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MAO'S AGRARIAN REFORMS: THE SOCIALIST RURAL TRANSFORMATION IN
AN EAST CHINA COUNTY, 1946-1965

by

Woyu Liu

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in History
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2012

Thesis Supervisors: Professor Stephen G. Vlastos
Professor R. David Arkush (Emeritus)

ABSTRACT

My dissertation “Mao’s Agrarian Reforms: The Socialist Rural Transformation in an East China County, 1946-1965” focuses on the 1949 communist revolution and its impact on Chinese society. In particular, it examines a series of key stages of the socialist rural transformation from 1946-1965 in Baoying County, an area near Shanghai comprising over 1,000 villages and a population of nearly 500,000. The dissertation starts with the study of the land reform movement from 1946-1952, which introduced class struggle for the first time to the villages of northern Jiangsu Province, where Baoying County was located. Next it examines the agricultural collectivization movement enforced by the state from 1952-1957, followed by a chapter on the Great Leap Forward Movement in 1958-59, which ended in a great famine. The dissertation concludes by exploring the accumulated tensions between farmers and the communist officials as exposed in the Socialist Education Movement, a political campaign later became the prelude to the Cultural Revolution.

Unlike previous scholarship, which has mostly relied on interviews with a limited number of participants or officially published writings that have undergone severe censorship, my research is based on more than five thousand pages of unpublished documents culled from the county archives and inner-Party publications that I managed to collect during the past years. These primary sources enabled me to explore in-depth issues that have been ignored or underdeveloped in the existing literature, such as the varied responses of farmers towards the socialist agrarian reforms and the widespread corruption among the grassroots officials, which was rooted in the practices of collectivism in agriculture. Furthermore, by viewing the process from the bottom up, I hope to provide a solid foundation of facts for reassessing the intricate relations among farmers, state officials and the Communist Party in late and post-revolutionary China.

Abstract Approved: _____
Thesis Supervisor

Title and Department

Date

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Title and Department

Date

MAO'S AGRARIAN REFORMS: THE SOCIALIST RURAL TRANSFORMATION IN
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Graduate College
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Woyu Liu

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the
thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
History at the May 2012 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____
Stephen G. Vlastos, Thesis Supervisor

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Wenfang Tang

Shuang Chen

Alyssa Park

To my parents
who support me always

and in memory of Gao Hua
who led me into the world of history

All villages are busy in farming.
All banks are deep in the currents of spring.
Over thousands of miles sweep the eyes of universe.
It maintains the succession of seasons for hundreds of years.

农务村村急，春流岸岸深。乾坤万里眼，时序百年心。

Du Fu 杜甫 (A.D. 712-770), "Five Poems about
the Jiang Village in Spring" 「春日江村五首」

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I am also indebted to the entire faculty and fellow students in the Department of History for providing a stimulating and friendly environment in which to learn and grow.

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Dissertation Year Fellowship. Without the support of these grants, I would have not been able to conduct field research outside the United States or concentrate on completing the thesis.

Lastly, and most importantly, I wish to thank my parents for their love and support throughout my life. Without their patience and understanding, I could not be the person I am today. I am especially grateful to my father, who was the first reader of most chapter drafts and often shared his thoughts with me. To them I dedicate this thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BYA: Baoying Archives
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
GLF: Great Leap Forward
JSA: Jiangsu Archives
KMT: Kuomintang
MAT: Mutual Aid Team
PLA: People's Liberation Army
PRC: People's Republic of China
UPUS: United purchase and united supply of grain
YZA: Yangzhou Archives

CONVERSION OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

1 *jin* 斤 = 10 *liang* 两
= 500 grams
= 1/2 kilograms
≈ 1.1 lbs.

1 *dan* 担 = 100 *jin*
= 50 kilograms
≈ 110 lbs.

1 *mu* 亩 = 1/6 acre

1 *li* 里 = 1/3 miles
= 1/2 kilometer

1 *chi* 尺 = 1/3 meter
≈ 1.1 feet

INTRODUCTION

When the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, China was overwhelmingly an agrarian country: over 80% of its nearly 600 million populations were living in the countryside.¹ Rural China necessarily became the major target of the massive social reforms launched by the new regime. My dissertation examines a series of key stages of the socialist agrarian reforms in China, including the land reform movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the agricultural cooperation movement in the early and mid 1950s, the Great Leap Forward Movement in the late 1950s, the Great Famine at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, and the Socialist Education Movement in the early 1960s. My research focuses on Northern Jiangsu Province, especially Baoying County, an area near Shanghai comprising over 1,000 villages and a population of about 500,000. Through this case study, I hope to explore some key problems about China's socialist rural transformation, such as how the reforms integrated individual farmers into a totalitarian party-state; farmer's various responses to these changes; the role grassroots cadres played in this process; and how these reforms altered state-rural relations in post revolutionary China.

As studies of modern China have shown, a crucial problem of China's modernization has been rural reconstruction. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, many Chinese intellectuals and reformers devoted themselves to this cause, but

¹ According to a survey by the Chinese government in 1953, the population of Mainland China was 594.35 million, and among them 505.34 million were rural residents. See "The General Situation of Five National Population Censuses," National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2001c/d0404c.htm> (accessed on March 3, 2012).

all failed—mainly due to the unstable political situation. At the same time, various regions of rural China were damaged by warlordism, and the war against Japan from 1937-45, and the civil war from 1946-49. It was not until the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 that a comprehensive project was launched by the state to reform rural areas systematically. As a result, hundreds of millions of Chinese farmers were involved voluntarily or involuntarily in the socialist agrarian reforms, which turned out to be one of the most momentous changes in the history of the twentieth century. Today the modernization of rural China is still underway, and the origins of many of its present problems indeed can be traced back to the socialist transformation period. The study of rural China in the 1940s-60s, therefore, will not only reveal its tumultuous past, but may help us understand its current predicaments as well.

Previous Research

Because of its significance, the socialist agrarian reforms of China have inspired many books and articles in both Chinese and English, and all the major events, such as the land reform movement, the agricultural collectivization, the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine, and the Socialist Education Movement, have been studied by scholars to different extents. Among them, the land reform movement has received the most extensive research, especially when more archives on this topic became available in the recent decade. The traditional accounts usually depict land reform as a movement that liberated farmers from the exploitation of landlords, satisfied the economic needs of the poor, promoted agricultural development, and helped the communists win popular

support. They also mention some flaws of the reform, such as the brutality of class struggle, but the authors often add that, despite those small errors of “excessive behaviors,” the land reform movement generally achieved great accomplishments.² Recent studies, however, began to question these accounts from multiple perspectives. Some suggest that, in many areas landlords were not as exploitative as the communists declared and the CCP actually exaggerated the conflicts between the rich and the poor so as to justify their attacks against the former. Some notice that violence was widely used in the movement, and many details of the tortures imposed on landlords were revealed by their studies of the land reform movement in different provinces. The recent studies also paid much attention to more specific aspects of land reform, such as *suku* [speaking bitterness], mass meetings and folk arts that had been utilized by the communists to mobilize the masses.³ It is safe to predict that more in-depth research on the land reform movement will be conducted in the future.

² Some books of this sort see: 董志凯[Dong Zhikai], 解放战争时期的土地改革[Land Reform in the War of Liberation] (Beijing: Beijing Daxue Press, 1987); 赵效民[Zhao Xiaomin], 中国土地改革史[A History of Chinese Land Reform] (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1990); 杜润生[Du Runsheng] ed., 中国的土地改革 [Land Reform in China] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Press, 1996).

