to demonstrate Chinese peasants’ long history of building cooperatives prior to 1949, it could only find to the two examples listed above speaks for itself. One famous case of failure was the cooperative farm in Miaozidian village of the Shan-Gan-Ning base area. To make better use of laborers, in March 1944, three rich peasants decided to form a farm of collective working. Local party cadres considered it “close to socialism” and promised lower taxes and less war service. So 14 households formed a cooperative farm. They calculated their land, cattle and laborers as shares and pooled them together. Ideally, they should farm land collectively and distribute income

60 Ren Ziming and Zhao Mingze, “1944 nian Jia Baozhi chuangban tudi yunshu hezuoshe” (How did Jia Baozhi form the land and conveyance cooperative in 1944), *Zhongguo nongye hezuoshi ziliao*, no 2 (1988).

61 Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

according to the share. From the very beginning the cooperative farm was in a mess, rich members wanted to withdraw, some poor ones simply fled. Only with frequent urges of party cadres, the farm barely reaped the grain, in February 1945. Less than half of the production plan was fulfilled. The farm disassembled. Local party learned the lesson, “At current stage, peasants still value the private ownership of their products,” “cooperative farm is a form too advanced for now.”⁶² Quite a few similar cooperative farms were built in Shandong province, and then failed. One Shandong provincial head admitted that such kind of cooperatives “could not be accepted by Chinese peasants at current stage,” “In the past, peasants took care of their own land. Now when land is collectivized, peasants do not care about farming land as much as before. The larger the size of cooperative farms, the smaller proportion each peasant has, the less he cares about the land. Therefore, such kind of collective farming often leads to a drop in production.” So propagating it was a “naive idea that does not fit peasants’ request, and won’t work.”⁶³

Mutual aid teams did not necessarily increase land yield, cooperative farms did not fit in peasants’ mentality. However, before the CCP leaders had time to reexamine comprehensively the theory of “getting organized,” the civil war between the CCP and the Nationalist Party burst out in 1946. In order to mobilize more peasants and to expropriate more resource for the war, from 1946 to 1948, radical land reform was carried out in north China, especially in old liberated regions.⁶⁴ Enormous disruption of rural production resulted. Remaining mutual aid teams and cooperative farms, if any, fell apart. The CCP was fully aware of excesses and consequences. But for the

62 “1944 nian An’zhai xian miaodianzi ban hezuo nongchan de shimo” (The history of Miaodianzi in Anzhai county building cooperative farm in 1944), *Zhongguo nongye hezuoshi ziliao*, no 4 (1987).

63 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 151.

64 Old liberated regions were regions that were occupied by the CCP during the war against Japan (1937-45). Nearly all of them were located in north China. Research on the radical land reform in North China between 1946-48 is discussed in Huang Daoxuan, “Mengyou yihuo qianzai duishou?” (Ally or potential rivals) online article, retrieved from http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=6520.

wartime mobilization the CCP was willing to pay that price.⁶⁵ Once again, productivity became negligible.

Starting from 1948, when the victory against the National Party approached and chaos in the countryside reached a breaking point, the party modified radical land reform policies. To encourage peasants to work harder, the party promised them the right of private ownership, the right of hiring laborers, of money lending and borrowing, and of renting land. Further, in 1948, the notion of equally redistributing land and property was labeled “agricultural socialism” and was openly condemned.⁶⁶ Local governments no longer propagated, in some areas even discouraged, to form mutual aid teams. From 1948 to 1950, the mutual aid teams were in recession.

1949: an alternative plan

In the late 1940s, the CCP began to prepare for ruling the country. The Soviet system became their instant choice. CCP leaders frequently consulted with Stalin on a wide range of important issues.⁶⁷ As Soviet archives reveal, the CCP had planned to establish a socialist government. Stalin did not support it. Differing with his writing in the 1920s, Stalin now suggested moderate plans to Chinese comrades and preached gradualism. As he cabled to Mao, “for the time being no nationalization of all land and no abolition of private ownership of land will be affected, no confiscation of the property of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie, from the petty up to the big bourgeoisie, no confiscation of the property of not only big landowners, but also of the middle and small ones living by hired labor.”⁶⁸ The CCP seemed to have accepted his suggestions. In February 1949 Liu Shaoqi, secretary of the CCP Central Committee

65 Chen Yung-fa, “Reconsidering yan’an, Again.”

66 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 144.

67 Li Hua-yu discusses these issues in details in *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*.

68 Andrei Ledovsky, “Two cables from correspondence between Mao Zedong and Joseph Stalin,” *Far Eastern Affairs* (hereafter as *FEA*), no 6 (2000): 95.

and number two in China's Communist Party's "pecking order," reported to Mikoyan, who was visiting the CCP in early 1949 as Stalin's special agent, that "The transition to socialism will be lengthy in terms of time, and harsh in terms of struggle," "we shall have to wait 10 to 15 years for the full offensive against capitalist elements in our economy."⁶⁹ In the Second Plenary Session of CCP's Seventh Central Committee, a meeting held in 1949, projected new China's economic strategies of accommodating a mixed economy and the development of capitalism under the banner of "New Democracy." Theoretically this plan was based on Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP). Liu Shaoqi was a strong supporter of it. As for rural economic policy, peasants were encouraged to work for themselves and to accumulate family wealth. Rich peasants were to be protected. Supplemented to the development of individual rural economy, Zhang Wentian and Liu Shaoqi proposed the Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (SMC) as the form to draw peasants into the state's orbit.

In the late 1940s, the old base areas, especially the northeast China, served as the trial areas for the CCP's new policies. As Li Hua-yu rightly points out, in the early 1950s many ideas that developed in the northeast China were adopted as the basis for national economic policy.⁷⁰ The rural development plan was one of them. In the northeast region, land reform was completed in 1948, rural prosperity and stability became major issues. Zhang Wentian, the then-governor of Heilongjiang province, suggested the party's guideline should shift from encouraging class struggle to encouraging rural production. He criticized the actions of advocating for rash collectivization or forcing peasants to join mutual aid teams. Instead, he advocated for SMC, a Soviet model that was not depicted in *Short Course*.

In 1923, Lenin published his far-reaching article "On Cooperation" stating that "if

69 Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949," *FEA*, no 3 (1995): 86-87.

70 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 69.

the whole of the peasantry were organized in cooperatives, we would be standing firmly with both feet on the soil of Socialism.”⁷¹ Lenin clearly underscored the role of cooperatives in building a socialist society, yet he died in 1924 without elaborating on it. His followers needed to figure out what kind of cooperatives should be created. In the late 1920s, heated debates arose between CPSU leaders Bukharin and Stalin.⁷² Roughly speaking, Bukharin believed that Lenin’s cooperatives referred to Supply and Marketing Cooperatives by which the state could organize small producers through commodity circulation and indirectly control them through economic regulations. In his plan a private rural economy would be allowed. Stalin, on the other hand, interpreted Lenin’s cooperatives as referring to producers’ cooperatives in which the state would organize small producers in collective production and directly administer them. The private sectors would be eliminated. It has been generally agreed among the present scholars that Lenin had little to say about producers’ cooperatives in his article.⁷³ But, in the late 1920s, Bukharin was politically defeated and his theories were erased from Soviet history. Later on, *Short Course* was compiled in which Lenin’s ideas were twisted in Stalin’s favor. Disciples of *Short Course*, such as Mao Zedong, probably believed that Lenin had originally advocated collectivization in the form of producers’ cooperatives and did not know about Bukharin’s interpretation. But some CCP comrades did know about Bukharin’s version. Zhang Wentian who studied in Moscow between 1925 to 1930, was one of them. Zhang Wentian was actually known within the party for his deep knowledge on Bukharin. In 1953, he was referred

71 V. I Lenin, "On Co-operation," in J Fineberg ed. *V.I.Lenin Selected Works* (New York, 1923), 402 – 403.

72 Relationships between Stalin and Bukharin in the 1920s were quite complex. They were allies against the Troskyite left, then they broke when Stalin turned towards forced grain collection. Please refer to Moshe Lewin’s research.

73 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 72.

to teach Li Weihang, then the head of the United Front Department, about Bukharin.⁷⁴

Li Hua-yu convincingly shows how Zhang Wentian was deeply influenced by Lenin's idea of the "transition from capitalism to socialism" and his NEP policy.⁷⁵ In addition, Zhang also incorporated Bukharin's theory, although he did not give Bukharin, known then as a traitor, any credit. As Bukharin, Zhang asserted that one key in the transition to socialism was to organize SMC,

At present, SMCs in the countryside are the economic headquarters that direct the economic activities of small producers and the central linkage between agricultural production and consumption. After the land reform, they were the most important form of organization for peasants and small handicraftsmen. Without cooperatives, it would be impossible to organize economically thousands and thousands of small agricultural producers.⁷⁶

Zhang concluded that SMC "can not only facilitate the circulation of commodities between cities and the countryside, but also connect the state-owned economy with small producers."⁷⁷ Acknowledging the future of collectivization, Zhang reminded his comrades that the efforts of forced collectivization had resulted in failure and he suggested to guarantee peasants' right to private property.⁷⁸ Zhang Wentian stressed, "nowadays, we should pay particular attention to consumer cooperatives which could connect state owned economy and private economy."⁷⁹ At this point, Zhang Wentian's theory closely resembled to Bukharin's projection of the function of SMC.

Zhang Wentian was not the only one who at that time discovered the form of

74 Li Weihang, *Huiyi yu yanjiu* xiajuan (Recollections and research, vol. 2) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1986), 744.

75 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*.

76 Zhang Wentian, *Zhang Wentian xuanji* (Selected works of Zhang Wentian) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1985), 402; Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*, 73-74.

77 Zhang Peisen, *Zhang Wentian Nianpu* (A chronicle of Zhang Wentian) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000).

78 Zhang Wentian wenji bianjizu ed., *Zhang Wentian Wenji 4 ce* (Collected works of Zhang wentian, vol 4) (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi ziliao chubanshe, 1995), 1-5.

79 Zhang Wentian, "Outline of the basic guideline of economic construction and composition of economy in the northeast region" (September 1948) (Guanyu dongbei jingji goucheng ji jingji jianshe jiben fangzhen de tigang), in *Zhang Wentian wenji*, 32-33.

SMC. Almost at the same time, Liu Shaoqi wrote a series of articles on SMC. He planned to integrate the country's whole economy through marketing administration and SMC was the instrument to achieve this goal.⁸⁰ Liu pointed out that Lenin and Stalin both had emphasized on the importance of cooperatives. He underscored that the alliance between cooperatives and the state owned economy would lead China toward socialism. He particularly valued the key role of SMC:

Obviously, without widespread SMCs as the bridge to connect small producers and the state-owned economy, the country led by proletarians will not forcefully guide hundreds of thousands of scattered small producers; therefore, the construction of national economy of New Democratism will not proceed smoothly.⁸¹

Liu Shaoqi proposed building SMCs as the means of assuring that hundreds of thousands of peasants would produce in accordance with proletarians' demands. A close reading of Liu's works on cooperatives in this period reveals that his language was not based on *Short Course*, but on Lenin's work during the NEP. Liu Shaoqi considered China's situation in 1948 similar to that of the Soviet Union in the NEP period. As he said, "Our policies are very similar to the conditions of the USSR before the capitalist uprising in 1918 and of their NEP policies, so their experience is worth thinking."⁸² His interpretation of Lenin's "On Cooperation" resembled Bukharin's too. Liu Shaoqi showed little interest in forming mutual aid teams and his use of the term cooperatives often did not include mutual aid teams. In a politburo meeting in September 1948, Liu suggested organizing cooperatives across China, he only referred to SMC. Mao Zedong had to interrupt adding that mutual aid teams were also a form

80 Liu Shaoqi, "Lun xin minzhu zhuyi shiqi de jingji yu hezuoshe" (On the economy of New Democratic period and cooperatives), in *Liushaoqi lun xin zhongguo jingji jianshe* (Liu Shaoqi on the economic construction of the People's Republic) (Beijing: Zhongyang wentian chubanshe, 1993).

81 Liu Shaoqi, "Dui 'guanyu dongbei jingji goucheng ji jingji jianshe jiben fangzhen de tigan' de ruogan xiugai" (Several amendments on 'the outline of the basic guidelines of economic construction and composition of economy in the northeast Region'), *Liushaoqi lun xin zhongguo jingji jianshe*.

82 Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu xin zhongguo de jingji jianshe fangzhen" (The Guideline of economic construction of new China), *Liushaoqi lun xin zhongguo jingji jianshe*.

of cooperatives.⁸³

Liu's proposals seemed to be welcomed by the CCP leaders. Even Chairman Mao said "Comrade Liu Shaoqi did great research on this (cooperative) issue."⁸⁴ As part of New Democracy policy, Liu especially remarked that "the transfer of agriculture onto socialist lines, we envisage only on condition that agriculture has been provided an industrial base."⁸⁵ Mao seemed to agree with it, as he told Mikoyan "we have given land to the peasants, but we have not given them the commodities they need and which we do not have. If we do not develop industry, we shall not be able to supply the peasants with commodities."⁸⁶ The Second Plenary Session of CCP's Seventh Central Committee, declared that "it is possible to lead the development of agriculture toward the direction of modernization and collectivization," while "both at present and during a relatively long period of time in the future our agricultural and handicraft industry are and will remain dispersed and individualized in terms of the basic form."⁸⁷ Officially, Liu Shaoqi's plan that encouraged individual rural economy and gave priority to increasing rural production over moving towards to collectivization was adopted. SMCs, not the mutual aid teams, were propagandized to be established in a large scale.

Deeply in Mao Zedong's heart, he was not fully convinced by the virtues of the New Democracy policy and he warned it was wrong to let peasants take their course.⁸⁸

83 Liu Shaoqi, "Xin minzhu zhuyi jingji jianshe wenti" (problems on New Democratic Economy construction), *Liushaoqi lun xin zhongguo jingji jianshe*.

84 Mao Zedong, "Xianzai de xingshi he women dangqian de renwu" (Current Situations and the Mission of the Party) (January, 8, 1949), *Mao Zedong wenji*, vol. 5.

85 Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949," *FEA*, no 3 (1995): 86-87.

86 Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949," 87.

87 Zhu Yonghong, "Reflections on the Party's Policy Toward the Rural Individual economy During the First Seven Years of the State," in Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun eds., *The Politics of Agricultural Cooperativization in China*, 29.

88 Mao Zedong, "Zai Zhongguo gongchangdang di qi jie zhongyang weiyuan hui di er ci quan ti huiyi shang de baogao" (Report to the Second Plenary Session of The Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China), *Selected works of Mao Zedong*, vol 4.

But for the time being, he did not involve himself much in rural issues and did not challenge Liu Shaoqi's rural policy. Challenges for Liu were to come from cadres of lower ranks.

Gao Gang - playing the ideological card

The New Democracy policy was not unanimously supported among CCP cadres. Theoretically this policy was grounded on Lenin's NEP theory. But in 1949, not many CCP cadres knew about NEP, as Bo Yibo recalled.⁸⁹ Quite the contrary, many cadres were confused by the New Democracy policy and questioned the necessity of tolerating capitalism. As Liu Shaoqi acknowledged, "In the party there are people who are inclined to a leftist, voluntaristic, hasty construction of socialism. This tendency reveals itself in the fact there are those who draw up unrealistic plans in which they fail to allow for our possibilities."⁹⁰ Gao Gang, member of the politburo and chairman of the Northeast China Bureau, was one of them. He advocated following the Stalin model as depicted in Stalin's writings of 1920s and realizing the socialist transformation of agriculture and industry. In the northeast region, he raised a slogan "building a model of Soviet socialism." Immediately, he was criticized by Liu Shaoqi for his "leftist" error.⁹¹

Gao Gang in no way accepted this charge. He chose to play Soviet card. In the wake of the founding of the PRC, Gao Gang was of particular importance. In addition to his unchallenged authority in the northeast region, he was widely known for his close relationship with Soviet comrades. He had formed a particularly friendly relationship with Ivan Kovalev, Stalin's special envoy to the CCP between 1948 to

89 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu shang ce* (Reflections on certain major decisions and events, vol 1) (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1991), 65.

90 Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949," 87.

91 Shi Dongbing, *Gao Gang hunduan zhongnanhai* (Gao Gang's failure in Zhongnanhai) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 1995).

1950. Kovalev referred Gao Gang as a “true comrade” and “an exceptional man.” Andrei Ledovsky who served as Consul- General in Mukden in the period 1950-52 also admired Gao Gang and considered him an orthodox pro-Soviet Communist and sympathetic to the Soviet model of economic planning.⁹² Gao Gang did not waste these valuable resources. After he was criticized by Liu Shaoqi, details of this CCP’s internal discussion reached Stalin through Kovalev. Kovalev, by his own judgment or inspired by Gao Gang, further hinted that divergences in different economic plans among the CCP were in essence signs of political line struggle. He claimed that pro-American and anti-Soviet sentiments were rife in the CCP. Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo were among these who allegedly showed their pro-American sentiment. Kovalev accused Liu Shaoqi of scheming to make a groundless attack upon Gao Gang. In this report, Kovalev’s evaluations on CCP leaders, except on Gao Gang, were generally negative.⁹³ Stalin appeared to disapprove of this report and later even gave this report to Mao Zedong to display his confidence to the CCP.⁹⁴ Mao’s true reaction to this report and how he interpreted Stalin’s motives were not revealed. Gao Gang’s allegedly pro-Soviet sympathies and unusually close relationship with Soviet comrades might have doomed him to eventually fall, as Lovalev claimed and Ledovsky suspected.⁹⁵ But Kovalev’s report must have alerted Mao of the political risk of appearing to encourage capitalism in China. After all, in 1950 Stalin was highly wary of the possibility of the rapprochement between China and the USA.

Gao Gang continued to play Soviet cards. In February 1950, he wrote to Mao Zedong stating that Liu Shaoqi’s speech in Tianjin in 1949 exposed Liu’s view that

92 Paul Wingrove, “Mao’s Conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, 1953-55,” *Cold War International History Project Working Papers Series*, issue 5-6.

93 “Ivan Kovalev’s report to Stalin on Dec 24, 1949,” translated by Ma Guifan, *Zhonggong dangshi yanjiu*, no 6 (2004): 88-92.

94 Stalin’s intention of doing this is still a matter of debate.

95 In 1954, Gao Gang was labeled the antirevolutionary faction and committed suicide. Paul Wingrove discussed this issue in “Mao’s Conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, 1953-55.”

China could only follow the road of capitalism, not of socialism. Gao Gang warned Mao that such kind of views had generated negative influences both in the CCP and in the international communist community. Gao Gang further reported to Mao that his Soviet comrades did not think comrades Liu Shaoqi was a real Marxist.⁹⁶ Now and then Gao Gang resorted to his Soviet comrades to justify his plans and charged those who disagreed with him as anti-Soviet. Indeed, the New Democracy policy did have generated suspects among the international communists. For example, Velio Spano, a prominent Italian Communist who traveled extensively in China, requested to have a confidential talk with the Soviet charge d'affaires in Beijing, P.A. Shibaev. Specifically, Spano wanted to talk with Shibaev, not as a Soviet diplomat, but as a member of the Bolshevik Communist Party. Spano declared that “blindness to the danger of capitalism swiftly regenerating itself and the underrating of the working class were typical of the majority of top functionaries in China he had talked with.”⁹⁷ Valuing its reputations in the international communist movement, for the CCP leaders ideological obligations were not merely a nominal concern.

The support for an immediate transition to socialism was also common among the CCP rank and file. When Zhang Wentian strongly denounced the idea that considered organizing all peasants into mutual aid teams as the only way of preventing peasants from sliding to capitalism, many CCP cadres in the northeast region asked, “Since our goal is agricultural collectivization, why don’t we carry it out today?”⁹⁸ *Northeast Daily* published an article claiming that the biased emphasis on peasants’ own preferences was in fact worship of the spontaneity of the masses movement and violated Mao’s assertion of not “letting peasants take their own course.”⁹⁹ Soon, in

96 Shi Dongbing, *Gao Gang hunduan zhongnanhai*.

97 Arlen Meliksetov, “‘New Democracy’ and China’s search for socio-economic development routes (1949-1953),” *FEA*, no 1(1996): 80.

98 *Zhang Wentian nianpu*, 900.

99 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*.

January 1950, Zhang Wentian was reassigned to assume Chinese delegate to the United Nation. Zhang Wentian, with surprise, heard his new job from the broadcast. The northeast region now came under the full control of Gao Gang.

In the summer 1949, after visiting collective farms in the Soviet Union, Gao Gang decided to focus on the agricultural policy for a breakthrough. He made a speech committing himself to bolstering the transition to collectivization by elaborating on Mao's terms "get organized" and "actively developing (agriculture) towards (modernization and) collectivization."¹⁰⁰ He implied that putting off collectivization with the excuse of lacking machines was a mistake of "line." On January 4, 1950, *Northeast Daily* published Gao Gang's speech which expressed the intent to upgrade mutual aid teams further and promised to grant them financial privileges. It further called on mutual aid teams to challenge individual farmers. This article did not explicitly call for limiting individual farmers, but the implication was rather obvious.¹⁰¹

Not surprisingly, Liu Shaoqi was not pleased with Gao Gang's behavior. He considered that mutual aid teams in the northeast China were based on broken and impoverished individual economies and were not a good basis for socialism. He thought it was impossible for the present mutual aid teams to develop into future collective farms.¹⁰² In addition to internal critiques, Liu Shao did not neglect the Soviet channel. In the same month when Gao Gang's article being published in *Northeast Daily*, Liu Shaoqi was interviewed by O.I. Chechetkina, a *Pravda* correspondent. In the interview, Liu clearly focused on peasant issues. He told Chechetkina,

Wealthy farmers will help productivity increase and will supply towns with goods... The new wealthy farmers are only beginning to appear and should

100 Shi Jingtang ed., *Zhonggong nongye hezuohua yundong shiliao*, 1020 – 1026.

101 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*, 204.

102 Liu Shaoqi, *Liushaoqi lun xin zhongguo jingji jianshe*, 153-155.

not be curbed... If we try ordering capitalism to stop, it will get us nowhere. On the contrary, we shall make things worse by that, because millions of peasants will turn against our regime.¹⁰³

Chechetkina dutifully sent this report back to Moscow,¹⁰⁴ yet we do not know the Soviet response. On August 26, 1950, Liu told Soviet Ambassador N.V. Roshchin that “we are most grateful to Comrade Stalin for his timely advice about improving relations with private capital, both urban and rural, about the treatment of wealthy farmers.”¹⁰⁵ As Meliksetov notes, the political backing by Stalin was of tremendous importance for Liu Shaoqi.¹⁰⁶ But Liu Shaoqi seemed not to highlight this point publicly.

Numerous mutual aid teams were built in the northeast region and quite a few incidents of forcing peasants into mutual aid teams or squeezing individual farmers were reported. Yet no punishment was imposed on Gao Gang. He was later summoned to Beijing to assume the post of Chairman of the State Planning Committee.

Gao Gang portrayed himself as an orthodox pro-Soviet comrade and justified his policy of “getting peasants organized” with the theory based on Stalin’s “On Several Problems of Leninism.”¹⁰⁷ Of course, this does not mean that faith in Stalin’s theory alone drove Gao Gang to challenge Liu Shaoqi. Gao Gang probably was more motivated by his political ambition: at the time, he was conspiring to take over Liu Shaoqi’s position. The difference between Liu and Mao on New Democracy policy in general, and on agricultural cooperatives in particular,¹⁰⁸ provided him with a chance

103 Arlen Meliksetov, “‘New Democracy’ and China’s search for socio-economic development routes (1949-1953),” 79-80.

104 This report is kept in Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation.

105 Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation, folio 0100, list 43, portfolio 10, folder 302, p. 178. Quoted from Arlen Meliksetov, “‘New Democracy’ and China’s search for socio-economic development routes (1949-1953),” 80.

106 Arlen Meliksetov, “‘New Democracy’ and China’s search for socio-economic development routes (1949-1953).”

107 Liu Jianping, “Nongye hezuohua juece de guocheng jiqi zhengzhixue yiyi: xin zhongguo 1951” (Policy Decision in the Cooperative Transformation of Agriculture and Its Political Implications: New China in 1951), *Kaifang shidai*, no 2 (2003).

108 Li Hua-yu and Arlen Meliksetov have discussed this issue in their works respectively. Many

to gain Mao's favor. At the same time, we should not overlook the impact of Soviet collectivization theory, with which by 1949 CCP cadres were quite familiar with, at least in terms of language, thanks to Mao's advocacy in the mid-1940s. A plan that differed from Mao would easily generate suspicion and confusion. Gao Gang further played Soviet card to attack Liu Shaoqi ideologically. The puzzle is that, as mentioned earlier, at this time Stalin himself was advising the CCP to accommodate capitalism, and Liu Shaoqi was following his suggestions; while Gao Gang used Stalin's early work to attack Liu Shaoqi and was supported by his Soviet comrades who should have known Stalin's attitudes well. What kind of role Stalin might have played has not yet been revealed.¹⁰⁹

Gao Gang was not the only who questioned Liu Shaoqi's rural policy. Soon, Lai Ruoyu, a provincial leader of Shanxi Province will launch another battle against Liu Shaoqi. But unlike Gao Gang who played ideological card, Lai Ruoyu chose a different approach to advance his agenda, circuitously.

Chinese scholars also have done research on this subject. One prominent scholar is Lu Zhenxiang who has written series of articles and books on it. Lu Zhenxiang, *Tansuo de guiji* (Trails of explorations) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003).

109 Documents and records on Gao Gang are extremely scarce in Chinese given he was labeled the "anti-revolutionary" and committed suicide in 1954 when failed in his political struggle against Liu Shaoqi. Ledovsky later writes a bibliography of Gao Gang in Russian language which has not been translated into Chinese or English. A. M. Ledovsky, *Delo Gao Gana-Rao Shushi* (Moscow: Institut Dalnego Vostoka, 1990).

Chapter 2 Lai Ruoyu's challenge to the party center in the early 1950s

Gao Gang was not the only high official who disagreed with Liu Shaoqi's rural policy. Lai Ruoyu, the vice secretary of the CCP Shanxi provincial branch soon, followed Gao Gang, initiated a battle against Liu Shaoqi. Unlike Gao Gang, Lai Ruoyu chose to let peasants voice for his opinions.

Assumptions and Challenges on Peasant Issues

Lai Ruoyu and his fellow provincial leaders in Shanxi were, like Gao Gang, duly impressed by Soviet collectives. After the CCP won the civil war, some of them began at once to think about how to build socialism. A socialist countryside should move in a socialist direction, they believed.¹ Unlike Liu Shaoqi, who suggested holding off for a while on building a socialist countryside, Lai Ruoyu declared on September 1, 1949, the day the Shanxi provincial government was established that "Our grand goal is modernization and collectivization. Without collectivization, there is no modernization. Those two are mutually related. We should now step by step move toward this goal."²

Four days later, Lai instructed his subordinate, Wang Qian, who was about to assume the post of party secretary of Shanxi's Changzhi prefecture which belonged to CCP's Taihang base area prior to 1949, to carry out investigations in this old liberated area. What were people thinking, what kinds of problems had they encountered, and what methods should the CCP employ to take the party's work one step further. Lai explicitly told Wang Qian "You can ask other people to deal with other matters; you

1 Gao Jie's interview of Tao Lujia on April 19, 2007.

2 Lai Ruoyu, "Zai shengwei kuoda huiyi shang de jianghua" (September 1, 1949) (Speech at the enlarged provincial conference), SPA, 00.29.1.

must take this mission very seriously and find the correct answer.”³ Lai did not explain clearly what kind of answer he was expecting, but Lai’s trusted subordinate, Wang Qian, was likely well aware of Lai’s hopes. Upon his arrival in Changzhi in late 1949, he initiated a series of investigations of rural conditions. What he discovered was more of a disappointing surprise than a pleasure.

As chapter 1 discuses, despite the CCP’s long history of mobilizing peasants, its knowledge of peasants, especially of the peasant economy, was limited and biased. Peasants, in the party’s eyes, were predominantly viewed as a group that made up the main revolutionary force, not as individual producers. In fact, prior to 1949 it did not care much about the issue of rural production. The CCP cared more about how to redistribute output among peasants and had stressed the extraction of resources through rural class struggles rather than increasing rural production, as Chapter 1 analyzes.⁴ However, in 1949 the CCP had to adjust to its new role as the ruling party and to consider ways of restoring rural order, improving rural production, and using tax measures to extract resources. Some CCP leaders were conscious of the new challenges. But their work was informed by certain fundamental assumptions about Chinese peasants.

First of all, following a Marxist analysis of capitalist organizations, CCP leaders assumed that peasants always acted to maximize gains by rationalizing production. They deeply believed that all peasants would work hard and produce more if they possessed adequate production materials. Peasants, they thought, were open to the idea of continuously investing in production. With the party’s guidance, peasants would be

3 Wang Qian, “Weishenme yao shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe” (Why did we try to build agricultural producers’ cooperatives), in Shanxi sheng shizhi yanjiu yuan ed., *Shanxi nongye hezuohua* (Agricultural cooperativization in Shanxi) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 2001), 656.

4 Xiaojia Hou, “‘Get Organized’ –the impact of Soviet models on the CCP’s rural economic strategy: 1949-53,” conference paper, presented on *The Soviet Impact on China: Politics, Economy, Society, and Culture, 1949-1991*, Columbia University, June 22, 2007.

willing to collectively purchase new farm tools and apply new technologies to increase production.

Second, party leaders believed that Chinese peasants had a strong sense of affiliation with land. In the CCP's view, peasants were intimately connected with the land. Peasants would at all costs struggle to keep their own land. As Mao often claimed, the origin of peasant poverty resided in unequal land distribution. The CCP believed that as long as peasants held land, they would improve their living standard and move ahead.⁵

Further, since it was the CCP that had distributed land to poor peasants and had appointed them to positions of village leadership, poor peasants and cadres would be grateful to the party and continue to serve the party, even if such loyalty conflicted to a certain degree with individual peasant interests. The party felt that assumptions of this sort were fully justified.

However, academic research on the peasant economy has demonstrated the otherwise. For example, Chayanov convincingly shows that peasant economy can not be understood in a discipline that originated from the study of capitalist economy. Peasants produced for the satisfaction of the family consumption and made balances between producing more and enjoying the life. As for the cause of poverty, Chayanov emphasizes the high ratio of consumer and laborer was the fundamental factor.⁶ Shanin highlights the multidirectional and cyclical mobility of peasants and reminded us the fatal effects of accidents.⁷ Both scholars ground their studies on Russian peasants and their approaches have yet been systematically applied to Chinese peasants. Nevertheless, their research has described to us the complexity of the

5 In terms of theory, scholars have successfully challenged these assumptions. Please refer to footnote 12.

6 Naniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay and R Smith eds., *A. V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy* (Homewood: Richard D. Irwin, Inc, 1966).

7 Teodor Shanin, *The Awkward Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

peasant economy and peasant society of which the CCP had rarely thought. James Scott further stresses on peasants' "safety-first" principle in pre-modern era based on his research on Southeast Asia.⁸ Although having not read these studies, the CCP was about to learn the lessons from harsh realities, as investigations in Changzhi quickly showed.

The Changzhi area was an old liberated region. Between the winter of 1948 and the spring of 1949, 96.3 percent of villages in its territory completed land reform, and land had been nearly equally distributed. Taking Yaozizhen village in Tunliu county as an example, of the 88 households in this village, the average landholding was 4.1 mou per person, and the average per capita output of grain was 3.6 dan.⁹ Former landlords and rich peasants on average owned 2.29 mou per person.¹⁰ According to official records, overall agricultural production had improved and total village output in two-thirds of the villages in the county now exceeded pre-war levels.¹¹ If adopting Tanaka's standard, peasants in Changzhi prefecture could not make ends meet. In accordance with Tanaka's estimation, aid organizations and economists general define "self-sufficient" as equivalent to 45 to 51.1 catties of unhusked grain per month, 600 catties per year.¹² Peasants themselves considered 700 catties unhusked grain per year as the standard of subsistence.¹³ The secrets for peasants' survival were income from

8 James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1976), vii -.5

9 1 dan = 150 catties = 167 pounds; 1 mou = 1/6 English acre

10 "Jin dongnan diwei youguan nongye shengchan de zongjie he tugai qingkuang" (1949) (Summary on the agricultural production and land reform in the southeast of Shanxi province), Jincheng City Archive (hereafter as JCA), 004.2.

11 This report also admits that the data of pre-war production was not accurate. "Changzhi diwei 1949 nian yilai nongye shengchan zongjie" (Dec. 10, 1949) (Changzhi prefecture summary on agricultural production since 1949), JCA, 1.1.4.

12 Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 47.

13 Gao Wangling, *Renmin Gongshe shiqi zhongguo nongmin fanxingwei tiaocha* (Investigation on peasants' anti-behavior during the People's commune period) (Beijing: Zhongguo dangshi chubanshe, 2006), 38.

sideline work and from the hidden lands. The Party's standard was much lower though, it considered 400 catties per year as the minimal income. Generally speaking, between 1949 and 1951 peasant livelihood improved.

However, from the point of view of the state, the situation was not so encouraging. Liu Shaoqi's cooperative plan did not work well. SMCs were established in various levels from provinces to villages. But they were operating as ordinary commercial shops and hardly played a role in connecting peasants with urban centers, not to mention its alleged function of regulating the peasant economy.¹⁴

The biggest problem was rural cadres. In the Changzhi area this was a concern even before 1949. The radical land reform of 1946-1948 in the old liberated areas of North China, together with the rectification of cadres between late 1947 and early 1948, had reconfigured the rural power structure. Overall, this movement was aimed at civil war mobilization¹⁵ and overwhelmingly favored "the poor and hired tillers." Property and land were equally divided, more often to the advantage of the poor. Middle peasants were hit hard. Before land reform, in many old liberated regions it was mainly middle peasants who assumed, often through peasant elections, the post of village head. In part this was because they could afford to devote a bit less time to work, could calculate and articulate, could provide meals to supervisors and visitors, and could manage to resist orders from above. But during the party rectification, class background became the dominant criterion and many cadres of middle peasant origin were labeled "impure" and were intentionally pushed aside.¹⁶ In the Taihang liberated region, which later became part of Changzhi prefecture, nearly all village cadres were

14 "Bo Yibo's report on the first national congress of cooperative workers." July 1950. SPA, Files on cooperation, vol 50.

15 Chen Yung-fa, "Civil War, Mao Zedong and Land Revolution – Misjudgment or Political Strategy? Part 3," *Dalu*, Taipei, series 94.

16 Huang Daoxuan, "Mengyou yihuo qianzai duishou?" (Ally or potential rivals?), online article, retrieved from http://www.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/wk_wzdetails.asp?id=6520.

relieved of duty.¹⁷ Poor peasants who shined in the political struggles and profited from the land reform came to power. Most of them were poorly-educated, radical-minded, and short-sighted. They were not particularly good at production nor did they have much moral authority. Their authority relied heavily on their ability to fight the “class enemy” and win party support. Cadres of district-level and higher rank were hit too. In Taihang, 1,800 out of 8,000 cadres were punished, one third of whom were expelled or put on probation. Moreover, to prevent nepotism, it was a common practice to relocate cadres. As a result, cadres often knew little about conditions in the places where they ruled and had little in common with local peasants.¹⁸

In mid-1948, aware of the disruptions in agricultural production and chaos in the countryside, the CCP decided to protect middle peasants’ interests and curb the practice of equally redistributing rural property, now labeled as “agrarian utopian socialism.” The old working style was criticized, but the new one was not yet formed. With the end of the civil war in sight and land reform already completed, a large number of cadres were at a loss. They could not easily handle the new problems posed by peasants, they did not want to be constrained by party regulations, and, more important, they did not see the benefit of serving the party: “There is no more fat profit in revolution, so why should we suffer any more. Serving the people is not as appealing as working on my own land.” Afraid of being relocated further to the south and fearful of being drafted into the army, some cadres renounced their party membership, while others became deeply depressed. To encourage local cadres, prefectural leaders organized training classes to talk about the new direction of the revolution – guiding agricultural production and talking about the Soviet Union. Many

17 “Gei Huabei ju zuzhibu de gongzuo baogao” (Nov 5, 1948) (Report to the organization department of the North China Bureau), *Dang de jianshe* (The construction of the party) (Shanxi: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989), 511.

18 “Gei Huabei ju zuzhibu de gongzuo baogao,” 512- 518.

rural cadres were interested in the references to the Soviet Union, and said “Now there is something in the future to aspire to.”¹⁹ In 1950, the situation for cadres had not improved much.