³ Some recent studies on land reform see: 黄宗智[Philip Huang], “中国革命中的农村阶级斗争：从土改到文革时期的表达性现实与客观性现实 [Rural class struggle in the Chinese revolution: the expressive reality and objective reality from land reform to the Cultural Revolution], 中国乡村研究 [Chinese Rural Studies] 2(2003); 杨奎松[Yang Kuisong], “新中国土改背景下的地主富农问题”[The problem of landlords and rich farmers under the background of land reform in new China], <http://www.yangkuisong.net/ztlw/sjyj/000285.htm> (accessed Aug.30, 2009). 张鸣[Zhang Ming], “华北地区土地改革运动的运作(1946-1949)”[The operation of the land reform movement in North China,1946-1949], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 4(2003); 张佩国[Zhang Peiguo], “山东‘老区’土地改革与农民日常生活”[Land reform in the Old Areas of Shangdong and farmers’ daily lives], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 4(2003); 莫宏伟[Mo Hongwei], “苏南土地改革中的血腥斗争”[The bloody struggle of land reform in South Jiangsu], 当代中国研究 [Modern China Studies] 4(2006); 李里峰[Li Lifeng], “土改中的诉苦：一种民众动员技术的微观分析”[Speaking bitterness in land reform: a micro analysis on a technique of mass mobilization], 南京大学学报 [Journal of Nanjing University] 5(2007); 张英洪[Zhang Yinghong],

Since the 1980s a lot of work has been done on the agricultural collectivization movement, especially the general process of the movement, from the initial Mutual Aid Teams to the agricultural cooperatives, and finally to the people's communes. Many discussions have even been made about the decision-making process of government policies, as well as the debates among the top leaders of the CCP. In addition, there are also many case studies introducing the concrete implementation of agricultural collectivism at the village level. Nevertheless, scholars diverge in their attitudes towards the agricultural collectivization movement: some believe it benefited poor farmers by helping solve their problems that stemmed from the lack of production resources; some argue that the plan of agricultural collectivization was in the right direction for the development of China's agriculture but was carried out too eagerly before the socioeconomic conditions had become ripe for such a change; some criticize that the movement was implemented in an inappropriate way that disregarded the opinions of farmers and violated their interests, while others denounce the movement as utopian, which was based on the unrealistic fantasy of Party leaders and irrational zeal of the masses. Certainly the agricultural collectivization movement also attracted the interest of

“土改：革命专政和暴力再分配——以湖南溆浦县为例”[Land reform: the revolutionary tyranny and violent redistribution—taking the example of Xupu County, Hunan Province], 当代中国研究 [Modern China Studies] 3(2008); 高王凌、刘洋[Gao Wangling and Liu Yang], “土改的极端化”[The extremalization of land reform], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 2(2009). Fangchun Li [李放春], “北方土改中的‘翻身’与‘生产’——中国革命现代性的一个话语—历史矛盾溯考”[*Fanshen* and production in the land reform of North China—a discourse of the modernity of Chinese revolution—tracing their historical conflicts], 中国乡村研究 [Chinese Rural Studies] 3(2005); Fangchun Li [李放春], “‘地主窝’里的清算风波——兼谈北方土改中的‘民主’与‘坏干部’问题” [The disturbance of reckoning in a “landlord nest”—about the problem of democracy and “bad cadres” in the land reform of North China], Chinese Rural Studies 6(2008); Brian J. DeMare, “Turning bodies and turning minds: *Land reform* and Chinese political culture, 1946—1952” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 2008) .

many economists, but their main concerns are the pros and cons of agricultural collectivism as an economic institution rather than a historical practice that had produced complicated results.⁴

The Great Leap Forward Movement and the Great Famine have increasingly become a research focus in recent years. The stories of the Great Famine that resulted from the Great Leap Forward were first revealed by some journalists and writers in the late 1980s and 1990s; after that scholars never stopped searching for the truth. Thanks to their effort, more information about the Great Leap Forward Famine, particularly the massive deaths in several areas, such as Anhui and Henan provinces, was revealed in the following two decades. Nevertheless, due to the strict control of media and archives by the Chinese government, most research on the Great Famine had to depend on fragmentary, sometimes unverifiable, sources. Only in recent years have scholars published articles and books based on the newly available materials. Some managed to calculate the death tolls with new data; some explored the influence of famine on sex ratio at birth; some tried to re-evaluate the impact the Great Famine on different provinces, and some conducted micro-studies at the village level and presented in-depth

⁴ Some major research on the agricultural collectivization movement see: 高化民[Gao Huamin], 农业合作化运动始末[A Full Account of the Agricultural Cooperation Movement] (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Press, 1999); 杜润生[Du Runsheng] ed., 当代中国的农业合作制（上）[The Institution of Agricultural Cooperation in Contemporary China (vol. 1)] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo Press, 2002). A detailed discussion on different opinions about agricultural collectivism see 叶扬兵[Ye Yangbing], 中国农业合作化研究[A Study on the Agricultural Collectivization in China] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Press, 2006), especially pp. 5-20.

studies through field research.⁵ All these research have come to a conclusion that the Great Famine was a human-made tragedy instead of a natural disaster, and it was one of the most terrible catastrophes in human history given the huge death toll in a single famine. Nevertheless, despite a new law in China allowing the declassification of archives more than thirty years old, large numbers of documents pertaining to the famine are still restricted to general researchers. This leaves plenty of room for further discussions of some less studied problems, such as the regional variations of the famine, the roles played by the Party cadres at different levels, and the responses of ordinary farmers towards the famine.

Compared to the events mentioned above, there has not been much research done on the Socialist Education Movement, and most published articles and memoirs on this topic are only focused on inner-Party struggles behind the movement.⁶ This probably is

⁵ Some most recent research on the Great Leap Forward Famine see: 杨继绳[Yang Jisheng], 墓碑: 中国六十年代大饥荒纪实 [Tombstone: A True Record of the Great Famine in 1960s China] (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Ltd., 2008); Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: the History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62* (New York: Bloomsbury 2010); Ralph Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); 林蕴晖[Lin Yunhui], 乌托邦运动: 从大跃进到大饥荒, 1958-1961 [An Utopian Movement: from Great Leap Forward to the Great Famine, 1958-1961] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008); Shige Song, "Dose famine influence sex ratio at birth? Evidence from the 1959-1961 Great Leap Forward Famine in China." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. March 28, 2012; Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer eds. *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2011).

⁶ Suh as 高华[Gao Hua], "大灾荒与四清运动的起源" [The Great Famine and the origin of the Four Cleanups Movement], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-first Century], (2000:60); 郭德宏[Guo Dehong] and 林小波[Lin Xiaobo], 四清运动实录 [A True Record of the Four Cleanups Movement] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Press, 2005); 戴安林[Dai Anlin], 湖南四清运动史 [History of the Four Cleanups Movement in Hunan] (Beijing: Yanjiu Press, 2005); 高华[Gao Hua], "在贵州'四清运动'的背后" [Behind the Four Cleanup Movement in Guizhou], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-first Century] (2006:2); 李若建[Li Ruojian], "安全阀: 四清运动的潜功能" [Safety valve: the underlying function of the Four Cleanups Movement], 开放时代 [Open Times] (2005:1); 任庆银[Ren Qingyin] and 王颖超[Wang Yingchao], "'四清'运动问题上中央高层的分歧

because the Socialist Education Movement seems less dramatic or complicated than the Great Leap Forward Famine that happened before it and the Cultural Revolution that broke out following it. In fact, the Socialist Education Movement in the early 1960s was an essential stage of the socialist rural transformation. It was during this movement that the CCP somewhat retreated from the radical agrarian reforms on the one hand, and on the other hand Mao Zedong seized the opportunity to reassert the importance of class struggle and develop a theory for launching the Cultural Revolution to defeat his political rivals. Furthermore, due to the power struggle within the top Party leadership, a number of details about farmers' sufferings and grassroots cadres' corruption were exposed, which may help clarify how the commune system was operated and how the rural areas managed to survive the Great Famine.

Sources of My Research

A key factor that made it difficult to study the socialist agrarian reforms of China and the history of the PRC at large is the limited access to reliable sources. This problem is particularly true for the scholars outside China. For example, due to the suspension of the diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic after 1949, no Americans could conduct independent research within China in the 1950s and 1960s. Except for a few, such as Edgar Snow, who maintained special relations with the CCP, most Westerners could only pry into "Red China" through two sources: the official

探微” [Exploring the internal disputes within the top leadership of the CCP regarding the Four Cleanups Movement], 社会科学论坛 [Social Sciences Forum] (2006:2).

publications of Mainland China and the interviews of Chinese emigrants, most of whom fled to Hong Kong secretly from the mainland.⁷ A special exception was William Hinton who witnessed the communist-led land reform in northern China before 1949 and published his best-seller book *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* in 1966.⁸ The situation became better as Sino-American relationships improved in the 1970s and a handful of young American scholars were invited by the Chinese government to visit China. After the United States and China reestablished diplomatic relations in 1979, a small number of American social scientists were allowed to conduct field research in China under the approval of the Chinese authority. They therefore gained first-hand experience of rural China, which enabled them to publish insightful books introducing the changes of specific Chinese villages from the early twentieth century until the mid 1950s.⁹

These American academics greatly helped the outside world to understand the rural transformation in China, but their findings inevitably were limited by insufficient access to primary sources, in particular local archives. The main sources of these studies were

⁷ Some books based on these sources see: Vivienne Shue, *Peasant China in Transition :The Dynamics of Development toward Socialism, 1949-1956* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1980); John Wong, *Land Reform in the People's Republic of China: Institutional Transformation in Agriculture* (New York, Praeger,1973) ; Richard Madsen, *Morality and Power in a Chinese Village* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

⁸ William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).