Officially, only cadres of township (xiang) and higher levels were considered state employees receiving salaries from the state payroll.²⁰ So village cadres were not financially sponsored by the government. Thus when the civil war was over, many village cadres believed their mission was accomplished and that it was time to work for themselves. Working for the party was increasingly considered a burden. Quite a few CCP village cadres asked to resign so they could concentrate on farming their own land. For example, in Suyu village in Wuxiang county, Changzhi prefecture, during land reform there were 68 CCP members and 36 activists who petitioned to join the party believing that “only the CCP can save China.” But by 1951, there were only 22 CCP members, half of whom did not engage in party affairs and many of whom believed they would live a happier life without the CCP.²¹ Wang Qian was particularly shocked by the fact that one party branch in Xianghuan county declared its own dissolution. The branch head said, “We have participated in fighting against the Japanese and against Chiang Kai-shek. Now the land has been redistributed, Japan and Chiang have been defeated. Our mission is over. Therefore our branch is dissolved.”²² Wang Qian was deeply concerned. He considered such erratic behavior to be extremely dangerous and regarded the problem as the most troubling issue for the party.²³

Agricultural production was another issue of concern. After the war, the party

19 “Gei Huabei ju zuzhibu de gongzuo baogao,” 504.

20 In 1950, the administration ladder within a province from low to high was village, (township), district, county, prefecture and province.

21 “Zhengzhi diaocha baogao” (June 22, 1951) (Political investigation report), JCA, 1.1.48.

22 Wang Qian, “Weishenme yao shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe,” 657.

23 Wang Qian, “Weishenme yao shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe,” 655-658.

articulated a new mission for rural cadres - - to guide peasants to produce. Many cadres did not understand this assignment very well. They said peasants knew how to farm their land and required no guidance from the party. Or, more practically, they claimed they did not know how to guide peasants since there was no party directive from above, unlike the era of land reform in which the CCP issued oceans of directives. So long as cadres followed those directives, there was no need to worry about making mistakes.²⁴ How to encourage cadres to be involved in guiding agricultural production became an “urgent and large issue that had to be addressed.”²⁵ In every farming season (spring, summer and fall), the provincial government needed to push counties to guide agricultural production. Counties then sent work teams²⁶ to villages to check up on rural cadres. During land reform, a time when certain groups had benefited and certain groups had suffered, it had been relatively easy for the party to inspect real conditions because there were always local actors eager to show change. But when it came to increasing productivities, no one suffered when make believe “success” was reported. Consequently, positive (and sometimes unrealistic or exaggerated) reports prevailed. In short, it was fairly difficult for higher level leaders to know the truth.²⁷

Peasant attitudes did not please the party either. The CCP had anticipated that once peasants obtained their own land, they would be willing to purchase better tools, apply new technologies, and invest in the land. Contrary to this prediction, however, in most cases, post-land reform peasants, especially middle peasants, were reluctant to

24 “Shanxi sheng chunji shengchan jiancha baogao” (March 31, 1950) (Report of the investigation on the spring plowing in Shanxi province), SPA, C55.1002.64.

25 “Shanxi sheng chunji shengchan jiancha baogao.”

26 John Burns defines work teams as “cadres organized at one level of the government or party to go down temporarily to lower levels in order to investigate and report on conditions there, supervise the implementation of policy and solve problems as they arise on the spot.” Jean Oi, in addition to it, stresses on work teams’ role in the administration and regulation of economic policy. Jean C. Oi, *State and Peasant in Contemporary China*, 92

27 “Shanxi sheng chunji shengchan jiancha baogao.”

focus all their efforts on farming or to invest in production. As a result, unit yields had not significantly increased. First, peasants had a living memory of the land reform of 1946-48 and feared that their property would be “socialized” (equally redistributed) in the near future. Thus they were afraid of looking “outstanding” in production. They asked rhetorically: who is dreaming of accumulating wealth? It is enough to simply meet all one’s basic needs. The lesson they learned from the past was that “If your output increases one tenth, your burden will increase ten times.”²⁸ The CCP immediately recognized this attitude for what it was, and quickly put forward such slogans as “work harder to accumulate family wealth” to appease peasants. But these slogans did little to ease peasant worries.

In addition to their fears of being “socialized,” there was something more deeply rooted in peasant culture that prevented tillers from applying new technologies. James Scott convincingly shows that, based on his research in Southeast Asia, peasants “typically prefer to avoid economic disaster rather than take risks to maximize their average income.”²⁹ Peasants tended to resist innovations because adopting new strategies might mean abandoning a system that they knew well and that involved minimal risks. Moreover, after land reform in North China, family holdings were fairly small and households contained fewer members.³⁰ A family with fewer laborers and small plots saw itself as being in a tenuous situation and was risk adverse. A common attitude was “safety-first.” Increasing production was not a high priority for such a family.³¹ Although probably unaware of this sort of peasant psychology, the CCP was quite clear about the fact that few peasants could afford the cost of new

28 “Shanxi sheng chunji shengchan jiancha baogao.”

29 James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. The question is can Scott’s findings be applied to China.

30 In land reform, peasants in extended families usually dividend into smaller core families to keep the land size per family smaller and thus avoid being labeled landlords or rich peasants.

31 James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*, 19.

farming tools. What state agents and activists could do, Wang Qian soon figured out, was to organize peasants to buy tools collectively. But the question was how to manage such groups.

After receiving some property allocations and no longer forced to pay rents, a large number of peasants did experience improved livelihoods. Middle peasants were the dominant group in the countryside. But from the point of view of the state, the changes that had taken place did not directly benefit other parts of the nation. Grain availability on the free market dropped off considerably. In pre-land reform times, it was not uncommon for a small group of wealthy households, mainly small landlords and so-called rich peasants, to supply as much as one-half or more of the entire surplus marketed by villages.³² In prewar Wuxiang county, Changzhi prefecture, for example, landlords and rich peasants made up 5.99 percent of the rural population, yet they provided 28.9 percent of total output. Middle peasants, on the other hand, often produced only enough food for themselves. In 1948, after land reform, 86 percent of the rural population in Wuxiang county was made up of middle peasants and they produced roughly 86 percent of total output. If one compares 1949 production to prewar yields, peasants as a whole produced 9.1 percent more grain, but the amount of surplus grain sent to the free market dropped dramatically. In Hanbi village, for instance, annual marketed grain in the prewar period amounted to over 800 dan, while in 1950 it dropped to 409 dan.³³ Peasants were unwilling to sell their grain. They preferred to eat better and live better, or just build up their surplus supplies.³⁴ Studies show that on average peasant consumption of grain increased from 370 catties per

32 John Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker eds., *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 254-255.

33 “Wuxian liuge cun jingji diaocha” (August 7, 1950) (Investigations on the economy of six villages in Wuxiang), JCA, 024.11.

34 “Wuxian liuge cun nongye shengchan zhong zuzhi huzhu de kaocha baogao” (August 7, 1950) (Investigations on organizing mutual aid teams in agricultural production in six villages of Wuxiang), SPA, C 77. 04. 0002.

capita in 1949 to 440 catties per capita in 1952.³⁵ Grain procurement increasingly became the CCP's major concern.

Meanwhile, not all peasants had improved their lives after land reform. One of Wang Qian's reports on five villages in Changzhi prefecture (Lucheng, Weijiazhuang, Beiliu, Chuandi and Shibutou) revealed that before land reform there were 329 poor peasant families. As a result of the 1946-48 land reform, 88 percent of them had risen to the level of middle peasants or upper-middle peasants. But within two years after land reform, 19 households had fallen back into the poor peasant category. The causes were diverse. Five households declined because of the death of laborers or livestock, four because of "laziness," three because of mistakes in managing sideline work, and two because of increased family size. Conditions for former rich peasants and landlords now members of condemned groups, were even worse.³⁶ Changzhi prefectural officials were now keenly aware that factors other than the lack of land, namely natural disasters, increases or decreases in labor power, marriage, laziness, and excessive indulgence, all could lead to poverty.³⁷ These sorts of factors seemed unavoidable. But some investigators asked: was there a better way to deal with them?³⁸

Peasants did not hesitate to sell their land when encountering financial difficulties or non-farming opportunities. For example, the same report shows that 35 households were in the throes of selling their land and four had already completely sold out. A

35 Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, "Zhongguo gongchangdang weishenme fangqi xin minzhu zhuyi" (Why the CCP Gave Up New Democracy), *Twenty-first Century* no 13 (October 1992): 17.

36 "Changzhi diqu wuge cun tugai shengchan zhong jieji bianhua de diaocha" (Jan 10, 1950) (Investigation of the changes of class statuses during land reform and production in five villages of the Changzhi area), *Changzhi diqu shiban he fazhan nongye shengchan hezuoshe de ruogan lishi ziliao* (Several historical documents on building the experimental Agricultural Profucers' Cooperatives in Changzhi area) (Shangxi: Rural Politics Department, 1977).

37 Those changes verified the theories of Shannin and Chayanov on peasants' multi-directional mobilizations.

38 "Changzhi diqu wuge cun tugai shengchan zhong jieji bianhua de diaocha"

small number of peasants went bankrupt or were unable to achieve family subsistence. Those people should not be left to starve. However, the customary relief system had been destroyed and the new one not yet established. The party itself did not want to directly assume the full responsibility of feeding the needy, partly because it did not possess such financial resources at that time. A new method was needed to accommodate the unfortunate and feed the hungry.

Peasants not only decided how much to sell on the market, they also decided what kind of crops should be planted. Conditions varied in different regions. For example, in Sichuan province, if soil conditions permitted, peasants preferred to plant cash crops which were far more profitable than grain. Castor-oil plants and tobacco were popular choices. By contrast, in poorer Changzhi prefecture many peasants preferred to plant grain to feed the family and to avoid economic risks. It was not uncommon for peasant planting patterns to conflict with party plans. In the case of Changzhi, the Shanxi provincial government made it clear that it was in need of cotton and other cash crops. In Sichuan, to the government's dismay, as cash crop production rose substantially, grain production fell proportionally. Finding a way to keep peasant planting practices in line with the needs of the state was a constant concern for provincial leaders.

Another problem that cadres of all levels encountered was how to work out a concrete production plan. Within the framework of the sort of centrally planned economy the CCP intended to build in the early 1950s, each level of the system was required to make a plan and move ahead accordingly. Agriculture was no exception. From central party leaders down to village heads, each level had to compile an annual production plan. Each spring, local CCP cadres took tremendous pains to create production plans. Because of customary culture and illiteracy, peasants were reluctant, if not downright unwilling, to make plans of this sort. Pressed too hard, peasants or

rural cadres fabricated plans. And peasants rarely followed that phony plan. Instead, they laughed at such attempts. In short, for all practical purposes, individual family farming was inconsistent with a centralized national economy.

Moreover, the CCP encountered an entirely new phenomenon in the countryside, that of surplus labor. The CCP had always operated under conditions of labor shortages. As a matter of fact, mutual aid teams were first organized during war time to meet a shortage of labor. Women were encouraged to step out of their homes and work in the fields. But when the civil war ended, the situation reversed itself. Non-military men were relieved from war-related service, and now women and landlords had to work, so household holdings per active tiller declined. Underemployment was widely reported across the nation. Furthermore, a large number of soldiers were scheduled to be demobilized in the near future. The problem of absorbing surplus laborers into rural society became an increasingly challenging task for regional leaders.

But many rural cadres could not readily see a bright socialist future on the immediate horizon and had little aspiration to serve the party. Even when they wanted to serve, they asked for detailed directives as guidelines. Peasants were not enthusiastic about work; they consumed more and provided less to the market. The poor remained poor, with some becoming destitute. Some leaders believed class polarization was on the rise. “Lazy” peasants remained lazy and had no hesitation about selling the land they had received during land reform. The party had little control over peasants planting strategies. All of these were new and unanticipated phenomena. As had happened to the Soviet Union in the middle 1920s, before very long, it was resolved that the existing structures must be changed, yet it took some time before the appropriate means of implementing this decision were found.³⁹

39 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization* (New York. London:

Under such conditions, Wang Qian concluded that new policies and restructuring should be undertaken to move peasants along a socialist path once again. Peasant committees had been the best way to organize peasants for class struggle during the civil war era, but at this stage, few peasants were interested. A new organizational model that could organize peasants around economic issues and at the same time facilitate party political control was what he had in mind.⁴⁰

Having discussed this with Lai Ruoyu in advance, Wang Qian's first response was to learn from the Soviet Union and to advocate the building of Soviet-style collective farms. However, knowing something about the tremendous damage done to the agricultural economy of the Soviet Union during the rapid collectivization movement of the early 1930s, Wang Qian hesitated. If the form of the collective farm was adopted immediately, peasant land and property would have to be taken from them. Would this lead to production declines and livestock massacres? Wang Qian had no answer and dared not implement collectivization. He decided instead to move ahead step by step, starting from the mutual aid team, a form Mao Zedong had fervently advocated in the mid-1940s and which was being promoted by Gao Gang in the Northeast, a place that influenced the ideas of key party leaders and informed national economic policy in the early 1950s.⁴¹

Upgrading Mutual Aid Teams

Wang Qian soon obtained support from the Shanxi provincial government for his proposal. In essence, Shanxi provincial leaders were closely following trends in the Northeast and on occasion went even further in the direction of collectivization. All along, though, Shanxi leaders offered numerous local reports and local data to

W W Norton & Company, 1975).

40 Wang Qian, "Weishenme yao shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe," 655-658.

41 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948-1953*, 69.

convince the central party of its regional wisdom.

Gao Gang's advocacy of building mutual aid teams amounted to resistance to New Democracy policies and thus angered Liu Shaoqi. When Shanxi provincial leaders sided with Gao Gang's economic projections, they too conflicted with Liu Shaoqi. Unfortunately for the Shanxi locals, however, the direct superior of the Shanxi organization in the party hierarchy was the North China Bureau which was under Liu's direct influence. Inevitably, as Shanxi provincial leaders marched toward collectivization, they consistently encountered obstacles and constraints that originated with the North China Bureau and Liu Shaoqi. Past research, mainly based on Bo Yibo's memoir, has focused mostly on the heated disputes between Shanxi provincial leaders and Liu Shaoqi in the middle of 1951.⁴² But from the very beginning, well before 1951, Shanxi provincial leaders chose to confront the North China Bureau.

On January 4, 1950, *Northeast Daily* published a speech by Gao Gang in which he declared a determination to upgrade mutual aid organizations and to offer them financial incentives. Not surprisingly, Liu Shaoqi was unhappy. On January 23 he told An Ziwen that mutual aid teams in Northeast China were based on broken down and impoverished individual economies. They were not a good foundation for socialism. He thought it was impossible for the present mutual aid teams to develop into future collective farms and hinted that to launch collectivization was a "left" opportunist mistake.⁴³ When Mao Zedong was shown the record of Liu's conversation with An Ziwen, he was not pleased, at least according to Gao Gang. But Mao did not intervene at this time.⁴⁴

Inspired by Gao Gang's proposal, Shanxi leaders continued to actively consider how to upgrade mutual aid teams. In March 1950, they developed a new slogan about

42 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*.

43 Liu Shaoqi, *Liu Shaoqi lun xin Zhongguo jianshe*, 153-155.

44 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*, 207.

“combining organizational mobilization with improving technology” to boost production and to guide peasants towards collectivization.⁴⁵ But on April 28, the North China Bureau sent directives requesting “the rectification of simple notions of agrarian utopian socialism,” making it clear that the right direction for rural development among peasants was a New Democracy in which the private economy was the main force. It should be respected.⁴⁶

The North China Bureau’s directive had nearly no effect on Changzhi prefecture. From May to June, at local conferences at various levels, the direction of rural development toward collectivization continued to be highlighted. According to Tunliu county estimates, in 1950 approximately 2000 to 3000 people had attended conferences hosted by the county focusing on the issue of rural development and stressing the need to organize peasants into mutual aid teams as a way of moving toward collectivization. The county party treated such reports as calls for political mobilization. But the report from Tunliu county also showed that at the village level, even after this round of “education,” most party members and village heads did not comprehend the meaning of the message, and nearly all peasants still wanted to work individually in a manner chosen by themselves.⁴⁷

On June 7, *Shanxi Daily* published Gao Gang’s speech at the CCP’s first congress in the Northeast region, one in which he again emphasized the building of mutual aid teams. In the same month, *Shanxi Daily* responded enthusiastically to Gao’s lead by publishing several articles that introduced success stories about mutual aid team experiments and discussed details about how to operate such mutual aid teams. One

45 *Shanxi Daily*, March 5, 1950.

46 *Zhonggong zhongyang Huabei ju zhongyao wenjian huibian 1 ce* (Collections of important documents of the North China Bureau of the CCP, vol 1) (hereafter as *Huibian*) (internal circulation), 638-639. SPA.

47 “Nongcun fangxian guanche zhuanti baogao” (October 30, 1950) (A special report on carrying out the direction of rural development), JCP, 24.1.1.

article entitled “Discussing a Couple of Problems in the Mutual Aid Movement in Old Liberated Areas” is of particular interest. This article questioned the notion that peasants had joined mutual aid teams in order to overcome difficulties in production, and the assertion that after land reform peasants encountered a few difficulties in the groups so they tended to withdraw from mutual aid teams. By contrast, this chapter argued that peasants withdrew because mutual aid teams could not meet their demands for enlarging and expanding development. The party should expand the function of mutual aid teams to attract peasants. For example, this article introduced the practice of collectively opening up wasteland.⁴⁸ This triggered discussions and disagreements.

One month later, another article in *Shanxi Daily*, this time citing developments in Xin county, advocated a new form of organizing peasants which was called the “agricultural cooperative.” In agricultural cooperatives, peasants, together with their private land, joined as share holders. Coop members farmed the land collectively, but land and output remained the property of owners. This form was considered by the prefecture as an advanced form and leaders were encouraged to extend it to other areas.⁴⁹

The North China Bureau promptly fought back. On July 10, it published in *People’s Daily* an editorial entitled “Striving for the Wealth of Peasants in North China.” This article asserted that the most urgent problem with respect to peasants was their reluctance to work harder due to fear of further redistribution of private property. The solution was to widely disseminate New Democratic policies and to assure peasants that accumulating wealth by working hard was fully justified, glorious, and encouraged by the government. A rich peasant economy was allowed, and prosperous peasants were protected by the law. The party’s job was to convince peasants that

48 *Shanxi Daily*, June 11 1950.

49 *Shanxi Daily*, July 22, 1950.

socialism would come along only in the very distant future. Mutual aid teams and cooperatives should never be forced on people. Forcing farmers violated the principle of mutual benefit; that is, joining such groups was meant to benefit both the group and the individual. Further, the article forbade rural cadres from imposing hollow political instructions on peasants.⁵⁰ On August 26, the North China Bureau once again sent out a directive calling for the curbing of “agrarian utopian socialism” and criticizing the practice of forcing peasants to “get organized.” Without identifying the target, this directive stated, “Some branches have not seriously implemented the North China Bureau’s directive on rectifying the simplistic idea of agrarian utopian socialism. They are expected to carry out a deep investigation and thoroughly overcome this problem.”⁵¹ It was not hard to figure out who “some branches” referred to.

Shanxi provincial leaders again chose to ignore the directive. Instead, they turned in a report (that will be analyzed later in this chapter) to the North China Bureau which stated that the restrictions placed on mutual aid team formation were based on the fact that such groups could not meet peasant demands for increasing production. But in fact, they insisted, many peasants did not want to withdraw from mutual aid teams. So, according to Shanxi leaders, what the party should do is guide mutual aid teams and actually expand their functions.⁵² In November, Changzhi prefecture was able to publish a report on mutual aid in *People’s Daily* in which the practice of collectively purchasing farming implements was recommended.⁵³ This article was a landmark in the Shanxi provincial leaders early, some said premature, march toward coop formation and collectivization and brought national attention to Changzhi.

50 *People’s Daily*, July 10, 1950.

51. *Zhonggong zhongyang Huabei ju zhongyao wenjian huibian*, p. 638-639.

52 “Laoqu Wuxiang nongcun kaocha baogao” (August 25, 1950) (Investigation of villages in the old liberated region of Wuxiang county), in *Shanxi sheng nongye hezuo shi wenjian huibian juan* (Collections of documents on the agricultural cooperation movement in Shanxi province) (hereafter refer as *Huibian juan*) (Internal circulation), 258-265.

53 *People’s Daily*, November 14, 1950.

One detail that was not noted in those promising reports was that local cadres in Changzhi prefecture had been reported to higher-ups for their ignorance and commandism, factors that facilitated the implementation of radical policies. Cadres of district and lower levels knew little or nothing about central policies. Believing that “communism” would arrive within two to three years, they did not care about peasant rights to private property. Fearing the specter of rural class polarization, in many areas they forbade trading in land. Predominantly siding with poor peasants, they did not hesitate to infringe on the rights of middle peasants. As for mutual aid teams, they regarded them as administrative organizations designed to control peasants. As for how to deal with peasants, that was easy. Peasants were “like pecans, you have to smash them to get what you want.” Others cadres said, “Thousands of words do not work as well as one slash.” Eight cadres in Changzhi were exposed as leaders who had oppressed people to death. In addition to violence, they had also organized numbingly long conferences to “persuade” peasants. When it came to organizing peasants into mutual aid teams, they simply asked peasants, “The Chairman Mao requested you to get organized, so why don’t you follow his instruction?” “What kind of people do not support Chairman Mao?”⁵⁴ Few peasants dared to be labeled as anti-Mao and thus meekly followed orders. Certainly, the attitudes of local cadres toward peasants and socialism produced high rates of “organizing peasants” which provided Changzhi prefecture with the sort of positive data it wanted.

Losing Touch with Reality

Changzhi got its national reputation because of a series of reports. Acting on Wang Qian’s orders, counties in Changzhi prefecture submitted numerous reports supporting the development of mutual aid teams. Quite a few of them reached the

⁵⁴ *Neibu cankao* (Internal reference), February 28, 1951.

Central Committee of the CCP and some were even published in the *People's Daily*. But during the transmission of the reports from the counties to the central government, messages that were already tendentiously formulated were further distorted to meet the needs of various groups. This becomes clear when one compares three such reports and understands how the information was spun and thus “perfected” during the process of transmission from the local to the central level and finally to the public.

One of the major investigations Wang Qian ordered was carried out in six villages in Wuxiang county, Changzhi prefecture. The statistics based on this investigation generated several influential reports. On August 7, 1950, Wuxiang county submitted a summary entitled “Investigation of the Movement to Organize Mutual Aid Teams and Agricultural Production in Six Villages in Wuxiang county” to the agricultural department of Shanxi province. Basing its analysis on this report, on August 25, 1950 Shanxi province submitted a report entitled “Investigation of Villages in the Old Liberated Areas of Wuxiang county” to the North China Bureau. This report was later published by *Shanxi Daily* on October 12, 1950. On November 14, a Changzhi prefecture report “On the Current Situation and Problems Associated with Getting Organized” was published in *People's Daily*.

The original Wuxiang county report summarized developments and new problems in the six villages under investigation. After land reform, middle peasants comprised 86 percent of the rural population. Rural production had recovered and agricultural output in 1949 had surpassed the prewar record by 9.1 percent. Peasants improved their livelihood. Now, 14 percent of households were able to store 10 dan of surplus grain, 6.7 percent stored over 5 dan, and 33.5 percent stocked over one dan of surplus grain. At the same time, 47.2 percent of households could barely feed themselves and 6.5 per cent could not meet their needs. The main problem, as far as this report was concerned, was the increase in labor surpluses. So the report suggested expanding

investments in agriculture, that is, putting more effort into careful planting in order to absorb surplus laborers. It mentioned that class polarization had begun and land sales were taking place. 4.33 percent of households were involved in land sales, with a few even selling all their land. This report noted that in areas where peasants had been organized and were helping each other, the pace of class differentiation was somehow slower, and the scale smaller. But it also acknowledged that the pace and scale of polarization was closely related to whether peasants could acquire loans and credit. Thus the report petitioned the state to grant peasants more credit and loans. This report discussed next the issue of mutual aid teams. The fact was that mutual aid teams were in the process of contracting. Fewer households participated in them. Investigators also noticed that a significant number of mutual aid teams were organized on the basis of sharing livestock. Peasants of the same economic status were more likely to form a mutual aid team, they said. But these groups tended to deny access to seniors and females, and failed to make long term production plans. According to the report, the reasons were, first, that peasants feared that their property would be “socialized” in the near future, thus they did not want to invest in farming. Second, with more surplus labor, there was no need to get organized to overcome difficulties. Finally, rural cadres did not place much emphasis on organizing peasants.⁵⁵

In general, while stressing the need for prosperity in the countryside, this report acknowledged certain problems, such as surplus labor. It was aware of the fact that most peasants did not want to form mutual aid teams and explained the economic considerations involved. It affirmed neither peasant desire for mutual aid teams nor any call by them for party guidance. Quite the contrary, it implied that many peasants had refrained from withdrawing from mutual aid teams simply because they were

55 “Wuxiang liuge cun nongye shengchan zhong zuzhi huzhu de kaocha baogao” (August 7, 1950) (Investigation on the movement to organize mutual aid in agricultural production in six villages of Wuxiang), SPA, C 77. 04. 0002.

afraid of being labeled “laggards” by the party. They chose to maintain the form in name only. Agreeing to the necessity of organizing peasants into mutual aid teams, this report did not highlight the socialist future or the long term goal of collectivization. Rather, it suggested that the party provide more economic incentives in order to attract peasants into mutual aid teams so as to get them to produce more. Obviously the original report regarded the mutual aid team as an economic form, and nothing more.

In Shanxi’s report to the North China Bureau, the basic statistics were in accord with the Wuxiang county report, but its focus on the nature of peasant problems and its analysis of the issues were different. The focus shifted to the alleged problem of class polarization and the phenomenon of land concentration. It highlighted the claim that some families had doubled their land holdings in two years, which was by no means a gradual development. It urged the party to be alert to such a trend. As for the mutual aid teams, it claimed, after investigating certain cases and reviewing the overall picture, that all villages that had “gotten organized” had fewer or no land transactions. It also discovered that mutual aid teams were heading in different directions. Certain teams were developing fast and very well, the report insisted. Acknowledging that many mutual aid teams were in decline, the Shanxi report stated that the downswing did not mean that peasants were unwilling join mutual aid teams. Quite the contrary, peasants were reluctant to leave mutual aid teams. A common reaction of peasants was, “Chairman Mao is right, we must get organized.” The writers asserted that after the party had led peasants to acquire land, peasants had improved their political consciousness and had gradually formed the habit of working collectively. Thus they reached the following conclusion. Although peasants as small producers were inclined to work individually, they had the potential and even the desire to be organized along more socialist lines. So what the party should do is follow Chairman Mao who said the serious issue was the education of peasants. The report was confident: “When we did

it right, there was no problem getting peasants organized.”⁵⁶

Unlike the internal Wuxiang county report, this provincial one was published in *Shanxi Daily* and thus circulated quite widely in public arenas. It told of peasant aspirations regarding mutual aid teams and proposed the nurturing of peasant culture in the direction of increasingly collective work styles. It also portrayed the reemergence of class polarization as an urgent issue in the countryside, and called on the party to focus on and eradicate the problem. As a consequence, many other problems in the countryside were downplayed in the article, if not totally neglected.

The Changzhi prefectural report, which appeared in *People's Daily*, painted an even simpler picture. First, it presented rural life as filled with abundance and wealth. Without providing supporting statistics, it said that in the Changzhi area advanced villages had produced 50 percent more, or doubled their prewar output. Peasants were getting rich and had more surplus grain. For example, in Wulihou village the majority of village households had stocked surplus grain in amounts greater than five dan. Also, the article asserted, there was abundant “idle money” or capital available in the countryside which needed to be properly channeled by the party. The present situation was one in which the peasants were demanding further developments, yet the party could not offer the guidance they needed. So, peasants embraced the idea of “working individually” (*dan gan*), and mutual aid teams were falling apart. Such phenomena were dangerous. If they were allowed to continue, only a few peasants would become rich while most peasants would go bankrupt. Rural cadres, they warned, must not ignore such a situation. The Changzhi report quoted Mao's writings in the mid-1940s and claimed that the party must fight the idea of “leaving peasants alone,” and resolve to put peasants on the road to collectivization. Shanxi employed two methods. One was to combine mutual aid teams with new technology by having peasants purchase

56 “Laoqu Wuxian nongcun kaocha baogao,” 258-265.

farm tools collectively in mutual aid teams. According to the article, these methods had been shown to work well and a revolution in agricultural production had already started. In a final section, the report discussed whether rich peasants should be allowed into mutual aid teams.

This *People's Daily* report was quite different from the first two. For instance, the statistics it used were inconsistent with those cited in the first two reports. It was too good to be true. Even if the numbers were valid, they could not represent the typical situation. Second, the report did not rely on data to make its claims. Instead, it simply quoted Mao's words to prove its points. Moreover, the Changzhi report was ideologically driven, and from beginning to end discussed the long term goal of collectivization. From this point of view, the peasant tendency to work individually and the presence of rich peasants in the community were considered "bad" phenomena. The report formally declared that those who preferred to work individually stood in opposition to the goal of collectivization and it expressed a clear resolve to curb the trend. Of all the reports, this one reflected the least about rural realities. Sadly, this was the most influential report and when it was published in *People's Daily* its message reached the whole nation.⁵⁷ Subsequent reports out of Shanxi followed the tone of the Changzhi report and often went further.

By comparing the three reports, it is possible to see that during the process of transmission of information from the local to the central level, and from internal circulation to the public circulation, reality was sacrificed and messages were distorted further and further. The development of agricultural production in the countryside was exaggerated, especially in the Changzhi report, to convey a single message: it was time to prioritize ideological agendas since the economy had already been improved. It is likely that Changzhi prefectural leaders were aware of the exaggerations. In an

⁵⁷ *People's Daily*, November 14, 1950.

internally circulated summary of the agricultural production of Changzhi prefecture, a note was added underscoring the fact that agricultural production in 1949 was only slightly higher than prewar levels, and that the data showing an increase of over 40 percent were not reliable at all. This summary concluded that one-third of villages had not yet reached their prewar levels of production.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, such phenomena as alleged class polarization and land sales were increasingly highlighted, while their complex causes, such as natural disaster, personal difficulties, and the lack of credit, were entirely overlooked. The causes were not analyzed, yet the solution was said to be crystal clear: form mutual aid teams and get peasants organized. The diversity of views among peasants was not explored. Instead, peasants were simply categorized into two groups: those who wanted to work individually to accumulate family wealth and those who wanted to form mutual aid teams but did not receive meaningful assistance from the party. Although no data or research findings were provided to support the claim, the Changzhi report argued that deep in their hearts most peasants expressed a desire to enroll in mutual aid teams and be guided toward collectivization. So it was the responsibility of the party to work ever harder to educate and lead peasants. The fact that many peasants were in desperate need of credit and loans was not highlighted. On the contrary, it was the myth of abundant idle money floating around in the countryside and available for investment that was underlined. In sum, the story was that peasants had reached a bottleneck in rural production and were in need of guidance for further development. Only mutual aid teams could help peasants improve their lives while taking the right road in the direction of collectivization. Mao's writings on mutual aid and China's socialist future was reiterated and regarded as self-evident.

58 "Changzhi diwei 1949 nian yilai nongye shengchan zongjie" (Changzhi prefecture's summary of agricultural production in 1949), JCP, 004. 2.

Once the task of guiding peasants toward collectivization became a central issue, mutual aid teams were no longer viewed as merely economic organizations, but as political and ideological symbols. Many pressing issues in the countryside were neglected, and the need to move toward collectivization in the future justified the necessity of developing mutual aid teams in the present. The disbanding and breakup of mutual aid teams was thus increasingly regarded as a serious concern that needed to be addressed at once. The party was assigned the political task of swinging into action.

The higher a report reached, the simpler its message was. The complex problems encountered by the peasants in Wang Qian's internally circulated investigation were increasingly downplayed, if not totally overlooked. During the process of communication and channeling, politically motivated interpretations with a specific purpose were injected, one after another. Although real peasant mentalities and conditions were not accurately presented, nearly all reports left the misleading impression that they represented the views of peasants and often employed peasant voices and language. Plans, suggestions, and innovations were commonly presented as coming directly from peasants or as the party's earnest responses to peasant requests.

The challenge for scholars who seek the truth is to pay more attention to the intentionally ignored messages contained in the reports. But contemporary leaders did not have easy access to grass roots reports. In the case of Mao Zedong, a large number of reports he saw had been subjected to round after round of censorship, editing, and interpretation. The complexity of rural realities faded away in the process of communication. What peasants were thinking was not as important as what they should be thinking. In the end those faulty reports proved sufficiently plausible to convince Mao that he had found one possible solution once and for all.

In fact, even the original Wuxiang county report was produced for a specific purpose: to promote mutual aid teams. It did not fully reflect what peasants were

thinking and what peasants were in need of. We can say with certainty that the situation was far more diverse and complex than the picture crafted for the reports. Moreover, the situation varied dramatically in the different regions of China. In short, peasant problems could not be resolved by any one solution. But it is still worth asking whether any peasants were interested in forming mutual aid teams.

The answer is, yes, there were such peasants, like Geng Changsuo and his followers in Wugong village in neighboring Hebei province, who formed mutual aid teams and even cooperatives as early as the mid-1940s.⁵⁹ But such mutual aid teams were purely economic organizations and the goal was to make money. Their secret of success resided in developing sideline industries, not in increasing agricultural production. Once the party intervened to incorporate political goals or apply political principles, many of these promising enterprises were doomed in economic terms. It is fair to say that in 1950 in places where there was no special guidance, the overwhelming number of peasants were reluctant, if not resistant, to joining mutual aid teams. A case in point is Li Shunda of Changzhi prefecture. In 1949 Li Shunda was a national model laborer and the head of Xigou village, Wuxiang county. Later in the coop movement of the mid-1950s he emerged as the most recognized model laborer in the nation, and he was granted the honor of talking to Chairman Mao. He was the very symbol of the cooperativization movement and there was even a documentary film about him. But in 1949, even his mutual aid team was in the process of disintegration and Li was considering moving into town. This worried Changzhi prefecture whose leaders decided to redouble their special guidance when it came to Li and his village. In late 1949, the party branch of Wuxiang county sent cadres to help Li. A work team of cadres from different levels was established in Li's village. This team gave Li

59 Edward Friedman, Paul G. Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven & London: Yale University, 1991).

suggestions, helped him conduct research, discussed issues with him, made working plans for him, and most importantly, manufactured reports for him. Changzhi county even assigned Li a secretary to host receptions and to help him study the experiences of other villages. In addition to the investment of personnel, a large amount of material support was also sent Li's way.⁶⁰ It was with such unflagging support that Li Shunda soon became a national star in the early 1950s.

Decades later, an interview with Tao Lujia, the present day propaganda minister of Shanxi, shed considerable light on the situation in the early years. Tao was asked, "Did peasants practice cooperative farming or have such aspirations?" He replied candidly, "Peasants themselves did not have such aspirations. The key was our guidance."⁶¹

Clashing with Liu Shaoqi and the North China Bureau

Following Changzhi prefecture's November declaration, on December 30, the Shanxi provincial government submitted another summary of its mutual aid movement to the North China Bureau. According to this report, mutual aid teams flourished. For example, in the Changzhi area, up to 75 percent of peasants had joined mutual aid teams, and agricultural production had increased substantially. As a survey of 57 villages claimed to show, total output now surpassed the prewar level by 80 percent. As mutual aid teams deployed new farming implements and made efficient use of labor, unit yield improved significantly. Moreover, they asserted, in order to meet the needs of increasing production, quite a few mutual aid teams had collectively purchased large farm implements, and some teams took the initiative to collect community funds for further investment and group welfare.⁶²

60 "Youguan Li Shunda he Xigoucun xiang shengwei he Huabei ju de baogao" (June 10, 1951) (A report on Li Shunda and Xigou village to the provincial government and the North China Bureau), JCA, 44.1.1.

61 Gao Jie's interview with Tao Lujia on April 19, 2007.

62 "Zhonggong Shanxi shengwei xiang Huabei ju zhuanbao nongyeting guanyu 1950 nian shengchan

In Changzhi's reports, everything about the mutual aid teams appeared promising. Nevertheless, the truth was not so reassuring—as Shanxi leaders knew all too well. The idea of combining mutual aid teams with new technology was rather hollow and had very little practical result. It did little to reverse the trend of mutual aid team breakups into farming by individual households, a point that even Lai Ruoyu had to admit.⁶³ “Experience had proven that, without proper guidance, peasants would not get organized.”⁶⁴ So the key solution, cadres decided, was to guide peasants. Yet guiding peasants itself was not an easy task. Village cadres kept asking questions such as, “How should we guide peasants while respecting the principle of voluntarism?” and “If this principle (voluntarism) is to be honored, mutual aid teams should be allowed to disband.”⁶⁵ It was often the case that they simply lacked the confidence, experience and willingness of leading those “hoodlums.” Not surprisingly, some merely convened a meeting to announce this policy of “getting organized” and made no follow-up effort to enforce it.⁶⁶ Changzhi prefecture cadres repeatedly instructed village cadres to publicize good examples so other peasants would follow them, but other than this modest suggestion, no approaches were provided; and more often than not, good examples were not created. Village cadres needed guidance on the day-to-day conduct of the affair.