⁹ Such as Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University, 1991); Jean Chun Oi, *State and Farmer in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Steven W. Mosher, *Broken Earth: The Rural Chinese* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

secondary materials, including the newspapers, magazines and books published openly in China and the interviews they conducted with local farmers and cadres, as well as the English transcripts of Chinese publications and broadcasts. These sources they used, especially interviews, were not always reliable given the tight censorship of the Chinese government and the misinformation reported by some interviewees. For instance, after talking to many youths fleeing from Mainland China, a Hong Kong-based journalist concluded that many interviewees were inclined to exaggerate or fabricate some facts to justify their escape from the mainland. He thus raised suspicion of the integrity of these interviewees and the authenticity of the information they offered.¹⁰ The reliability of the information collected in field research within China was also treated with suspicion. An American scholar reported that their research activities were often closely supervised by local officials, and farmers had received official warnings to hide the truth from foreigners.¹¹ As a result, it required a great deal of skill and experience for outsiders to find out the real situation within these villages.

In addition to the difficulties of information collection, Western scholars also faced a moral dilemma. In order not to offend the Chinese authorities who could deny their admission to China, many Western scholars practiced a form of self-censorship when making comments on Chinese situation; those who criticized the Chinese government straightforwardly might put their careers at risk. A typical example was Steven Mosher, a graduate student in anthropology at Stanford University. He spent a

¹⁰ 徐晚成 Xu Wancheng, 我对中共统治下的青年学生考验报告书 [Report on My Investigation about the Yong Students under the Rule of the CCP] (Hong Kong: Longwen Bookstore, 1970).

¹¹ Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, "Introduction," *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

year from 1979 to 1980 in South China, and published an article after returning to the United States exposing the cruelty of China's family plan policy. In revenge Chinese government froze the long-term fieldwork of other foreign scholars and further requested Stanford University to punish Mosher. Stanford finally expelled Mosher on the pretext that he had violated professional ethics in his field investigation, such as misleading local farmers to cooperate with him and leaking the confidential information of his research subjects.¹² Mosher's case sent a strong message warning his colleagues that, in order to secure their chance of doing research in China, academic objectivity sometimes had to give way to pragmatic considerations; otherwise, they might not only ruin their own careers, but jeopardize the research opportunities of others. For this reason, many American scholars had to carefully calibrate the rhetoric of their arguments to make it sound moderate, especially when discussing controversial issues such as the socialist agrarian reforms.¹³

Cognizant of all of the above problems and looking back at the communist practices in China from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, both Chinese and Western scholars have recognized the necessity to rethink what had become standard interpretations by introducing new perspectives based on new sources. In recent years,

¹² A detailed introduction to the case of Steven Mosher see Richard Madsen, *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), pp 153-155; Steven Mosher, *Broken Earth: the Rural Chinese* (New York: Free Press, 1983).

¹³ The mixed feelings of these American scholars towards China are clearly expressed in a series of articles recalling their first visits to Mainland China, such as Mark Selden "Understanding China and Ourselves," Steven Mosher "Witnessing Hell in China," Roderick MacFarquhar "A Long Wait for the PRC," Edward Friedman "Finding the Truth about Rural China." These articles are published under the title "My First Trip to China" on the website of 信报财经新闻 [Hong Kong Economic Journal] http://www.hkej.com/template/features/html/first_trip/index.jsp (accessed March.3, 2012).

some articles and books have been published based on the newly available sources, which I cite in the following chapters. But most documents pertaining to “politically sensitive” topics, such as the Great Leap Forward, the Great Famine, and the Cultural Revolution, remain inaccessible to the general public because of their potential impact on the official accounts of these issues (in fact, this is the reason I have to end my research in 1965, the year before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution). Given this situation, new information from previously unutilized archives has the potential to produce a breakthrough. For example, Dr. Frank Dikötter from London University won the Samuel Johnson Literature Award in 2011 for his book *Mao's Great Famine*, which was based on research in several hundred new archives in several provinces of China. My dissertation similarly relies on the collection of new sources; I have made many trips to the libraries and archives in Mainland China and Hong Kong in the past three years. After many frustrating encounter and overcoming expected or unexpected difficulties, my field research resulted in the collection of more than five thousand pages of primary materials and inner-Party publications, most of which have never been made public.

The most important sources for this research are the archives from Baoying County in Jiangsu Province. These archives include the documents issued by the central, provincial, prefectural and county governments and Party committees, the reports submitted by CCP Baoying County committee to its supervisory committees, the scripts of the speeches of county leaders, the minutes of the meetings held by the county committee, the reports drafted by communes and work teams, and other sorts of materials. Among them the most useful for historical research are various meeting minutes and the

reports sent to the county committee from the communes and work teams. In the 1950s and 1960s the county committee frequently called meetings attended by the cadres at the county and below levels to collect information and promote the implementation of government policies. The meeting minutes indicate that there were many grassroots cadres daring to speak out on the negative situation in their own villages, such as farmers' resistance to agricultural cooperation and the sufferings caused by the Great Leap Forward Famine. In supplement to the interviews of farmers who personally experienced the socialist agrarian reforms, these meeting minutes provide abundant details, and sometimes more accurate records, about farmers' words and deeds in the 1950s and 1960s. In addition to calling meetings, the county committee and its supervisory committees also routinely sent work teams to villages to inspect the implementation of specific policies. This practice resulted in large volumes of investigation reports. Usually these reports were more frank and objective about real problems than those submitted by the county leaders to their supervisors, in which they often tried to trumpet their accomplishments while downplaying the negative aspects of their work. The great famine in Baoying County, for instance, was eventually revealed by the work teams dispatched by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee and Jiangsu Provincial Committee.

The Subjects of My Research

In many traditional accounts, the socialist agrarian reforms of China are described as a top-down process in which the government was the single dominant force and ordinary farmers were merely passive followers of the policy-makers. Therefore, much

has been discussed about the formulation and content of these state policies, but it remains unclear how the policies were implemented on the ground and how the lives of villagers were actually affected. My research, however, views the socialist rural transformation as a process of dynamic interactions between farmers and the state, which was represented by cadres at the county, commune and other levels. It pays particular attention to the diverse responses of farmers towards the agrarian reforms, especially how they struggled to deal with the socio-political transition by insisting on maintaining or changing their traditional culture and customs. I hope to reveal the multifaceted relations between the state and farmers, which were far more complicated than the familiar dichotomy of cooperation and resistance. Meanwhile, I also attempt to understand the complexity of farmers' interests and motivations, which varied among different groups and should not be labeled simply as capitalistic, reactionary or patriotic.

Another major subject of my research is grassroots cadres. There have been many studies condemning the corruption of local cadres who abused power, accepted bribes, used violence, and cheated higher level supervisors. These findings suggested that, so long as they met the minimum needs of the CCP to exert its control over rural communities, these cadres would be left to act like "local emperors" under the acquiescence of Party leaders.¹⁴ Consequently, there has been a strong tendency to put the blame on local cadres instead of high ranking policy-makers for the negative effects of agrarian reforms. My study, however, does not assume the grassroots cadres were the

¹⁴ Jean Chun Oi, *State and Farmer in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

culprits who ruined the reforms. I would rather consider them as interface of the conflicts between the traditional rural autonomy and the newly established totalitarian Party-state.

The totalitarian rule of the CCP in rural areas would have been impossible without the help of large numbers of cadres. In the early 1950s the cadres in a county were divided into four levels: county, ward, xiang, and village. After the founding of people's communes in late 1957, xiang and villages were reorganized into communes and brigades, and at the bottom of this administrative system were production teams. Among the county-level cadres and the members of CCP county committees in particular, many were appointed by prefectural and provincial committees and relocated from other places. Below the county level, however, almost all grassroots cadres were selected from the locals; they came from different groups of farmers, and often lacked basic education and knew little about communism or socialism. As a result, these grassroots cadres played conflicting roles in rural society: on the one hand, they represented the state in implementing radical policies, such as the imposition of heavy taxes and requisition of agricultural products, which brought them into confrontation with the interest of farmers; on the other hand, they still shared many traditional customs and values with farmers, such as the worship of ancestors and folk deities, which put them in a conflict with the official ideologies of the CCP. Hence, to examine the dilemmas faced by grassroots cadres will help to clarify how state policies were implemented on the ground, and further explain how farmers reconstructed their identities during the great social changes.

In short, by viewing the socialist rural transformation from the bottom up, I hope to provide a useful perspective for reassessing the intricate relations among farmers, grassroots cadres and the Communist Party in late and post-revolutionary China.

Locations of My Research

So far the majority of the existing scholarship on rural China is focused on North China, where the CCP had already established its base areas in the 1940s and thus had more time to consolidate its rule than in areas occupied by the Japanese until 1945 or controlled by the Nationalists until late in the Civil War. Moreover, for a long time since the 1970s, foreigners could only conduct research in a few “model villages,” where the CCP enjoyed more popular support and the agrarian reforms encountered less resistance; therefore, the information they collected sometimes did not reflect the situation of ordinary villages in other regions. For example, when the land reform movement was just about to be launched in most areas in the second half of 1950, an agricultural cooperative had already been founded in the village that was the research site of an influential study.¹⁵

The geographic focus of my research is northern Jiangsu Province in East China, in particular Baoying County, a region that has rarely been studied by scholars. With mild climate and abundant water resources, Baoying was traditionally known as “the land of fish and rice,” and the natives commonly had less impetus than their northern counterparts to support revolutions or radical reforms. The political condition of Northern Jiangsu was also different from that in North China: it was occupied by the Japanese

¹⁵ Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State*.

army in World War II, and later became a front in the Civil War. Compared to the situation in North China, the Communists did not have a military advantage in this area; as a result, their attempt at launching the land reform movement met furious resistance from big landowners and rich farmers, and even caused bloody revenge incidents between landlords and farmers. Despite their military victory in 1949, therefore, the CCP did not enjoy much popular support among the villagers of Northern Jiangsu, and its plan of agrarian reforms also faced more challenges in this area than in North China.

The counties of Northern Jiangsu, therefore, offer a unique setting to study the regional variations of socialist agrarian reforms, where conditions differed in so many respects from rural areas of North China. At the same time, one cannot assume the case of Northern Jiangsu or Baoying County was representative of the situation in the entire nation. In fact, given the great regional differences of China, many more case studies of the agrarian reforms are needed before one can hope see the whole picture of China's socialist rural transformation.

It is noteworthy that in 2009 Li Huaiying published *Village China under Socialism and Reform: A Micro-History, 1948-2008*, recounting the history of Qin Village, which is also located in northern Jiangsu Province close to Baoying County. Although Li focused his research on a village instead of a county and relied on extensive interviews of local villagers instead of archives, some of his conclusions are consistent with my research on Baoying County. For example, he found that farmers were not as weak and powerless as scholars traditionally described; they actually exploited every opportunity to defend their own interests in a variety of forms, and many conventional

social relations and practices of farmers eventually survived the communist revolution and socialist reform. He also provided abundant evidence to prove that the interactions between farmers and cadres were far more complicated than commonly believed; the agricultural cooperation movement brought the expansion of the state's power to its climax, and etc. Nevertheless, despite many similarities between Qin Village and Baoying County, there were certainly differences. For example, Li found that farmers' resistance "forced the state to make substantial adjustments of its rural policies in the wake of widespread unrest against collectivization in the 1950s and later again in the early 1960s."¹⁶ My research, however, shows that farmers' resistance was constantly undermined by the increasing expansion of state's power throughout the 1950s, and what made the government to somewhat relax its control over rural society in the early 1960s was the massive death of farmers instead of their resistance. Li also argues that, by allowing farmers to check the accounts of communes, send appealing letters to higher-level authorities, attend mass meetings and write big-character posters, the central government intentionally encouraged farmers to help supervise grassroots cadres and reveal their corruption. Evidence from Baoying County, however, suggests that farmers had been largely excluded from the process of decision making and the management of local affairs from the very beginning of the socialist agrarian reforms. Without effective ways to participate in the operation of the commune system, they could only vent out their discontent in abnormal ways, such as spreading political rumors, reaping premature

¹⁶ Huaying Li, *Village China under Socialism and Reform: A Micro-History, 1948-2008* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.4.

crops secretly, and even cursing and beating cadres; to publicly denounce the corruption of cadres or appeal to higher-level authorities turned out to be useless in most of the time unless top Party leaders decided to use the public rage to meet their own political ends. All these points will be further elaborated in the following chapters.

Methods of My Research

As mentioned above, there have been many studies about China's socialist agrarian reforms, and many of them were conducted by economists, sociologists, and political scientists. These social scientists used their case studies of China to test or revise specific theories in their respective fields and thus contributed to the improvement of these disciplines. But sometimes they might also distort our understanding of China's history because they are concerned more with drawing universal conclusions rather than investing vast time to investigate detailed facts; consequently, some of their arguments turned out to be based on incomplete information and counter to the facts revealed by newly released sources. My research, however, is basically empirical, and my primary purpose is not to create theories, but to reveal the complicated historical facts with abundant first-hand materials. In this way, I hope to provide a solid ground for other social scientists to examine China's socialist agrarian reforms from multiple perspectives.

Recognizing the limitation, as well as the advantages, of localized research, I seek to extend the validity of my findings by making my research a long-term study of the whole process of China's rural transition from the mid 1940s throughout the mid 1960s. I believe all events, from the land reform movement to the Socialist Education Campaign,

were inseparable parts of a comprehensive project that interacted to reshape the rural society, and only by putting them in a broad context, can we acquire a more complete understanding of the historical logic and continuity of these changes and further make a balanced assessment of their real effects.

Structure of My Research

This study is organized chronologically and covers the key stages of the socialist agrarian reforms in Baoying County from 1946 to 1965. Due to the limited availability of primary sources on Baoying, however, in the first chapter on the land reform movement, I extended the scope to other areas of Northern Jiangsu Province, where the local conditions were similar to Baoying County. The Communists initiated land reform in these areas during the Civil War that broke out between the CCP and the Nationalist Party in 1946; this forced many landlords to form their own armed forces to fight back. As a result, both farmers and landlords were thrown into a bloody war and the most violent form of class struggle was introduced into villages for the first time. Soon after the Communists took power in 1949, land reform was carried out in more regions, which resulted in the torturing and killing of countless landlords. The traditional rural order dominated by big landowners was consequently destroyed, and in its place a new ruling system under the control of the CCP was firmly established.

The second chapter examines how the CCP consolidated its rule over the rural population by organizing individual farmers into a collective agricultural system in the 1950s. At first, farmers were asked to share manpower and tools with others, and soon

they were required to surrender all their land to the state-controlled agricultural cooperatives. This policy, along with increasingly tightened control of the grain market by the government, aroused great resentment and resistance of farmers; nevertheless, people's communes eventually were created widely at the insistence of Party leaders. The agricultural cooperation movement, therefore, put all rural residents under the strict control of the government and laid the foundation for further radical reforms in the late 1950s.

The third chapter discusses how a radical movement called the Great Leap Forward, which was supposed to promote agricultural and industrial production, actually ended in a great famine claiming the lives of huge numbers of farmers. This chapter traces the development of famine in Baoying County and reveals how the tragedy came into being. In particular, it examines the different roles of county leaders, commune cadres and ordinary farmers in the crisis.

In the chapter that follows, I explore how the CCP responded to the great famine in the early 1960s. By launching a series of political movements, Party leaders attempted to blame grassroots cadres for ruining the plans of the central government and consequently causing the massive deaths of farmers. These movements revealed serious corruption among local officials, but failed to solve the problems. Moreover, they actually aggravated the clash within the top leadership of the CCP over how to handle the crisis, and therefore brought China to the edge of another great social chaos.

The conclusion briefly reviews the practice of agricultural collectivism in China under the leadership of the CCP. It further reflects on the socialist rural transformation by

putting it in the context of modern Chinese history, and on this basis argues that many problems of the socialist agrarian reforms actually resulted from a continuous decline of rural economy and the increasing expansion of state power throughout the twentieth century; the practice of agricultural collectivism, therefore, provided precious lessons for future rural reconstruction and the rebuilding of a balanced rural-state relations in China. Moreover, regarding the research on the changes of rural China in Mao's era, this study suggests that county governments played an essential role in this process: they not only facilitated the expansion of state power into the very bottom of rural society, but also determined how the policies designed by the central government would be implemented on the ground. More research at the county level, therefore, may help scholars better understand how the socialist reforms were carried out and affected the lives of ordinary Chinese.

CHAPTER I
PEOPLE'S SUPPORT OR PARTY MANIPULATION:
THE LAND REFORM MOVEMENT, 1946-1952

Ever since the last years of the 1940s when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was about to win the civil war, discussions about the reasons for its success has never ceased.¹⁷ A prevailing view is that, compared to their Nationalist rivalries who had lost the confidence of the public, the communists had overwhelming popular support in China, especially in the countryside. The most cited evidence for this viewpoint is the land reform movement, during which the communists distributed land to poor farmers, and farmers provided manpower and material assistance in turn to the CCP.¹⁸ In retrospect sixty years later, however, some questions may be raised regarding the accuracy of this impression. First, despite abundant first-hand accounts about cities, there are few in-depth

¹⁷ Some recent discussions on the Chinese Civil War include: Christopher R. Lew, *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War, 1945-49: An Analysis of Communist Strategy and Leadership* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Odd Arne Westard, *Decisive Encounters: the Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); 金冲及 [Jin Chongji], *转折年代—中国的 1947 年* [The Turning Year—1947 in China] (Beijing: Sanlian Shudian Press, 2009); 高华 [Gao Hua], “六十年后再论国民党大陆失败之原因” [Rethinking the reasons for KMT's failure on the mainland sixty years later], Gao Hua, *革命年代* [The Revolutionary Times] (Guangzhou: Guangdong People's Press, 2010); 舒文 [Shu Wen], “国民党政府在抗战胜利后迅速崩溃的原因分析” [An analysis on the reasons for KMT's rapid failure after the success of Anti-Japanese War], *清华大学学报（哲学和社会科学）* [Journal of Tsinghua University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)] 1 (2008); 汪朝光 [Wang Chaoguang], “全面内战初期国民党军事失利原因之辨析” [An analysis on the reasons for the military failure of the KMT at the initial stage of the all-out Civil War], *民国档案* [Republican Archives] 1(2005).