Other than follow instructions, some substantial ingredients had to be introduced. In the winter 1950, cadres of Changzhi prefecture raised a new call asking peasants “to purchase new farming tools and to conquer the surprising difficulties.” To substantiate this call, mutual aid teams were requested to collect community funds from members.

huzhu yundong de zongjie baogao” (Dec 30, 1950) (CCP Shanxi branch's report to the North China Bureau on the development of mutual aid teams in 1950), *Shanxi nongye hezuohua*, 49 – 57.

63 Lai Ruoyu, “Guanyu changzhiqu shiban nongyeshe de yijian” (March 1951) (Opinions on the trial of building Agricultural Cooperative in Changzhi area), in *Huibian juan*, 273.

64 “Shengchan huzhu yundong zongjie baogao” (Jan 17, 1951), SPA, C77, 04, 0001.

65 “Shengchan huzhu yundong zongjie baogao” (Jan 17, 1951), SPA, C77, 04, 0001.

66 “Shengchan huzhu yundong zongjie baogao” (Jan 17, 1951), SPA, C77, 04, 0001.

Another concern underlying this new policy was the unanticipated outcome of the boom of mutual aid teams: well-off peasants were making use of the form to exploit the poor. Since hiring laborers was considered politically risky, “cunning” rich peasants set up mutual aid teams as a screen and recruited poor peasants to work in them.⁶⁷ Changzhi prefecture cadres were not comfortable with this development and decided to place some restrictions upon such activities. Wang Qian figured that collecting community funds [Gongji jing] would curb the development of the rich peasant economy within mutual aid teams. To discourage rich peasants, he set forth three rules: the funds were collected according to the amount of private land held by peasants, but were shared equally among all members; if a member withdrew from a team, he was not allowed to take away his share of community funds; the funds were used to cover the expenditures of production and community welfare. Beginning in December 1950, the practice of collecting community funds was enforced within Changzhi prefecture area.

Peasants resisted it. Without doubt, taking money out of peasants’ private pockets was unpopular with them. Peasants with relatively more land were resentful; they did not concur with the idea that they could not take their shares out when they exited the team; they disputed the use of the community funds. However, despite peasants’ opposition, Wang Qian concluded that “community funds might possibly lead peasants towards agricultural collectivization while at the same time keeping rich peasants out of the mutual aid teams.”⁶⁸ The practice was nevertheless continued.

In February 1951, Wang Qian went further. The fact that some good mutual aid teams now had more public assets, partly due to the forced accumulation of

67 Later this chapter will discuss a case of how the “screen” worked.

68 “Changzhi zhuanqu huzhuzu zhong de gonggong caichan yu gongjijin wenti” (February 21, 1951) (Problems on communal property and community funds in mutual aid teams in Changzhi prefecture), *Huibian*, 271-273.

community funds and partly due to the rewards in kind those good mutual aid teams received from the local government proved to Wang Qian that “as mutual aid teams operate well, the accumulation of public assets is inevitable.”⁶⁹ Observing how difficult it was to collect community funds from peasants, Wang Qian predicted that, collecting community funds would be much easier in agricultural producers’ cooperatives in which funds would be deducted from the incomes before being distributed to individual peasants.⁷⁰

Depressed by the number of mutual aid team breakups, but encouraged by those new phenomena like community funds and the accumulation of public assets, Lai Ruoyu became aware that mutual aid team movement had reached a turning point. He reasoned that the only method to prevent them from collapse was to actively exhort them to move even further towards higher level socialist organizations. Following Wang Qian’s suggestions, in March 1951, Lai proposed setting up experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives in Changzhi prefecture.⁷¹ Details of building those experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives will be discussed in chapter 3.

Lai Ruoyu’s report instantly upset the North China Bureau. During the course of the Changzhi mutual aid and coop conference, a North China Bureau inspection team arrived on the scene and recommended not to start the trial in haste, as chapter 3 will discuss. Wang Qian did not change his plan. No compromise was reached. Instead, the opinions of both sides were written down and submitted to the North China Bureau. When the work team discussed this issue with Lai Ruoyu, Lai explicitly sided with Changzhi and reasserted his claim that the disagreements were related to different

69 “Changzhi zhuanqu huzhuzu zhong de gonggong caichan yu gongjijin wenti,” 271-273.

70 “Changzhi zhuanqu huzhuzu zhong de gonggong caichan yu gongjijin wenti,” 271-273.

71 “Zhonggong shanxi shengwei shuji Lai Ruoyu guanyu sheng di’erci dang daibiao huiyi zhuyao neirong xiang huabei jubing Mao zhuxi de baogao” (March 5, 1951) (Lai Ruoyu’s report to the North China Bureau and Chairman Mao on the second congress of CCP in Shanxi), *Shanxi nongye hezuohua*, 63-64.

attitudes towards private ownership.⁷²

The North China Bureau placed some constraints on Shanxi leaders and decided to convene a conference on mutual aid and cooperatives in five provinces and cities in North China to discuss the issue of building agricultural cooperatives. Informed of this upcoming conference, Shanxi provincial leaders met and approved Lai Ruoyu's draft regarding "Upgrading Mutual Aid and Cooperative Organization" and promptly submitted it to the North China Bureau. In this report, Lai alleged that mutual aid teams had reached a turning point. They might decline, they might become rich peasant organizations, or they might be promoted in ways that advanced a socialist agenda. Lai proposed upgrading mutual aid and cooperative organizations in order to check the "the spontaneous tendency" of the individual peasants and to further destabilize and eventually eliminate the private ownership system. He insisted that accumulating communal investment funds and distributing profits according to labor were two key principles.⁷³ But such efforts to weaken the private sector touched Liu Shaoqi's most sensitive nerves. Liu and the North China Bureau retaliated immediately. The North China Bureau first questioned the data contained in the Shanxi report, and then directly and personally criticized the Shanxi representatives.

During the conference on mutual aid and coops, the majority of attendees criticized the Shanxi report because it was inconsistent with New Democracy policies and because agricultural cooperatives were said to be manifestations of utopian socialism. Under New Democracy, it was wrong to eliminate private ownership. There could be no true collectivization without mechanization. Some participants blasted Wang Qian for "cutting a fine figure" (*chu fengtou*). After the conference, Liu Lantao,

72 Tao Lujia, "Mao Zhuxi zhichi Shanxi sheng shiban hezuoshe" (Chairman Mao supported Shanxi province in the building of trial cooperatives), *Shanxi nongye hezuohua*, 635-654.

73 "Ba laoqu huzhu zuzhi tigao yibu" (April 17, 1951) (Upgrading the mutual aid organization one step further in the old liberated areas), *Huibian*, 35-36.

head of the North China Bureau, told the Shanxi representatives that “Comrade Liu Shaoqi does not agree with Shanxi’s report. When you return, tell the provincial branch not to endorse the errors in the report. You should read some related books and report back to the North China Bureau.”⁷⁴

The North China Bureau’s critique generated disputes among Shanxi provincial leaders. In a standing committee meeting of the CCP Shanxi branch, Cheng Zihua, the chairman of the Shanxi government, supported the North China Bureau and said there was no need to discuss the issue of the direction of rural development. Shanxi should follow the instructions of the North China Bureau. Lai disagreed. He reiterated that the issue that the old liberated area should focus on was how to consolidate mutual aid teams, upgrade them and steer them toward collectivization and modernization. Wang Qian then gave a particularly important talk. Referring to some model cases in Changzhi prefecture as relevant examples, he asserted that rural cadres who did not actively lead peasants were the cause of the decline of mutual aid teams. He highlighted positive peasant affiliations with mutual aid teams. More importantly, he widely quoted Mao’s earlier writings and CCP directives of the 1940s that advocated mutual aid teams and collectivization to underscore the necessity of getting peasants organized. He acknowledged that peasants seemed enthusiastic about the individual economy, but insisted they also wanted to get better organized and increase productivity. Rural cadres were advised to take active note of this latter characteristic. Moreover, he reminded cadres of the important role played by new agricultural equipment in liberating production. In the end he concluded that insuring the right direction of rural development meant doing more than forming mutual aid teams. Coop formation should be initiated.⁷⁵

74 Tao Lujia. “Mao Zhuxi zhichi shanxi sheng shiban hezuoshe.”

75 *Shanxi sheng nongye hezuo shi wenjian huibian juan*. 282-292.

Lai Ruoyu won his debate with Cheng Zihua. As a matter of fact, Cheng Zihua was soon transferred to a post outside Shanxi.⁷⁶ Lai drafted a reply to the North China Bureau in which he virtually rejected its charges, emphasizing that his suggestion was just an experiment.⁷⁷ The disputes between Lai Ruoyu and Liu Shaoqi from May 1950 to July 1950 have been well recounted by Bo Yibo.⁷⁸ Liu Shaoqi took a position that adhered strictly to the policies for economic construction that the party had adopted in 1949. He introduced two principles that lower levels were to follow. First, no attempt should be made to undermine private ownership in the countryside, and, second, mechanization was a prerequisite for full scale collectivization. Liu Shaoqi further accused those who wanted to begin collectivization in the countryside of pursuing “utopian socialism.” But some of the important details related to the confrontation are not adequately addressed in Bo Yibo’s memoir.

Presumably irritated by the stubbornness of the Shanxi provincial leaders and in all likelihood concerned with pressures arising from the Gao Gang camp, that is, people who held ideas like those espoused by the Shanxi leaders and who seemed also to be challenging his position, Liu Shaoqi was furious. Bo Yibo’s writings do not do full justice to the extent of Liu’s anger. On May 7, Liu Shaoqi asserted at a national propaganda conference that it was virtually impossible to guide China’s agriculture towards socialism by organizing mutual aid teams or agricultural cooperatives. Liu actually identified the target of his criticism when he declared that “Comrade Lai Ruoyu did not accept the critique of the North China Bureau, therefore he made huge mistakes.” Liu sternly advised other comrades to maintain their faith in the party, refrain from embracing localism, and avoid fighting against the center. Otherwise the

76 Gao Jie’s interview with Tao Lujia on April 19, 2007.

77 Details of this report and the North China Bureau’s feedbacks were discussed in Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*.

78 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*.

state center would exert organizational discipline and punishment.⁷⁹ In the next two months, and on several different occasions, Liu attacked Lai Ruoyu and the Shanxi government. Even Bo Yibo, who clearly sides with Liu Shaoqi, concludes that it was inappropriate and politically insensitive, if not wrong, for Liu Shaoqi to severely criticize a provincial government on so many occasions without consulting Mao and other CCP leaders.⁸⁰

However, Lai was not intimidated. During his debate with Liu Shaoqi, Lai sent petitions to the central CCP and to Mao himself. He instructed Shanxi officials to ignore directives from the North China Bureau and proceed as previously planned until they received a reply from Mao, as will be discussed in the chapter 3.⁸¹ One explanation for such boldness was that at this moment Lai was in contact with Chen Boda, Mao's secretary and highly trusted advisor. Lai was informed by Chen that Mao was interested in Gao Gang's Northeastern experiments for building socialism in the countryside. Mao said, as Marxists, "We should focus on the new phenomena of socialism."⁸²

In response to Liu Lantao's order to read more books, Shanxi leaders read more Marxist classics, but they did so for the purpose of further supporting their own proposal! They discovered that in *Capital* Marx had said "All fully developed machinery consists of three essentially different parts, the motor mechanism, the transmitting mechanism, and finally the tool or working machine," and "The tool or working machine is that part of the machinery with which the industrial revolution of the 18th century started."⁸³ Lai Ruoyu concluded that new "tools" such as big farm

79 Shi Dongbing, *Gao Gang hunduan zhongnanhai*.

80 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*, 212.

81 Shi Dongbing, *Gao Gang hunduan zhongnanhai*.

82 Shi Dongbing, *Gao Gang hunduan zhongnanhai*.

83 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol 1, see in Tao Lujia, *Mao Zhuxi jiao women dang shengwei shuji* (Chairman Mao taught us how to be a provincial governor) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996).

equipment made of iron and pulled by horses were the “working machines” Marx had referred to. Compared to China’s traditional farming tools made of wood, the new tools represented a significant improvement. Organizing cooperatives and encouraging the use of such new tools was an important part of the process of mechanization. Tractors, he quipped, should not be regarded as the only modern machine of relevance to rural people. As for the question of when to start moving peasants into collective farms, Shanxi leaders found yet another theoretical text. Engels once said, “It will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production.”⁸⁴ In this sense, Liu Shaoqi’s support of the development of New Democracy capitalism was rebutted. Further, in order to justify their views about the rules that should govern coop formation, Shanxi leaders highlighted Engel’s ideas about the transformation of small peasant private enterprises and private property into cooperative enterprises and property as the best method of liberating peasants.⁸⁵ Taking Marx and Engels as their theoretical forefathers, Shanxi leaders were confident that their plan had nothing to do with utopian socialism.

The debate between the North China Bureau and Shanxi leaders continued. During the debates, Liu Shaoqi made his ideas increasingly clear. He did not regard mutual aid teams as a form that paved the way for socialism, but as a means of increasing productivity. It was wrong to widely recommend agricultural cooperatives. Agricultural cooperatives themselves had no future. Rich peasants, he argued, would surely flourish and even control the village if the party could not constrain them. For the next decade or more the party should not think about building socialism in the

84 Frederick Engels, “the Peasant Question in France and Germany,” see in Tao Lujia, *Mao Zhuxi jiao women dang shengwei shuji*.

85 Tao Lujia, *Mao zhuxi jiaowo dang shengwei shuji*, 205-206

rural sector. But Liu Shaoqi eventually crossed the line in the eyes of Mao Zedong and Mao intervened.

Set the tone: The First National Mutual Aid and Cooperation Conference

Mao Zedong did not clearly address on why he chose at this point to support Shanxi leaders. But certainly, Shanxi leaders' proposal of building agricultural producers' cooperatives inspired him. As chapter 1 analyzes, in the 1940s, Mao regarded mutual aid teams as the first step towards the collective farm. Although Mao was quite certain about the jumping-off point and the terminal (collectivization), he had no idea on what's the between. Shanxi's trial of agricultural producers' cooperatives, to Mao, ideally bridged the two points of his grand version of China's path to collectivization. Agricultural producers' cooperatives made Mao's vision suddenly viable. Mao Zedong highly valued the form of agricultural producers' cooperative, as he frankly stated,

Without agricultural collectivization, there is no way to achieve industrialization. China is an agriculture-based country, industry is scarce. There are four hundred million peasants that formed one hundred million households. It is very difficult to take command of those one hundred million households, it is like catching a fish from an 'ocean of peasants.' We have to have them organized.⁸⁶

Mao made it clear that one way to organize peasants was in the agricultural producers' cooperative, "we should not give it up simply because we have no machines. It is like our army, should we not fight if we don't have modern weapons?"⁸⁷

No doubt Mao acted upon Shanxi's proposal. Mao held a private talk with Liu Shaoqi, Bo Yibo, and Liu Lantao. He explicitly endorsed Shanxi leaders. Presumably impressed by the success of Shanxi leaders in finding theoretical support in Marxist

86 Jie Xuegong, "1952 nian gongzuo gangyao de baogao," *Huibian juan*, 312.

87 Jie Xuegong, "1952 nian gongzuo gangyao de baogao," 312.

classics, Mao based his own position on Stalin's statements in *Foundations of Leninism*. Mao asserted that just as the British putting-out system had provided the foundation for a new set of production relations associated with industrialization, the Chinese mutual aid teams could perform a similar function in the creation of new production relations associated with socialism.⁸⁸ Convinced or not, Liu Shaoqi, Bo Yibo and Liu Lantao appeared to have been "persuaded by Mao's arguments" and abruptly abandoned their viewpoints.

Mao instructed Chen Boda to convene the First National Mutual Aid and Cooperation Conference in September 1951. Liu Shaoqi wrote a keynote speech, but it was shelved and never discussed. Instead, Chen Boda's "Resolution on Mutual Aid and Cooperation in Agriculture (Draft)" (hereafter as the Draft) was adopted as the keynote message. From then on, Liu Shaoqi ceased to actively comment on the cooperative issue and seldom published his thoughts about it.⁸⁹ Indeed, at the time and in subsequent years, Liu made repeated self-criticisms of his "mistakes" on the issue of cooperatives.

In Chen's Draft, peasants' desire to work collectively and to join mutual aid teams was accentuated. After the conference, Mao consulted with Zhao Shuli, a highly respected writer on peasants and rural life, about the Chen's draft. Zhao replied candidly and simply, that peasants had no desire to join mutual aid teams; they only wanted to work individually. Stimulated by Zhao Shuli, Mao instructed that the Draft should also affirm that many peasants preferred to work individually. Consequently, the Draft was rewritten. The first paragraph of the revised version declared that the enthusiasm of peasants after land reform was related to a combination of aspects of both the individual economy and cooperative labor.

88 Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*, 191, translated by Li Hua-yu in *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China 1948-1953*, 153.

89 Liu Jianping, "Nongye hezuohua juece de guocheng jiqi zhengzhixue yiyi: xin zhongguo 1951."

Draft modified the original plan of transition to socialism in rural sector. Although acknowledging peasants' dual natures, apparently, it announced to nurture peasants' nature of working collectively and implied to discipline their inclination of working individually. It was not easy for cadres to figure out this point wrong, by carefully reading the text.

Second, Draft clarified the point that it was from now, not ten years later, to transit to socialism. It did not elaborate on when the party should immediate start the transition, yet the tone of "let's act earlier than later" had been implied, and seemed correctly received by its readers.

Most important, inspired by Shanxi's proposal, a path toward collectivization came into shape in the draft: started from mutual aid teams, followed by the agricultural producers' cooperative modeled from Shanxi's prototype, and end with a more advanced agricultural producers' cooperative which should be a collective farm of complete socialist nature. Soon, this formula would be formally presented as a three-stage path to be strictly followed, from mutual aid teams to lower-stage agricultural producers' cooperative to higher-stage agricultural producers' cooperative.⁹⁰

The produce of this draft was rather arbitrary. It neglected an important reality: most peasants were not enthusiastic about farming. Moreover, peasant preferences for working individually were only recognized after Zhao Shuli's frank feedback. The draft was heavily influenced by the series of reports that had appeared in Shanxi and was based more on what the party wanted peasants to be than on what peasants themselves wanted. Nevertheless, this draft served as the foundation of a series of future movements, and its assertion of the dual nature of peasants was never questioned during the Mao era. The notion that peasants were willing to work

90 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 198-199.

collectively inspired the party's expressed desire to guide them, while the notion that peasants were traditionally inclined to work individually alerted party members to their responsibilities to guide peasants.

The first stage of mutual aid team and cooperation movement in the early 1952 thus was about to commence.

Chapter 3 The first stage: experiments and diversity

Let's go back and see how the plan of building experimental agricultural producers' cooperative worked out in Changzhi prefecture.

Wang Qian and his vision of agricultural producers' cooperatives

In March 1951, Lai Ruoyu proposed to build experimental agricultural producer's cooperatives in Shanxi. A rough plan was, in these cooperatives, peasant members would pool their land and farmed collectively; net profits would be distributed according to both labor and land input. In addition, community funds would be collected and public assets would be accumulated; the socialist principle of "distribution according to labor" was to be put into practice.¹ This form was inspired by the cooperative farms that were established sporadically in the 1940s. As chapter 1 points out, most of those cooperative farms had failed. However, by exclusively referring to the allegedly successful ones, mainly "Jia Baozhi land and conveyance cooperative," Shanxi leaders appeared to be confident. Moreover, Lai Ruoyu argued, his plan was grounded in the fact that peasants had already accumulated community funds and public assets. But he knew, as chapter 2 shows, this "fact" existed merely because it had been imposed by Changzhi prefecture.

The decision to introduce experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives was evidently made from the top-down, starting at provincial and prefecture levels. Unlike their treatments of expanding mutual aid teams, this time, Lai Ruoyu and Wang Qian

¹ "Zhonggong shanxi shengwei shuji Lai Ruoyu guanyu sheng di'erci dang daibiao huiyi zhuyao neirong xiang huabei jubing Mao zhuxi de baogao" (March 5, 1951) (Shanxi Branch secretary Lai Ruoyu's report to the North China Bureau and Chairman Mao on the Second Congress of CCP in Shanxi), *Shanxi nongye hezuohua*, 63-64.

did not disguise their direct involvement and did not bother to pretend that their plans came from peasants' initiatives. Following Lai Ruoyu's proposal, Changzhi prefecture cadres convened a mutual aid and cooperative conference for the heads of mutual aid teams to discuss the details of creating and operating experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives. Wang Qian certainly dominated the conference and virtually set the rules for the whole event.

On March 27, 1951, Wang Qian made a passionate appeal stating that the ultimate goal for the Chinese countryside was collectivization and modernization, that communal purchases of farm implements would advance collectivization, that the acquisition of community funds would allow for the accumulation of more collectively owned property, and that group farming would undermine the age old peasant tendency to work in individual households. In order to facilitate agriculture's transition towards collectivization, he called on peasants to form the experimental agricultural producers' cooperative, a form supposedly more closely associated with full-fledged socialism. Not only did he draw up the general blueprint for agricultural cooperatives, he also spelled out specific rules. He recommended that peasants to pool at least two-thirds of their land into the cooperatives and farm it collectively. Profits would be distributed mainly according to labor input, and supplemented by a component linked to individual land input. Community funds would be collected and would not return to members if they withdrew. Wang Qian was also cautious. He made it clear that certain qualifications were to be met before launching the trial: all experimental cooperatives should be formed by good party cadres and good model laborers; they should be built in areas with relatively good natural resource so to guarantee the high yield and they should be geographically close to the party headquarters so the party could provide timely assistance.²

2 Wang Qian, "Zai changzhi qu huzhu daibiaohui shang guanyu shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe de

As chapter 2 points out, the North China Bureau was alert to Lai Ruoyu's proposal and tried to place some constraints on it from the very outset. So the Bureau sent a work team to attend this conference. The work team immediately raised quite a few concerns and disagreements on Wang Qian's plan.

First of all, the work team pointed out, the timing was bad. Peasants had not been informed of a clue what was going on, mutual aid teams had no material preparation, and the spring sowing season already started, so starting the trial in the year (1951) was premature and imprudent. Making such a suggestion was sensitive to peasants' needs, and more importantly, followed the CCP's custom of mobilizing peasants. Here a Catch-22 for the CCP to mobilize peasant needs to be introduced: the party can launch political movements of any kind among peasants during the slack season (usually the winter when no land work needs to be done), but the party need to terminate the movements as soon as the spring sowing season starts and let peasants farm the land undisturbed: failure in spring sowing will doom the whole year, and affect the next year. In this case, Wang Qian was so zealous that he completely waived this rule. The stakes were too high to let this rule stand in the way.

As for the community funds, the work team feared that it would constrain rich peasants and was concerned that the principle of "sharing it according to the labor" would generate conflicts among peasants. The work team also questioned the ways of using the funds. It strongly opposed to Changzhi's plan of retaining the funds to the mutual aid teams when members withdrew, which to the work team, had violated the principle of private ownership that Liu Shaoqi was endorsing.³

Wang Qian and his fellows did not accept the suggestions. They claimed those

baogao" (March 27, 1951) (Report on building the experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives at the meeting the representatives of mutual aid teams in Changzhi), *Huibian juan*, 274-276.

3 "Chungeng gongzuodui shanxi xiaozu guanyu Changzhi zhuanqu huzhu daibiao huiyi qingkuang de baogao" (March 30, 1951) (Shanxi branch of the spring planting work team on the mutual aid and cooperation conference of heads of mutual aid teams in Changzhi prefecture), SPA, C 54. 2003. 47.

suggestions “diverged in principle aspects” from their approval.⁴ On the one hand, they filed reports to the North China Bureau to defend their proposals, which eventually triggered the debate between Liu Shaoqi and Lai Ruoyu, as chapter 2 discusses; on the other hand, Wang Qian continued to proceed with his plan and issued more regulations.

On March 29, 1951, Wang Qian gave the closing talk further elaborating the rules of operating agricultural cooperatives. In his version, each cooperative should consist of approximately 20 households; the proportion of profits that were to be distributed according to land input should be lower than the land rent of the time which was around 30 percent; landowners at their own costs were responsible for supplying seed and fertilizers, later for agricultural taxes; last, 20 percent of the total profit should be collected as communal including investment funds, public welfare funds, and education funds. Wang Qian insisted on the principle that if a member withdrew from the cooperative, he would not be allowed to take his share of these funds. Cooperative heads would be compensated for their non-farming labor. Then Wang Qian promised state loans and reduced taxes from the government as financial incentives. In the end, Wang Qian warned mutual aid team heads not to spread the news among the countryside in order to avoid chaos.⁵

From the very beginning, agricultural producers’ cooperatives manifested the characteristic of favoring labor value over land value. If Wang Qian’s formula was adopted, land input would hardly bring any profit to land owners. A rough calculation is as following: after 20 percent deduction of community funds, the land input would receive 24 percent of the land output (80 percent * 30 percent). The taxes combining

4 “Chungeng gongzuodui shanxi xiaozu guanyu changzhi zhuanqu huzhu daibiao huiyi qingkuang de baogao.”

5 “Wang Qian tongzhi sanyue 29 ri zai huzhu daibiaohui shang de zongjie baogao” (March 29, 1951) (Wang Qian’s Report on Mutual Aid and Cooperation conference of heads of mutual aid teams), SPA, C77. 4.5.

the state agricultural tax and local additional taxes ranged from 15 percent to 25 percent of land output, the expenditures on seed, fodder, and fertilizers could easily take 20 percent of the output. It was apparent that the cost for land would exceed the earnings from land.⁶ Even so, according to the official records, after the conference, all attendees agreed that agricultural cooperatives could better increase rural productivity: many mutual aid team heads signed up for the experiment. After careful weighing their options, Changzhi prefecture cadres selected seven of them to form agricultural producers' cooperatives. Later three more were added, thus the ten experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives were selected.⁷ It was obvious that at the beginning Changzhi prefects had opted for caution believing the quality was far more important than quantity. Meanwhile they limited the scope of experiments so they were capable of, with the resource, ensuring a dazzling success. A telling episode is that the most prominent model laborer Li Shunda, who of course volunteered to sign in, was not accepted by the prefects. They feared that a possible failure of Li Shunda would draw too much attention and dampen the whole trial, given Li's nation-wide reputation and influence.⁸

Changzhi's experimental cooperatives: perfect cases

In April 1951, when the North China Bureau and Liu Shaoqi were attacking Shanxi leaders for proposing to introduce agricultural producers' cooperatives, as chapter 2 outlines, experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives had already been

6 In the case of Yaoshanggou cooperative, expenditures on seed, fodder and fertilizer cost 106 dan out of 501 dan total land output. "Wuxiang Yaoshanggou 1951 nian shi ban nongye shengchan hezuoshe de zuihou baogao" (October 23, 1951) (The final report of Yaoshanggou village of Wuxiang county on building experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives in 1951), JCA, 50.1.1

7 "Guanyu nongye shengchan hezuoshe chunji shengchan diwei xiang shengwei baogao" (October 4, 1951) (The prefecture's report to the province on the spring production of agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, C77. 4.5.

8 Tao Lujia. "Mao Zhuxi zhichi shanxi sheng shiban hezuoshe."

established in Changzhi prefecture. The founders of these cooperatives moved quickly. Take Wuxiang county as an example. The mutual aid and cooperative conference for heads of mutual aid teams in Changzhi prefecture closed in the end of March. On April 5, Wuxiang county started to call for volunteers. On April 20, in three villages four cooperatives were already formed, all of which were founded on former mutual aid teams. In Wuxiang county cadres' own words, "we have spent hundredfold efforts to consolidate the cooperatives."⁹

Within this brief span of time, eighty-seven households joined the four cooperatives and pooled 77.9 percent of their land. All of them were middle peasants. Of the 87 households, 35 were the CCP party members and 12 were the comsomol members. In respect of income distributions, 50 percent of total land output would be contributed to labor input, 30 percent to land input and 20 percent to community funds. For the sideline income, 20 percent would be collected as the community funds, and the rest would be distributed only according to labor input. Land owners needed to take care of taxes and miscellaneous items such as seed and fertilizers. Quantitatively the arrangement exactly complied with Wang Qian's suggestion. In each cooperative, one cooperative head and one (or two) deputy head(s) were selected, plus a secretary who took notes and made accounts. As analyzed earlier, such kind of arrangements virtually left no profit for land input. Peasants knew it. Nearly all elderly peasants in Wuxiang county did not believe cooperatives would run well. The father of a deputy village head in Jianzhang village openly questioned the formula. He asked, land input would bring no net income; other investment needed large financial input, loans needed to be paid back, in cooperatives there was no benefit for peasants at all. In addition, a cooperative needed to feed four cadres who did not farm but demanded

9 "Guanyu shijian nongye shengchan hezuoshe gongzuo de zongjie baogao" (April 30, 1951) (Summary on building experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, C77.4.5.

income; how could it possibly be done? Not to mention the common sense that even family members in custom were to be disparted [Feniia], so how could 20 or 30 households manage to work together? Troubles were on the way, he predicted.¹⁰ But it turned out that there were peasants who registered themselves into the cooperatives, on their own. Didn't they know how to calculate?

The answer is of course they knew how to calculate. Indeed, they had their various ways of calculating. According to a Wuxiang county report, peasants joined the cooperatives for at least four reasons. Political ambitions drove 45 households, mainly party members and village activists, to join the cooperatives. Their political aspirations and their views of the future convinced them to follow the party's call closely. It is true that some young attendees did not do the economic accounts: they had non-material aspirations in the long term. Another group of fifteen households were less progressive. But they did not want to be left behind politically, yet they did not want to endure big economic losses too. Seven households were wavering back and forth. They assumed that they would end up with some economic loss, but they were afraid of being considered politically backward which would bring more harm. After "being inspired and educated" by the party members.¹¹ They ultimately decided to join; yet this was a painful decision. The third group was those who were not inclined to haggle. They were either relatives of cooperative heads or had fostered good relationships with those heads whom they trusted. So they were easily "persuaded" into the cooperatives. 13 households fell into this category. The fourth groups adopted a very different approach. Its members were well known among their native villagers for their canniness and were fond of calculations. They carefully calculated every detail and foresaw the pure economic gains, then they put themselves

10 "Guanyu shijian nongye shengchan hezuoshe gongzuo de zongjie baogao."

11 "Guanyu shijian nongye shengchan hezuoshe gongzuo de zongjie baogao."

in the cooperatives. Some would take advantage of the cooperatives' distribution formula, such as those households that had extra laborers while holding small amount of land. Others were purely opportunists. Their past of dealing with the CCP convinced them that in whatever experiments the CCP called for, if you joined at the very beginning, you would very likely be rewarded with a handsome profit, because the CCP would make sure those experiments did not fail.¹² Bearing a variety of calculations, eighty seven households in Wuxiang county formed four cooperatives, all expecting good rewards.

The majority of peasants in Changzhi were not optimistic about those experiments. As a matter of fact, they were irritated. Most village cadres were in a dilemma. Their superiors encouraged them to join cooperatives, yet they knew they would suffer economic losses in cooperatives. They feared that they would be forced to join cooperatives. They knew, if cooperatives failed, they were doomed for the whole year. Those with abundant land or with land of good quality did not want to join cooperatives. The most irritating impact was that the long-standing fear of communism seemed to become a reality: private property was to be collectivized! Some peasants immediately held back their investments in land. Villagers with cooperatives, and their neighboring villages, watched those experiments with fear.

In the face of sharp critique from above and deep doubts from below, the stakes on the ten experimental cooperatives were high. Wuxiang county heads were keenly aware of it, as were Changzhi prefects. Wuxiang county heads helped the four experimental cooperatives in their region make a production plan for 1951 in which total production would at least double. They placed strict constraints on the withdrawal from cooperatives: yes, the principle of volunteerism was honored and members were allowed to withdraw, but, they added that, if a member was to

¹² "Guanyu shijian nongye shengchan hezuoshe gongzuo de zongjie baogao."

withdraw, he could not take out his land for the year. Other restrictions were also created, such as regulations with tons of details governing the working of individual peasants.¹³

In May 1951, Wuxiang county submitted a follow-up report to Changzhi prefecture informing of the success of the four cooperatives. Within a month, the cooperatives had figured out methods to substantially increase their output. One was to plant more cash crops, the other was to focus on sideline work. Four cooperatives doubled or tripled their cash crop planting areas, mainly for cotton and tobacco. Together they planted 183.3 mou cash crops, accounting for one eighth of the sown area. More importantly, they tried to find work for those surplus laborers. Surplus laborers had become the most pressing issue for peasants themselves, if not for the party yet. Take Yaoshanggou village cooperative (the head was Wang Jinyun) as an example. The cooperative consisted of 28 full laborers. To take care of 367 mou sown area, 10 laborers were more than enough. What would the other 18 laborers do? The cooperative figured out, they could conduct sideline work, they could raise pigs, make terrines, make vinegar and sell eggs. Or, they could even be full-time workers at cities nearby, the cooperative planned.¹⁴

Of course, assistance from the party was extremely crucial. On April 27, Wuxiang county party branch and Wuxiang county government both delivered congratulation letters to the four cooperatives declaring that the party and the government would be their strong supporters and assuring them all kinds of aids. Within a month, two loans of 12 million RMB total worth (old currency), were granted to Yaoshanggou cooperative.¹⁵

13 “Guanyu shijian nongye shengchan hezuoshe gongzuo de zongjie baogao.”

14 “Guanyu nongye shengchan hezuoshe gonggu gongzuo de zongjie baogao” (June 1, 1951) (Summary on consolidating agricultural producers’ cooperatives), SPA, C77. 4.5.

15 “Guanyu nongye shengchan hezuoshe gonggu gongzuo de zongjie baogao.”

In October, those efforts bore fruit. at least on paper. For example, in Yaoshanggou cooperative, the average unit yield per mou was 1.8 dan, 25.5 percent higher than the unit yield of 1950, which was 1.47 dan. This number was 12 percent higher than the highest unit yield of the mutual aid teams of the same village. Sideline output was even higher. Overall, yield per capita was 1485 catties (sideline products were converted into grain), which was 73.4 per cent higher than that in 1950, and 33 per cent higher than that of mutual aid teams in 1951. Still this achievement had not fully fulfilled the original production plan Wuxiang county set for it.¹⁶

When it comes to net income distribution, surprisingly, the formula set forth by Wang Qian was modified by peasants themselves. After rounds after rounds of discussions among cooperative members, a more flexible formula was adopted. This plan rewarded labor input and land input equally and dramatically reduced the amount of community funds. The community funds were levied progressively. The rates ranged from 2 percent to 15 percent.¹⁷ In addition, peasants were allowed to take out most of their community funds with them if they withdrew. Distribution based on land input ranged from 37 percent to 42 percent of land output, while remuneration based on the amount of work done should account for no more than 56 percent and no less than 48 percent. Land owners were compensated by the cooperative for their supplying of seed, fodder and fertilizers.

The final distribution in Yaoshanggou cooperative was as follows: the total income (agricultural income and sideline income) was 693 dan grain. 328 dan were given to labor input, 136 dan were given to land input, 106 dan were paid for rents of

16 “Wuxiang Yaoshanggou 1951 nian shi ban nongye shengchan hezuoshe de zuihou baogao.”

17 The fomula was as following: for those unit yields approximately equal to the village average yield, 2 percent of the output was collected as community funds; for those whose unit yield 25 percent higher than village average, 5 percent of the output was collected; for those unit yield 50 percent higher, a rate ranging from 10 percent to 15 percent was set. “Wuxiang Yaoshanggou 1951 nian shi ban nongye shengchan hezuoshe de zuihou baogao.”

cattle, fodder, seed and fertilizers, 51 dan was collected as the community funds and 70 dan was used to pay back state loans. All households of the cooperative earned more than they had in 1950, yet the degree of the increase varied. Those with less land but more laborers doubled their income, and those with more land slightly received more.

The outcome was promising. The same report listed ten reasons that cooperatives should do better than any mutual aid team and any individual farmer, mostly due to the advantages of large-scale cultivation and the advantages of sideline work. At theoretical level, it was an impressive case. By pooling land together, strips were abolished, land were consolidated and extra acreage were obtained. Meanwhile, more rational cropping patterns could be introduced and more surplus laborers could work on sideline. In the future, those theoretical reasons would be presented as accomplished facts and be constantly repeated. Of course, the report also attributed the success to the consistent assistance from the local party leaders, which indeed was indispensable, as will be discussed later. Then the report raised several suggestions to consolidate and develop the cooperative. First of all, it pointed out that the unit yield of land that members kept as the private portion (*Ziliu di*) was not as high as that of the pooled land, and members easily got into conflicts with each other on when to work on their private portion, and when on pooled land. After democratic discussion, it was agreed upon that the private portion should be reduced to 5 percent per household, and limited to the least fertile land.¹⁸ Second, the report admitted that half of surplus laborers, roughly speaking, had not been used. So a more scientific way of allocating surplus laborers was to be found. Third, the cooperative heads worked so hard that the efforts they had put in were worth much more than they received, so the

¹⁸ This finding definitely contradicted with the common sense. As data of the late 1950s and 1960s show, unit yield of peasants' private portion was always much higher than the pooled portion. See Gao Wangling, *Renmin Gongshe shiqi zhongguo nongmin fanxingwei tiaocha*.

report urged to weigh the work of cooperative heads differently and better compensate them.¹⁹

Nearly all other nine cooperatives in Changzhi prefecture were just about as successful as the Yaoshanggou cooperative, according to the official accounts. Nearly all documents on the ten experimental cooperatives accessible now in archives have left records indicating an unqualified triumph. The counties where those cooperatives were located each submitted a report to Changzhi prefecture, Changzhi prefecture then wrote a summary for each cooperative, and summated them to higher authorities together with an overall account. Not surprisingly, during the process of reporting, the figures were inflated. Take the reports on the Yaoshanggou cooperative as an example. Wuxiang county reported to Changzhi prefecture that the unit yield of the Yaoshanggou cooperative was 1.8 dan, but Changzhi prefects raised the figure to 2.6 dan when reporting it to Shanxi province. In addition, Changzhi's report emphasized that the Yaoshanggou cooperative had devoted itself to organize peasants to study politics, to discipline them, to carry out criticism and self-criticism and to educate them to incorporate personal interests to state interests,²⁰ which were not mentioned at all in Wuxiang county's report. Again, the reports drafted by higher authorities had influence on issues at higher levels. Based on Changzhi prefecture's version, a special folder was compiled for this set of documents. They would be frequently referred to during the high tide of cooperativization movement in the middle of 1950s. Decades later, a collection entitled "Several historical documents on the trial and the development of agricultural producers' cooperatives in Changzhi" was published.²¹ As chapter 2 analyzes, the reporting system suffered from overaggregation of information.

19 "Wuxiang Yaoshanggou 1951 nian shi ban nongye shengchan hezuoshe de zuihou baogao."

20 "guanyu 10 ge nongye shengchan hezuoshe de zongjie" (November 1951) (Summary on the ten agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, 53.1.1

21 Shanxi Rural Political Affair Ministry, *Several historical documents on the trial and the development of agricultural producer's cooperatives* (Shanxi, 1977).

At each level the data collected lost precision. The exact statistics provided by villages rarely went beyond the prefectures.

At the experimental stage, it was apparent that the ten cooperatives were established because of orders from above and were closely monitored by the cadres of counties and prefectures. Nevertheless, peasants were not merely passive receivers. To join or not, peasants calculated carefully and made their own decisions. For a limited time, peasants' own decisions were honored. There were peasants who volunteered to join cooperatives. Political ambitions, respect and fear towards the CCP, personal bonds, economic considerations and opportunism all played their roles.

Further, to a certain degree peasants also managed to modify the rules to their advantage. The best example was the rate of community funds. Few peasants liked this idea: 20 percent of total output being taken away from them surely was galling to peasants – it nearly equaled the tax rate. The course of negotiations between peasants and local party cadres has not been documented, but peasants did end up with a much lower rate. This change was later acknowledged by the party. The North China Bureau commented in early 1952 that the community funds should range from 1 percent to 5 percent of total income, it should not significantly affect peasants' annual earnings. Peasants also succeeded in increasing their return on land input. Landowners managed to have the cooperative compensate for the cost of seed, fodder and fertilizers, which in original plans were shouldered only by land owners. The rate of community funds and the remunerations on land input and labor input implied different underlying political views about the degree of socialism and the need for material incentives. Those changes were ultimately acknowledged by the local government and later became a common standard from which many agricultural producers' cooperatives, both inside and outside of Shanxi Province, took models.

Despite various attitudes among members to the forming of each cooperative,

they all expected it to be profitable and did their best to make money out of it. They had figured out that the right methods were to plant more cash crops and to develop sidelines. Given the large number of surplus laborers, the latter obviously was the key. In the early 1950s (until 1952), peasants paid the same agricultural tax on cash crops as on grain, and sideline products bore no tax at all.²² In reality the operation of cooperatives was highly economically driven, with political pursuit and ideological superiority towards socialism playing their roles mainly in reports submitted to the administrative hierarchy.

To a certain degree, the earliest agricultural cooperatives were what the peasants and local officials made of them for their own gains.

Critiques and not so perfect cases

The achievements of those ten experimental cooperatives were nearly too dazzling to be true. However, so far no documents have been discovered to disprove those achievements. To help us make a fair judgment here I will only provide some circumstantial information, some with the advantage of knowing what happened later.

A crucial factor with which we need to be concerned is how the agricultural tax was collected. Taxation in China in the early 1950s was a complex issue. It varied dramatically at different years, in different regions, and varied even more between rules and their implementations. A definitive conclusion on this issue is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For our purpose, very roughly speaking, in Shanxi province, before 1952, in theory, agricultural tax was collected upon a fixed base, yet the rate differed each year, adjusted to the needs of the party. Taking into accounts factors like the amount of sown land, the fertility of soil, planting custom, and harvest of normal years, the “should-be normal yield” (Changnian yingchan liang) for each household’s

²² *Zhongguo nongmin fudanshi*, 44-80.

land was set after a democratic discussion among peasants. Then this number was ratified by the local government. Each year a household paid certain portion of this base number, according to the tax rate of that year, which ranged from 15 percent to 25 percent, as the agricultural tax.²³ The actual yield played a relatively minor role in the way the tax was calculated. In practice, it was even simpler, probably due to the low literacy of rural cadres. In 1949 and 1950, in Shanxi each mou was required to pay 22 catties of millet as the state agricultural tax and 5 catties of millet as the local additional tax; in 1951 and 1952, the state agricultural tax was 21 catties per mou, with a certain amount of local additional tax.²⁴ So the amount of taxes peasants actually paid had little to do with their actual output. In other words, no matter how high land yield peasants claimed they had attained, they were not required to pay more than the fixed amount. In the short term, fabricating a high yield would not cost peasants a penny; quite the contrary, if the unit yield was high enough to impress local cadres, local government was likely to reward peasants with a bonus, sometimes a draught animal or sometimes a expensive farm implement, which by no means were trivial. Furthermore, having their names known to local leaders could easily bring peasants a bunch of benefits, such as priority in obtaining government loans, being nominated as model laborers, etc. The model laborers would be provided chances to travel to the provincial capital, to Beijing, or even abroad. In addition, promoting “core elements” after a campaign had become a normal practice for the party, so local activists tended to over-fulfill established goals to gain promotions and benefits.²⁵

For peasants in Changzhi prefecture, presenting a better performance was even more attempting. As an old liberated region, since 1949, Shanxi provincial

²³ *Zhongguo nongmin fudanshi*, 47.

²⁴ *Zhongguo nongmin fudanshi*, 76-77. This tax system started to change in 1952 and the amount of tax was increasingly linked to the land's actual output.

²⁵ Yu Liu, “Why did it go so high? Political mobilization and agricultural collectivization in China,” 740.

government had relocated a large number of cadres out of Shanxi to the south to help administer new liberated regions; at the same time the Shanxi administration infrastructure itself was expanding. As a consequence, the administrative personnel were in shortage. So in August 1951 the party branch of Shanxi province decided to enroll over ten thousands new state cadres.²⁶ In Changzhi prefecture, the plan was set between 1951 and 1952 to develop 1000 new cadres of peasant origin who would be fully relieved of agricultural work, two hundred of them would be selected from rural model laborers.²⁷ Peasants aspired to become state cadres because a peasant's life was too full of hardship: total dependent on a natural environment which was harsh and unpredictable, he was at the mercy of adverse natural conditions; cultivating land itself was exhausting; and his spells of intense hard work and a life lived in villages kept him far removed from any center of civilization.²⁸ For him, acquiring a government job meant he could be part of the state payroll system and say farewell to the harsh living style as a peasant. Each month he would receive a fixed salary that was enough to feed the family; he no longer needed to worry about the weather. For once, his dream now had a chance to come true, and this might be his only chance of his long life. Encountering such a tempting and rare opportunity, rural party members, village model laborers and activists were eager to take advantage of it. As a peasant, the ways with which they could acquire superiors' attention were rather limited. Now those experimental cooperatives that their superiors cared about so much provided them the channel to interact with county heads and the CCP cadres of even higher ranks, a chance to make themselves known. For this chance, peasants had little hesitation to

26 "Wei yingjie xin de jianshe gaochao daliang peiyang tiba ganbu de tishi" (August 18, 1951) (A notice on promoting a large number of cadres to meet the needs of the new tide in development), JCA, 39.1.1.

27 "1950 nian changzhi diwei youguan ganbu xun lian jihua" (Changzhi prefecture's plan on training cadres in 1950), JCA, 43.5.1.

28 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization*, 22-30.

inflate production figure to call attention to themselves.

Considering the low risk and the high return, peasants commonly inflated data. Although at this experimental stage (1951), so far there is no document exposing such a practice in the ten cooperatives, one year later, many of them would be exposed to have falsified accounts, as chapter 5 will show. For example, Yaoshanggou cooperative was a well known case of overreporting the harvests in 1952.

While I found no documents to disprove the perfect records of Changzhi prefecture (located in southeast of Shanxi Province), reports on the northwest region of Shanxi, drafted by the investigation team dispatched from the central government in October 1951, presented stories dramatically different from the products of Changzhi prefecture.

In northwest Shanxi, 1951 was a bad year in terms of weather. Drought, flood, hail and frost hit the region one after another. Not counting the areas that were totally deprived of products, on average the northwest region only produced 40 percent of a good harvest. Five percent to 15 percent of the rural population could not make ends meet. The shortage of grain was estimated to reach 105,000 tons. Relief aid was urgently needed. Peasants petitioned the government for loans, for an exemption for the tax they owed to the state for the year of 1948 and to help them sell sideline products. Local governments did not react promptly. In Hequ County, 9 old villagers committed suicide. Health care was always a serious problem. Peasants could not get medical treatment at all, according to a local saying, "Death is the only cure."²⁹ In Xing County, 1400 children died of measles in 1950. It was common that peasants held grudges against rural cadres. Upon the arrival of the investigation team from the central government, common peasants poured in to complain about rural cadres. At the

²⁹ "Jin Sui Fen Tuan de zong he bao gao" (October 10, 1951) (Summary report of Jin-Sui work team), SPA, C55. 1003. 3.

same time, rural cadres had their complaints too, saying “it is messy at the bottom.” “We just cannot handle such a large amount of diverse requests from above.”³⁰

What happened in the northwest of Shanxi Province was not unique among the old liberated regions in north China. The same happened in Yan’an, the holy land of the CCP revolution. An investigation report revealed that in May 1951, overall agricultural production in Yan’an had not reached pre-war (pre-1937) level. Peasants were living on substitutes. Most rural cadres and peasants were not interested in mutual aid teams, and some formed false mutual aid teams simply to fool the regional cadres. Model laborers exaggerated their production data to save face. For example, Wang Jinxian only produced 2 dan in the village welfare lot, but he reported to have produced 20 dan.³¹

The absence of any mention of the problems, or the local cadres’ success in remedying the problems, in Changzhi’s reports, suggests the favorable reports did not reflect the whole scene. But leaving aside our suspicion, let’s play the innocent. Assuming that the data Changzhi prefecture provided were authentic and peasants did produce much more in cooperatives, could they have sustained their high production?

First of all, please note that in cooperatives’ calculation, agricultural taxes were not included. With a 15 percent to 25 percent tax, households with more land barely increased their income, if any. Meanwhile, few reports acknowledged the significance of government loans. In the case of Yaoshanggou cooperative, it obtained at least 12 million worth in government loans, which could purchase 670 dan of grain at the local market. This number nearly equaled the total output of the cooperative in 1951, combining both agricultural products and sideline products. Such a high government investment was a common policy in the ten cooperatives. For example, another

30 “Jin-Sui fen tuan de zong he bao gao.”

31 *Neibu cankao*, July 13, 1951.

experimental cooperative, Guo Yu'en's cooperative in Pingshun county, received a loan of 6.8 million that was the equivalent of 51 per cent of its total output; the interests of the loan accounted for 59 percent of the increased agricultural production of the cooperative. In both cases, two cooperatives had no way to pay back the state loan in the same year: they could barely afford the interest. Paying back state loans soon became a severe burden for cooperatives. Further, such excessively high government investment could hardly extend to a wider range. The North China Bureau was already agitated by this feature, imploring local governments to limit their investments to agricultural producers' cooperatives.³²

The most promising part of the cooperative economy was its ability to organize surplus laborers to conduct sideline works. However, in most cases, even cooperatives could not find enough jobs for all laborers. The prosperity of sideline work depended on villages' dynamic interactions with urban markets. We now know, the urban markets were shrinking dramatically after the founding of the People's Republic of China.³³ Very soon, finding a short term job in cities would become more difficult and later illegal, after the household registration system was adopted and ration supply system was enforced. How could cooperatives make full use of those surplus laborers? Planting a larger portion of cash crops was another way to increase income. Indeed, if the high production of those experimental producers were authentic, the key secrecy was planting more cash crops. Planting cash crops in an excessive portion was possible in 1951 when the central government was in need of industrial materials like cotton and encouraged peasants to plant them. But in 1952, the trend was reversed. The central government made it clear in its annual plan that "grain output must be substantially increased, it's planting acreage in no way can be reduced." Accordingly,

32 "Huabei nongye shengchan hezuoshe de qingkuang yu jingyan" (Situations and lessons of agricultural producers' cooperatives in the North China Bureau), *Huibian*, vol. 2, 586-589.

33 Many reports from *Neibu cankao* have demonstrated this tendency.

cash crops should not exceed their 1951 portion.³⁴ In 1952, a higher tax would be levied on cash crops. The degree to which cooperatives could seek profits from cash crops would become more and more restricted. As a matter of fact, in 1953, Changzhi prefecture was criticized for its stresses on planting cash crops. In its five year plan, it estimated to increase its cash crop sown area from 590,000 mou to 2,230,000 mou, while to cut down its grain crop sown area from 8,490,000 mou to 6,910,000 mou. Disproportionably increasing cash crop planting brought severe pressure on state's grain supply plan. Shanxi province was furious when discovered that it had to support more grain to villages than to the cities.³⁵

From the moment cooperatives started running, administrating them was a problem. How were labor inputs to be calculated? Who should work on a specific piece of land? How to make sure every member worked as hard as others? Most of the time, cooperative heads did not farm land, so how to weigh their input? Draught animals were borrowed from individual members, so how to compensate them and on what basis? How much land should each family keep as their own private portion (Ziliu di)? Those questions were definitely difficulty to answer, yet peasants cared about them and spent days and nights arguing with cooperative heads on every detail. Cooperative heads were overwhelmed, so were local cadres. For their convenience, some even suggested pooling all of peasants' land into cooperatives, purchasing all livestock and farming implements from cooperative members once and for all, and not linking cooperative heads' income with their labor input of farming. One after another, those suggestions would be put into practice in the mid-1950. During the

34 "Zhongyang renmin zhengwuyuan guanyu 1952 nian nongye shengchan de jue ding" (Feb 15, 1952) (The State Council's decision on agricultural production of 1952), in *zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingji dang'an ziliao xuanbian, 1949-1952, nongye juan* (hereafter as *Nongye Juan*) (Selected collection of economic archives in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1952, volume on agriculture) (Beijing: Shehui kexue chubanshe, 1991), 43.

35 "Bixu kefu zai lingdao nongye shengchan zhong de yanzhong mangmu xing" (March 30, 1953) (Must rectify the severe mistakes of blindness in leading agricultural production), *Jianshe*, no 210.

reexamination they were simply explained as “leftist” errors, yet with documents of the early stage we know that they were not purely ideological. They had their roots in every day practices of operating a cooperative. In other words, they were part of the mechanism of cooperatives.

The ten cooperatives were all composed of middle peasants. Given the formula of distribution favored labor input, poor peasants who tended to have less land should have been the group that were most enthusiastic to join the cooperatives. But it was not the case in reality. The reason was not documented. It seems likely that either poor peasants refused to join, or the cooperative heads refused to admit poor peasants. The party was not ready for this surprise.

Indeed, deeply in Shanxi cadres’ heart, they knew that they had not listened to any opposition, they knew they had not given close attention to local conditions and regional diversity, and they knew they had over-estimated the popularity of mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives. On crucial issues like land input compensations, community funds and public assets, “leftist” ideology overrode observations of concrete results. Yet for the next two years, they tried to conceal those problems and only presented the bright stories of the ten experimental producers.³⁶

What if agricultural cooperatives had been left to peasants themselves? It is hard to address this question properly and directly. But some cases in Sichuan province might provide us some vague ideas. Sichuan province was liberated in 1950 and was considered a “backward” region in terms of the CCP’s strength. In the early 1950s, the CCP’s penetration of rural Sichuan was relatively weak. In Zizhong county of Sichuan, in spring 1952, in response to the party’s call of building experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives, 25 cooperatives were established. Most of them

36 Tao Lujia, “zai di 190 ci shengwei changweihui shang de fayan” (Talk on the 190th meeting of the provincial committee), *Huibian juan*, 333-334.

were organized by village heads after they attended a party meeting in Zizhong county. But the county heads seemed not to have provided much guidance to those cooperatives, and various rules were set by peasants themselves. Of the 25 cooperatives, only two survived after the fall harvest of that year. Of the two survivors, Sun Xianhe's cooperative was the most influential one and was better documented. Take Sun Xianhe's cooperative as an example. In spring 1952, the cooperative was formed and members were required to pool all their land. The land peasants registered during land reform was counted as shares, regardless of the actual amount of land peasants had and of the variations in the land's quality. Such an arrangement worked to the disadvantages of the middle peasants who usually had land of better quality and occasionally owned some unregistered land, but this arrangement was a good way to avoid disputes since each household had their land certificate identifying the amount of the land. Later cooperative members complained about the inconvenience and asked for some private land to plant vegetables, so each family took a small share (roughly 2percent) of land back. Cooperatives purchased members' draught animals with credits and put the animals to collective use. After the harvest, the cooperative could not pay back those credits and the cooperative went in deep debt. Then the debt was transferred to the poor members who did not own livestock originally. The most interesting part was the distribution rule of Sun Xianhe's cooperative. A fixed wage of labor was decided by the cooperative, which was only half catties rice per work point, five points per day as the maximum. Sideline income was listed under land output, so land owner would take shares of sideline products too. As a result, in Sun Xianhe's cooperative, labor input only accounted for 20 per cent of total income, land input accounted to a much larger portion. In essence it was a cooperative that hired laborers, with relative low wages. Sun Xianhe's cooperative thus provided us some peasants' perceptions of how a cooperative should be operating, yet details of this cooperative

were not recorded. This case might give us some hints on how peasants would have managed cooperatives if they were given full control.³⁷

In Zizhong county, the overwhelming majority of cooperatives were controlled by middle peasants, although it was not rare that poor peasants were the nominal heads, for the convenience of acquiring state loans. Middle peasants definitely played the key role, and they knew it. As one cooperative head, who was a party member and a middle peasant, said, “only we, middle peasants, are able to coordinate them, poor peasants, because we have the resource.”³⁸ The key distinction was between “we” (middle peasants) and “they” (poor peasants). All cooperatives in Zizhong county, except the Sun Xianhe cooperative, were divided into “upper courtyard” and “lower courtyard.” The former accommodated middle peasants and their property, the latter accommodated poor peasants and their stuff. The former accused the latter of being lazy, the latter were jealous of the former for being rich. They did not trust each other and spied on each other. Fights between the two “courtyards” easily led to the collapse of cooperatives.

Poor peasants did not ally themselves with cooperatives. When there was a sign of trouble, poor peasants were often the first ones who jumped out and firmly claimed the right to withdrawal. Of course, some middle peasants formed cooperatives to exploit poor peasants, but poor peasants were not purely passive. Some of them were in fact active in forming cooperatives, mostly aiming at taking advantage of those peasants with better resources yet with bad class background. Sadly such kinds of cooperatives tended to collapse even sooner.³⁹

Compared with Changzhi’s ten experimental cooperatives, those cases of failures

37 “Cong zizhong xian qige nongye shengchan hezuoshe tiaocha zhong suo kandao de jige wenti” (October 24, 1952) (Several problems discovered in Zizhong county’s report on seven agricultural producer’ cooperatives), in Sichuan Provincial Archive, Agricultural Committee, vol. 362.

38 “Cong zizhong xian qige nongye shengchan hezuoshe tiaocha zhong suo kandao de jige wenti.”

39 “Cong zizhong xian qige nongye shengchan hezuoshe tiaocha zhong suo kandao de jige wenti.”

were well-kept secrets of the local governments, and only came to light later through research in local archives.

In summary, although the real conditions of those ten experimental agricultural cooperatives are not fully known to current researchers, at the time they were hailed by leaders as pure successes.

The first wave of mutual aid and cooperation movement: Diversity

When Shanxi was building its pioneering agricultural producers' cooperatives, organizing peasants into mutual aid teams was put on the state's agenda. In September 1951, the Draft was passed. The Draft proposed a three-stage plan to move peasants up from mutual aid teams to lower stage agricultural producers' cooperatives and to advanced agricultural producers' cooperatives. It further set a target of having 40 percent of the rural population organized into mutual aid teams by the end of 1952.⁴⁰ Following the direction Mao Zedong just pointed out, on October 14, 1951, the Northeast China Bureau, headed by Gao Gang, issued "the report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement in the northeast." This report called the party members to be alert of peasants' inclination of working alone and discipline it. Three days later, Mao endorsed Gao Gang's plan and ordered it to be widely circulated.⁴¹ In December 1951 Mao sent the Draft to party committees at various levels for trial implementation. Between winter 1951 and spring 1952, a political education campaign was carried out in order to convince peasants that "getting organized" was necessary not only to increase production, but also to achieve collectivization.

In February, 1952, the State Council issued the "Decisions on Agricultural Production in 1952" demanding that "in old-liberated regions 80-90 percent of rural

40 Zhu Yonghong, "Reflections on the Party's Policy Toward the Rural Individual economy During the First Seven Years of the State," 29.

41 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 201-202.

population should get organized in 2 years; in new-liberated regions this task should be completed in 3 years.”⁴² Cautiously upgrading a few mutual aid teams to agricultural producers’ cooperatives was also recommended. Following this directive, each province set its own plans. The Agricultural Ministry and the People’s Bank issued decrees declaring that state loans should be given to peasants’ organizations and should be utilized collectively. A lower interest rate was provided as a stimulus to those who got organized.⁴³ The first wave of national mutual aid and cooperation movement unfolded.

As the “getting organized” wind blew over the country, it is time for us to go beyond the border of Changzhi prefecture and observe how peasants across the nation responded to the call.

Although Mao Zedong had specifically instructed CCP cadres to “take mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives as important issues,”⁴⁴ for the time being, party cadres of county level and higher did not regard this movement as the most urgent issue. They were overwhelmed with the “three-anti” movement that started in late 1951. The “three-anti” movement was directed against three sets of vices: corruption, waste and obstructionist bureaucracy. The targeted groups were party member themselves, bureaucratic officials and the managers of factories and other businesses. This movement was first launched in late 1951 in the northeast China, under the direction of Gao Gang, and then spread to the rest of China.⁴⁵ Being

42 “Nongyebu, zhongguo renmin yinhang guanyu 1952 nian nongdai gongzuo de zhishi” (January 25, 1952) (Directives of the Agricultural Ministry and the People’s Bank on the agricultural loans in 1952), *Nongye juan*, 154-155.

43 “Nongyebu, zhongguo renmin yinhang guanyu 1952 nian nongdai gongzuo de zhishi” (January 25, 1952) (Directives of the Agricultural Ministry and the People’s Bank on the agricultural loans in 1952), *Nongye juan*, 154-155.

44 *Huibian juan*, 37.

45 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search For Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd. 1999), 509.

targeted, party members themselves were fully engaged in this campaign.⁴⁶ At the same time, the party made it clear that the “three-anti” movement was not going to extend to the countryside. As the North China Bureau instructed, although the corruption at district and village levels was extremely severe, the three-anti movement should not be extended to district or lower levels. The tension on the county level was heating up already. Considering conditions in the countryside were so complex, the Bureau feared that once the fire kindled in the countryside, the party could not easily contain it. So the North China Bureau ordered, if anyone discovered any village starting the “three-anti” movement on its own, the county should immediately send a work team to put it down. Village cadres were not encouraged to confess their corruption; common peasants were not allowed to make accusations of corruptions in their home villages.⁴⁷ So the “three-anti” movement did not directly hit party members of low ranks.⁴⁸ With the ongoing three-anti movement, cadres of county and higher ranks rarely cared about other issues. Even in Changzhi prefecture, when the three-anti movement began, many county cadres ceased to go to villages for two months.⁴⁹ Without frequent interventions from above, village cadres took control of mutual aid teams and cooperation movement. In north China, during the spring of 1952 more than 3000 agricultural producers’ cooperatives were organized, most of which were organized by village heads, rural activists and peasants, without the guidance from above.⁵⁰

46 The influence of this campaign was far more than eliminating corruption, waste and obstructionist bureaucracy. This campaign hit capitalism and capitalists hardly, as chapter 4 will discuss.

47 “Huabeiju guanyu qu, cun liangji muqian jianjue bu jinxing sanfan gei ca’ha’er shengwei de zhishi” (The North China Bureau’s directive to Caha’er province on not carrying on the three-anti campaign at district and village levels), *Huibian*, vol. 2, 434.

48 Indirectly, three-anti effected peasants’ live. Because of the three-anti movement, commercial trade between cities and countryside was blocked. Peasants’ sideline products had no market. This was an important reason for wide spread spring famine in 1953.

49 *Neibu cankao*, March 20, 1952.

50 *Neibu cankao*, June 18, 1952.

Rural cadres and peasants were left alone. Rural cadres' responses to the call were diverse. Many cadres showed little interest and did not care about "getting organized." For example, in many regions of Sichuan province, after land reform was completed, rural cadres primarily focused on increasing agricultural productivity, saying "to carry out land reform we should rely on poor peasants; to increase rural productivity we need to rely on middle peasants." In selecting model laborers, they took agricultural productivity as the only standard regardless of farmers' class backgrounds. As a result, 90 percent of the model laborers there were middle peasants and rich peasants. Local cadres merely overlooked the assignment of guiding peasants into mutual aid teams.⁵¹ Some even did not believe mutual aid teams had a bright future and treated it casually.⁵²

Some responded to the call zealously. They seemed to have regarded it as a political movement and calculated according its political advantage rather than prospects for economic improvement. For example, in Guizhou province, located in southwest China, peasants were informed that "Building mutual aid teams is an order from above. Everyone must join. Those who refuse to are trying to make trouble for us." The party secretary of one village told peasants, "If you don't join mutual aid teams, you are not led by the CCP. Unless you go to Taiwan, this is an order from the state (that you have to obey)."⁵³ In Jiangxi province of southeast China, many peasants were informed that joining the mutual aid teams was a constitution of obligation.⁵⁴ In the northeast, village cadres created a slogan "Joining agricultural producers' cooperatives is following Mao Zedong's road, not joining it is following Truman's (American president's) road." In 1951, Chinese troops were fighting against

51 *Neibu cankao*, July 5, 1952.

52 *Neibu cankao*, July 5, 1952.

53 *Neibu cankao*, Sept 21, 1952.

54 *Neibu cankao*, April,22, 1952..

American in Korea, and American president Truman and Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan were the symbols of evil. Taking their side was doubtlessly counter-revolutionary and was considered a crime. No one wanted to be labeled like that. Some village cadres even publicly announced that “if you don’t join mutual aid teams now, when socialism arrives, you will be forced to write confessions.”⁵⁵

In such a context the decision was not hard to make. Quickly a large number of mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives were established across the nation. Nor surprisingly, a large number of them were extremely short-lived; many only existed on paper in reports. For example, by August 1952, the number of mutual aid teams in Hunan province increased from 1000 to 10000. But investigation showed that most of them were only notional and had little validity. Another example is from Ba County. Its head claimed that it had established 13,000 mutual aid teams, but it turned out later that all except 15 percent of them were complete fakes. It was not rare that mutual aid teams were formed in a meeting convened by rural cadres and were disbanded immediately after the meeting.⁵⁶ In No.1 village of Taihe county, 18 mutual aid teams were established in the morning and 10 dissolved in the afternoon of the same day. For the remaining 8 mutual aid teams, members did not even know who was the head of their teams.⁵⁷ To fulfill the quota, in some counties of Southwest China, rural cadres formed mutual aid teams according to administrative affiliation totally regardless of peasants’ own willingness, then reported the “achievement” to their superiors. Such kind of mutual aid teams did not go into effect at all. Sometimes, coercion in addition to verbal threats was employed. The most frequently used method was to hold peasants in a meeting for days until they acceded to join mutual aid teams. Nevertheless, the degree of violence was mild. Excessive violence was rarely reported.

⁵⁵ *Neibu cankao*, June 18, 1952.

⁵⁶ *Neibu cankao*, August 25, 1952.

⁵⁷ *Neibu cankao*, July 5, 1952. .

To make their names known, a few rural cadres were willing to go further than the Draft had indicated. Cases of “rash tendency” were reported. Some villages were reported to be entirely collectivized, with land, horses, houses, grain and even clothes.⁵⁸ But such extreme “rash” attitudes did not spread widely. Reports on it were sporadic.

A good example is Muliu village of Shanxi. In order to have their village reported in the newspaper, a demobilized soldier, the village head and one party member decided to build a collective farm instead of a mutual aid team. Their plan was: pool all land together, have peasants work together and eat together. The harvest would be collected together and stored in two warehouses; its members would be provided what they needed; every day, members would work for 8 hours, study for 6 hours and rest for 8 hours. With this plan in mind, the three organizers held a village meeting calling for “organizing a collective farm and practicing socialism.” Peasants kept silent when asked for their opinions. Then the organizers accused those who had refused to join of being unpatriotic. Some peasants acceded, while others remained skeptical. Eventually the three organizers were criticized.⁵⁹

At the same time, probably more rural cadres treated this movement as purely economic, partly because the Draft had emphasized to increase production, partly because of their own economic status. Many cadres used economic incentives to attract peasants. Offering agricultural loans to mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives was quite common. “The government will lend peasants whatever a mutual aid team needs,” rural cadres promised to villagers. In this way, Junchu county organized 18 mutual aid teams. But after being granted agricultural loans, 16 of them immediately disbanded.⁶⁰ More importantly, since there were no

⁵⁸ *Neibu cankao*, April 14, 1952.

⁵⁹ *Neibu cankao*, July 8, 1952.

⁶⁰ *Neibu cankao*, August 25, 1952.

specific instructions on how to manage mutual aid teams, rural cadres were inclined to give peasants more “freedom.” Peasants were able to make their own rules.

Peasants’ responses varied as well. Rural activists, model laborers and some party members usually were the first group that answered the party’s call. Like in Changzhi prefecture, their motivations were multiple: their faith in the CCP, their habits of following the CCP closely which so far had been proved to be rewarding, their aspirations for honor and respect, their ambition to get involved in local politics, and the lure of material prizes. All of these gains could be significant. Good performance in a mutual aid team or agricultural producers’ cooperatives substantially increased their chances of being selected as model laborers, which not only increased their social status, but also reinforced their actual control over the village. There were reports that model laborers with good reputations dared to challenge local cadres of higher ranks, even to resist their orders. Moreover, political prestige could bring them and their family’s enormous benefits. For example, Geng Changsuo, a national icon in forming mutual aid teams in Hebei, managed to find his sons comfortable jobs in big cities through his networks with the party cadres he built during extensive meetings he had joined.⁶¹

For common peasants, economic issues were important, especially for middle peasants. Agricultural loans were tempting, of course. In many regions, especially those old liberated regions, agricultural loans were almost exclusively given to mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives. Prizes and honors were bestowed. As a matter of fact, from the end of 1951, the title of model laborers was highly recommended, if not restricted, to heads of mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’s cooperatives, and so were the rewards. The mutual aid teams or agricultural producers’ cooperatives could be nominal, but the prizes were not. For

61 Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

example, the first established mutual aid team in Jieyang County of Guangdong province in 1952 was rewarded with a buffalo.

Rural people of bad class background tended to make alliance with people of good class background. It was reported that rich peasants, and sometimes former landlords, volunteered to join a mutual aid team and offered to lend, even transfer their draught animals and tools to peer members. They were making economic sacrifices in hopes of befriending and seeking protection from the majority. In many cases, rich peasants and landlords were greeted sincerely and warmly by mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives.

Further, if managing well, peasants could profit more from mutual aid teams. By making distribution rules of their own, middle peasants, sometimes allied with rich peasants, "exploited" laborers and made more money than working alone. In cases when economic gain was the main motivation, mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives were controlled by middle peasants. Such kind of organization either intended to exploit laborers by paying them less or simply shut the door to poor peasants.

Keshan county, located in northeast China, is a good case showing us how the movement was carried out economically. Tong'an village was a relatively wealthy village in Keshan County. In 1952, there were 73 middle peasants, 21 upper middle peasants, 6 rich peasants, and 49 poor peasants and hired laborers in this village. Four out of 6 rich peasants were party members. One was secretary of village party branch, one was former deputy village head and one was a provincial model laborer. They were engaged in "capitalist" business and at the beginning they were not interested in leading the mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives movement. But ultimately quite a few mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives were formed in which rich peasants played major roles. Economic calculation was the

driving force. Investigation of eight agricultural cooperatives in Keshan county revealed that most cooperatives were controlled by rich peasants. In terms of distribution, most of them enormously favored land input and production material input; seven of them hired laborers in the summer to farm. Further, mutual aid teams and agricultural cooperatives were used by rich peasants as a screen to exploit the poor. Rich peasant Wang Fa, together with three other wealthy families, established a mutual aid team. This team also admitted 5 poor peasants as team members. Five poor peasants were living at Wang's home, following his orders and working for him. Although those 5 people were essentially hired laborers and followed Wang's orders, they were reported as mutual aid team members and one of them was the nominal team head. Under a similar system, rich peasant Chen Qingshan gained 20 percent more income in a agricultural producers' cooperative in 1952 than in 1951 when he hired two laborers. According to the report, Chen himself did not cultivate land at all. It was by no means uncommon that under the name of mutual aid teams, rich peasants hired laborers and paid them wages even lower than the market price. Moreover, all of them despised poor peasants. For example, Wang Fuqing's mutual aid team originally consisted of 8 rich families and 4 poor families. When the poor families were unable to support themselves in the sowing season, they were expelled from the mutual aid team. In other mutual aid teams, the poor managed to stay, but their land was usually the last cultivated.⁶²

Rules of mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives varied dramatically from place to place. Some favored land input, while others favored labor input, some required the accumulation of more community funds regardless peasants' complaints, while others did not. Despite different rules, there were problems in common. Members fought with each other over the distribution of resources, which

⁶² *Neibu cankao*, Sept 17 and Sept 29, 1952.

often led to the disruption of the organization. Nearly all mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives lacked democracy and were controlled only by one person. Finance was messy. Few members wanted to work hard and fewer wanted to help other members. One phenomenon that particularly disappointed the party was the lack of improvement in peasants' cultural world. Even in those mutual aid teams or agricultural producers' cooperatives that claimed to be successful, peasants' old mentality remained, they continued to be selfish. They only sought individual profits and short-sighted objectives. Mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives did not care about, or perhaps sometimes did not dare, training peasants of the principles of socialism. One village head in north China said "I got peasants organized, but I dared not to talk more broadly about the future of socialism. If I did so, peasants would not join." Even cadres at the county level did not attempt launching socialist education for peasants.⁶³

The situation in Shanxi Province was not necessarily better. Officially mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives appeared to have mushroomed. By spring 1951, 278 agricultural producers' cooperatives had been established in Changzhi prefecture, and the number of peasants who got organized rose from 52 percent of the rural population in 1951 to 80 percent in 1952. But even Shanxi provincial leaders had to admit things were not perfect. For example, the developments were not balanced. In some counties, 95 percent of peasants had been organized, yet in others where rural cadres did not care about the mutual aid and cooperation movement, the rate was less than 10 percent. As for cooperatives, one third of them distributed resources more according to land input than to labor input, which was against the fundamental principle of agricultural producers' cooperatives

⁶³ *Neibu cankao*, April 29, 1952.

set by Wang Qian.⁶⁴ As in other regions, many peasants formed nominal mutual aid teams of no validity to cover their activity of individual farming, some aimed at those material incentives. It was extremely rare that peasants raised their political consciousness. Political education on collectivism was scarce, peasants' improvement in mentality was close to zero and they remained extremely selfish: taking advantage of other members' illness; working others' cattle to death; only pursuing profit. As peasants said, "get organized to accumulate the family fortune."⁶⁵

In Changzhi prefecture, problems were striking too. It occurred frequently that members used mutual aid teams to exploit others. It was common that drought animals were rewarded proportionally, too much in the party's standard. In Luchengxi village, one herd of cattle was calculated as equal to 11 human laborers. In this way, to the party's eyes, better-off peasants, with their possession of drought animals, were exploiting the poor. Secondly, female laborers received less than half of male laborers. One quarter villages in Changzhi prefecture did poor in developing mutual aid teams, over 5000 mutual aid teams were purely notional and had little validity: they either lacked the team leader or lacked a production plan. Many "mutual aid teams of individually farming" were created. As peasants summarized, "(mutual aid teams were) formed in spring, loosened in summer, collapsed in fall. (The pattern) will repeat next year."⁶⁶

Forcing peasants to join mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives, treating the movement as a political event, commandism, making false registrations, tempting peasants with economic incentives, rash tendency – all the

64 "Bo Yibo, Liu Lantao tongzhi guanyu huabei ongye huzhu yundong de fangzhen he renwu xiang mao zhuxi de zonghe baogao" (Bo Yibo and Liu Lantao's reports to Chairman Mao on the development of mutual aid and cooperation movement in north China), *Huibian*, vol. 2, 598.