¹⁸ This viewpoint is commonly accepted in the Mainland China, and it is also reflected in the studies of some western scholars, such as Vivienne Shue, *Peasant China in Transition: The Dynamics of Development toward Socialism, 1949-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

and reliable records of the countryside in 1940s China —this is mainly due to the unfamiliarity with rural areas of Chinese intellectuals and foreign visitors, as well as the high illiteracy rate of Chinese farmers. As a result, most of our knowledge about the Chinese farmers and their political positions in and after the civil war can only be obtained from the official sources of the CCP or the Nationalist Party. Inevitably, these sources are often overwhelmed by political propaganda or personal biases, and thus might lead to misleading conclusions.

Actually, historians have realized the insufficiency of traditional accounts. For example, in his study of China's Civil War, Westard suggests that the outcomes of land reform could vary by time and place, and the radical policies of the movement could actually create obstacles for the CCP in some areas. But this assumption is not fully discussed in the book, mainly due to the difficulty of accessing primary sources.¹⁹ In order to overcome this problem, scholars have made effort recently to rethink the land reform movement with new sources and perspectives.²⁰ As a part of this effort, this

¹⁹ In fact, as Westard noticed, despite the commonly recognized importance of land reform, no monograph in the English literature has been dedicated to the research on this movement. Odd Arne Westard, *Decisive Encounters: the Chinese Civil War, 1946-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), especially Chapter 4.

²⁰ Some recent studies on land reform include: 黄宗智[Philip Huang], “中国革命中的农村阶级斗争：从土改到文革时期的表达性现实与客观性现实 [Rural class struggle in the Chinese revolution: the expressive reality and objective reality from land reform to the Cultural Revolution], 中国乡村研究 [Chinese Rural Studies] 2(2003); 杨奎松[Yang Kuisong], “新中国土改背景下的地主富农问题”[The problem of landlords and rich farmers under the background of land reform in new China], <http://www.yangkuisong.net/ztlw/sjyj/000285.htm> (accessed Aug.30, 2009). 张鸣[Zhang Ming], “华北地区土地改革运动的运作(1946-1949)”[The operation of the land reform movement in North China,1946-1949], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 4(2003); 张佩国[Zhang Peiguo], “山东‘老区’土地改革与农民日常生活”[Land reform in the Old Areas of Shangdong and farmers' daily lives], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 4(2003); 莫宏伟[Mo Hongwei], “苏南土地改革中的血腥斗争”[The bloody struggle of land

chapter attempts to approach the subject by making use of the unpublished archives and unnoticed publications in Jiangsu Province. Although few of these materials are written by farmers, most of them are inner-Party documents and first-hand literature on the civil war and land reform, and thus are valuable in revealing the real situation in the countryside.

Another difficulty to make an accurate judgment on the CCP-farmer relations in the late 1940s and early 1950s is the regional diversity of the land reform movement across the country. So far, most existing researches on land reform are focused on North China, where the CCP had firmly established its rural base areas during the Sino-Japanese War and enjoyed more popular support than in other areas. In order to balance this situation, this paper concentrates on a less studied area: northern Jiangsu Province.²¹ Located between the Nationalist controlled regions south to the Yangzi River and the Communist base areas in the north, Northern Jiangsu was one of the few areas where the

reform in South Jiangsu], 当代中国研究 [Modern China Studies] 4(2006); 李里峰[Li Lifeng], “土改中的诉苦：一种民众动员技术的微观分析”[Speaking bitterness in land reform: a micro analysis on a technique of mass mobilization], 南京大学学报 [Journal of Nanjing University] 5(2007); 张英洪[Zhang Yinghong], “土改：革命专政和暴力再分配——以湖南溆浦县为例”[Land reform: the revolutionary tyranny and violent redistribution—taking the example of Xupu County, Hunan Province], 当代中国研究 [Modern China Studies] 3(2008); 高王凌、刘洋[Gao Wangling and Liu Yang], “土改的极端化”[The extremalization of land reform], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-First Century] 2(2009). Fangchun Li [李放春], “北方土改中的‘翻身’与‘生产’——中国革命现代性的一个话语—历史矛盾溯考”[*Fanshen* and production in the land reform of North China—a discourse of the modernity of Chinese revolution—tracing their historical conflicts], 中国乡村研究 [Chinese Rural Studies] 3(2005); Fangchun Li [李放春], “‘地主窝’里的清算风波——兼谈北方土改中的‘民主’与‘坏干部’问题” [The disturbance of reckoning in a “landlord nest”—about the problem of democracy and “bad cadres” in the land reform of North China], Chinese Rural Studies 6(2008); Brian J. DeMare, “Turning bodies and turning minds: *Land reform* and Chinese political culture, 1946—1952” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 2008) .

²¹ Northern Jiangsu in this paper refers to a part of today’s Jiangsu Province north to the Yangzi River. It was divided into Central Jiangsu and Northern Jiangsu by the CCP in the time of Civil War.

civil war first took place and later was vastly devastated by the back and forth battles between the two parties. Therefore, a study on Northern Jiangsu will be useful to examine the CCP-farmer relations in the areas without an advantageous environment for the communists.

Spring 1946: from Famine to Land Reform

Thanks to the united front formed between the Communist and Nationalist parties during the Sino-Japanese War, the CCP not only recovered from its last major defeat in 1934, but took the chance to expand its influence to a large sphere in North and East China behind the Japanese front line; in the area of Northern Jiangsu, two communist base areas were therefore established in the early 1940s. In spring 1946, with the end of the Sino-Japanese War and the hope for a peaceful settlement to the Communist-Nationalist conflict, the farmers of Northern Jiangsu seemed have been temporarily released from the threat of another civil war. But they were severely hit by an unexpected famine, which resulted in an extreme shortage of food, clothes and firewood. Driven by hunger and cold, farmers began to attack some landlords who had cooperated with the Japanese occupiers. They tied up these landlords, sent them to the communist cadres for punishment, and then divided their food and properties. As the famine continued, such attacks began to expand to more landlords who were not cooperators but often treated villagers badly.²² A debate hence arose within the communist cadres of Northern Jiangsu

²² “谈谈华中土地改革——章蕴在全国土地会议上的发言（一九四七年八月一日）” [Talking about the land reform in Central China—Zhang Yun’s address at the National Land Conference (Aug.1, 1947)] ,

regarding how to deal with the spontaneous actions of farmers. Some cadres supported farmers, but more called attention that these attacks had violated CCP's policy of uniting the landlord class, a policy still effective since the Sino-Japanese War. Unable to reach a consensus, the communist leaders of Northern Jiangsu forwarded the problem to the CCP Central Committee.²³

When Mao Zedong received the report, he was just considering making changes to the current moderate policies of the CCP towards landlords, which was designed during the Sino-Japanese War for the purpose of creating a favorable environment for the survival and expansion of the Party. When the Sino-Japanese War was over and another civil war was approaching in 1946, however, Mao might have recalled the land reform movement he conducted in Jiangxi Province in the 1930s: through attacking landlords mercilessly in land reform, the communists extracted enormous manpower and material resources that were essential for their resistance to the Nationalists' offensives.²⁴ Now some farmers' spontaneous attacks against landlords happened coincidentally just around the time when he decided to adopt radicalism again. As a signal of policy change, Mao responded to the report from Northern Jiangsu as follows:

Providing it is a real people's movement, when correcting the leftist mistakes, that is to say, the overreactions of cadres and ordinary people toward middle and rich farmers as well as middle and petit landlords, we

江苏党史资料[Materials on CCP History in Jiangsu] 35 (Nanjing: CCP Party History Committee of Jiangsu Province,1990),p.56.

²³ Ibid, p.57.

²⁴ About the Jiangxi land reform, see 陈永发 [Chen Yung-fa],“内战、毛泽东和土地革命——错误判断还是政治谋略？”[Civil War, Mao Zedong and land reform—a misjudgment or political trick?], *大陆杂志* [Mainland Journal] 92:1-3 (1996).

should persuade them with extraordinary kindness and enthusiasm so that they will correct their mistakes and figure out remedies voluntarily and pleasingly. Absolutely never throw cold water to make them feel frustrated.²⁵

Compared to the vague meanings of “overreactions” and “mistakes,” Mao’s instruction was clear that local cadres should support, instead of restrain, farmers’ attacks against landlords. Soon after, on May 4, 1946, the CCP Central Committee enacted a resolution, calling for an all-out attack on landlords and rich farmers.²⁶ Hence began the May 4 Land Reform. Initially, this movement was supposed to be carried out only in the areas firmly controlled by the CCP, but at the end of 1946 when Civil War was already underway, Mao asserted that only if land reform was to be implemented “rapidly and completely,” would the communist forces obtain solid support of farmers. He therefore ordered this movement to be implemented in all areas where the communist forces were present, regardless of local conditions.²⁷ Consequently, a large-scale land reform movement was started in Northern Jiangsu despite the fact that huge Nationalist armies were targeting the area just across the Yangzi River.

Party’s Attack and Landlords’ Resistance

²⁵ “中央关于纠正群众工作中的错误问题给陈毅的指示（一九四六年四月十一日）” [Central Committee’s directive to Chen Yi on correcting the mistakes in mass work (Apr.11, 1946)], 中共中央文件选集 [Selected Documents of CCP Central Committee] 16 (Beijing: CCP Central Party School Press, 1992).

²⁶ “中国共产党中央委员会关于清算减租及土地问题的指示” [CCP Central Committee’s directive on rent reduction and the land problems], *Selected Documents of the CCP Central Committee*, 16.

²⁷ Suzanne Pepper, “The KMT-CCP Conflict 1945-1949,” *the Cambridge History of China* 13, eds. John K. Fairbank and Albert Feuerwerker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), P.754.

Unlike the spontaneous attacks of hungry farmers which aimed at individual landlords only, the land reform movement was an organized assault against all landlords and rich farmers. Consequently, these well-to-do groups in the countryside were deprived of private properties, and many became homeless overnight. Besides economic loss, they had to endure various humiliations, such as wearing paper-made “top hats” at mass meetings or public parades, shaving half head, wearing scarlet waistcoats or sewing red straps on their chests. Under the close surveillance of militias, they were also stripped of the freedom of walking around or talking to other villagers, and sometimes they would be punished even for returning home late in the evening. Furthermore, they were commonly bound, hung and beaten by communist cadres or land reform activists, and at least 10,000 people were reportedly tortured to death in Northern Jiangsu and nearby regions.²⁸

The brutal punishments forced thousands of landlords and rich farmers to flee, forming a “refugee wave” in adjacent cities such as Nanjing and Shanghai. In the propaganda of the Nationalist government, these refugees were living proofs of the communists’ inhumanity, and therefore justified the decision of the government to send in large armies to Northern Jiangsu in the name of escorting refugees back home. As a result, under the encouragement of the Nationalist government, exiled landlords created their own military organization named “restitution corps,” and began to return home since July 1946 with the backing of 150,000 Nationalist troops. The situation in Northern

²⁸ “陈丕显在华中土地会议上的总结(节录)(1948年4月25日)” [The concluding address by Chen Pixian at the Central China Land Conference(excerpt), Apr.25,1948], *Jiangsu Party History Materials*, 35, pp.132,135,137.

Jiangsu soon turned upside down, and the communist forces had been ousted from all major towns in the area by spring 1947.²⁹

In the retaken areas, landlords became the natural allies of the Nationalist troops to recover the control of the Nanjing government. All communists and their collaborators were required to surrender themselves to the government—some of them would be allowed to remain in their positions to help establish the administrative system of *baojia*, and those suspected of spying for the CCP would be sent to the House of Correction or executed secretly. At the same time, those farmers who had participated in land reform were required to return the land and other properties to their former owners, and to recover the loss of rents and interests of landlords; if they failed to follow the demands, landlord restitution corps would pull down their houses, take away their cattle, or torture them privately, and even charge fees for hanging and beating them.³⁰

Nevertheless, to ordinary farmers not actively involved in land reform, landlords often showed some courtesy by delivering food to poor families, and declaring that they would not demand forced labor or recruit soldiers from local residents as the communists did, nor would they kill anybody but the communist leaders.³¹ This strategy turned out to

²⁹ Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle 1945-1949* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 1999), pp.298-99.

³⁰ 饶子健[Rao Zijian], “坚持淮北敌后斗争的回忆” [A memory on the fighting at Huaibei behind the enemy line], 洪泽革命史料选辑 [Selections of Revolutionary Historical Materials of Hongze] 5 (Hongze: Party History Office of CCP Hongze Committee, 1983), p.4.

³¹ “两年来军事资料总结——几个时期对敌人斗争的特点” [A Summary of the military materials in the past two years—some features of the struggle against enemies in several periods], 阜宁革命史料选辑 [Selections of Revolutionary Materials of Funing] 1, (Funing: Party History Office of CCP Funing Committee, 1984), p.224.

be helpful to alleviate the unrest of farmers caused by the return of landlords. In some areas like Tai County, landlords even organized “Iron Fork Teams” consisting of hundreds of farmers to maintain local security.³² At first, some farmers might be coerced or lured by landlords to join the organization, but later many chose to stay on out of the fear of being retaliated by the CCP. In 1946, for instance, when the communist force was approaching Heheng Xiang of Tai County, 350 out of 436 household farmers fled with landlords. Although the communists attempted repeatedly to persuade them back and guaranteed their safety, 105 families still insisted to stay with the landlord restitution corps by the end of that year.³³ In fact, not only common farmers, but some communist soldiers also defected to landlords. For example, a communist platoon sergeant led eight soldiers to surrender to the landlord restitution corps of Tai County on December 14, 1946, and they were followed two days later by another team leader and ten soldiers from the same troop.³⁴ In this way, landlord restitution corps kept recruiting new combatants and expanding its influence in Northern Jiangsu in 1946-47.

Guerrillas' Revenge and See-saw Battles

The initial success of the landlord restitution corps, to a large degree, was due to the fact that the main communist forces in Northern Jiangsu had been relocated to North

³² 王锐[Wang Rui], “回顾白米区的坚持斗争”[A memory on the fighting at Baimi District], 泰县革命斗争史料 [Revolutionary Historical Materials of Tai County] 5 (Taixian: Collection Team of Party History Materials of CCP Taixian Committee, 1982), p.126.

³³ “1946年12月大事记” [Chronology of Key Issues, Dec. 1946], *Revolutionary Historical Materials of Tai County* 8 (1982).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

China soon after the outbreak of Civil War in 1946, and therefore only small numbers of communist guerrillas were left to insist on fighting. Considering the gap of power, the communist guerrillas usually avoided direct battles while assaulted their enemies by destroying communication facilities, raiding at night, or assassinating the chiefs of landlord restitution corps.³⁵ Sometimes, the guerrillas even promised to protect the security of the family members of those farmer members of restitution corps under the condition that they would cooperate with the communists. As a result, some restitution corps soldiers often shot at the sky to warn the communists before launching offensives, or left unused bullets on the ground to the guerrillas.³⁶ All these tactics helped prevent further deterioration of the military confrontation in the countryside, and allowed ordinary farmers some space to choose their own survival strategies in the war. Certainly, not all guerrilla leaders had flexible attitude towards their enemies; there still were a few insisting on fighting uncompromisingly, but they had to retreat eventually due to the lack of support of main forces, leaving their local supporters to the revenge of the Nationalist troops and landlord restitution corps. In Sinan County, for instance, after the guerrillas evacuated in October 1946, about 1,200 local residents were killed by shooting or being buried alive for collaborating with the CCP.³⁷

³⁵“中共中央华中分局关于就地坚持游击战给各地电(1946年7月25日)”[Telegram from CCP Central China Bureau about insisting on local guerrilla fighting (July 25,1946)], *Selections of Revolutionary Historical Materials of Hongze*, 9, p.48.

³⁶马骏[Ma Jun], “回忆白米区革命斗争片断情况”[Some memories on the revolutionary struggle at Baimi District], *Revolutionary Historical Materials of Tai County* 5, p.120.

³⁷王化东[Wang Huadong], “洪泽湖上红旗不倒”[Red flag persisting on the Hongze Lake], *Selections of Revolutionary Historical Materials of Hongze* 9, p.13.