65 *Neibu cankao*, April 29, 1952.

66 Changzhi diwei guanyu bannian lai nongcun shengchan huzhu hezuo yundong zonghe baogao (June 30, 1952) (Changzhi prefecture's report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement of the last six months), JCA, 92.1.1.

phenomena would be repeated again and again in the future cooperativization movement. Still, compared with what happened later in the cooperativization movement, the first stage of mutual aid and cooperation movement had certain unique features.

First of all, the lack of intervention or direction from the CCP at higher levels (county and higher) was significant. Rural cadres at the village levels played the leading role and mainly responded to themselves. They took into account their personal interests and local specifics more fully than cadres at higher levels later did.

At the same time, because the policy itself tried to balance between increasing production and moving toward socialism, local cadres could interpret the policy in a way they preferred. Ideology was not dominating. Many cadres chose to take it as an economic movement and gave priority to rural production.

To a larger degree, peasants' choices were left to them. Except in areas where local cadres were extremely powerful and faithful to the state policy, which was not very common, peasants could choose to join a mutual aid team or agricultural producers' cooperative or not. At least they could choose to organize a nominal one which did not affect their lives too much. The rate of fake was extremely high.

Because the Draft did not provide details on how to build a mutual aid team, there was plenty of room for manipulation. At the local level, rural cadres and peasants together shaped the system and managed to profit from it. They could better accommodate this movement to their local conditions and protect themselves. Peasants were rational. They made their choice after careful calculations. For instance, some peasants chose to form their own organizations to avoid being organized by outsiders.⁶⁷ Individual farmers were not commonly discriminated.

Despite the central government's stress on the socialist nature of mutual aid

⁶⁷ *Neibu cankao*, May 15, 1952.

teams, very few peasants were aware of it. It was very rare that peasants got organized because of their political consciousness.⁶⁸

In short, during this wave, although commandism did occur, the degree of violence was quite limited. Not closely supervised by superiors, rural cadres played important roles. Peasants had the capacity to monitor the movement to their advantage and protect their own interests. At this stage the movement was less influenced by ideology than economic factors.

68 *Neibu cankao*, April 29, 1952.

Chapter 4 Second stage: under the shadow of the three-anti movement

Gao Gang: launched attacks upon capitalism

Despite of the party's effort to protect the countryside from the turmoil of the three-anti movement, rural society was deeply impacted by the campaign. For a short term, the direct impact was in favor of most peasants. Since corruption was a standard occurrence in the countryside, local cadres were profoundly concerned, if not scared, by the movement, so they worked unusually cautiously and avoided upsetting common peasants. Chapter 3 briefly analyzes such kind of "relaxed" attitudes. Cadres in Shanxi were no exception.¹ For example, it was discovered later that in spring 1952 rural cadres there were reluctant to intervene in peasants' production plan in the fear of generating unnecessary grudge.²

But, at the same time, the three-anti movement fostered an atmosphere of constraining and eliminating capitalism. The attacks upon corrupted capitalists immediately extended to all capitalists and the capitalist activities. The media, in response to the central government's call, somehow went beyond the scope set by the central government. Even influential party publications, like *Xuexi* (Study) magazine, could not well manage to stay within the confines of the party intentions. The first three issues of *Xuexi* in 1952 all published articles that completely denied the necessity of preserving capitalism in the New Democracy stage and that focused only on the "anti-revolutionary" nature of capitalists. They implied that the national capitalists should be eliminated as a class. *Xuexi* magazine were later internally criticized by the Central Propaganda Ministry for its "leftist" errors,³ but it faithfully reflected a

1 *Neibu cankao*, March 8, 1952.

2 *Neibu cankao*, March 20, 1952.

3 *Jian She* (April 9, 1952), no 154.

general sentiment of the time that disapproved of every aspect of capitalism. The media regarded rich peasants as capitalists in the countryside, and pressed to constrain their activities.

In January 1952, Gao Gang, at an internal meeting of the Northeast China Bureau, addressed the issue of the “direction of agricultural production.” He explicitly pointed out that phenomena like corruption, waste and bureaucracy, were fundamentally rooted in capitalism. The rightist trend that tolerated the development of capitalism was severely encroaching on the party. Gao Gang was particularly concerned with the direction of the development of agricultural production. To him, the attitude not to curb peasants’ tendency of becoming rich peasants, the attitude not to immediately guide peasants towards collectivization were rightist errors. Essentially, these attitudes denied the leadership to the proletarians among peasants and gave in to the growing capitalism. If they were to be allowed, Gao Gang warned, ultimately the countryside would walk down the old road of capitalism. Then Gao Gang continued to categorize several common actions among peasants as the capitalist activities: borrowing and lending money, hiring labors, engaging in trade in the pursuit of profit, individual farming, employing material prizes as incentives and providing no political education on socialism. By quoting passages of Lenin, Stalin and Mao Zedong, Gao Gang labeled the attitude that treated the mutual aid and cooperation movement passively as a rightist error. He announced that “The primary task was to convert the current small producers’ economy step by step into an agricultural cooperative economy.” To attain the goal, Gao Gang prohibited party members from engaging in capitalist activities, as listed above, and urged them to actively participate the mutual aid and cooperation movement. He concluded that in the party the elements of capitalism and rich peasants must be cleaned up.⁴

4 Gao Gang, “Kefu Zichan Jieji xixiang dui dang de qinshi, fandui dangnei de youqing sixiang”

On January 24, 1952, Gao Gang's address was published in *People's Daily*, under the headline "Overcoming the encroachment of capitalism in the party, combating the rightist-trend ideas in the party." Regarded as an indicator of the political wind, this article was widely cited and caught tremendous attention within and outside of the party. Starting in April 1952, peasants' various practices in the mutual aid and cooperation movement, as discussed in chapter 3, came under the scrutiny of regional leaders, in order to weed out the elements of capitalism. The two most commonly criticized capitalist activities in the mutual aid and cooperation movement were hiring laborers and admitting rich peasants. To fight back, the East China Bureau forbade agricultural producers' cooperatives and mutual aid teams to hire laborers or admit rich peasants. If some members sincerely wanted to keep rich peasants in their teams, they should be patiently "educated."⁵ The Central Committee endorsed this assertion with minor amendments.⁶

Under the intense atmosphere, the mutual aid and cooperation movement moved into a new stage. In May 1952, the Northeast China Bureau formally brought forth a proposal to build agricultural producers' cooperatives on a large scale. It issued a draft entitled "launching the agricultural cooperativization movement" claiming that there were two directions of agricultural development in northeast China. One was along the old road of capitalism due to peasants' past experiences as individual farmers. Quite a few of party members had become rich peasants, rich peasants had profound influence

(Overcoming the encroachment of capitalism in the party, combating the rightist-trend ideas in the party), *People's Daily*, January 24, 1952.

5 "Huadong ju guanyu zai nongye huzhu hezuo zhong duidai funong wenti de yijian" (April, 1952) (The East China Bureau's comments on how to treat rich peasant problem in the mutual aid and cooperation movement). *Jianshe*, no 159.

6 Amendments are: if other members indeed needed rich peasants' production materials, rich peasants could be allowed to stay, yet they should by no means exploit others; meanwhile, mutual aid teams purely consisted of rich peasants were not real mutual aid teams, they should be dismissed. "Zhongyang Guanyu zai nongye huzhu hezuo yundong zhong duidai funong de zhengce wenti de zhishi" (April, 1952) (The Central Committee's directives on the policy of how to treat rich peasant in mutual aid movement), *Jianshe*, May 14, 1952.

over other peasants. Party cadres, who should have been alert to this tendency, ignored it. The other direction was along the road of “getting organized,” from mutual aid teams, to agricultural producers’ cooperatives, and ultimately to the collectivization, as advocated by Chairman Mao. Without explaining why the former direction was not to be followed, the draft stated that the notion of allowing the rich peasant economy to prosper was completely erroneous; the rich peasant economy must be curbed. The fact that this report did not bother to explain why capitalism had to be curbed reflected the reality that by then conducting capitalism was already commonly regarded as incorrect. This draft also announced that tractors or horse-dragged farm implements would be widely adopted across the northeast region and that the agricultural producers’ cooperatives would be adopted as the major form of the mutual aid and cooperation movement.⁷

Compared with earlier documents this draft raised some new points. The annual agricultural production plan of 1951, issued by the State Council in February 1952, explicitly declared that the rich peasant economy was permitted, labor hiring was not constrained, and short-term labor hiring was recommended.⁸ The Draft, issued in the end of 1951, also acknowledged peasants’ right to work individually. In contrast to them, the Northeast China Bureau’s draft condemned peasants’ tendency of working individually as an activity of capitalism. It urged rural cadres and the party members to be alert of the rich peasant economic activities and to refrain themselves from engaging in them. Most importantly, this draft identified agricultural producers’ cooperatives, instead of mutual aid teams, as the major form of the mutual aid and cooperation movement. Bearing those new elements, this draft was endorsed by the

7 “Zhongyang pizhuan dongbeiju guanyu tuixing nongye hezuohua de jueyi” (April 1952) (The Central Committee’s endorsement of the Northeast China Bureau’s decision on propelling agricultural cooperativization), *Jianshe*, no 161, May 30, 1952.

8 “Zhongyang renmin zhengwuyuan guanyu 1951 nian nonglin shengchan de jue ding” (Feb 15, 1952) (The State Council’s decision on agricultural and forest production in 1951), *Nongye juan*, 39.

Central Committee in Beijing and was sent to all regional bureaus, provinces, and prefectures.

Activities like hiring labor, borrowing and lending money, buying and selling land, engaging in trade and individual production were all categorized as acts of capitalism and to be eliminated. These developments implied that, in effect the party had taken the position that the individual economy in the countryside was a force for capitalism, and it anticipated the danger that individual peasants' prosperity would have an adverse effect on the development of the mutual aid and cooperation movement.⁹

Consequently, the party carried out a number of investigations to check the development of capitalism in the countryside, most of which tended to highlight the degree of the development of capitalism. For example, in Shanxi province, during summer 1952, the party launched at least three series of investigations: the investigation on the development of capitalism in the countryside, the investigation on class relationships in the countryside and the investigation on the potential of agricultural productivity. The first two aimed at digging out the deep degree to which capitalism had invaded the countryside, the last, as a supplement to the first two, was an excessively optimistic estimation of the rural development under socialism. In the years to follow, those investigations would serve as the statistical ground for a series of socialist transformation movements. The party shaped those investigations with specific purposes and adopted the strictest standard to judge the activity of capitalism. Under the tense circumstance, even the North China Bureau, which in 1951 worked bravely to protect certain "rights" of capitalism, now had to bend, and agreed to constrain capitalism.¹⁰

9 Zhu Yonghong, "Reflections on the party's Policy Toward the Rural Individual economy During the First Seven Years of the State,"55.

10 "Bo Yibo tongzhi xiang maozhuxi, zhongyang zhuan bao huabei ju zhengce yanjiushi guanyu

The changes were not merely in propaganda. They reinforced, if did not cause, the extension of the three-anti movement into the countryside. By May 1952, the three-anti movement in cities had produced tremendously adverse effects on productivity: the national capitalists had fully given up, many abandoned their enterprises and fled; the national economy was at a standstill; and urban underemployment escalated sharply. Many CCP leaders felt the pressure and decided to shut down the movement in urban areas. It was decided then to extend it to the countryside, yet in the countryside how it should be proceed was not clear.

The North China Bureau, with some reluctance, agreed to extend the three-anti movement to the countryside. As usual, it was prone to prudence. It suggested to start the three-anti movement in the county level and did not launch the three-anti movement in the district and village levels until after the fall harvest. With respect to the methods, the measures employed in the cities should not be adopted, the North China Bureau declared. Instead, the party rectification should be used. Aware that the targets of the three-anti movement (corruption, waste and bureaucracy) were too common in the countryside to be pursued, the main aim of this movement, as defined by the North China Bureau, was not to punish cadres who had committed violations in the past, but to prevent them from practicing the errors. Most cadres could get through the movement by making self-criticism.¹¹ Siding with cadres against common peasants, the Bureau decided that cadres should not have to return ill-gotten gains to peasants or redistribute them as “victory fruits” among peasants, a standard practice during the land reform. Ultimately, the movement should end up with an improved

nongcun ziben zhuyi fazhan qingkuang he duice de baogao” (September 6, 1952) (Comrade Bo Yibo’s report to Chairman Mao and the Central Commiittee on the Policy Research Office of the North China Bureau’s findingd of situations and solutions in the development of capitalism in the countryside), *Huibian*, 611.

11 In principle, the punishment should be minimized, and no decapitation should be employed. Actions in villages were verbal, no violence would be permitted, no beating, no arresting, no binding.

agricultural production plan for the next year.¹² Apparently, the North China Bureau did not intend to shape the three-anti movement into an anti-capitalism campaign, nor connect it with the mutual aid and cooperation movement.

However, local agents had different orientations. For example, cadres in Changzhi prefecture immediately regarded the anti-rightist approach as the central pillar of this movement, and used Gao Gang's article as the guideline. Changzhi prefecture reported, "under the influence of the three-anti movement, more than 80 percent of party branches had studied comrade Gao Gang's article 'Overcoming the encroachment of capitalism in the party, combating with the rightist trend ideas in the party,'" they "rigidly criticized these rightist mistakes, combated the ideas of rich peasants." As a result, mutual aid teams developed into a new stage, and party members vigorously registered themselves into mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives.¹³ Perhaps this was a strategic move. It is not impossible that local cadres purposely switched the focus of the movement so as to protect themselves. By focusing on the elements of capitalism, they could either distract others' attention to the rich people, or make up for their errors of corruption by taking a firm stand against capitalism. Such kind of orientation was not rare. As a matter of fact, the Northeast China Bureau openly endorsed it.

The Northeast China Bureau pointed out that in the three-anti movement, it was inadequate to solely focus on anti-corruption and to overlook the existence of capitalism in the countryside. Corruption and bureaucracy indeed stemmed from the thought and the practice of capitalism. Therefore the true target of the three-anti movement in the countryside was the thought and practice of capitalism. The Northeast China Bureau ordered to combine the three-anti movement with the party

12 "Huabei ju guanyu qu cun liangji san fan yundong de yijian" (June 16, 1952) (The North China Bureau's comments on the three-anti campaign in the district and village levels), JCA, 84.1.1.

13 "Changzhi diwei guanyu bannian lai nongcun shengchan huzhu hezuo yundong zonghe baogao."

rectification. The key issues were: to fight against the capitalist trend within the party and to press the development of the rural economy through cooperativization. At the county level, although it was necessary to combat against corruption, wiping out capitalist thought was certainly indispensable. At the district level and lower, the main task was to check those exploitative deeds and thoughts. By comparison, checking the corruption was a minor issue.¹⁴

The Central Committee of the CCP endorsed this decree and distributed it to all counties for trial.¹⁵ This decree sent out a clear signal to combine the issues of the three-anti movement and the party rectification movement with the mutual aid and cooperation movement as a whole. Given the political orientations of the three-anti and party rectification movement, by this point, the mutual aid and cooperation movement was hardly regarded as an economic event. Together they would be deployed with the full range of resources and administrative action, as shall be discussed later in this chapter.

The North China Bureau tried to make a compromise between its plan and the Northeast China Bureau's plan by setting anti-corruption, anti-waste and anti-bureaucracy as the primary task, and anti-capitalism as the secondary task.¹⁶ Such dual approaches left plenty room for subjective interpretations in the implementation. For example, Shanxi province defined the party rectification movement as a combination of education on communism and of a campaign against rightist trends within the party. Changzhi prefecture further set the aims as eliminating exploitive

14 “Zhonggong zhongyang dongbei ju guanyu xianqu cun ji zhengdang yu dui dang yuan gugong fangzai deng wenti de zhishi (draft)” (August 12, 1952) (The Northeast China Bureau's directive on the party rectification at the county, district and village levels, and on the issues of party members hiring laborers), JCA, 84.1.1.

15 “Zhonggong zhongyang dongbei ju guanyu xianqu cun ji zhengdang yu dui dang yuan gugong fangzai deng wenti de zhishi (draft)”

16 “Guanyu ganbu gongzuo he zhengdang jiandang gongzuo zhong de jige wenti” (September, 1952) (Several problems on cadre issues and party rectification/reconstruction). *Jianshe*, no 179 (October 10, 1952).

thoughts and deeds, correcting the direction of rural development and ensuring all party members were aware that mutual aid and cooperation was the only right path to socialism.¹⁷ Consciously or otherwise, the mutual aid and cooperation movement was then profoundly involved in the party rectification movement. Combating rightist and securing a socialist future became the new core for each party member. For example, cadres in Chengjiashan village of Shanxi province, in the past had no interest in the mutual aid and cooperation movement. But to meet the party rectification requirement, they demanded every party member to join cooperatives. When some party members showed their reluctance, cadres said: “After receiving three lashes an old donkey will climb a mountain; do you want five lashes?”¹⁸ The three anti movement and the rectification movement imposed direct political pressure on local cadres to push for mutual aid and cooperation movement. In October 1952, the second National Agricultural Work Conference was convened and demanded that 60 percent of the rural population be “organized” by the end of 1953. In November, the party center decided to establish Rural Work Department in Beijing to monitor the nation-wide mutual aid and cooperation movement.

A new stage had arrived.

This time, village cadres were no longer the leaders of the mutual aid and cooperation movement. Instead, they became the first target. Cadres of district and county levels threatened village cadres with force, beat them, on occasion even disbanded whole villages to press rural cadres to implement the party order. Under enormous pressures, village heads themselves had to press the peasants even harder.

17 “Changzhi diwei guanyu nongcun zhengdang gongzuo jihua” (October 25, 1952) (Changzhi prefecture’s plan on rural party rectification), JCA, 92.1.1.

18 “Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao” (April 21, 1953) (Report to Comrade Liu Lantao), JCA, 146.1.1.

Power of the Soviet model

One phenomenon that particularly disappointed the party was the lack of improvement in peasants' mentality. The party's diagnosis was the lack of guidance from the party and the lack of socialist education, so it decided to reinforce the party's guidance. However, even party members had only vague ideas of what socialism was and knew little about collectivization. To correct peoples' view of socialism, to connect mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives with China's socialist future and to make sure the movement was on the right track, again the CCP turned to Soviet models for demonstration.

In April 1952, Agricultural Ministry and the North China Bureau sent China's first major agricultural delegation, consisting of officials, peasants, and agriculturists, to the Soviet Union to visit Soviet collective farms. They returned to China in September 1952, just in time to help the CCP launch the mutual aid and cooperation movement. In the first half of 1952, the lack of guidance from the party, the lack of a standard model, and the lack of education on socialism were the main problems that concerned the CCP. This delegation provided a timely opportunity to cope with these problems. With their own experience in the USSR, delegates were expected to show Chinese what a socialist country should be like, to convince peasants of the bright future of collectivization, and to enlighten cadres about how to lead a collective farm. So upon their returning, the delegates were busily engaged in spreading the idea of collectivization and socialism on various occasions. The media, from the *People's Daily* to local newspapers, immediately focused on those events and took this chance to carry socialist education. *Hebei Daily* illustrates how the Soviet collective farms were presented in local media.

On Sept 23, a full page of *Hebei Daily* was dedicated to interviewing peasant delegates. The headline was "the road of the Soviet peasants is the road of Chinese

peasants.” Model laborer Yu Luoshan told the reporter that although he was a member of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association, before the trip he had thought that Sino-Soviet friendship meant that the Soviet Union had aided China to defeat Japan and sent specialists to help China’s economy. He did not believe China should follow the Soviet road to socialism. But in this trip, he saw that Soviet peasants were living in paradise. Although working collectively, they had their own separate families. Husband, wife, and kids were living in a big house with a private yard. One family that Yu visited had a house of three rooms, one warehouse, one stockyard and owned one horse, 10 sheep, two cows and a 5-mou private plot. In 1951 they produced far more than enough to feed themselves. Soviet farmers were no longer worried about food, clothing, natural disasters, or having too many children to feed. As a matter of fact, there was nothing to be worried about because rural productivity was so high in collective farms. In China it took a 5-member family more than 10 days to reap 15 mou of grain and everyone was exhausted; while in Soviet collective farms, 5 people driving one tractor and two combines could reap 900 mou grain in one day, and everyone enjoyed sunshine on the tractor. What a contrast! Yu concluded that Chinese people must follow the Soviet road if they wanted to live a happy life.¹⁹

Yu’s narrative was very typical of all those interviews. When it came to describing the Soviet collective farms, their prosperity, material abundance, high productivity and farmers’ paradise-like everyday life were emphasized. The images of every household being able to keep a large amount of private property, the miracle of tractors, and the Soviet government’s subsidies for children were striking. In interviewees’ comments, nearly all of them emphasized how they turned from doubt to full faith in socialism. Interview titles spoke for themselves, “Collectivization and mechanization led Soviet peasants to happiness,” and “We should follow the Soviet

¹⁹ *Hebei Daily*, Sept 23, 1952.

People's road."²⁰ Pages of photos of Soviet collective farms, farmers, and tractors were displayed in newspapers and exhibited publicly.

Those delegates toured around to give lectures to inspire local cadres and peasants' enthusiasm to build agricultural producers' cooperatives. The responses were impressive. Peasants were curious and anxious. What concerned peasants most was the detail of running a collective farm. They asked, "What stuff was to be collectivized?" "How was land nationalized?" "Do collective farmers own their homes?" "How do collective farmers sell their surplus products?" and "Do individual farmers exist in the USSR?" Obviously peasants were eager to know the distribution principles of collective farms. It is likely that the peasants who attended the lectures were rural cadres and activists. The extent to which common peasants knew about the Soviet collective farms through the media was probably more limited, but the effects of the Soviet models on rural cadres was rather significant.

The secretary of fourth district of Da city Jing Naiwen was a case in point. He was a member of the delegation to the Soviet Union. Before he went to the Soviet Union, he knew little about socialism and was reluctant to guide peasants. He admitted that peasants' understanding of China's socialist future was increasingly ambiguous and he himself did not have faith in mutual aid teams. But after he visited the Soviet Union, he came to know what socialism should be and was now convinced that the old pre-Revolutionary activities "were all politically backward," and that "peasants did not know the superiority of socialism and did not know the advantage of collectivization." He was confident that peasants would no longer be interested in becoming a rich peasant once they saw the power of collectiveness. Comrade Jing believed he finally knew how to educate peasants and cadres. He told a reporter that in the near future he would talk about how peasants in his district had improved their understanding of

²⁰ *Hebei Daily*, Sept 23, 1952.

socialism after he educated them.²¹ Jing was not the only cadre who was inspired by this trip. As a matter of fact, the party seized this chance to launch an education campaign on patriotism, on getting peasants organized and on China's socialist future. This time, the mutual aid and cooperation movement was definitely treated as a project with significant political meaning.

In October, in Hebei province, at each level of the party branches, a cadre was specifically assigned to take charge of the mutual aid and cooperation issue. The secretary of each county was required to make a report every other month and the secretary of each village had to convene village meetings regularly to educate peasants. On October 17, *Hebei Daily* published a report on how rural branches of Daming county educated peasants. In Xiaohu village, Daming county, the party members convened village conferences in holidays to educate people. They told peasants that producing more grain was not for the benefit of the peasants themselves, but to support the state. They instructed peasants to make a production plan not according to peasants' needs but according to the need of the state.

Taking the Soviet collective farms as the model, "getting organized" became more political. First, it was formally announced that transitioning from mutual aid teams to agricultural producers' cooperatives and to collective farms was the only path to socialism. Then, taking Soviet people as the model, Chinese people were told to work harder for a better living. Furthermore, getting organized or not was now a matter of the party line: everyone would go either on Soviet road to socialism or on a road toward capitalism. As the report concluded, "all political activities should focus on mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives."²² Counties in Hebei province were instructed to educate peasants of the meaning of socialism, of the

21 *Hebei Daily*, Sept 25, 1952.

22 *Hebei Daily*, Oct 17, 1952.

direction of the rural economy and of the significance of getting organized.²³

The month from Oct 17 to Nov 17 of 1952 was named “Sino-Soviet Friendship Month.” Newspapers published a series of articles to introduce the Soviet experience, with titles such as “Soviet peasants are farming land with machines,” “The Soviet Union is the most advanced country of the world,” “What kind of country the Soviet Union is,” “Thank the Soviet Union and learn from the Soviet Union,” and “The happy life of Soviet collective farmers.” In addition to the description of the paradise-like life of Soviet farmers, a new theme developed: Soviet peasants’ happy life was the result of collectivism. Soviet peasants contributed to making the country rich while at the same creating a happy life for themselves.. They were willing to hand in more of their property to the collective, which Chinese peasants consistently refused to do.²⁴ In following months, slogans such as the “Soviet road of collectivization is our peasants’ bright future,” were widely disseminated repeatedly.

At the same time, the party claimed that Stalin’s last work, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, showed in detail how the transition from socialism to communism would be achieved and demanded that Chinese learn and master Stalin’s ideas for guidance on how to construct a new life.²⁵ Learning from the Soviet experience was getting more and more formal. For example, on Nov 10, in Beijing the Agriculture Ministry, the Ministry of Water Resources and other central institutions invited Soviet officials and specialists to address the history of Soviet collectivization and answer questions on the operation of collective farms.²⁶

The Soviet models were displayed across China, education on socialism prevailed and regulations of mutual aid teams and agricultural producers’ cooperatives were

23 *Hebei Daily*, Oct 30, 1952

24 *Hebei Daily*, Oct 30, 1952.

25 *Hebei Daily*, Oct 29, 1952.

26 *Hebei Daily*, Nov 13, 1952.

specified. Compared with the first stage in spring 1952, economic factors were no longer the main concern. The concern for the correctness in politics dominated. Rural cadres were no longer the leading figures. Rather, they became the targets of socialist education and were pressed to serve the party rather than to protect their villagers. Taking Soviet collective farm as the ultimate model, the large amount of public assets, the advantage of large-size production and the myth of socialism, were getting associated with China's mutual aid and cooperation movement. The media, cautiously yet firmly, justified the message that for the state's interest, sometimes individuals would have to endure some personal loss. Soviet peasants had done it; it was now Chinese peasants' turn.

Shanxi Province: moving ahead

By spring 1952, agricultural producers' cooperatives were still in the trial stage. Except in Shanxi province and the northeast region, in other regions building a agricultural producers' cooperative required the permission from the province. The number of agricultural producers' cooperatives was very small. In Shanxi province and the northeast China region, the regulation was looser. For example, in Shanxi, to build a agricultural producers' cooperative needed the permission from the district level, whereas in northeast region, it was the county level. Nevertheless, in all regions, prudence was stressed. Formally certain premises were set to be met. Although slightly varied region by region, they largely resembled the criteria set by Wang Qian. In brief, in the first half of 1952, agricultural producers' cooperatives were little more than a showcase. The main form was mutual aid teams.²⁷

However, under the circumstance of the three-anti movement and the party rectification, enlightened by the perfect examples of Soviet collective farms, the

²⁷ Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 230.

mutual aid and cooperation movement entered into a new stage. This chapter will take Shanxi province as an example to show how the new stage took off in 1952.

The influence of Gao Gang's January address was far-reaching. Local cadres with acute political sensibility already noted the changed atmosphere and tried to adopt the new doctrine. For example, on January 29, Gao Gang's article was republished in *Shanxi Daily*. In March, *Shanxi Daily* published one column under the headline "All, come to learn Comrade Gao Gang's article and defeat the capitalists' attack upon the countryside."²⁸ As the editorial pointed out, Gao Gang's article was extremely important and bore great significance in guiding the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Shanxi province.²⁹ District and county cadres began to report their achievements in learning Gao Gang's article. For example, Pinshun county of Changzhi prefecture reported that it would organize cadres of all levels, the party members, and members of mutual aid teams to study comrade Gao Gang's article, in order to criticize and eliminate capitalism and to alter the "rightist error" in the mutual aid and cooperation movement.³⁰ Pinshun county even managed to have this action reported in *People's Daily*.³¹ In the following month, "after studying comrade Gao's article," over 500 mutual aid teams asked for permission to form agricultural producers' cooperatives.³² In May, *People's Daily* published another report about the development of the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Shanxi claiming that after intensely studied comrade Gao Gang's article, in many counties, all the party members had joined mutual aid teams.³³

As comrade Gao Gang's article was widely studied, common party members and

28 *Shanxi Daily*, March 17.

29 *Shanxi Daily*, March 17.

30 *Shanxi Daily*, March 17, 1952.

31 *People's Daily*, April 13, 1952.

32 *Neibu cankao*, April 25, 1952.

33 *People's Daily*, May 8, 1952.

peasants raised questions on how to implement Gao Gang's agenda. *Shanxi Daily* then created columns to answer those questions. For example, one female party member posted that, her husband was sick and was unable to farm land. There was no laborer in her family, so she hired a laborer. But according to comrade Gao's article, the party members should not hire laborers. What could she do to survive? *Shanxi Daily* answered, she should fire the laborer and join a mutual aid team. Another peasant asked, "Comrade Gao Gang said that in mutual aid teams the party members should take care of other peasants in predicaments. How should this rule be practiced?" *Shanxi Daily* answered that the mutual aid teams were prohibited from excluding families with difficulties; instead, mutual aid teams should give them some special preference if needed.³⁴ On a volunteer basis, mostly peasants tended to form mutual aid teams with partners of similar economic status and were unwilling to admit poorer partners. Such a tendency was to be discouraged under the new guidance. This time political correctness would be underscored. Volunteer principle and economic necessity should not take precedence over political concerns.

Counties and villages started to check the "capitalism activities" in their territories.³⁵ Kinds of "deviations" that had been tolerated in 1951 were no longer acceptable in summer 1952: they must be curbed. The party's solution to these problems, as always, was that the party must reinforce its control over peasants and guide peasants towards collectivism.³⁶ In Changzhi prefecture, inspections were imposed upon those agricultural producers' cooperatives established in 1951. Two findings were made. First, the cooperatives had placed excessive emphasis on sideline work and ignored agricultural work. Cooperative members had preferred to engage in trading rather than to open up wasteland. Another finding was, according to the report,

34 *Shanxi Daily*, June 20, 1952.

35 *Shanxi Daily*, March 17, 1952.

36 *Neibu cankao*, April 29.

as land and laborers were pooled together, peasants wanted to pool their livestock and farm implements too. But cooperative heads were unwilling to meet peasants' request. The report concluded, those heads could not handle peasants' request with bravery.³⁷

In summer 1952, the mutual aid and cooperation movement revitalized and grew further. The boundary of prudence was crossed. On July 26, the CCP's Shanxi branch set up a Mutual Aid and Cooperation Direction Committee, headed by Tao Lujia, to take charge of the mutual aid and cooperation movement. Upon its establishment, the committee issued a report demonstrating the advantages of agricultural producers' cooperatives compared with mutual aid teams; in agricultural producers' cooperatives, with larger size and more laborers, modern agricultural technologies, such as tractors, and large-scale rural construction, such as irrigation, were to be applied. The potential of land and laborers was to be realized in a full strength, and peasants' income might double compared to that of mutual aid teams. Further, the committee claimed, agricultural producers' cooperatives could better educate peasants on collectivism and political study. On average, one cooperative subscribed to 7-8 newspapers. This report discovered that peasants in cooperatives had increasingly identified the cooperative's interests with their own interests, and considered cooperative members their relatives. Agricultural producers' cooperative would not only lead the rural economy towards collectivization and modernization, it would also serve as an excellent school of political and cultural education. Therefore, the committee concluded, facts had proven that agricultural producers' cooperatives were of unlimited attraction to mass peasants: it was time to energetically promote it.³⁸

On August 20, *Shanxi Daily* published an editorial entitled "the Chinese

37 *Neibu cankao*, June 26, 1952.

38 "Shanxi Sheng 1952 nian shang bannian jianli yu fazhan nongye shengchan hezuoshe de qingkuang he jingyan" (Situations and lessons of Shanxi Province in building and developing agricultural producers' cooperatives in the first half of 1952), *Huibian juan*, 315-320.

Communist Party is the organizer and the instigator of leading peasants towards cooperativization,” which explicitly pointed out that the party’s central political task in respect to its rural duties was to lead the mutual aid and cooperation movement. This article represented a turning point. Previously, as chapter 2 analyzes, the party’s key task in the countryside was to guide peasants to produce more and increase rural production; but at this point, politics had replaced economy as the central concern.

In the same month, for the first time, *Shanxi Daily* started to publish articles to introduce Soviet collective farms and to praise Soviet agronomists. In September, Chinese peasant delegates’ visit to the Soviet Union was highlighted. In November, articles on Soviet experience and Soviet models reached a new high. In the same month, the first collective farm in Shanxi province, the “Changzhi Sino-Soviet friendship collective farm” was established. One month later, the first tractor station in Shanxi was established, also in Changzhi.

On October 10, 1952, the new secretary of the CCP’s Shanxi branch Gao Kelin criticized the mutual aid and cooperation movement for its unbalanced development. Gao Kelin analyzed the reasons for the “unbalance,” as first, local leaders lacked close inspection and monitoring over the countryside and often were deceived by false reports; second, they did not go into villages to lead peasants; third they had not mastered the method of winning over peasants by showing them good examples. Gao Kelin then demanded in-depth inspections of rural conditions. He implied that prudence had been important in the past, but it was no longer the main issue.³⁹ In December, he further declared that the peasants who had not yet organized were the ones who still dreamed of capitalism, and he called to fight firmly against the rightist error of failing to organize peasants.⁴⁰

39 “Zai zhonggong shanxi shengwei kuoda huiyi shang de zongjie baogao” (October 10, 1952) (Summary report in the enlarged meeting of the CCP Shanxi Provincial committee), *Huibian juan*, 321.

40 “Zai quansheng nongye fengchan laodong mofan daibiao dahui shang de baogao” (December 19,

From July on, *Shanxi Daily* created numerous columns to broadcast rules for operating agricultural producers' cooperatives, ranging from the use of community funds to the enforcement of the distribution rules. In general, those rules were either too complex and well-balanced to be applied correctly or too idealistic to be implemented at all. For example, the principle of voluntarism always was asked to be honored, as well as the principle of favoring the labor and providing aids to the poor. As cases in Chapter 3 have shown, the two principles more often than not were not mutual reinforcing.

Since prudence had been out-dated, the emphasis on faster pace and larger size took priority. From cadres at the county level, down to village level, all believed the larger, the better. Meanwhile, the ongoing education campaigns on socialism was simply understood as to cultivate local cadres' antipathy for the individual peasant economy and drive them to overlook the fact that after land reform private farming continued to be the dominant factor in agricultural production and the chief mode of existence in rural areas. Ignoring these realities, the need to replace private ownership with some "socialist" elements was stressed. For example, without bothering to examine the conditions of the countryside, the head of Licheng county of Changzhi prefecture, raised the slogan "to achieve the complete cooperativization in three years." When cadres of lower ranks told him that peasants did not want to form cooperatives, he criticized them for their rightist errors. The county head did not waste his time in discussing details of running cooperatives, he did not study the criteria Changzhi prefecture had set forth to build a cooperative, and he completely ignored the feedback from district cadres. He simply insisted on building more cooperatives. To produce more "socialist elements," Licheng county cadres ordered every long-lasting mutual aid team in the county to plant eight mou of collectively operated

1952) (Report on the provincial conference of the model labors representatives) *Huibian juan*, 323-324.

high-yield land. Peasants were forced to pool their land of good quality in this category. To meet the requirement, some mutual aid teams had to rent high-yield land from outside. The commitment to “eliminate small private economy” stemmed the passion for public assets, and the obsession of collectivism trampled the voluntary principle. Furthermore, located in Changzhi prefecture, cadres in Licheng county sensed the pressure to compete with Wuxiang county that frequently had its name mentioned in newspapers. As Licheng cadres said, if they (Wuxiang county) could do it, why could not we? Without doubt, these attitudes affected cadres of lower ranks.⁴¹

Cadres at the county level rarely cared about the operation of those cooperatives, so long as the task was fulfilled, especially during the party rectification process. As peasants complained, “Cadres of county level don’t come down to the townships; cadres of district level don’t come down to villages, village heads don’t farm land, and common peasants don’t sleep because of continuous meetings.”⁴²

Pressed by the supervisors in the county, cadres of districts and villages, usually with lower literacy and poorer understanding of politics, had a very simple understanding of the policies. Immediately after the party rectification movement, to prove that they had been “corrected,” rural party members forced peasants, and themselves, to build agricultural producers’ cooperatives, regardless of peasants’ resistance. Cadres seemed to have commonly held the idea that once the agricultural producers’ cooperative was established, they had fulfilled the requirement of the rectification movement and need to do no more. Strictly speaking, what they had learned in the party rectification movement should be mainly applied to party members, not to common peasants. But in practice, rural cadres usually applied what they had just learned to common peasants. Some party members simply told villagers,

41 “Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao” (April 21, 1953) (Report to comrade Liu Lantao), JCA, 146.1.1.

42 “Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao.”

“in three years, private ownership will be eliminated, all production materials will be collectivized,” and “all people should get organized.” Theoretically, all agricultural producers’ cooperatives were supposed to be built upon good mutual aid teams, but this rule was totally ignored in Licheng county. 58 out of 98 cooperatives built in late 1952 had nothing to do with mutual aid teams; CCP members formed them arbitrarily to fulfill the requirement.⁴³

Meanwhile, Shanxi province and Changzhi prefecture continued to build up their national reputation as pioneers in the mutual aid and cooperation movement. Now and then *People’s Daily* published reports on them. In addition to reports mentioned above, in June, *People’s Daily* reported the success of the first ten experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives in Changzhi prefecture, especially their continued progress in 1952. The report marked two new developments: enhanced political education for members and the increased public assets. According to the report, as peasants pooled land and laborers together, they demanded that their production materials should be pooled together too. The report concluded that it was time to “step by step resolve the contradiction between collective management of production and private ownership of production materials, which is the key to improve the cooperatives further.”⁴⁴ In the same month, the success of Guo Yu’eng cooperative in Changzhi prefecture was published in *People’s Daily*, which was later set as a national model for agricultural producers’ cooperatives. The “advanced” features of this cooperative were more land pooled in, more peasants joined (members increased from 18 households to 46 households), more public assets, and better collective working habits.⁴⁵ In the same year, the chief editor of the *People’s Daily* Fan Changjiang wrote a pamphlet describing the experience of Guo Yu’eng cooperative. This pamphlet was published by

43 “Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao.”

44 *People’s Daily*, June 5, 1952.

45 *People’s Daily*, June 3, 1952.

the People's press and was circulated widely.⁴⁶

Thanks to Gao Gang, party members were no longer allowed to work individually, which meant there would no right to withdraw from a mutual aid team or agricultural producers' cooperative. For example, Li Shunda mutual aid team, one of the most well known mutual aid teams in the nation, in December 1951, decided to convert to a agricultural producers' cooperative. Some old members chose to withdraw. Lu Quanwen was one of them. Lu, born a poor peasant, had made his way up to middle peasant status by working hard and had become a party member. He concluded that "based on the soil conditions in our village, there is no more room for higher yield, no matter how well we get organized." He was allowed to withdraw. But after Gao Gang's January address, under the investigation of the direction of rural development, Lu's action was reexamined carefully and criticized publicly. Every party member in Li Shunda's cooperative studied Gao Gang's article and then one after another denounced Lu. In the end, Lu Quanwen burst into tears, crying, "I was wrong. I betrayed the party, I betrayed Chairman Mao, and betrayed comrades' help and education." He apologized for his pursuit of personal profit and joined Li Shunda cooperative."⁴⁷ Like many other good examples in Changzhi, this episode was reported in *People's Daily*.

In July, an article entitled "the steady development of agricultural producers' cooperatives in North China" was published in *People's Daily*. Again, Shanxi was presented as an example. The five criteria Wang Qian had set for the ten experimental cooperatives, as discussed in chapter 3, served the basis of the criteria of building agricultural producers' cooperatives in North China.⁴⁸ In August, Changzhi's example of how to involve rural cadres in the mutual aid and cooperation movement was

46 *Shanxi nongye hezuohua*, 682-683.

47 *People's Daily*, Oct 24, 1952.

48 *People's Daily*, July 18, 1952.

introduced in *People's Daily*.⁴⁹ In September, the development of mutual aid teams in Shanxi, mainly in Changzhi prefecture, was reported in *People's Daily*,⁵⁰ and in October, Shanxi's experience of building agricultural producers' cooperatives was again endorsed by *People's Daily*.⁵¹

According to those reports, the mutual aid and cooperation movement moved ahead in Shanxi province smoothly and swiftly. By September, 56.3 percent of households in Shanxi had got organized. Public assets had increased substantially. Many mutual aid teams had made annual production plans, combined sideline work with land farming, adopted advanced technology to farm land, and estimated a dramatic increase of their income.⁵² At the same time, peasants' mentality had been improved and they had a better understanding of collectivism. Aware of the advantages of agricultural producers' cooperatives, more and more peasants had voluntarily asked to form agricultural producers' cooperatives. As peasants said, "agricultural producers' cooperatives are like a train, and the party is like the locomotive; they lead us walking towards a society of happiness."⁵³ In Changzhi prefecture, over 1000 agricultural producers' cooperatives were established in the fall 1952. The achievement appeared dizzying. Yet along with the rapid advancement, the rash tendency emerged, with severe consequences.

Rash tendencies

Although in theory the three-anti movement and party rectification movement were confined to CCP members, in practice the criteria the party set for the party members were widely applied to masses of peasants. In mass media, it was announced

49 *People's Daily*, Aug 7, 1952.

50 *People's Daily*, Sept 3, 1952.

51 *People's Daily*, Oct 20, 1952.

52 *People's Daily*, Sept 3, 1952.

53 *People's Daily*, Oct 20, 1952.

that hiring laborers and money lending were forms of exploitation that should be prohibited. Rich peasants were to be beaten, as had happened to landlords in land reform. Individual farming was considered capitalism, and as cadres informed peasants, “Individual farming takes you towards the road of capitalism that only leads to death.” Peasants were supposed to get organized; individual farmers were no longer to be tolerated, but to be despised. Slogans were posted like “Do you farm individually? Individual farming is backward; it is the barrier to socialism,” and “there is no future for individual farmers; They will be isolated, be washed out and be the shame.”⁵⁴ Not surprisingly, these words were capable of producing results; and once again, rural cadres displayed their ingenuity in “mobilizing” peasants.

For example, in Jincheng county of Changzhi prefecture, a wide variety of measures were used to attack individual farmers, ranging from financial boycott to psychological discrimination. Financial boycott was widely applied. Individual farmers were neither granted any state loans nor other aids. In addition, they were assigned to shoulder a larger share of local miscellaneous levies. For instance, a mutual aid team as a whole needed to subscribe to one newspaper, while the individual farmer was required to subscribe one for his own family, regardless of whether he was literate or not. Even if individual farmers did not use the newly cooperative-purchased farm implement, they were forced to pay for a share of the implement. In many cases individual farmers were forbidden to use village facilities such as wells or mills. Discrimination went far beyond economic methods. Organizationally, individual farmers were separated and often were categorized with landlords. In some villages individual farmers were forced to make personal reports twice a day to the village head. Psychological discrimination might be even harder to bear. In village

54 “Zhuyi jiuzheng youguan huzhu hezuo de cuowu xuanchuan” (September 1952) (Pay attention to rectify the incorrect propaganda on the mutual aid and cooperation). *Jianshe*, no 181.

ceremonies, either marriages or funerals, individual farmers were forced to carry a big drum on their backs, which in old customs was considered humiliating and done only by slaves.⁵⁵ Facing these pressures, many individual farmers gave up and decided to join a mutual aid team, preferably one that was notional.

To peasants' surprise, this time, joining notional mutual aid teams was not enough to fulfill the party requirement, partly because now cadres of district and county levels might come to inspect, partly because now the mutual aid teams were no longer the party's favorite form. This preference had been clearly demonstrated in media and Shanxi leaders' speeches. Although certain criteria were set as the basis for building agricultural producers' cooperatives, and on principle, building a agricultural producers' cooperative needed the permission from county cadres or even prefects, in practice, many local cadres pushed for a agricultural producers' cooperative to demonstrate their progressiveness.

As discussed in chapter 2, the mutual aid team was mainly a form of labor-sharing among peasants and it could be "created" on paper by merely listing a number of peasants as a team. It did not necessarily involve any surrender of property. But the agricultural producers' cooperative was a form that required peasants to pool parts of their property as the initial investment. So once peasants registered, they were asked to hand a certain amount of property into the agricultural producers' cooperative. Collecting money was much harder than just listing peasants' name on paper. In addition to threats in words, rural cadres had to resort to violence. They developed a series of methods to "persuade" peasants to join mutual aid teams or agricultural producers' cooperatives.

Since the ultimate goal of socialism had been clearly displayed, with the reference

55 "Jincheng xian huzhuzu zhong dangqian qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti" (May 11, 1953) (Situations and problems of mutual aid teams in Jincheng county), SPA, C 29.1.17.

of Soviet examples and by the party rectification movement, peasants' long-standing notion that socialism was to socialize property seemed to be confirmed.⁵⁶ Rural cadres held the blind faith that the more public assets, the better the cooperative would be. In the course of developing agricultural producers' cooperatives, publicly owned assets were blindly expanded. Regardless of the criteria set by the central decree, in the eyes of local cadres, the difference between mutual aid teams and agricultural cooperatives was that cooperatives collectivized peasants' livestock and farm implements. It was reported in almost each county that some cooperatives had collectivized all their members' land, livestock and farming tools. For example, among over one thousand new agricultural producers' cooperatives established in Changzhi prefecture in fall 1952, 76 percent of them had collectivized all of their members' livestock and farm implements.⁵⁷ Even old farm tools and old furniture were acquired by the cooperatives regardless of whether there was any need for them. In some villages even buckets and scrap iron were demanded for the cooperative. The extreme case was that some cooperatives even took the lumber peasants saved for their coffins –something many seniors cared about most.⁵⁸ According to an incomplete statistical account of Qinshui county of Changzhi prefecture, in 43 cooperatives, 496 livestock that were collectivized were of no help for the cooperatives at all. A variety of measures were developed to “ensure” peasants pooled their livestock into the cooperatives. As the first step, a deadline was set, such as “cattle need to be turned to the cooperative in five days, horses in seven days. After the deadline, all the rest would be confiscated.” Second, those who refused to hand in their livestock were publicly criticized and

56 “Linfeng zhuanqu huzhu hezuo yundong zhuanqi baogao” (May 7, 1953) (Linfeng prefecture's special report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement). SPA, C29.1.17.

57 “Jiuzheng nongye shengchan hezuoshe fazhan zhong de mangmu maojin qingxiang” (March 1953) (Rectify the impetuous tendency in the development of agricultural producers' cooperatives). *Jianshe*, no 205.

58 “Jiuzheng nongye shengchan hezuoshe fazhan zhong de mangmu maojin qingxiang.”

repeatedly roll-called. Third, often a quota was set to be fulfilled by villagers. Fourth, all hidden property was searched for and if discovered was confiscated by the cooperative without any compensation.⁵⁹

After peasants agreed to hand their property to the cooperative, more problems arose. First of all, supposedly private property should be compensated, yet there was no standard for the rate of compensation or the process of who should make the decision. It was determined case by case. In most cases, the compensation was underestimated: They “collectivized farm cattle for public feeding and public use at a very low price, and such payment was not made to the owners for a long period of time;” Sometimes poor peasants just “used the cattle of middle peasants at no cost.” During the campaign against capitalism, it was a standard practice that the interest of poor peasants were over-emphasized at the expense of that of middle-peasants.⁶⁰ There were, occasionally, cases that the cooperative used high prices to persuade peasants, or peasants succeeded in bargaining. In either case, the cooperatives needed to pay peasants, with credits, for their property, and the process of payment took years or forever. As one woman campaigned, “the cooperative is getting richer, the household is getting poorer.”⁶¹

Sadly, often such actions were endorsed by cadres at higher levels. For example, the mutual aid team requested Su San, a middle peasant, alone to pay for a plough the team wanted to buy. Su San refused and petitioned to the district cadre. The district cadre said, “Your money is useless if it was kept at your home. You need to donate it to realize its potential.” Su San had to sell his grain reserve to pay for the plough. Of

59 “Guanyu huzhu hezuo mangmu maojin qingxiang diandi jiyao” (May 12, 1953) (Accounts on the impetuous tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement), SPA, C29.1.16.

60 Gao Huamin, “Rectifying the Problems of Impetuosity and Rash Advance in the Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperativization Movement in 1953,” *The Politics of Agricultural Cooperativization in China*, 61,

61 “Guanyu huzhu hezuo mangmu maojin qingxiang diandi jiyao.”

course, he decided not to produce more grain. Such kind of case was not rare.⁶²

Taking care of livestock was always a problem. In most cases, the burden of feeding livestock was not fairly divided. Peasants who had just suffered significant losses with respect to their private property tended to care much less about the property of “others.” As a result, fat livestock became skinny and skinny ones were dying. In one cooperative in Huguan county of Changzhi prefecture, 14 livestock died. As peasants sarcastically commented, “see, this is the advantage of the agricultural producers’ cooperatives, in no families could so many livestock die.”⁶³ This phenomenon not only occurred in Changzhi prefecture; it took place across China, from northeast China to the central south China.⁶⁴

More often than not, taking members’ property was not enough. Those newly established agricultural producers’ cooperatives, following the example of the ten cooperatives in Changzhi, were not shy in demanding state loans. As an “advanced” form, their requests usually were granted. Consequently, they ended up with huge debts, often to the degree they could not even afford the interests payments. But this phenomenon was not unique; the first ten experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives had done the same.

Enlarging public assets was only one aspect of being more “socialist.” Incorporating more socialist rules in everyday operations was also an important factor. Vested interest, which some cooperatives believed was of capitalist nature, would be eliminated from the cooperative operation. Compensations for the land and cash investments were certainly categorized as non-socialist and doomed. In most cases, land compensation was strictly limited up to 30 percent before agricultural taxes or

62 “Jincheng xian huzhuzu zhong dangqian qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti.”

63 “Xiang Shengwei de san yuefen zonghe baogao” (March 1953) (Summary report to the province in March), JCA, 124.1.1.

64 Reports on the loss of livestock in cooperatives were numerous, from each main region of China. See *Neibu cankao*.

around 10 percent after agricultural taxes. Further, some cooperatives started to consider eliminating compensation for land at all.⁶⁵

As public assets increased, so did the size of cooperatives. The watchwords “it is better to have more than less, to have larger than smaller” and “the more the better, the bigger the better” spread widely.⁶⁶ Blind faith in larger size was widespread. For example, in Hongjing village of Licheng county, Changzhi prefecture, in summer 1952, one agricultural producers’ cooperative consisted of 27 households. After fall 1952, the village cadres issued orders to increase the members to 40 household. The district cadre was not satisfied, and said, in order to compete with the Wang Jinyun cooperative in Wuxiang county, all households in Hongjing village (a total 101 households) should join the cooperative. His advice was honored.⁶⁷

The most well known development associated with socialism, was of course the practice of “eating from a big pot,” which has been often discussed by scholars.⁶⁸ In this chapter, I will brief introduce some less referred “socialist” features. For example, welfare became a bright new feature. Multiple proposals were drafted to create fantastic welfare systems. For example, in Linfen county of Changzhi prefecture, village heads initiated proposals like “a woman with children would be paid 30 percent of income even if she does not work,” “women confined to the home would be financially supplied by the team,” “kids under 18 years old would be raised by the team,” and “seniors over 50 years older would be taken care of by the team.” On the one hand, those proposals reflected common peasants’ aspirations for a social welfare system; on the other hand, those proposals were simply unrealistic. In the short run,

65 “Jincheng xian huzhuzu zhong dangqian qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti.”

66 Gao Huamin, “Rectifying the Problems of Impetuosity and Rash Advance in the Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperativization Movement in 1953,” 62.

67 “Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao.”

68 Gao Huamin, “Rectifying the Problems of Impetuosity and Rash Advance in the Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperativization Movement in 1953.”

they would only have adverse effects on productivity. Young male laborers did not want to work with women, and were resentful of the rule that women were to be paid equally.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the need for a good welfare system was practical. Peasants had delivered their livestock to mutual aid teams or agricultural producers' cooperatives, and they had shouldered large debts, so they felt they were justified to make as many requests as they needed. As one cooperative member Yang Manfu said, "I did what you told me to do, I have nothing left; the cooperative should help me in every respect. After all, there is nothing you can get out of me."⁷⁰ This passage sounds like Mr. Yang had read the communist manifesto. Spontaneously, cooperative members turned to the cooperatives for help in the face of material shortages and personal problems. In theory to meet their requests was one essential purpose of the cooperatives, yet in fact the cooperatives were not ready for it. Therefore, the cooperatives turned to the state agencies, mostly banks and credit unions, for aid. For example, in one village of Yi county of Changzhi prefecture, after all property had been collectivized, cooperative members went to the cooperative head for subsidized food, medicine and entertainment such as watching a drama. With no more grain for the winter, the cooperative head managed to get a loan of 4 million yuan from the state bank to feed its members.⁷¹ Few other cooperatives had such good luck and as good a network as this cooperative. For example, in Hongdongbei county of Changzhi prefecture, of three cooperatives total 122 households, 22 households already were unable to make ends meet; 33 households were short of seed, all cattle were very hungry and skinny, and they did not know what to do.⁷² Sadly, no record about their fate has been

69 "Guanyu Shencha nongye shengchan hezuoshe de jinji zhishi" (April 3, 1953) (An urgent directive on inspecting agricultural producers' cooperatives). SPA, C54. 1005. 34.

70 "Linfeng zhuanqu huzhu hezuo yundong zhuanti baogao."

71 "Linfeng zhuanqu huzhu hezuo yundong zhuanti baogao."

72 "Linfeng zhuanqu huzhu hezuo yundong zhuanti baogao."

discovered.

Side effects and the spread

As agricultural producers' cooperatives grew larger, running them became more and more difficult. As chapter 2 shows, managing a cooperative of 20 households was not easy. A cooperative of 100 households or more was virtually unmanageable. Newspapers might have provided many seemingly viable rules, yet peasants' literacy was usually much lower than those writers assumed, and farming included a work load that was difficult to quantify. For example, work points were supposed to be a basic tool to count peasants' work and serve as the basis of their labor compensation, but in 1952, as many cases revealed, cooperatives were not used to it, and quite a few did not employ this system at all. Peasants tended to work as little as possible, as chapter 5 will show. But occasionally, cases were reported that peasants were forced by the cooperative heads to work on land for long hours with high intensity.⁷³ In this sense, cooperatives were intruding on peasants' everyday life. One investigation said, "Some cooperatives emphasized 'united action' which resulted in peasants having no time to take care of their personal issues."⁷⁴

Meanwhile, agricultural cooperatives were given more functions. At this stage craftsmen and small traders were forced to join cooperatives, which often led them to simply shut down their business. For example, in Jincheng county, at the excuse of combining agriculture with sideline work, rural cadres arbitrarily levied taxes on peasants' sideline work and pursued profits, which was extortion. In Kaiwan village, Ji Hongfu mutual aid team issued regulations to collect 20 percent of members' sideline work. Even women's earnings by nursing infants was not exempted. Arbitrary taxes

⁷³ *Neibu cankao*, August 14, 1952.

⁷⁴ "Guanyu huzhu hezuo mangmu maojin qingxiang diandi jiyao."

were also applied outside mutual aid teams. In Xiyao village, each laborer who was working outside the village was required to pay 500 yuan per day for their residence outside of the village. In Hedong village, a progressive tax was designed for those peasant workers. In Jin village, all of peasants' income, except agricultural income, was subjected to pay 5 percent as the community funds. Discontent among peasants was serious.⁷⁵

With an unprecedented supply of money, village cadres took this opportunity to build up infrastructure, of which they had dreamed: auditoriums, dining halls, libraries, and offices. All were established, one after another, at the expense of peasants' cattle and huge debts.⁷⁶

The cooperatives, as a channel between the state and individual peasants, also facilitated state agencies' "aid" for peasants, which, more often than not, peasants considered as burdens. For example, for a long time the state had tried to persuade peasants to employ new farm implements, such as new types of ploughs. Peasants showed little interest and simply refused to buy it. But mutual aid teams and cooperatives, which were much less cautious in spending money and much more eager to please state agents, proved much more willing to buy it. In Licheng county, in 1951, only 57 ploughs were sold, but by spring 1953, 581 ploughs were purchased, mainly by mutual aid teams and cooperatives. Another example was the subscriptions of newspaper. In 1952, in Licheng county, 92,117 copies of newspapers and books were sold, but in the first three month of 1953, 74,996 copies were sold, mostly to mutual aid teams and cooperatives.⁷⁷

Last, but not least, this powerful movement provided rural cadres tremendous

75 "Jincheng xian huzhuzu zhong dangqian qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti."

76 "Guanyu Shencha nongye shengchan hezuoshe de jinji zhishi" (April 3, 1953) (An urgent directive on inspecting agricultural producers' cooperatives). SPA, C54. 1005. 34.

77 "Xiang Liu Lantao tongzhi de baogao."

chances to abuse mass peasants and take advantage of them. What was accompanying all of these excesses was coercion and violence, ranging from threatening words to bloody torture. Fully exploring the methods and the degree of the violence is beyond the scope of a chapter. Cases of death and suicide occurred, and tears and grief were more common.

Phenomena listed above also spread into mutual aid teams. As mentioned earlier, the practical difference between agricultural producers' cooperatives and mutual aid teams was the amount of property collectivized. Since agricultural producers' cooperatives were characterized as a more advanced form, rural cadres drew a conclusion that the more public owned assets in teams, the more the teams were like cooperatives, and the more progressive they were. Even cadres at the county level held similar notions. Blind faith on a large scale plagued mutual aid teams too. Popular slogans, included "small teams should join together to form a large one," "those with less than five households are not counted as mutual aid teams," and "it is glorious to join larger teams" were popular.⁷⁸

In Jincheng county of Changzhi prefecture, large scale mutual aid teams were formed. On average one mutual aid team consisted of 25 households, the size of the first ten experimental producers' cooperatives. Community funds were blindly collected, and public assets were excessively expanded. The first district made it clear that the agricultural cooperatives need to collect 20 percent of the output as the community funds; mutual aid teams collected 10 percent to 15 percent.⁷⁹

Other than the deep impact of the three-anti movement, one more factor that was also responsible for cadres' excessive passion was industrialization. In 1952 the industrialization plan was announced and more CCP cadres were needed in industry

78 Gao Huamin, "Rectifying the problems of impetuosity and rash advance in the agricultural mutual aid and cooperativization movement in 1953," 62.

79 "Jincheng xian huzhuzu zhong dangqian qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti."

sectors. Plans for relocating cadres from agricultural sectors to industrial sectors were underway. Cadres who had been assigned posts in the countryside aspired to be selected and “relocated” to urban areas.⁸⁰ This chance stimulated rural cadres to improve their performance.

This chapter does not deny that there were cases of peasants voluntarily joining cooperatives. They assuredly had their own calculations. However, compared to those who joined the first ten experimental cooperatives in Changzhi prefecture, peasants at this phase reacted to many more coercive pressures. Some were convinced that “earlier or later, we are bound to follow the road. Doing it earlier is always better than later. By doing it earlier we are respected and receive more privileges from the state.” As the political atmosphere became intense, peasants of “bad” class background directly felt the pressure and were scared. To demonstrate their improvement and hopefully avoid being targeted, they invited poor peasants to form cooperatives by offering them economic incentives.⁸¹ Once the mutual aid and cooperation movement became regarded as a political movement, peasants no longer had much room to maneuver. It is not surprising that economically those cooperatives would fall apart.

At this stage, the mutual aid and cooperation movement can be considered essentially a political movement, no longer economically based. As a matter of fact, the pursuit of profit was considered capitalism and was to be “altered.” Many adjustments peasants had adopted in 1951 now became immoral, if not illegal yet. Hiring laborers, emphasis on sideline production, planting more cash crops, high compensation to land, livestock and cash investment were all condemned as elements of capitalism. The economic-based formula was formally disregarded. In addition to compensation for land, compensation on livestock was another example. Customarily,

80 “Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu chungeng shengchan gei geji dangwei de zhishi.”

81 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*

one herd of cattle was calculated as equal to, if not higher than, one and half full laborers because they were much more effective in farming land than men. But under the new circumstance, this formula was labeled as exploitation. So the compensation for cattle was reduced to the equivalent of half of a laborer, which, in the owners' calculation, was not enough to pay for the fodder. The choices usually were: eat the cattle or sell them. But under high pressure from cadres, when peasants dared not to withdraw from mutual aid teams, cattle owners considered cattle an increasing burden and had to donate cattle to the team or propose that a agricultural producers' cooperative to be formed.⁸² In the party's overly optimistic assessments, such actions might be interpreted as peasants' "selflessness" and their eagerness to join cooperatives, but we can assume that they would not raise any more cattle.

This rash tendency was by no means limited in Shanxi Province. By the spring 1953, in every province, except minority administrative regions, a number of agricultural producers cooperatives and mutual aid teams of larger size were established. Patterns like the zeal for forming agricultural producers' cooperatives over mutual aid teams, discriminating individual peasants occurred in many regions.⁸³ As one party document in 1953 acknowledged in the new liberated regions, it was common to use political methods to form mutual aid teams which often infringe the interests of middle peasants; in the old liberated regions, it was common to have placed too much emphasis on agricultural producers' cooperatives, collectivized too many assets and injected too many "new" socialist features in the cooperatives.⁸⁴

Generally speaking, nearly all of the phenomena described here in Shanxi did

⁸² *Neibu cankao*, December 4, 1952.

⁸³ Gao Huamin, "Rectifying the Problems of Impetuosity and Rash Advance in the Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperativization Movement in 1953," 62.

⁸⁴ "Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu chungeng shengchan gei geji dangwei de zhishi" (March 16, 1953) (The Central Committee's directive to party committees at all levels on spring plowing and production), *zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingji dang'an ziliao xuanbian, 1953-1957, nongye juan*, (hereafter as *Nongye juan 1953-57*) (Beijing: zhonggong wujia chubanshe, 1998), 25-26.

occur in other regions, probably to a less extent. More important, what happened in Shanxi well reflected how local cadres and rural peasants reacted to heavy political pressure from above, which eventually was the case all over China when the cooperativization movement was formally launched and carried out in 1954-55. In this sense, what had happened in Shanxi was a microcosm of what would happen in 1954, 1955 and 1956, on a national level. Meanwhile, widely regarded as a national model in the mutual aid and cooperation movement, many other regions did look to Shanxi for inspiration, and some even simply copied the model of Shanxi that was presented in media.⁸⁵

In China's accelerating quest towards collectivization, the media certainly played an indispensable role. Sadly, I have not yet examined this topic in detail. Nevertheless, in my research, I did come across some interesting evidence on this topic. For example, in the northeast region, many peasants planned to form agricultural producers' cooperatives, yet few knew how to operate one, simply understanding it as "working together and eating together."⁸⁶ In the northeast China, the media evidently favored agricultural producers' cooperatives over mutual aid teams. Without exploring the basis for building cooperatives (with criteria set by the central party), the advantages of agricultural producers' cooperatives were simply highlighted. Moreover, intentionally or otherwise, newspapers created an illusion that agricultural producers' cooperatives might solve many problems faced by mutual aid teams. For example, one report on Jin Shilong cooperative presented the following story: Jin Shilong cooperative was built upon Jin Shilong mutual aid team. When it was still a mutual aid team, it encountered 18 "unsolvable" difficulties in its operations; so it became

85 *Neibu cankao*. Sichuan.

86 *Neibu cankao*. Jan 7, 1953.

upgraded to a cooperative. Suddenly, these 18 difficulties no longer bothered the cooperative. Following this report, many local cadres raised the slogan “to be rid of these 18 difficulties (of running a mutual aid team), build a agricultural producers’ cooperative.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *Neibu cankao*. June 18, 1952.

Chapter 5 Abandoned rectification and the resumption of cooperativization

Appreciating the aftermath

The excesses among the mutual aid and cooperation movement in late 1952, as chapter 4 lists, sapped the energy of peasants and severely impaired agricultural production. It was reported that in many counties in Shanxi province, for the whole winter no one collected the night soil, no one conducted sideline work and no one cared about tending crops. For example, in Podi (village) cooperative of Wuxiang county, members were not even interested in picking beans. Instead, pigs took care of the beans. One elderly peasant was worried. “The agricultural producers’ cooperative could afford losing these beans. I cannot afford losing my pigs. I am afraid they will die of eating too much.”¹ The Changzhi prefecture of course did not worry about these pigs, but they did worry about the agricultural production plan of 1953.

From October 1952 to April 1953, peasants’ desire to farm land reached the lowest level since 1950. In two agricultural producers’ cooperatives of Changzhi, 70 percent of arable land went to waste during the fall of 1952. Peasants refused to plant. Indeed not all peasants in Shanxi joined in cooperatives or mutual aid teams, yet nearly all of them either had witnessed or heard about what was occurring in cooperatives nearby. In their eyes, their neighbors were unjustly deprived of their private livestock and farm implements. Their land brought them little or no profit, and watchwords like “overthrow the private ownership” were in the air. What was their conclusion? Virtually all of them had only one reaction, “Communism is coming!” They were next in line. There was no way that they would let the state take away their

¹ “Xiang Shengwei de san yuefen zonghe baogao” (March 1953) (Report to the Provincial branch in March), JCA, 124.1.1.

property. They said frankly, “I am afraid of joining in the cooperatives. I am afraid that I won’t be given any grain after the harvest. I am afraid of being starved.” Pessimistic about the future, they figured, in their miserable life, they deserved at least some good times. So they chopped down fruit trees, slaughtered livestock for meat and took rest as much as possible. For example, peasant Feng Zituo in the past rarely ate any meat. But in the Chinese New Year of 1953, he slaughtered three pigs and even wanted to eat more. In Wuji village of Changzhi prefecture, eight households sold all their livestock, some even sold their extra homes. In Tingcheng village of Qin county, Changzhi prefecture, there had been at least eight blacksmiths each year from 1950-52, and dozens of carriages had been sold. Yet in 1953 there was only one blacksmith in the village and he was nearly out of business because he did not even sell one carriage. Peasants refused to spread fertilizer, saying “Why bother? After the fall of 1953 they will all belong to the cooperative.”² The reality for peasants was that they had little hope of maintaining their farming activities at the present level, let alone of expanding them.³

But the impact of the rash tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement went far beyond infringing peasants’ incentives in farming land. Other perilous signs had come to the surface as well.

The cooperativization movement and the following heavy additional levies hit peasants severely. Local government was fully aware of this fact. As its reports revealed, peasants complained, “For the whole year, I have worked so hard, yet the gain is not even enough to feed the state.” They concluded that “there is no future for farming. It’s much better to leave the village and find a job in cities.” Land became a

2 “Linfeng zhuanqu huzhu hezuo yundong zhuan ti baogao” (May 7, 1953) (Linfeng prefecture’s special report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement), SPA, C29.1.17.

3 The Soviet farmers met the same question in the late 1920s. Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization*.

burden. No peasant wanted to purchase land. The story of selling land for free was no longer a myth. In Licheng county, one mou arable land in 1951 was worth 6-7 dan millet. In 1953, no peasant was willing to purchase extra land, regardless of the price. In order to get rid of some land, peasant Wang Changsuo sold 6 mou arable land not only for free, but also by offering the buyer a bonus. When peasants felt better off abandoning land, the government doubtlessly should have been alert and re-examined its rural policies.

Cadres in Changzhi prefecture were also aware that recruiting for the army was getting much easier; peasants joined the army with enthusiasm. “In past years, it had been difficult to recruit peasants into the army; this year, it is difficult to persuade them to go back home (from the recruiting station).”⁴ This dramatic turn, probably partly due to the waning of the Korean War, indeed reflected peasants’ pessimism about their future in the countryside. Meanwhile, a large number of youth left villages for cities seeking other chances. The primary reason, as Changzhi prefecture analyzed, was that they felt “any profession is better than tilling land.” Compared with all other careers, farming was hard working, yet the gain was so tenuous. With additional taxes and other miscellaneous levies, peasants did not see any profit. Peasants complained that they were unable to take up half of their production. Peasants calculated that a worker’s salary of half a month would be equal in value to their fall harvest.⁵

Increasingly, peasants’ hostility towards the state became apparent. When hit by the freeze that threatened grain, peasants said, “Let it be. We have nothing to eat; so the state,” “I only have my flesh now. You (cadres) do whatever you want to me.” Although most peasants adopted passive method of resistance, there were groups that chose to fight. Even in Changzhi prefecture, an old liberated region where the party

4 “Xiang shengwei de san yuefen zonghe baogao.”

5 “Xiang shengwei de san yuefen zonghe baogao.”

had deep roots, when peasants were pressed too hard, in 1953, they embraced millenarianism, and the “Wholehearted worship of ‘Tao’ of heaven and dragon China society” [Yixin tiandao longhua hui] revived and organized thousands of people conspiring to revolt. The revolt was put down even before it started, but the people’s attitude appalled the party leaders. Admitting that chaos among peasants had reached an unprecedented degree since 1949, local cadres were conscious of the causes: the party was making mistakes in implementing rural policies, and common peasants could not make ends meet. It was time to sincerely take account of peasants’ standard of living and improve the party’s work in the countryside.⁶

Take Changzhi prefecture as an example. At this point, prefecture cadres had to acknowledge that the most dangerous trend in Changzhi was the rash tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement. The excesses triggered peasants’ deep distrust of cooperatives. Even those who had volunteered to join the cooperatives now did not enroll willingly. Peasants lost a magnificent amount of private property. Changzhi prefect started to worry about the production plan of 1953, which by then was clearly going to be difficult to fulfill; the spring sowing plan in 1953 was already in trouble. Another alarming phenomenon was the resumption of superstitious religions. From 1949 to 1952 the old superstitions had disappeared, yet in 1953, peasants once again started to pray to emperors and gods. Changzhi prefect concluded that infringing on middle peasants’ interests had shaken the foundation of new China.⁷

Given the pioneering role of Changzhi prefecture in the mutual aid and cooperation movement, its acknowledgment of the gloomy truth in the countryside proved that the situation was grave. Excesses by no means were isolated phenomena

6 “Guanxin nongmin shenghuo, gaishan nongcun gongzuo, an’ding nongcun shengchan” (April 23, 1953) (Take care of peasants’ living standard; improve works on peasants and stabilize rural production), *Jianshe*, no 215.

7 “Xiang shengwei de san yuefen zonghe baogao.”

in Shanxi province. Quite the contrary, excesses occurred different levels of intensity in many regions, as briefly discussed in chapter four. In the northeast region, the degree of excesses was severe as well. For instance, in 1952, over 1200 agricultural producers' cooperatives were established in Northeast China. In general, members received compensation worthy less than half of their production, and some cooperatives went bankrupt.⁸

In the end, between 1952 and 1953 both the north China region and the northeast region suffered significant drops in grain production. In Northeast China, planned production was 44 billion catties, yet the actual production at best estimation was only 37 billion catties. Grain production in north China dropped by at least 10 percent. In Shanxi, wheat production dropped by 600 million catties.⁹

Another gloomy sign was the spring famine in 1953, which was pervasive across China. In Shandong province, 4 million people were short of food;¹⁰ in the central-south China region (including Henan, Hubei, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hunan and Jiangxi), over ten million people were living with insufficient food;¹¹ in the east China region, 16.57 million people experienced famine;¹² in the northwest region, 1.8 million peasants were in famine.¹³ Peasants abandoned their land, fled to cities, sold their children, starved, even committed suicide. The mutual aid and cooperation movement did not save Shanxi. In some areas of Shanxi, by April 20, six percent of the rural population had no food at all and the same amount of people had food supplies only for 5 more days.¹⁴ For instance, of the 17 villages in Tunliu County of

8 *Neibu cankao*, Dec 23, 1952.

9 *Dangdai zhongguo liangshi gongzuo shiliao* (Historical documents on contemporary China's grain work) (Beijing: internal circulation, 1989), 150-167.