It was in late 1947 that the confrontation between the communist guerrillas and landlord restitution corps reached a turning point. Due to the dramatic change of power balance in favor of the CCP, the Nationalist army had to concentrate its forces in cities, and therefore could no longer maintain an active presence in rural areas. This influenced the landlord restitution corps in two ways: on the one hand, without a strong support from the government, they had to reluctantly reduce the frequency of activities; on the other hand, they increased the strength of attacks in hope of frightening the communists and their supporters. Almost around the same time, the CCP Central China Bureau strongly rebuked the communist guerrillas in Northern Jiangsu for their “lenient policy” towards enemies, and ordered them to recapture the lost towns and villages and to retaliate on landlords mercilessly like “scoundrels” [泼皮虎] and “desperados” [亡命之徒].³⁸

Consequently, the communists launched a counter-attack more aggressively than before. After retaking Dongtai County, for example, the guerrillas believed if a father was a Nationalist, so must be his sons; if a husband was a Nationalist, so must be his wife; if a teacher had joined the “Three-People’s-Principles Youth League,” an organization affiliated to the Nationalist Party, then his students must also be the league members. In addition, all the village chiefs and primary school teachers were considered as the Nationalists, and all merchants doing business with the Nationalist troops and all former communist cadres who had surrendered to the Nationalists were automatically treated as spies. Tortures were widely used in interrogation to make these alleged enemies to

³⁸ 刘瑞龙[Liu Ruilong], “如何开好淮北会议(1947年1月30日)” [How to hold a good conference in Huibei (Jan.30, 1947)], *Selections of Revolutionary Historical Materials of Hongze* 9, p.54.

confess and to name accomplices, hence more suspects and more tortures. Eventually, the guerrillas arrested over 4,000 people in Dongtai alone, plus another several thousands in neighboring counties.³⁹

The large numbers of wrongly convicted Nationalists and spies in turn confirmed the assumption of communists that a more radical land reform was necessary to arouse farmers' revolutionary enthusiasm so as to undermine the social foundation of the Nationalist army and landlord restitution corps. Therefore, land reform was resumed in the areas retaken by the guerrillas, and consequently the fighting between the guerrillas and landlord restitution corps deteriorated rapidly: the guerrillas offered landlords only two choices: "either to keep life and give up land, or to keep land but lose life."⁴⁰ In revenge, landlord restitution corps showed no more mercy to the communists and land reformers: not only all captured guerrilla soldiers would be killed, but their family members and local supporters would also be punished by being hung, whipped, drowned or buried alive; sometimes women had to suffer additional tortures with their nipples pierced by iron wire or their fetuses pushed out by sticks.⁴¹ As a result, land reform developed into indiscriminate massacres, not for economic interests, but for surviving the mounting hatred.

In this circumstance, few farmers dared accept the land confiscated from landlords, but to refuse it would also expose them to the risk of being punished by the

³⁹ "The concluding address by Chen Pixian at the Central China Land Conference (excerpt), Apr.25, 1948," *Materials on CCP History in Jiangsu* 35, pp.151-52.

⁴⁰ Liu Ruilong, p.72.

⁴¹ Ma Jun, p.115.

guerrillas. This dilemma ironically induced some farmers and landlords to reach secret agreements that the land would belong to farmers during the stay of guerrillas, and to landlords if the landlord restitution corps returned. This situation was unexpected by the communists who had miscalculated the socioeconomic conditions of Northern Jiangsu. Compared to North China, land in this area was traditionally less concentrated in the hands of big land owners. Therefore, although all the land of landlords and rich farmers had been confiscated by the communists, it was still not enough for every poor family to have an equal share. As a result, many middle farmers were also forced to surrender part of their land to fill the gap. This inevitably harmed the interests of a considerable part—usually 15-25 percent, sometimes more than 30 percent—of the rural population.⁴² Even so, the land given to each poor family was still too small to arouse their interest in the reform, let alone to make them risk their lives to support the communist revolution.

In addition to the miscalculation of local conditions, the misconducts of some guerrilla soldiers also made the CCP lose the sympathy of neutral farmers. For example, facing the attacks of the landlord restitution corps in 1947, the communist guerrillas in Huaibei District not only failed to keep their commitment of protecting local residents, but also displayed cowardice in their disordered retreat, during which many soldiers drowned in the struggle for limited evacuation boats.⁴³ To make it worse, after retaking the district in spring 1948, some soldiers even looted towns and villages without any

⁴² “中共华中分局关于华中土地改革三个月总结” [A summary by CCP Central China Bureau about the three-month land reform in Central China], *Materials on CCP History in Jiangsu* 35, p.50.

⁴³ Liu Ruilong, p.82.

restriction, forcing a number of local residents to flee their homes.⁴⁴ Consequently, after the Nationalist troops returned, local farmers captured every communist they could find and handed them over to the Nationalists.⁴⁵ This suggests that, in those areas where it did not have military advantages, the CCP could have many difficulties to maintain positive relations with neutral farmers, not to mention dominate the conflict with its opponents. As a result, the see-saw battles between the communist guerrillas and landlord restitution corps persisted until April 1949, when the main communist forces arrived from the north and finally defeated the Nationalist army in Northern Jiangsu. Nevertheless, the tensions triggered by land reform remained in the countryside, and soon put the CCP-farmer relations on another test in spring 1950.

Spring 1950: Land Reform was Back

The establishment of the People's Republic in October 1949 marked CCP's success in Civil War. However, due to the devastation of war and natural disasters, the life in late 1949 and early 1950 was by no means easy for the farmers of Northern Jiangsu. The agricultural output dropped by 30-40 percent in 1949, causing a desperate shortage of food across the region. To make it worse, farmers had to pay grain tax which normally amounted to 26 percent of their annual harvest; for some middle farmers, the tax could be as high as 30 percent. Consequently, many farmers who were unable to

⁴⁴ “中共阜宁县委扩大会议关于克服党内无政府无组织无纪律状态加强纪律性的决议(1949年3月23日)”[Resolution passed on the expanding conference of CCP Funing County Committee about overcoming the situation of anarchy, disorganization and indiscipline and strengthening disciplines within the Party, Mar.23, 1949], *Selections of Funing Revolutionary Materials 1*, p.204.

⁴⁵ “Talking about land Reform in Central China—Zhang Yun's address at the National Land Conference (Aug.1, 1947),” *Materials on CCP History in Jiangsu 35*, p.83.

sustain their lives requested the government to lend them rice, but their pleas were always rejected by local cadres. Irritated by the indifferent attitude of government officials, the hungry farmers finally decided to obtain food by force. Unlike in the famine of spring 1946, however, their targets this time were the state granaries instead of landlords' storerooms, because even landlords were also short of food. As a result, around 9 p.m. on January 11, 1950, about 1,300 villagers from Longwei Xiang of Yangzhou Prefecture gathered before two state granaries. In harsh whistles and gongs, they beat up cadres, burst open the doors, and looted the granaries. The riot lasted until 3 a.m. next morning, causing a loss of over 250,000 *jin* of rice and 14,000 *jin* of wheat.⁴⁶ In fact, this incident was only a part of serial rice-looting incidents in Northern Jiangsu around the Spring Festival of 1950. In Yangzhou Prefecture alone, for instance, seven granaries were looted of more than 300,000 *jin* of grain just in a week.⁴⁷

In addition to the desire for survival, farmers might also be driven by the complaint that government had failed to fulfill its moral obligation to aid the victims of natural disasters; they might also believe the lootings could be justified by a universal consensus that "food is the heaven for the people." Unexpected to these farmers, however, they soon found armies were sent in to force the recovery of the looted granaries. In Longwei Xiang, for instance, many farmers who refused to return grain were arrested and

⁴⁶ Documents of CCP Yangzhou Committee about the rice-looting incident in Longwei Xiang, Yangzhou Archives (YZA), B1-3-15.

⁴⁷ "扬州市委关于槐泗区龙尾乡抢粮事件总结" [A summary by CCP Yangzhou Committee about the incident of rice-looting in Longwei Xiang of Huaisi District], YZA, B1-3-15.

tortured, and a woman was even raped to death by a police officer.⁴⁸ Without any choice, farmers had to send back the grain they had looted, but few of them realized that the heavy hand of the government was indicating a huge storm of socialist agricultural reform. This reform was based on the class theory of the Communist Party, which attributed farmers' poverty to the exploitation of landlords, instead of natural disasters, technical backwardness, or any other reasons. Based on this assumption, the CCP leaders alleged that the rural poverty could not be rooted out unless the landlord-dominated land system was totally abolished; they even further blamed the traditional "feudalist exploitative land system" for China's humiliating modern history of "being invaded, oppressed, poor and backward." According to their plan to change the situation, the first step was to launch a nationwide land reform movement so as to "confiscate land from landlords and distribute it to the farmers who had no or little land."⁴⁹ Consequently, a new land law was soon enacted by the Beijing government on June 28, 1950, and thus began the land reform movement in vast areas of the Mainland China.⁵⁰

Landlords were Picked Out

When land reform was formally restarted in Northern Jiangsu in September 1950, local cadres faced two primary problems: first, farmers commonly suspected CCP's

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ 刘少奇[Liu Shaoqi], "关于土地改革问题的报告(1950年6月14日)"[Report on the problems of land reform, Jun.14,1950], 刘少奇选集(下卷) [Selections of Liu Shaoqi's Works, vol.2](Beijing: People's Press, 1985), pp.32-33.