10 *Neibu cankao*, March 25, 1953.

11 *Neibu cankao*, May 9, 1953.

12 *Neibu cankao*, May 9, 1953.

13 *Neibu cankao*, April 21, 1953.

14 *Neibu cankao*, April 20, 1953i

Changzhi prefecture, 672 households could not make ends meet. In Nanxinzhuan village and three others, one child was sold, 55 peasants fled, and 17 engaged in begging.¹⁵

Multiple factors accounted for this famine. Natural disasters did hit certain areas, but they alone could not produce a famine of such a scale. Although there are no statistics on this famine, and all local reports first of all attributed it to natural disasters, judged by the CCP's remedy policies in 1953, two factors played key roles. One was the "measure land area and determine production levels" movement [Chatian dingchan], which was carried out across the nation in 1952. Cadres were sent to the villages to re-measure the land owned by each family to determine the amount of tax each family should pay to the government. The goal was to maximize the amount of grain the government could collect from each peasant family. This movement hit the newly liberated regions particularly hard where peasants tended to have hidden a large amount of unregistered land. Old liberated regions such as north China and northeast China where land reform had been carried out rather radically and peasants had gone through a series of political movements, the impact of the "measure land area and determine production levels" movement on peasants was relatively moderate. Instead, it was the mutual aid and cooperation movement that deeply affected peasants' ways of living. Local reports could blame the natural disasters for the famine, but peasants were not fooled: it was the party, not the "heavens" that had issued a variety of policies that had adverse effects on them. For example, peasants in Subei were furious about "the people's government being a government that is killing people." Local cadres even sensed the possibilities of a riot.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Neibu cankao*, April 20, 1953.

¹⁶ *Neibu cankao*, Jan 22, 1953.

The rectification movement

It is important to keep in mind the Catch-22 in mobilizing peasants. The spring sowing season of 1953 was about to start. Deeply alarmed by peasants' anger and their passive resistance, the government wanted to appease peasants and have them focus on agricultural production. The North China Bureau acted first. On January 31, 1953, Liu Lantao, the head of the North China Bureau, issued "a reply to all county committee secretaries on the question of [how to] lead agricultural production," pointing out that "in terms of guiding the cooperatives, there is a tendency of rash advancement as manifested in striving for more and larger cooperatives." This tendency of "blindly going after higher forms, blindly expanding elements of socialism, and creating common property both excessively and impatiently must be checked and rectified."¹⁷ In response to this order, in early February 1953, Changzhi prefecture convened a meeting to criticize the rash tendenc.¹⁸ However, it seemed that this meeting was not followed by any major action. To reinforce the policy, on March 2, 1953, the North China Bureau issued a directive on "rectifying the tendency of blind and rash advance in the development of agricultural producers' cooperatives." This directive demanded that "party committees at all levels must pay great attention to the serious consequences produced by the mistakes of leftist adventurism" that should be immediately stopped and rectified.¹⁹ This directive especially criticized Changzhi prefecture for the wide-spread impetuosity there. It gave explicit order to stop building new cooperatives and to check all established cooperatives.²⁰

17 Gao Huamin, "Rectifying the problems of impetuosity and rash advance in the agricultural mutual aid and cooperativization movement in 1953," 63.

18 "1953 nian nongye shengchan hezuoshe de jiben zongjie" (January 25, 1954) (A basic summary on agricultural producers' cooperatives in Changzhi), JCA, 124.1.1

19 Gao Huamin, "Rectifying the problems of impetuosity and rash advance in the agricultural mutual aid and cooperativization movement in 1953," 64.

20 "Zhengdun nongye shengchan hezuoshe zhong de mangmu maojin qiangxiang" (March 2, 1953) (Rectifying the tendency of blind and rash advance in the development of agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, C 54. 1005. 34.

Ultimately, the Central Committee of the party in Beijing acted. On February 15, 1953, it issued the directive “Resolution on mutual aid and cooperation in agriculture.” On March 16, it issued the “Directive to party committees at all levels on Spring sowing and production.” On March 26, *People’s Daily* published an editorial entitled “the key to leading agricultural production.” These three articles, under the Central Committee’s order, were collected as a pamphlet with the title “The Guide to Present Rural Work” and were published by the People’s Publishing House. This pamphlet was to be widely studied and served as the party’s fundamental guideline of the time for leading peasants.²¹ This pamphlet was broadly referred as the “three big directives” [sanda wenjian] by cadres. All three directives called to check the impetuosity in the mutual aid and cooperation movement, to stop commandism in organizing peasants and to encourage peasants to produce more crops. Moreover, “three big directives” raised theoretical challenges to the ideas underlying the rapid development of the mutual aid and cooperation movement in 1952.

The directive “Resolution on mutual aid and cooperation in agriculture” acknowledged the simple fact that peasants’ inclination towards individual farming was unavoidable and should not be ignored or simply curbed. Not denying that the ultimate future of the mutual aid and cooperation movement was collectivization, this directive maintained that it was currently grounded in private ownership and should be moving forwards in zigzags. The party must consolidate its unification with middle peasants and also let rich peasants develop. Recognizing the co-existing two deviations in this movement, the passively “let peasants take their course” attitude and the rash tendency to intervene too much, this directive focused on attacking the latter. It emphasized that in dealing with any issue of the mutual aid and cooperation movement, two principles must be adhered to: the principle of voluntarism and the

²¹ *Nongye juan, 1953-57*, 24.

principle of mutual benefit. Coincidentally or otherwise, this directive suggested quite a few points that applied to the first ten experimental agricultural cooperatives in Changzhi prefecture. For example, it stressed that the only standard for judging a good mutual aid team or agricultural producers' cooperative should be the high agricultural productivity (higher than individual farmers) and increased income for its members. It set the aims of building agricultural producers' cooperatives as: meeting peasants' needs, the good ground of mutual aid teams, good leadership, peasants' activism and sufficient preparation. It further listed thirteen rules to regulate the cooperatives. Sideline work was encouraged and considerable autonomy was called for to be given to peasants, such as the right to determine the amount of community funds and income distributions. It even allowed cooperatives to hire short-term laborers and technicians. In the end, the directive called for respecting individual farmers and treating them fairly. In brief, this directive justified peasants' right to pursue personal interests and material profits in mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives. Thus this directive intended to depoliticize the nature of the agricultural producers' cooperative and treat it as an economic organization.²²

This directive was not well received by local cadres. One month later, another "Directive to party committees at all levels on spring sowing and production" was issued that explicitly stated that "the Central Committee required each comrade in the prefecture level, in the county level and in the district level, to study the Central Committee's directive on mutual aid and cooperation in agriculture." This new directive was sharper in attacking the rash tendency. In a harsh tone it listed in detail a variety of impetuous actions in the mutual aid and cooperation movement most of which have been narrated in chapter 4. It censured the use of the methods of land

²² "Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu nongye shengchan huzhu hezuo de jueyi" ((the Central Committee's) Resolution on Mutual Aid and Cooperation in Agriculture), *Nongye juan*, 1953-57, 125-135.

reform in the mutual aid and cooperation movement, demanded that all comrades accept peasants' correct critiques and rectify all leftist mistakes. It warned comrades that "in forming mutual aid teams and cooperatives, don't forget to start from peasants' actual political consciousness and their own personal experiences, and to start from peasants' practical needs and the existing production mode of small producers." It stated that it was incorrect and impossible to abolish the freedom of hiring laborers, the freedom of money lending, the freedom of trading, and the freedom of enriching the peasant economy in the countryside, as so called "the four freedoms". All in all, the directive made it crystal clear that overwhelmingly, the central issue in the countryside was the spring sowing; anything that would compromise it should be modified, delayed or cancelled.²³

People's Daily's editorial once again emphasized the dominant role of individual farming and reiterated that increasing production was what common people were mainly concerned with and was what the party should focus on. This editorial specifically elaborated on the issue of incorporating the small peasant economy into the centralized planned economy. It reminded the party cadres of the fact that since the small peasant economy was extremely scattered and private, it unavoidably generated some spontaneous trends and blindness in agricultural production, and even had some adverse effects on the state economy. Therefore, to incorporate the small peasant economy into a planned economy was a long-term task that could not be achieved in a short period. The main method to guide peasant was through reasonable commodity prices, supplemented with viable economic and political policies. The editorial denounced the action of forcing peasants to do things according to the party's plans.²⁴

23 "Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyang weiyuanhui guanyu chungeng shengchan gei geji dangwei de zhishi" ((the Central Committee's" Directive to party committees at all levels on Spring sowing and production), *Nongye juan*, 1953-57, 24-29.

24 "Lingdao nongcun shengchan de guanjian suozai" (The key to leading agricultural production), *People's Daily*, March 26, 1953.

In essence, this editorial asked the party members to tolerate petty peasants' backward thought and deeds, a point strikingly resembling Bukharin's conviction that "peasant should be accepted first of all for what he is, then guided along the path of self-interest towards better and more evolved social and economic structure."²⁵

In crucial respects the "three big directives" refuted Gao Gang's ideas and demanded that party members should respect peasants as small producers. They slowed down the transition to collectivization. In addition, they made it clear that the agricultural producers' cooperative was merely adopted on a trial basis in new liberated regions and the number should be strictly limited. Mutual aid teams were the main form to be propagated.²⁶ In theory, "three big directives" called for respecting small peasant economy, even at some expense of the central-planned economy; in practice, they denounced the rapid development of agricultural producers' cooperatives.

The North China Bureau immediately followed the new guidelines. On March 20, 1953, it issued the "North China Bureau's directive on reinforcing the party's guidance on agricultural producers' cooperatives (draft)" which explicitly called for "strictly controlling the number of cooperatives, immediately stopping building new agricultural producers' cooperatives and organizing cadres to inspect the established ones." It ordered local cadres to use the five standards set by the "Resolution on mutual aid and cooperation in agriculture" to examine each cooperative, one after another. The cooperatives that could not meet all the standards must be stopped and converted into mutual aid teams. The directive stated in the end, the party branch in

25 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization*, 335.

26 "Zhonggong zhongyang tongyi zhongnan ju guanyu jiu zheng shiban nongye shengchan hezuoshe zhong jizao qingxiang de baogao" (March 14, 1953) (The Central committee's support of the South China Bureau's report to rectify the rash tendency in the building experimental agricultural producers' cooperatives), *Nongye juan*, 1953-57, 143-144.

each level was expected to report its progress to the North China Bureau frequently.²⁷ To ensure this policy was honored by certain local cadres, on April 6, Liu Lantao wrote to county heads in Changzhi prefecture requesting each of them to write a report to him directly.²⁸

Without a leader as firm as Lai Ruoyu, Shanxi provincial leaders this time better complied with the orders of the North China Bureau, yet remained optimistic. On March 1, vice secretary of Shanxi party branch Tao Lujia prohibited building new collective farms in Shanxi and reminded his colleagues to respect the conservativeness and diversity of small peasants.²⁹ On March 26, he still planned to build 2500 new agricultural producers' cooperatives in Shanxi in 1953, but he started to call for prudence.³⁰ Abruptly, however, in April such an optimistic attitude vanished. On April 3, 1953, Shanxi party branch drafted "the urgent directive on inspecting agricultural producers' cooperatives" and distributed it to counties. This directive demanded that the party heads of all levels closely follow the North China Bureau's directives and personally inspect agricultural producers' cooperatives. The language of this directive was unusually aggressive. It urged the cadres who were wavering and had not acted quickly and firmly in disbanding unqualified cooperatives to act immediately. "If now converting (those unqualified cooperatives to mutual aid teams), it is easier to wipe the arse; if not, in the future it will be very difficult to wipe the big arse." Reluctance to act might eventually lead to the collapse of mutual aid and cooperation movement, the directive warned.³¹ The harsh tone revealed the reluctance, if not the resistance, from

27 "Huabei ju guanyu jiaqiang dang dui nongye shengchan hezuoshe de lingdao de zhishi" (March 20, 1953) (North China Bureau's directive on reinforcing the party's guidance on agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, C54, 1005, 34.

28 Reports from different county heads to Liu Lantao are found in Jinchen city archive. JCA, 146.1.1.

29 Tao Lujia, "Tao Lujia zai di, zhuan lianxi huiyi shang de jielun" (Tao Lujia's conclusion at the conference of prefectures), *Huibian juan*, 330-331.

30 Tao Lujia, "Tao Lujia zai di, zhuan lianxi huiyi shang de jielun," 331.

31 "Guanyu zhengdun nongye shengchan hezuoshe de jinji zhishi" (April 3, 1953) (the urgent directive on inspecting agricultural producers' cooperatives), SPA, C54. 1005. 34.

cadres of lower ranks in implementing the rectification directives.

In late March 1953, Changzhi prefecture convened a meeting of county heads to discuss the rectification and raised the guideline of “stop building new, inspect and rectify (the old), consolidate and improve.” After the meeting, it dispatched 125 district cadres to villages to conduct inspections. In early April, each county convened cadre meetings of three levels (county, district and village) to study “three big directives.”³² The rectification was carried out with great haste. According to a report of Changzhi prefecture, in twenty days the prefecture had completed a comprehensive inspection of 1349 cooperatives of the area and found 338 unqualified cooperatives. Oversized cooperatives were divided into smaller ones, and peasants were allowed to withdraw. In dealing with collectivized livestock and tools, the principle of “not to infringe a peasant’s personal interest while at the same time to facilitate the management of cooperatives” was well honored, yet the report did not elaborate on how such a subtle principle was to be applied. The report concluded that most peasants chose to stay in cooperatives and mutual aid teams happily and voluntarily; that peasants’ incentives to work were restored; that cadres, after studying “three big directives,” had substantially improved their political consciousness and working methods. In the end, this report warned that when fighting against the leftist mistakes, it was equally important to prevent the “rightist” mistake of not organizing peasants.³³

On May 4, 1953, Tao Lujia critically reviewed the history of the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Shanxi province. He admitted that cadres had overestimated the increase of agricultural production in Shanxi, that the progressiveness and achievements of the first ten experimental agricultural producers’ cooperatives in

32 “Guanyu xianweihui hou jinyibu jiuzheng huzhu hezuo yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang de zonghe baogao” (April 15, 1953) (On further rectify the rash tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement after the county conference), JCA, 1.1.50.

33 “Guanyu xianweihui hou jinyibu jiuzheng huzhu hezuo yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang de zonghe baogao.”

Changzhi prefecture were exaggerated, and that peasants' aspiration for collective working was overestimated. Furthermore, Tao Lujia admitted, from the very beginning, cadres refused to take into account the opposing opinions: the rash tendency was rooted in many rural cadres' mentality since 1951. Regardless of the diverse condition in different regions, a unified code was applied to all peasants. As a result, from the fall 1952, peasants had been deeply disturbed and considered giving up on farming. They no longer saved the grain but consumed lavishly. The price of land plunged. Situations were especially bad in areas where agricultural producers' cooperatives were established. Given all those facts, Tao Lujia asked rural cadres to focus on agricultural production and downplay the importance of mutual aid teams and cooperatives. He warned not to launch some hollow education on socialism, as occurred in 1952. Tao Lujia instructed cadres to intensively study the "three big directives," to work on increasing agricultural productivity; and to restore public assets.³⁴

Tao Lujia's critical remarks cast a pall over Shanxi's quest towards collectivization of the past three years. It seems Shanxi cadres were about to give up their pioneering role.

The new three-anti movement and falsified reports

The first half of 1953 indeed was a time for the CCP to reflect on its mistakes in rural policies. In November, 1952, Shandong Provincial prosecutor filed a report exposing excesses and misdeeds of local cadres. According to the report, commandism was fairly common among rural cadres. More often than not, it was their only working method. Rural cadres had developed a variety of measures to impose their wills upon

34 Tao Lujia, "Zai 190 ci sheng changwei shang de fayan" (speech on the no 190 meeting of the Provincial standing committee), *Huibian juan*, 333-336.

peasants, ranging from political threatening, long-lasting meetings with no break for food and rest, to the use of police and militia. Beating, arresting, detaining, holding private court, extorting confessions were all common. Cases that local cadres shot peasants just for making one negative comment were reported. In addition, village cadres raped women. Often, it was the whole group of village cadres were involved - sometimes raping women to death.³⁵ Appalled by Shandong's report, the Central Committee of the party decided to have other regions to run a check. In the following months, more and more reports reached the Central Committee, demonstrating kinds of excesses which were by no means sporadic. Beijing was infuriated. In early 1953, a new "three-anti" movement, targeting commandism, bureaucratism, and the violation of laws, was launched in the countryside. During this new three-anti campaign, more excesses in the mutual aid and cooperation movement were reported to the center. The new three-anti movement in effect acted as a brake on anti-capitalism campaign in the countryside and provided a chance for the Central Committee to check and stem the rash tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement.

When spring famine occurred in 1953, the drop in agricultural production was undeniable. So the high productivity those model mutual aid teams and cooperatives had claimed were put into question. Actually, as early as December 1952, Shanxi provincial leaders noticed some falsified accounts and issued a decree criticizing such misreporting. This decree instructed that any model laborer or cadre who had intentionally falsified accounts or intentionally covered up those falsified reports would be severely censured, even punished. Meanwhile, no matter what their true unit yields were, they should no longer be rewarded as model laborers. This decree

35 "Shandong fenju jilu jiancha weiyuanhui guanyu fandui guanliao zhuyi fandui mingling zhuyi fandui weifa luanji de yijian de baogao" (November, 1952) (Shandong branch law enforcement committee's report and comments on anti-bureaucratism, anti-commandism and anti-violations of laws), *Jianshe*, issue 197..

questioned the custom of only praising, never censuring, model laborers, and it instructed to watch those model laborers closely and critically.³⁶

As the rectification against the rash tendency proceeded, a large number of falsified reports were discovered, one after another. The situation was especially bad in Wuxiang County. In April, thirteen agricultural producers' cooperatives in Wuxiang including the well known Wang Jinyun cooperative were discovered to have falsified accounts.³⁷ By June 1953, 135 units, (include agricultural producers' cooperatives, mutual aid teams and individual farmers) out of 408 units that had been awarded special status in 1952, were exposed to have fabricated data. As peasants commented, "just useless, you are cheating yourself." Nearly all famous model laborers were involved. As a matter of fact, falsifying reports had become a trend spreading all over the region. All local residents knew it, as they said, "From villages to the central government, one level is cheating another." It is important to note that cadres at district and county levels were likely involved in the cheating; in many cases, they were the backstage bosses.³⁸

Take Li Shunda cooperative as an example. The official report showed that the unit yield of Li Shunda cooperative in 1952 was 442 catties per mou, yet the real yield was at best 372 catties per mou. In the fall 1952, an investigation team composed of cadres of Shanxi province, Changzhi prefecture and several neighboring counties was dispatched to Li Shunda cooperative to check the production. By then the crop had not been fully harvested, so the investigation team estimated an average unit yield of 442 catties per mou. To make Li Shunda eligible for the national competition of

36 "Huabei ju zhuanpi shanxi shengwei guanyu zhengque zhixing peiyang nongye laodong mofan zhengce de jue ding" (December 19, 1952) (The North China Bureau's comments on Shanxi's decision on correctly educating agricultural model laborers), *Huibian*, 629-630.

37 "Guanyu jiefu jibao fengchan qingkuang de buchong baogao he chuli yijian" (July 4, 1953) (Additional reports and comments on the situation of exposing falsified accounts on harvest), JCA, 1.1.124.

38 *Neibu cankao*, May 14, 1953.

high-yielding model laborers, the county cadre Chen Jie used this estimated unit yield as the real yield and submitted it to Shanxi province. Li Shunda ultimately won the prize. However, the real yield was only at most 372 catties per mou. Chen Jie decided to conceal this fact, saying “if correcting the number, Shunda’s reputation over the nation would be tarnished.” In the first round of “checking falsified accounts” in April 1953 that was conducted by cadres of the same county, Chen Jie managed to have Li Shunda cooperative spared. In May, when the Agricultural Ministry in Beijing sent its own agents to investigate, Chen Jie worked with the cooperative treasurer and other county cadres to modify the old accounts and finally got the cooperative through the inspection. Only in June, when Changzhi prefecture sent cadres to settle the issue of compensating collectivized livestock and to make a new annual production plan of even higher yield, did Chen Jie and Li Shunda confess their misdeeds.³⁹ In this case, the cheating was covered up for several rounds of inspections. Even then, only some material interests of cooperative members were revealed. I believe, the exposed cases were merely a drop in the ocean of unexposed ones.

Well aware of the degree of the data fabrication, Changzhi prefect prohibited counties from punishing these cheaters without the prefecture’s further notice. Changzhi prefecture emphasized that only those who intentionally cheated the party and had very bad reputations, and that were opposed by masses of people were to forfeit the title of model laborer and return their prizes; in most cases, a public apology was the only punishment. In effect, most model laborers maintained their title and their prizes. The principle was, as Changzhi prefecture set forth, “to protect and nurture model laborers, unite with them, educate them, and correct them.”⁴⁰ Contrary to the decree of Shanxi province, in practice, the action of falsifying accounts was

³⁹ *Neibu cankao*, July 23, 1953.

⁴⁰ “Guanyu jiefu jiabao fengchan qingkuang de buchong baogao ji chuli yijian.”

rarely punished.

From this episode we can learn, as contemporary peasant activists learned, that first prefects usually were unwilling to punish model laborers and were reluctant to criticize local cadres, unless extremely severe violations were exposed. Second, without high pressure from above, prefecture cadres seldom focused on “bad things” in their regions. Those cadres, township or even higher levels, who were sent to model villages often encouraged peasants to exaggerate their yields. It is unlikely that such cadres could actually inspect peasants. Third, the local governments, concerned with rural stability, were willing to aid those who suffered from “progressing too fast” if they had at their disposal the resources. Agricultural lending was a good example. The more peasants owed to the bank, the more rate deductions they were offered.

At this time, peasants were not required to pay extra taxes for higher production. However, later model laborers, together with millions of Chinese peasants, paid a heavy price for their exaggerations. The high unit yield they falsely reported left the party with an illusion of substantially increased rural productivity and an assumption that a large amount of surplus grain existed, hoarded among peasants. More tragically, fabricating high unit yield coincided with the “measure land area and determine production levels” movement. Consequently, the party raised its expectations and increased its extraction plans to claim its share of the “increased” production.

In the middle of 1953, from the Central Committee to villages, “three big directives” were studied and implemented. While not overtly questioning the theory of the mutual aid and cooperation movement, they placed substantial constraints on the movement and justified peasants’ mentality as small producers. Gao Gang’s anti-capitalism manifesto had been devalued, peasants’ nature as small producers was once again honored, the three-anti movement was replaced by the new three-anti movement which aimed at protecting peasants. The political atmosphere appeared to

be completely altered. At this time, Gao Gang was appointed the chair of Central Planning Committee and was relocated from the northeast region to Beijing, Lai Ruoyu was transferred out of Shanxi province. Shanxi provincial leaders were less enthusiastic in supporting the mutual aid and cooperation movement: at least they no longer dared to challenge the central directives. Agricultural production once again became the foremost concern of the CCP's rural policy; more and more inconvenient truths about the agricultural producers' cooperatives had been discovered. In summer 1953, the mutual aid and cooperation movement was virtually stopped. It seemed that socialism for Chinese peasants was once again postponed. Peasants seemed to be granted a break. Were they?

The limits of the rectification

“Three big directives” appeared clear and well balanced: to disband those poorly operated cooperatives, modify those shabbily run, and consolidate those well based. The voluntary principle was to be honored; peasants were allowed to withdraw at any time along with their assets. Yet, considering that so many properties had been pooled together, so much zeal or anger had been invested, and often so large amount of debts were hanging there, any move would arouse strong personal emotions and personal interests. Rectification was not an easy task.

In practice, the more balanced the policies were, the more difficult to implement them. To comprehend “three big directives” was not easy for most local cadres. To measure what local cadres had learned from “three big directives”, several prefectures in Shanxi province tested them. The scores were surprisingly low. For example, of 193 cadres in Wutai county, only 19 passed the test; 177 of them did not know the differences among mutual aid teams, agricultural producers' cooperatives and collective farms. Some cadres had never even heard of “three big directives.” Of 40

cadres in Yucheng prefecture, only two had read the “directive to party committees at all levels on spring sowing and production.” To explain those local cadres’ poor performances in tests, in addition to the “objective” reasons such as low literacy and the lack of time, the lack of subjective motivation needed to be included as well.⁴¹

A report drafted by “the spring-sowing inspection team” sent by Shanxi province to Changzhi prefecture well demonstrated the confusions and angers the rectification had engendered in the countryside. In contrast to the Changzhi’s own report, the report from the inspection team revealed rural cadres’ resistance to the rectification. Heads of multiple counties had not studied the “three big directives,” and most cadres of the district level could not understand them. For those who had studied the documents, a common reaction was “then what we should do in the future to lead peasants?” Those cadres who had little knowledge of farming did not want to raise the issue of agricultural productivity. Confusion prevailed among rural cadres. Fearing that they would be labeled rightists who “let peasants take their course,” quite a few of cadres dared not to rectify the leftist mistakes. In practice, deviations were common. For example, in Pingshun and Gaoping county, cooperative heads returned the collectivized livestock to the former owners, a point “three big directives” had stressed. However, they retained other public assets, controlled their members’ trading activity and vehemently attacked the small peasant economy. In Qin county, Yangcheng county and Jincheng county, county heads were still wavering on whether to push for the rectification. Many hesitated or carried out policies slowly and reluctantly. There were cadres who resisted the policies and personally modified them in order to delay or deny cooperative members’ requests to withdraw. As happened in Wuxiang county, county heads created various methods to threaten the households who had asked for withdrawal. Rural cadres tended to claim that their cooperatives

41 *Neibu cankao*, June 22, 1953.

were well founded and had no problems. Reasons were multiple. Some did not want to lose their title of model laborers and their reputations; some simply did not want to “lose face.” Some complained to their superiors, “You shit, we wipe. Only your words matter. I could not take back what I have said. You can go ahead to make the correction.”⁴²

In half-completed cooperatives, situations were complex and difficult. In many cases, collectivized livestock had already died or were sold, farming implements had worn out, fertilizers had been mixed together and land had been sown collectively. More often than not, many agricultural producers’ cooperatives were in deep debt. In these cases, what share of the debt should peasants shoulder?⁴³ However, such kinds of messes were covered up. For example, the operation Hedong cooperative of Jincheng county was stopped, but conditions were very bad, yet the village head in his report to the district said “we did fine.”⁴⁴

Resistance to the rectification movement was by no means only limited in Changzhi prefecture. For example, in Hebei province, quite a few cadres were angry about rectification. In their view, they had made enormous efforts to persuade or force peasants to form a agricultural producers’ cooperative. Now, with some orders from above, all their efforts were to vanish. They asked, “Is it illegal to form a cooperative? If it is legal, we are going to hold on; if it is illegal, take me to court;” “if you say so, it is a cooperative; if you don’t say so, it is a mutual aid team. It is what it is like now and I am not going to change it;” or “if converting (cooperatives) to mutual aid teams now, I won’t form any cooperative for the rest of my whole life. And I will not allow

42 “Guanyu xianweihui hou jinyibu jiuzheng huzhu hezuo yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang de zonghe baogao.”

43 Ye Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 270.

44 “Guanyu changzhi qu jiuzheng huzhu yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti” (May 13, 1953) (Report on the problems and situations of rectifying the rash tendency in the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Changzhi prefecture), SPA, C29.1.16.

my sons to form one either.” It was not rare that cadres felt ashamed, even betrayed.⁴⁵

“Three big directives” were fairly well balanced documents. On the one hand, they called for toleration, even respect for the small peasant economy and criticized the leftist mistakes; on the other hand, for undisclosed reasons, they recommended to converting most of agricultural producers’ cooperatives to mutual aid teams and to preserve mutual aid teams as the major form of organizing peasants. Given rural cadres’ commonly poor understanding of the policies, they could rarely maintain such a balance. In the end, they sent peasants some simplified messages, such as, “you can voluntarily join mutual aid teams, or farm individually as your wish,” “cooperatives are not as good as mutual aid teams, mutual aid teams are not as good as individual farmers.” Some rural cadres who had been earlier labeled “laggard” now laughed at those once “activist” cadres. A common understanding was that the wind was going to change and the state would no longer endorse mutual aid teams. Reports also showed that there were cadres who responded promptly and simply regarded the rectification as to “stop and return the property to individuals.” For example, in the Xiwan agricultural producers’ cooperative, one militia head forced the unit to disband without consulting with its members, so the cooperative members were not delighted by this arbitrary decision.⁴⁶ In practice, if a cooperative was considered unqualified, it was more likely to be disbanded rather than to be converted to a mutual aid team. Labor hiring, money borrowing and lending, and private trading resumed, as the ban was lifted by “three big directives.”⁴⁷

In brief, correcting the impetuosity was much more than acknowledgement of errors and making of apologies. Some local cadres were concerned that there were too

45 Yangbing, *Zhongguo nongye hezuohua yundong yanjiu*, 271.

46 “Guanyu changzhi qu jiuzheng huzhu yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang qingkuang yu cunzai de wenti.”

47 *Neibu cankao*, July 6, 1953.

many problems to be solved at one time so it was better not to touch them immediately. Some of the worries from the below were realistic and were well grounded, such as the worry that if livestock were returned to their owners, they might be immediately sold or slaughtered, with an adverse effect on agricultural production. However, those worries fell on deaf ears.⁴⁸

The resistance to the rectification was not just from some peasants and cadres at the bottom. At the central level, there was discontent as well. For example, Deng Zihui, minister of newly-established Rural Work Department in Beijing, viewed situations differently. On April 18, 1953, at the second national rural work conference, he claimed that agricultural producers' cooperatives should be the main form in the old liberated regions and that cadres of new liberated region should make greater efforts to help mutual aid teams and prepare them to become agricultural producers' cooperatives after the fall. Deng Zihui criticized the rash tendency, however, he also valued the trend of move peasants towards socialism and thought it should go further. To him, the key issue of the first or second five year plan was to build agricultural producers' cooperatives.⁴⁹ Five days later, he described the "two roads" of rural developments and confirmed that the only correct road was to get peasants organized and moving towards socialism. Deng Zihui suggested building slightly lower a number of new agricultural producers' cooperatives in 1954. Nevertheless, he also highly praised the virtue of good cooperatives and warned against to simply disbanding those poorly-operated cooperatives. He explicitly pointed out that the notion of "ensuring the private ownership" was wrong; the notion of unqualified encouragement for the "four freedom" was inappropriate.⁵⁰

48 "Guanyu xianweihui hou jinyibu jiuzheng huzhu hezuo yundong zhong mangmu maojin qingxiang de zonghe baogao"

49 Deng Zihui, "Dui nongye hezuohua yundong de zhidao yuanze" (April 18, 1953) (Principles of guiding the mutual aid and cooperation movement), *Nongye juan*, 1953-57, 135-144.

50 Deng Zihui, "Deng Zihui zai quanguo diyici nongcun gongzuo huiyi shang de zongjie baogao"

Given Deng Zihui's post, his view should be read as a sign of the split among the central leadership. Deng Zihui was to become the leading official in charge of the cooperativization movement. In 1955 he bravely confronted Mao Zedong's plan to push peasants into the high-stage producers cooperative (quasi- collective farm) and risked his political career to protect peasants. He was purged. Since then, he has been respected by contemporary CCP members and highly revered by historians. Because so, a possibility that at the early stage Deng Zihui might have been a strong supporter of Mao is ignored. But a simple fact is that in January 1953 Mao personally asked Deng Zihui to take up the appointment of minister of the Rural work Department. If Deng Zihui had not supported Mao in the beginning, why had Mao Zedong chosed him? Deng's talks in April 1953 confirm this argument. It is fair to say that in 1953 Deng Zihui was Mao's confidant in rural issues and he likely than not knew Mao Zedong's plans better than most other central leaders. Therefore, the divergence between his talks and "three big directives" indeed reflected a split among the CCP leadership, with Mao Zedong and Deng Zihui on one side, and leaders like Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo on the other side.

The thought of Mao Zedong in 1953

Between 1952 and 1953, Mao Zedong devoted himself to promoting "the general line for socialist transition" (hereafter as the general line) for China. How and why at this moment Mao Zedong engaged in devising the general line has been a subject of much research and is not a topic for this dissertation.⁵¹ What we need to note is that as Mao was more and more obsessed with his visions of China's socialist future, his

(April 23, 1953) (Deng Zihui's summary report on the first national conference on rural work), 34-50.

51 The most recent book is *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, written by Li Hua-yu. She probably over estimates Mao Zedong's willingness of duplicating the Soviet model, but she describes the whole issue in a full range. So far, this is the most through monograph on this topic.

optimism for China's socialist future grew accordingly. Some other factors also help him to foster such kind of optimism. In October 1952, during the nineteenth party congress of the CPSU, Malenkov reported that the Soviet Union had solved its grain problems through collectivization. His remarks received long applause from the audience. Mao must have heard the story because in October 1953 he used Malenkov's story to encourage the members of the Central Committee to adopt similar policies.⁵² In 1952, as more and more stories of pure success from the mutual aid and cooperation movement were reported, Mao Zedong was impressed by the virtues of getting peasants organized. So in February, 1953, Mao made changes to the Draft that was originally written in December 1951. In place of setting mechanization as the precondition for collectivization, Mao modified the text of the Draft so that collectivization could begin "with the complete consent of the peasants and suitable economic conditions." As Li Hua-yu analyzes, by using a vague term as "suitable economic conditions," Mao freed himself to begin collectivization whenever he wished, even before the mechanization was obtained.⁵³ In the Soviet Union in the 1920s, there was a deification of the machine.⁵⁴ For Mao, since China did not have machines, he and his followers created, consciously or otherwise, the deification of "getting peasants organized."

In February 1953, when more and more negative reports on the mutual aid and cooperation movement and rural situations reached the center, Mao launched his first formal inspection trip after 1949 to southern China to observe for himself the conditions of the country. The primary purpose of this trip was to collect first-hand information. To obtain more information, riding on his own special train from place to place, Mao met with party leaders at all levels as well as common people. He learned,

52 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 163.

53 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 124.

54 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power – A Study of Collectivization*, 366.

or precisely speaking it was arranged for him to learn, about both positive and negative things about mutual aid teams and agricultural producer cooperatives. He was told by local cadres that the idea of organizing mutual-aid teams had become rooted in the minds of the people.⁵⁵ He was also told that experiments of agricultural producers' cooperatives in Xingtai prefecture were successful. Mao Zedong was very delighted to hear about them and commented, "Mutual aid cooperation is better than farming on one's own." "It is possible to achieve collectivization without mechanization, and therefore China does not have to follow the Soviet way of doing things."⁵⁶

The first document of "three big directives" was issued by the Central Committee of the CCP on February 15, the exact day Mao Zedong was about to leave for Wuhan. The other two documents were issued when Mao Zedong returned to Beijing. These documents were not in keeping with Mao's optimism he had just fostered during the trip. More important, what he had observed with his own eyes contradicted these documents. As Li Hua-yu points out, in early 1953 there were no directives written by Mao on combating the rash tendency of the mutual aid and cooperation movement.⁵⁷ However, in March, Mao made some concessions by acknowledging the existence of the small peasant economy and emphasizing the fact that mutual aid teams and cooperatives were still founded on the ground of private ownership, so they should not be equal with the collective farm.⁵⁸ To what degree Mao Zedong was sincere when he made those concessions was unknown. But, soon Mao would forget about them and further attack the cadres who had placed too much emphasis on the small peasant

55 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 127; Zhang Yumei, "Wo xiang Maozhuxi huibao nongye hezuohua" (I reported to Chairman Mao about agricultural cooperativization), *Zhonggong Dangshi ziliao*, 48 (1993): 104.

56 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 128; Zhang Yumei, "Wo xiang Maozhuxi huibao nongye hezuohua."

57 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 155.

58 Gao Huamin, "Guanyu hezuohua yundong bufa jiakuai yuanyin de lishi kaocha" (Historical investigation on the reasons for accelerating the pace of cooperativization), in *Zhonggong Dangshi Yanjiu*, no 4 (1997): 44.

economy.

Starting in April, 1953, the Central Committee instructed the party to study *Short Course*. Two days later, this directive appeared in *People's Daily*, sending a clear signal to the nation that Stalinism and Stalin's path to socialism were to be adopted.⁵⁹ Ideas of Stalin and Lenin were widely cited. However, as Chinese scholars have pointed out, what was reflected in Chinese media was in essence Soviet war communism that had been inherited and developed by Stalin, not Lenin's NEP. The party's, more precisely Mao Zedong's, understanding of Lenin's transition theory was as such: in the transition period, capitalism, commodity production and communism existed concurrently. The small peasant economy was rooted deeply in capitalism, upon which capitalism would survive and revive. So the fundamental feature of this transition period was the cruel struggle between dying capitalism and growing communism. In this sense, the goal of the transition period was to eliminate capitalism, to eliminate classes, and to create a socialist society. Briefly, in Mao's understanding, the tasks of the transition period were: to eliminate capitalism, to modify the small peasant economy and to form a state-owned socialist economy.⁶⁰ Ideas manifested in *Short Course* dominated his thought. Lenin's famous excerpt "small production is still very, very widespread in the world and small production engenders capitalism and the bourgeoisie continuously, daily, hourly, spontaneously and on a mass scale" was to be reiterated, extensively and intensively.

By June 1953, Mao had fully in his mind completed his vision of China's transition to socialism, drawing mainly from the key features of the Stalinist road to socialism, as presented in *Short Course*: industrialization, collectivization in the

59 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 132.

60 Weng Youwei, Xi Fuqun and Zhao Jinkang, *Dangdai zhongguo zhengzhi sixiangshi* (The history of political thoughts in contemporary China) (Henan: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1999), 66-69.

countryside and an all-out war on the capitalist economy.⁶¹ In summer 1953 Mao started to push for this agenda, first concentrating his attack on the notion of preserving the capitalist economy.

On June 15, 1953, at a politburo meeting, Mao criticized three kinds of “rightist” expressions, namely, “the consolidation of a New Democratic Order,” “walking toward socialism from New Democracy,” and “protecting private property” in the countryside. Mao then attacked the small peasant economy and those who proposed to respect it. In essence, Mao refuted the very basic notion of “three big directives.”⁶² However, in the summer, Mao focused his attention mainly on state-capitalist relations, not on state-peasant relations, a topic he would later pick up in October.

From June to August, 1953, the national conference on Financial and Economic Work was convened in Beijing. Mao proclaimed that the main purpose of the conference was to discuss the general line and to redirect the thinking of the party leaders from building a New Democratic Economy to making an immediate transition to socialism. In addition to citing Lenin and Stalin, Mao enlisted Gao Gang to help him attack the leaders who disagreed with him, mainly Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo, who had a history of conflict with Gao Gang. It seemed that although the majority of the party leaders were not wholeheartedly convinced by the general line, after two months of persuasion and coercion, they acquiesced. In fall 1953, Mao won acceptance of the general line from important party leaders.⁶³

Then Mao moved forwards to “consult” with leading non-communist national figures and business leaders about his general line. In a meeting of Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (hereafter as CPPCC) in September 1953, Mao released his general plan to CPPCC members. Liang Shuming, a well-known

61 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 134.

62 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 132-139.

63 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*.

Confucian scholar who had conducted extensive social experimentation in rural China prior to 1949, stood up and questioned Mao's general line and the first five year plan. Liang made two sharp critiques of the party's rural policies: he believed that peasants were living in hell while the workers were living in heaven, and he said the party had forgotten the peasants.⁶⁴ Based on peasants' complaints, as described earlier, Liang Shuming's remarks were accurate. Humiliated, Mao immediately launched a brutal counterattack. Mao's angry action was partly because he hoped to suppress dissent by creating an intolerant atmosphere,⁶⁵ partly because of the fact that Liang dared to confront him publicly, and probably also because deeply in Mao's heart, he knew Liang was correct. Ironically, when Liang blamed Mao and the party for having forgotten the peasants, Mao was blaming peasants for having forgotten the party too.⁶⁶ Sadly, Liang's eloquent defense of peasants only triggered Mao to act quickly and boldly. Two years earlier, in fall 1951, Mao Zedong accommodated Zhao Shuli's objections to the Draft; however, in September 1953, convinced by what he had been shown and had incorporated into his own vision, Mao Zedong was no longer open to the ideas of "the discontented."

Soviet comrades further convinced Mao. On September 7, 1953, Khrushchev drafted a report on the measures to improve Soviet agriculture. In approving the report, the CPSU recognized both the positive and negative features of collectivization and decided to maintain the system and further improve it. Mao must have felt encouraged by Soviet decision to maintain the collective system that Stalin set up decades earlier.⁶⁷

64 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 140. To learn more about Liang Shuming, please refer to Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* 2nd ed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

65 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 141.

66 Feng Xianzhi and Jin Chongji eds., *Mao Zedong Zhuan shang ce* (The biography of Mao Zedong, vol 1) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 355-356.

67 Li Hua-yu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China*, 163.

In October the third National Mutual Aid and Cooperation Conference was convened. To orient this conference, Mao held a conversation with Chen Boda and Liao Luyan, vice ministers of Rural Work Department. With full faith in the high productivity of agricultural producers' cooperatives, Mao said, "the room for individual farmers to increase productivity is very limited. (We) must rely on mutual aid teams and cooperatives." In the face of a grain procurement crisis, Mao attributed the shortage of grain supply to the contradiction of private ownership and production forces and insisted that "the private ownership must be converted to collective ownership in the transition to socialism." Agricultural producers' cooperatives must be built, the more, the better.⁶⁸ Mao's evaluation of the rectification of spring 1953 was rather low. To him, it certainly had hampered the progress of mutual aid and cooperation movement. Mao condemned Rural Work Department for not talking about socialism and for overvaluing the small peasant economy. Pressed by the urgent need to increase agricultural productivity, Mao was obsessed with the virtues of large-scale cultivation. The two main excesses that the rectification movement had targeted were: building too many agricultural producers' cooperatives and blindly stressing that larger is better. Mao neglected both. Between mutual aid teams and agricultural producers' cooperatives, Mao apparently favored the latter. He said, "The general rule is from mutual aid teams to cooperatives, but directly jumping to building a cooperative should be allowed." "Developing agricultural producers' cooperatives is not only necessary, but also possible, the potentiality is prodigious." If conditions permitted, he even suggested building collective farms. Mao also valued the virtue of larger size and believed that building larger cooperatives were indeed practicing socialism. He encouraged that whenever possible larger size cooperatives should be built. In his mind, multiple problems in the countryside would be remedied automatically in large

68 Gao Huamin, "Guanyu hezuohua yundong bufa jiakuai yuanyin de lishi kaocha."

cooperatives. “Mutual aid teams cannot prohibit peasants from selling their land. Only cooperatives, large-size cooperative can do it.” Mao estimated that a large cooperatives of hundreds of households could help take care of impoverished families, so “all problems will be solved.”⁶⁹

Liao Luyan faithfully conveyed Mao’s orientation to the attendees. Aware of Mao’s intention, attendees unanimously agreed that the rectification in the spring was of some value, but it had been too prudent. After the rectification, to “let peasants take their course” was viewed as a main deviation that should be now curbed. The political atmosphere was once again altered. Bo Yibo, for example, changed his positions. Reviewing the history of agricultural producers’ cooperatives in north China, Bo Yibo concluded that except for a very few cooperatives, agricultural producers’ cooperatives had produced more than individual farmers and mutual aid teams. The excesses had been exaggerated in the rectification movement causing good cooperatives to suffer unnecessarily. Of all cooperatives under rectification, only 20 percent truly needed to be “corrected,” the remaining 80 percent were good. Bo said, “There was some rash tendency in accumulating the public assets in cooperatives. But now situations have changed.” “The overall tendency now is to collectivize livestock and farming implements, which will bring about more and more accumulation.” Bo commented that on the issue of developing agricultural producers’ cooperatives, cadres he had contacted were not brave enough. They should be braver. To substantially encourage building new cooperatives, Bo promised to grant each agricultural producers’ cooperative that consisted of over 30 households state loans ranging from 10 million yuan to 15 million yuan. This loan was to be repaid in eight years, a much longer duration than for other loans. All in all, “the investment is necessary,” “10 to 15 million yuan for each cooperative of 30 households is appropriate.” Then Bo

69 Gao Huamin, “Guanyu hezuohua yundong bufa jiakuai yuanyin de lishi kaocha.”

advocated doubling the number of agricultural producers' cooperatives in north China in 1954.⁷⁰ What a contrast to the tone and actions of the North China Bureau only months earlier! After the conference, a goal of building 32,500 agricultural producers' cooperatives by fall 1954 was set.

As mentioned earlier, most central officials accepted Mao's grand vision reluctantly. It seemed that they lacked the enthusiasm to carry it out. What Mao Zedong needed was a platform to formally announce his plan and have the plan implemented with the full range of resources and administrative actions. The grain procurement crisis provided him a timely opportunity to unfold his plan.

The nationalization of the grain market

In the fall of 1953, a severe grain procurement crisis occurred. Marketable grain plunged. In every region of China, state-owned grain stores sold much more grain than they purchased. For example, in Henan, in October the traditional grain procurement season, the state sold nine times more grain than purchased. By then, the state's total grain reserve had dropped by one third due to the spring grain crisis. Worst of all, much less grain was sold by peasants. Publicly, the state blamed private traders for speculation. Internally, the state blamed peasants for hoarding their grain and consuming too much. The solution was to press peasants to sell "surplus" grain. To remedy the situation, the policy of nationalization of grain market [tonggou tongxiao] was put on the table.

Three popular explanations have been given to explain the decision to nationalize the grain market. One explanation is that this policy was originally a temporary solution to the grain procurement crisis, but it was later kept for decades. The second

70 Bo Yibo, "Zai disan ci quanguo huzhu hezuo huiyi shang de jianghua" (Speech on the third national mutual aid and cooperation conference), *Zhongguo nongye hezuoshi ziliao*, no 5 (1987).

explanation is that it was part of Mao Zedong's general line. The third explanation is that it was created as part of the agricultural cooperativization movement. Recently published documents shed light on a fourth explanation: it had been long planned by the Financial and Economic Committee, but had been opposed by certain regional leaders. The grain procurement crisis provided the Financial and Economic Committee a golden chance to put this plan into practice.

Before 1949 China had been importing grain for years. After 1949, the grain import was cut off and the new state even planned to export some grains. So from the very beginning of the founding of the PRC, extracting grain from peasants was a challenge, despite of the CCP's long history of mobilizing peasants. This problem was directly shouldered by the Financial and Economic Committee which took charge of the state's financial budget. As early as 1951, Chen Yun, the head of the Financial and Economic Committee, raised the proposal of implementing forced purchase of surplus grain (Zhenggou). The Soviet Union's forced requisitioning of grain had a cruel reputation and this terminology had long been avoided by the CCP. However, in short term, it was one of the most efficient methods for states to extract grain, a fact the CCP was acutely aware of. Chen Yun could also draw on China's experience on the Japanese's grain extraction system in Manchuria during the anti-Japanese war (1937-45) and the Nationalist government's rationing system in Chongqing in wartime. Chen Yun's proposal vividly reminded his comrades of the three notorious models listed above – the Soviet, Japanese and Chinese Nationalist models - so Chen Yun had to differentiate his from them and give his plan a different name. In early 1952, Chen Yun and his fellows in the Financial and Economic Committee submitted a proposal to the Central Committee stating that the grain supply would be deficient for a long period to come. The urban population and the state reserve would have increasing need, so it recommended to employ the method of forced purchase of

surplus grain.⁷¹ This proposal was opposed by certain regional leaders and was not adopted.⁷² In September 1952, at the national grain conference, the possibility of forced purchase of surplus grain was again discussed. In October, the report on “the first national grain conference” suggested trying it. This suggestion was not taken because it was too late to start in 1952. In the spring grain crisis of 1953, the policy of forced purchase of surplus grain was brought up again. Fearing the possible chaos it might bring to peasants, the Central Committee did not approve it.⁷³ But in certain regions, for example in Sichuan, it was introduced on a trial basis later in 1953.⁷⁴ Overall, the Financial and Economic Committee was the main advocator for the policy of nationalization of grain market. As Chen Yun said, if the free market continued, the central government had to beg for grain every day, so every day was painful. He considered nationalization of the grain market a long-term solution.⁷⁵ The severe grain procurement crisis provided Chen Yun the best time to promote this plan. However, Chen Yun never mentioned anything related to the cooperativization plan or the general line prior to October 1953.

Comparing Chen Yun’s plan with “three big directives” which stressed the need to incorporate the small peasant economy into the central-planned economy with great prudence, the contrast is striking. More often than not, cadres, even in the central level, only cared about their own sectors with much less concern given to others, and least of all to the people’s everyday living.

In early October, the emergency meeting on grain crisis was convened in Beijing to discuss the operation of a nationalized grain market. For the first week, the whole

71 *Chen Yun wenxuan* (Collections of Chenyun) (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1986), 160.

72 Details of the debates between Chen Yun and those regional leaders have not been revealed.

73 Tian Xiquan, *Ge'ming Yu Xiangcun* (Revolution and the countryside) (Shanghai: shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 2006), 25.

74 *Dangdai zhongguo liangshi gongzuo shiliao*, 168 -178.

75 Tian Xiquan, *Ge'ming Yu Xiangcun*.

discussion had nothing to do with the general line or the cooperativization plan. Aware that the party would take away all the peasants' surplus grain from the current year plus their savings of the past,⁷⁶ the CCP leaders foresaw that peasants would resist the policy. There would be bloodshed. It was very clear to them that this was a political movement. However, to the party's dismay, the objections first came from within the party. On the provincial level, there were already complaints even before the final decision was made. Li Xiannian, the head of South China Bureau, briefly mentioned that Guangdong and Guangxi province both resisted the policy, Henan province was wavering, and Jiangxi vaguely opposed. Only Hunan and Hubei provincial leaders supported the policy.⁷⁷ But even in Hubei, when the provincial CCP congress was convened to discuss this policy, most representatives resisted it. A common reaction was "this is indeed the CCP's attack on peasants." Many were unwilling to carry out this policy. At county and district level, discontentment was stronger and deeper.

This was a serious issue. Those old cadres opposing the new policy were regarded the backbone of the party. Li Jingquan, who took charge of the trial of the policy of nationalization of grain market in Sichuan and who was known for his loyalty to Mao Zedong, suggested combining the nationalization of the grain market with the propaganda for the general line, to persuade those old cadres. Shifting attention to the bright future, it would be easier for cadres to overcome the present difficulties, Li Jinqun reasoned. Mao agreed and suggested that in propaganda, the nationalization of grain market must be combined with the general line. By clarifying the general line, it was possible that the whole party would embrace this policy and implement it. In propaganda, peasants should be told about socialism, about industrialization, and the Soviet future. Chen Yun, after discussing with Mao, confirmed that the nationalization

⁷⁶ *Dangdai zhongguo liangshi gongzuo shiliao*, 150-167.

⁷⁷ *Dangdai zhongguo liangshi gongzuo shiliao*.

of the grain market should be one part of the general line.⁷⁸ So in November, the propaganda for nationalization of the grain market was placed in the context of studying the general line. Now, to express the discontent with the nationalization of grain market had a much higher stake: “Are you questioning Chairman’s line?”

Starting from November, 1953, studying the general line was intensively enforced at each level. In the countryside, two major points of this campaign were, first, to urge peasants to sell more grain to the state, and second, to draw the line between capitalism and socialism leaving cooperativization as the only correct path to follow. Peasants’ spontaneous tendencies were to be curbed and further eliminated. To reinforce this movement, the CCP frequently educated rural branches. Under pressure from Mao’s words and intensified political atmosphere expressed in the general line, the effort of rectification movement in spring 1953 evaporated. The nationalization of the grain market paved way for cooperativization. Fearing of being stripped of all grain, in 1954 middle peasants poured into agricultural producers’ cooperatives. In years to come, what had happened in Shanxi in the late 1952 and early 1953 would be repeated in other regions, which is another story beyond the scope of this dissertation.

78 *Dangdai zhongguo liangshi gongzuo shiliao.*

Conclusion

The key question for this dissertation, as noted in the introduction is: why did the CCP ultimately choose Stalin's model, which had taken Soviet peasants into decades of hunger and suffering? The beginning points of the state-peasant relations in the Bolshevik Russia and the People's Republic of China seem different. In the eyes of Soviet Bolsheviks, the peasantry as a class became extinct. Lynne Viola has considered the state-peasant relations from the Russian Revolution of 1917 a continuing battle between two cultures.¹ She probably overestimates the conflicts from her own angle of cultural studies, but it was for certain that the state-peasant relations in the Soviet Union were not smooth. In the 1920s, the Soviet party could not penetrate the countryside; it was the mir, not the selsovet (the rural Soviet), that controlled the villages. Peasants' apathy, if not antipathy, towards the state and the party, has been well acknowledged, both by scholars in retrospect and the contemporary party leaders at the time.

The Chinese Communist Party, by contrast, has been widely considered a party that formed close relations with peasants. CCP leaders, in 1949, were quite confident about Chinese peasants, who in Mao Zedong's view, had better political consciousness than proletarians in the US.² Keeping in mind the Soviet collectivization as the ultimate goal for China's countryside in the future, Chinese leaders were keenly aware of tremendous disturbances the soviet collectivization had caused in the Soviet Union, and they made it clear that China would not launch a similar movement for years to come, as chapter 1 shows. As a matter of fact, at all times Chinese were cautious not to

1 Viola Lynne, *Peasants Rebels Under Stalin* (New York: Oxford University: 1996), 15.

2 Andrei Ledovsky, "Mikoyan's Secret Mission to China in January and February 1949."

use the word “collectivization”. However, in spite of Chinese leaders’ wariness, China soon ended up with collectivization, although in China, the official name was cooperativization. This movement started in 1953, was completed in 1956, reached its apex in 1958 in the so called commune movement, and was followed by a huge famine, as in the Soviet Union. So in the 1950s, state-peasant relations in China very quickly came to resemble state-peasant relations as they had been in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. If Chinese leaders had wanted to avoid this outcome, how could it have happened?

Like the Soviet Union in the middle 1920s, the CCP defined the early 1950s as a stage of “economic rehabilitation.” Russia in the 1910s and China in the 1950s each emerged from a civil war, and both then briefly adopted moderate agricultural policies. In Russia, it was New Economic Policy (NEP), in China, it was the New Democratic policy, a strategy similar in nature to Lenin’s NEP. Both strategies were intent on fostering a mixed economy and a market socialism. Both acknowledged the dominant role of individual farming. Both promised to protect rich peasants. In terms of the state’s control of the rural sector, Lenin recommended cooperatives as a solution, which was further elaborated by Bukharin in the middle 1920s, to serve as the state’s channel to control the individual peasant economy. In China, Liu Shaoqi and Zhang Wentian proposed building cooperatives, a form rooted in Bukharin’s idea of SMC, to connect the state with peasants. Following these suggestions, numerous commercial cooperatives were built in both countries. And, in both countries, they failed to serve as a channel between the state and individual peasants. They functioned as regular retail shops, at best serving the interests of the better-off peasants. Moreover, mismanagement and corruption were quite common.

After years of moderate policies in both countries, quite a few new phenomena occurred that were not necessarily to the party’s liking. In both countries, compared

with wartime, peasants slightly improved their living standard. The majority of peasants desired to be left alone, to prosper as farmers and to dispose of their produce as they saw fit.³ But the rural productivity remained low, many peasants lived at subsistence levels, rarely improving their life. New technology was not utilized by peasants. In both countries, peasants' earnings from off-farm work and crafts were sharply reduced.⁴ Peasants' main complaint against the state, in both countries, was to do with taxation, which roughly 14-20 per cent of peasants' income.⁵ The next common cause of dissatisfaction was the contrast between peasants' hard life and the better and easier life of urban workers. Peasant gradually began to adopt capitalist practices and become stratified.

One significant new phenomenon, in both countries, was the drop in the amount of marketable grain supply. As Moshe Lewin points out, in the Soviet Union the amount peasants marketed fell from 26 percent in prewar to 13.3 percent in 1928.⁶ The same happened in China. From archives I found in Shanxi province the amount of marketable grain dropped by nearly 50 percent in 1950. As the state sector was steadily developing in the direction of centralization and planning, it was coming into conflict with household decision-making in the peasant economy.⁷ Under the shadow of war - the Korean War for China and the war scare in 1927 for the Soviet Union - industrialization became imperative, and heavy industry took the priority. The states put a five-year plan on their agendas in the Soviet Union in the middle 1920s and in China in 1952. It was getting clearer that in the long run, agriculture could not bear the cost of the accumulation for industrialization. In short, Russian and Chinese leaders

3 Viola Lynne, *Peasants Rebels Under Stalin*, 15.

4 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 25

5 According to Fitzpatrick, the agricultural tax, in Novgorod province, was 14 percent of net profits. In China, between 1950-52, it ranged from 15-20 percent for most regions.

6 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*.

7 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 134.

began to feel that the existing structures must be changed.

Then the severe grain procurement crises triggered changes. In the Soviet Union, the grain crisis of 1927-28 directly caused leaders to adopt new measures of grain procurement. In 1929, a contract system was introduced that obligated all villages to deliver specified quotas of grain to the state. Together with the need to build the capital reserves for the first five year plan, in 1929, the decision of collectivization was announced. In China, the grain crisis of 1953 directly led to nationalization of the grain market in October 1953. Before it, Mao Zedong's general line was announced, and right after it, Mao proposed a new plan of launching a national cooperativization movement. After the new plans were announced, reality outpaced planning, collectivization or cooperativization, and soon went far beyond the initial central plans. The goals were achieved much faster than Stalin and Mao had originally anticipated, of course with more intense use of force than planned too.⁸

The parallels are striking. All in all, the most prominent resemblance is that, ironically, in both cases, two new regimes did not plan for the collectivization at its beginning, yet both ended up with the same. The path appeared similar, and the outcome was almost the same, however, the processes were not so identical. For example, in the case of China, unlike the Soviet Union, the accumulation for industrialization was not the primary motivation for starting cooperativization. Another significant difference is that in China, unlike the Soviet Union, cooperativization was not purely imposed from the center, it was initiated by cadres at intermediate levels and had support from groups at lower levels, as chapters 2-5 have shown.

In the Soviet Union, accumulation for industrialization was the main concern of the state in the middle 1920s, when left wing, right wing, and neutral groups all were

8 Viola Lynne, *Peasants Rebels Under Stalin*, 27.

thinking about this issue and brought forth different solutions, yet all agreed that accumulation had to come from agricultural production. The left began to hope that collectivization might prove practicable in terms of primitive accumulation. In the late 1920s, statistics convinced Stalin that collective farms were able to provide much higher rates of market crops than individual farms.⁹ In the face of the grain procurement crisis of 1928, Stalin personally imposed the policy of collectivization from above. The fundamental reasoning underlying his insistence on collectivization was his faith that collective farms and state farms were able to turn in much higher portion of agricultural products to the state than individual farmers. In other words, he launched collectivization to achieve primitive accumulation.

By contrast, in China, accumulation for industrialization was not a major cause for the cooperativization at all. In 1949, agriculture was the focus of the state's economic plan, next was light industry, and last was heavy industry in the order of priorities. The Korean War altered the whole blueprint. In 1952 Mao Zedong insisted that priority should be given to heavy industry, and industrialization was put on the national agenda. However, when it came to primitive accumulation, peasants were not the primary source. For example, Gao Gang proposed that the accumulation should mainly come from industry itself, by increasing productivity and saving more; next it should come from city taxes. Only the third source was agricultural taxes. My reading is that Gao Gang aimed to squeeze urban capitalists for primitive accumulation. He explicitly warned not to increase agricultural taxes and tried to lower the "scissor price" to protect peasants. In his opinion, peasants should not be asked to make sacrifices for the sake of industrialization. If one class was to be sacrificed, it was national capitalists.¹⁰ As a leading politician who supported radical transitions to socialism and

9 Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*.

10 *People's Daily*, October 5, 1952.

one of the earliest leaders pushing for the cooperativization movement, Gao Gang did not regard cooperativization as an effective way of achieving primitive accumulation.

Similarly, in regions where agricultural producers' cooperatives were established, no one cited the value of marketable crops as a rationale for founding them. For example, in Shanxi, no investigation was conducted to demonstrate the high rate of marketable crops, and no statistics were presented. Quite the contrary, peasants were promised lower agricultural taxes if they joined agricultural producers' cooperatives.

In the Soviet Union and in China, the grain procurement crisis functioned as the catalyst. But in China, the grain procurement crisis did not lead directly to cooperativization, rather it created a circumstance favoring radical solutions that ultimately led to cooperativization. In the Soviet Union, collectivization was imposed from above purely for the sake of extracting grain, yet in China, as this dissertation has demonstrated, it had strong support from cadres at intermediate levels and even lower ranks.

At the top, the role played by Mao Zedong is worth some discussion. Certainly, his undisguised interest in mutual aid teams and his deep faith in Soviet collectivization provided Gao Gang and Lai Ruoyu with whatever political incentives they needed to advocate their radical policies. But Mao himself was rather passive in the early stage of the mutual aid and cooperation movement. There is no evidence at present that Mao himself hinted to Gao Gang or Lai Ruoyu that they should push mutual aid teams, and he did not clarify his own position until he was presented with what appeared to be well-documented reports showing the effectiveness and popularity of cooperatives. Mao Zedong was convinced that cooperatives had two virtues: high unit yields and the claim that a good cooperative could solve all the problems in the countryside. It is fair to say that it was the Shanxi leaders' actions from relatively low levels in the administrative hierarchy who provided Mao with the

inspiration, evidence, confidence, and even theories that convinced the Chairman to support a nationwide coop movement— not Mao taking the initiative from the top down.

It is still not fully clear what drove Lai Ruoyu to so persistently advocate the building of agricultural cooperatives and to so boldly challenge Liu Shaoqi, the second most powerful figure in the CCP. Currently his former colleagues, including Tao Lujia and Wang Qian, all highlight Lai's deep faith in Soviet-style collectivization. Another explanation is that Lai was keenly aware of Mao's long-term preference for mutual aid teams and his lack of enthusiasm for New Democracy policies, so Lai chose to challenge Liu Shaoqi to win Mao's favor. This view has its merits. In retrospect Lai Ruoyu seems to have taken a well calculated risk. Ultimately his proposal was fully endorsed by Mao and applied to the whole country.

From the perspective of cooperativization's relationship with industrialization, this case is of particular significance considering its location and the issue it dealt with. Shanxi had been within the center areas for the CCP when it was based at Yan'an in the revolutionary era before 1949. But as the CCP conquered the whole nation, the political center moved eastward from Yan'an to Beijing, and Shanxi was losing its charm. How did the provincial leaders deal with such a change? The case described here is about peasant issues, which had been a key component of the politics. But in 1949, the CCP predominantly turned to urban issues, paying much less attention to the rural. For a prefecture like Changzhi, mainly a rural area, with no modern industry, no big cities, how could officials there attract attention from above and get promoted? In Shanxi's case, did Changzhi cadres launch agricultural cooperativization to counteract the potential effects of industrialization? This question has not been answered directly. Nevertheless, there are hints that these questions were in contemporaries' minds and might even be the dominant factors in making decisions, yet they have escaped notice

in scholarship. Now with more access to local archives and some internal-circulation reports, a chance arises to explore Chinese history from individual perspectives and group interests.

The 1951 episode had a direct impact on the political careers of Shanxi leaders. Ironically, Lai Ruoyu himself did not benefit much politically from this victory. In 1952 he was appointed secretary of the National Labor Union, a position that carried with little power or influence. Lai Ruoyu was purged in 1958 and died the same year. Cheng Zihua, who had opposed Lai Ruoyu on the issue of mutual aid teams, was transferred out of Shanxi province to an inconsequential post. This change was intentionally executed to facilitate the launching of the coop movement in Shanxi.¹¹ Other Shanxi cadres who were supportive of Lai Ruoyu were rewarded. Wang Qian, for example, had provided Lai Ruoyu with theoretical support and statistical backup at several critical moments and had been especially good at theorizing Shanxi's plans in terms of Mao's most authoritative writings. Wang Qian became well known and continued to build his reputation as a specialist on coops. He was soon promoted to the office of chief of the Policy Research Center of the North China Bureau and subsequently appointed vice minister of Rural Work Department of the North China Bureau. Between 1954 and 1956 he assumed the post of vice secretary of the central Rural Work Department. In 1956 he was appointed vice secretary of the CCP Shanxi provincial branch. Given the fact that both Lai Ruoyu and Wang Qian had deliberately twisted the facts in their favor, it is safe to conclude that political ambitions for moving up to higher positions must have played a role in their decision to promote cooperativization.

This dissertation also shows how reports were modified and twisted to meet the specific purposes of certain groups. Rural reality was complex and varied, but the

11 Gao Jie interview with Tao Lujia on April 19, 2007.

images presented to higher-level CCP leaders were one-dimensional and simplified. It was not rare that local cadres misled provincial cadres, provincial officials misled regional and central leaders. The central leaders, who were misled, ultimately made rash decisions. It is rather astonishing to consider how a policy that would transform millions of people's lives was grounded on intentionally fabricated reports. Moreover, when the central leaders tried to rectify the situation, the efforts were often circumvented by local cadres, as chapter 5 demonstrates. Breakdowns in communication at all levels were also a factor causing China to follow the Soviet Union down the same unfortunate path to collectivization.

This does not mean we should demonize all CCP cadres. The practical difficulties they encountered created day in and day out pressures. Constrained by ideological strictures and their limited experiences, they turned to the Soviet model as an easy way out, a way that would not entail any ideological risks.

While this dissertation underscores the CCP's subjective role in interpreting and applying Soviet models, we must keep in mind that the Soviet influences reached beyond the policy and strategy level. Certain Soviet norms were deeply ingrained in the CCP's conceptions of China's socialist future. One crucial question this dissertation should have addressed is the question "what is socialism." This dissertation frequently refers to the party's debates and resolution on how to make the transition to socialism, yet it does not explain what socialism is. Indeed seeking the answer for this question had been the central quest of the CCP leadership since 1949. And up to the 1990s, the CCP continued to puzzle over the nature of a socialist society and tried to reinterpret this term. Not knowing the ultimate answer, Mao Zedong and his fellows had a vague, even instinctive, perception that "socialism is the antidote to capitalism." This perception in crucial respects resembled that the Soviet Union. As

Kotkin puts it, “one achieved socialism by eradicating capitalism.”¹² It bespoke a certain commitment to social justice: no one should be left starving, people should receive education, every sick person should receive medical treatment, every one should be provided a job. The most distinguishing characteristic of socialism was the elimination of private property and exploitation.¹³ When the CCP could not achieve social welfare, the least it could do was to eliminate capitalism and abolish the private ownership of the means of production. The failures of achieving a welfare society generated the guilt which drove the CCP constantly to attack capitalism whenever the social-economic conditions were not at the edge of collapse.

Is it possible at all to measure the Soviet impact on China precisely? On the one hand, it is hardly to exaggerate the deep Soviet influence over China with respect to norms and perceptions, such as what is socialism,¹⁴ such as the faith that the means of production with the development of “the productive forces” would automatically yield a communist future as the solution for all problems.¹⁵ Moreover, both states adopted Leninist systems of government under communist parties, and both operated through multi-layered bureaucratic hierarchies. The similarity between state-peasant relations in the Soviet Union and China can be explained by analyzing decision making at all levels of these bureaucratic hierarchies. On the other hand, when it comes to specific policies and actions, the Soviet input should be treated with extreme caution, given contemporary Chinese, especially Mao Zedong’s sensibility about sovereignty, China’s fluctuating relationships with the Soviet Union, the complex Chinese domestic

12 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 152.

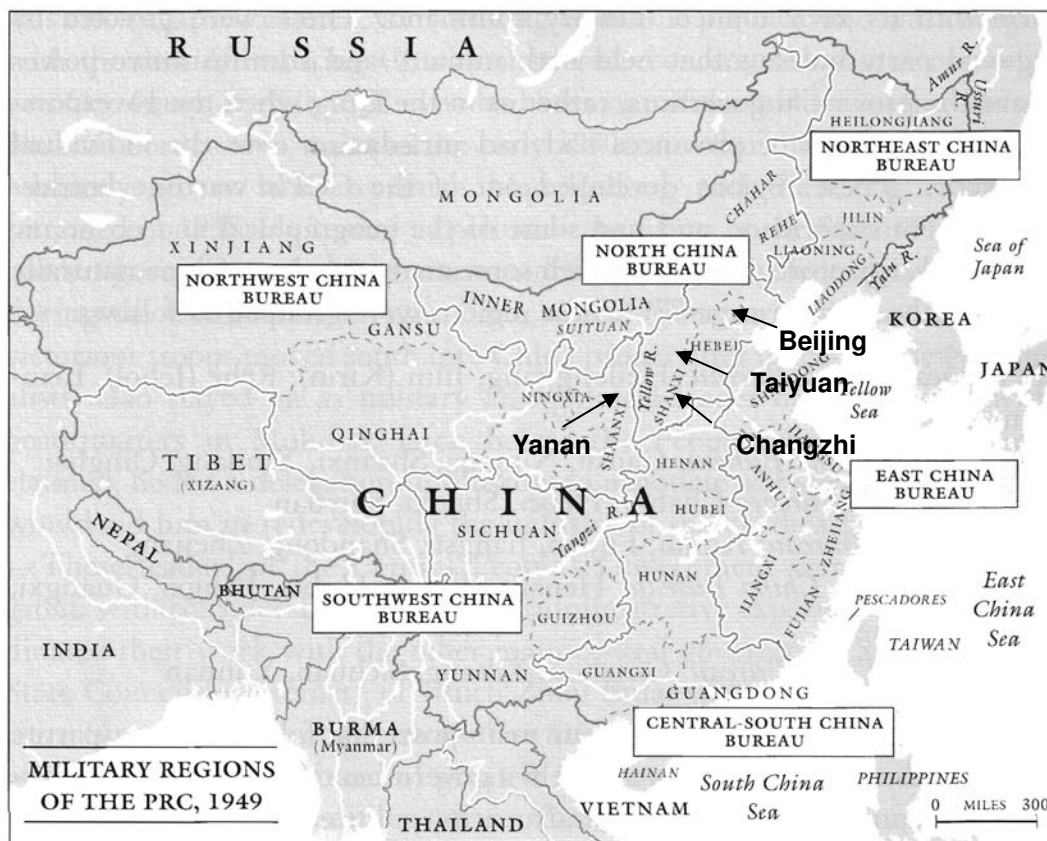
13 Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 152.

14 Li Huayu further shows in detail how the Soviet experience presented in *Short Course*, had served as the blue print for Mao’s projection of China’s socialist future, see Li Huayu, *Mao and the Economic Stalinization of China, 1948 – 1953*.

15 Maurice Meisner, “Stalinism in the history of the Chinese Communist Party,” in Arif Dirlik, Paul Healy and Nick Knight eds., *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong’s Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc, 1997), 187.

politics and then ultimately the dichotomy between the CCP's prescription and actual implementation. One more factor that further contributes to the complexity of Soviet impact on China is that at times there was more than one Soviet model available; even a single model appeared in more than one version; even one version was given different interpretations. Which model to choose and how to apply it was always an issue settled within China.

MAP



Military regions of the PRC, 1949

Source: Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* 2nd (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1999), 498

APPENDIX

From mutual aid teams, to cooperatives, to collective farms

Chinese peasants had a tradition of informal **mutual aid**. There were different types of mutual aid, most of which were temporary and seasonal. The fundamental principle was reciprocity. The foundation was usually friendship or kinship. The scale was small, usually involving a few families, and the operation was completely voluntary and functioned within the framework of the private economy. This tradition did not involve collective ownership or collective labor, just neighbors and relatives helping each other from time to time.

To overcome labor and livestock shortages, to reorganize peasants to meet the needs of war, and to better monitor and control agricultural production, in the early 1940s the CCP promoted **mutual aid teams** among peasants. They were totally based on private ownership, and agricultural output belonged entirely to the owner. But the party placed considerable emphasis on the advantages of group work and showed concern for helping the needy. The scale was small, usually consisting of five or more families. In 1943, learning from Soviet collectivization theory, Mao asserted that mutual aid teams were the sprouts of socialism and embodied the progressive nature of socialism. Mao's assertion was widely circulated among party members, yet the positive effects of mutual aid teams in improving production had hardly been tested in reality.

Agricultural producers' cooperatives were considered as the next step on the road to socialism. Initially, entry and exit were voluntary. Cooperatives combined a socialist component and a capitalist component. Individual farmers still owned the

land and livestock, but the land and livestock were pooled in the cooperative as an investment. Members of the cooperative worked on the land collectively. Profits were distributed proportionally, partly according to individual labor input and partly according to individual land investment. Remuneration according to labor was considered the socialist component, thus the higher the percentage of profits distributed according to labor the more socialist and “progressive” the cooperative. The scale was moderate, usually consisting of a dozen or so families. Meanwhile, to ensure a proper “socialist” direction, setting aside communal funds and investing in communally owned goods and equipment was required of most cooperatives. This practice initiated a transition in the direction of full collective ownership.

The last stage was the Soviet-style **collective farm**, although in China it was called a **higher level agricultural producers’ cooperative**. In this form, land and livestock were owned collectively by the cooperative. The scale was quite large, usually consisting of an entire natural village of hundreds of households. Peasants were required to work collectively and farm strictly according to the rules of the collective. Remuneration was entirely according to labor input. Entry was required. Exit with one’s former land and animals were not allowed.

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