⁵⁰ 杜润生[Du Runsheng] ed., 中国的土地改革 [Land Reform in China](Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Press, 1996), p.628.

capability to rule the country, and some even predicted that a third world war would shortly break out to bring down the communist regime. Secondly, farmers usually showed little interest in the theory of class struggle, still viewing their poverty as personal issues instead of class conflict. As for land reform itself, poor farmers naturally welcomed it, but they also worried about landlords' revenge in case the Nationalists would succeed in their counter-attack. Middle farmers were indifferent because they were supposed to neither lose nor obtain any land according to the official policies. The considerations of tenant farmers were varied: some did not see any necessity of land reform because they had already rented enough land from landlords; others feared that land reform would harm their interest by confiscating their leased land as the property of landlords. In spite of different concerns, however, most farmers held a wait-and-see attitude toward the movement. Therefore, in spite of an intensive propaganda campaign launched by the government to mobilize farmers' participation in land reform, only 10-15 percent of the farmers in Northern Jiangsu, mostly poor farmers, joined the official farmers' associations.⁵¹

In order to lead and organize the movement, the CCP county committees sent specific work teams to all villages. The work team cadres soon found that the most effective way of mass mobilization was not to lecture farmers, but to require them to attack landlords harshly. This strategy was facilitated by the new land law which picked

⁵¹ “中共靖江县委关于新区土改初步总结” [A primary summary by CCP Jingjiang County Committee on land reform in the New Areas], YZA, B1-3-23.

out landlords as the only objective of class struggle in land reform.⁵² The struggle against landlords was usually well planned by the work teams. At first, according to their historical activities and current attitudes toward land reform, landlords were divided into three categories: lawless landlords, misbehaved landlords, and surrendered landlords. And typical examples of each category would then be carefully selected to be the targets of public trial at mass struggle meetings. A mass struggle meeting usually was attended by hundreds or thousands of farmers, but most of them were only required by cadres to be present and knew little about what was happening. Therefore, the whole process of the meeting was often dominated by the cadres of work teams and the activists of farmers' associations, each of whom had different duties. At the beginning, for example, the "vanguard team" would stand up to break the silence, and the "prosecution team" followed to denounce the crimes and misbehaviors of landlords. And then, the emotional denouncements would be further analyzed by the "theory team," which had been trained to use the theory of class struggle to expose the exploitative nature of landlords' behaviors. If any landlords tried to defend for themselves, the "backup team" would come out to refute them, and the debates between defendants and accusers would finally be judged by the "judging team," whose conclusions certainly had been prepared in advance. In case of unexpected incidents that would disrupt the procedures, the "picket team" was always standing by, and the whole process was firmly controlled by the "headquarter," consisting of land reform cadres. At the climax of these mass meetings,

⁵² "中华人民共和国土地改革法" [Land Reform Law of the People's Republic of China] (June 28, 1950), 中国土地改革史料选编 [Selected Historical Materials about Chinese Land Reform] (Beijing: Guofang daxue Press, 1988), p.643.

landlords were normally bound and beaten by cadres and activists, or forced to kneel on the ground and to slap their own cheeks; the brutal scene often made women weep or look away.⁵³ In the end, landlords would receive different punishments: lawless landlords would be sent to the court for sentence; misbehaved landlords would be put under the surveillance of militias after surrendering their land ownerships and writing confession letters, and the voluntary surrenders would be released on site after handing over land titles to the government. In this way, the work teams successfully created an atmosphere of terror among landlords, as some of them lamented: “land reform itself is not horrible, but the struggle is unbearable. Death is standing before me whenever a struggle meeting is held.”⁵⁴

In fact, violence was more widely used in the next stage of “digging out the hidden properties” of landlords. In Gaoyou County, for instance, some landlords were dragged nakedly on the ground or forced to take cold baths in the winter.⁵⁵ In addition, a number of landlords, as well as their hired hands, were tortured to death or committed suicide, but cadres only regarded their deaths as incidents that were caused by mistakes and not worthy of further investigation.⁵⁶ As a result, violence soon extended to all landlords, regardless if they opposed land reform or not.

⁵³ “中共苏北区党委关于目前土地改革工作的指示” [Directive of CCP Northern Jiangsu Committee on current work of land reform], YZA, B1-3-11.

⁵⁴ “中共靖江县委关于新区土改初步总结” [A primary summary by CCP Jingjiang County Committee on the land reform in new areas], YZA, B1-3-23.

⁵⁵ “Directive of CCP Northern Jiangsu Committee on current work of land reform,” YZA, B1-3-11.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Among the punishments for landlords, the most severe was “suppression” (*zhenya*), which aimed to extinguish landlords physically. The suppression of landlords became especially popular after the CCP Central Committee launched a campaign against “counter-revolutionaries” in October 1950. In response to the call of the Party Center, the local cadres of Northern Jiangsu competed to make self-criticism for their “lenience” toward landlords, and pledged to strengthen the class struggle in the following stages.⁵⁷ Consequently, the pace of suppression was apparently accelerated. In Tai County, for instance, 1,982 people were arrested by February 1951 for their “historical or current counter-revolutionary activities.”⁵⁸ In an attempt to process so many cases “promptly and effectively,” the Party leaders of Tai County decided to simplify “unnecessarily complex procedures” by combining investigation, trial and judgment into a single step. As a result, 266 suspects were convicted and executed within four months, 137 “escapees” were captured, and another 966 were added to the wanted list.⁵⁹

The intensified attacks against landlords displayed the determination and capacity of the CCP to implement its policies, hence convinced many farmers that it was wise to seek protection from the new powerful rulers. At the same time, some others intimidated by the cruel punishments imposed on landlords also chose to cooperate with the government for the sake of self-protection. Consequently, the local cadres of Northern

⁵⁷“泰州地委关于镇压反革命活动以来的检查与今后继续贯彻的意见” [Opinions of CCP Taizhou Committee on the examination and continuous implementation of the Campaign of Suppressing Counter-Revolutionary Activities], YZA, B1-1-11.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Jiangsu were pleased to find the suppression campaign helped promote land reform “more powerfully than ever before,”⁶⁰ and the enrollment of farmers’ associations also increased to 30-40 percent of the rural population.⁶¹

Examinations and Escalations

By mid-February 1951, most work teams in Northern Jiangsu had reportedly finished their work of confiscating landlords’ land and other properties and redistributing them to poor farmers. Therefore, examination teams were sent down by the CCP county committees to evaluate the accomplishment of land reform. According to an incomplete statistics of Taizhou Prefecture, during the three months from November 1950 to January 1951, there were 843 “lawless landlords and local tyrants” and 919 “counter-revolutionaries” arrested, and another 550 landlords with no “obvious crimes” were under the surveillance of militias; in total, nearly 5,000 landlords had received varied punishments. Given this fact, the Party leaders of Taizhou proudly declared the “exploitative rule of the landlord class” was over.⁶² At the same time, a new political system was created in the form of various grassroots organizations. In Jingjiang County, for instance, farmers’ associations and women’s associations enrolled 34,946 and 8,729

⁶⁰“泰州地委对二、三两月开展土地改革工作检查运动的基本检查” [A primary summary by CCP Taizhou Committee on the examination movement of land reform in February and March], B1-1-11.

⁶¹“A primary summary by CCP Jingjiang County Committee on land reform in the New Areas,” YZA, B1-3-23.

⁶²“Directive of CCP Northern Jiangsu Committee on current work of land reform,” YZA, B1-3-11.

members respectively, and additional 2,498 militia-farmers were trained to maintain security at every village.⁶³

Nevertheless, despite the increasing influence of the official organizations in the countryside, examination teams also found that land reform actually had produced little impact on the political consciousness of ordinary farmers. For example, although farmers were frequently required to attend political meetings and studies, few of them really showed interest in these activities; in addition, feeling uncertain about the intention of the CCP, many middle and rich farmers began to sell their own land in preparation for another land reform. Among the poor farmers, some felt disappointed for not obtaining more land than expected, but others refused to accept land for fearing the “change of heaven,” which means the restoration of the Nationalists.⁶⁴ In many areas, land reform was even strongly opposed by tenant farmers, whose leased lands were also confiscated as the property of their original owners. In a village of Taizhou, for instance, a mass meeting ended up in a fight between cadres and tenant farmers regarding the plan of land redistribution.⁶⁵

Another problem discovered by the examination teams was the incompetence and corruption of local cadres. It turned out that, during the course of land redistribution, cadres normally abused their power for personal gain by embezzling public funds and engrossing quality land, and many of them devoted more energy to private businesses or

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “泰县大泗、塘湾区第一翻土改乡巩固工作检查报告”[A report on the consolidation work of first-round land reform at Dasi, Tangwan Districts of Tai County], YZA, B1-3-19.

⁶⁵ “中共泰州地委通报”[Announcement of CCP Taizhou Committee], YZA, B1-3-19.

gambling than to their daily work assignments. Furthermore, what upset Party leaders the most was that a number of local cadres still maintained close relations with landlords as relatives or friends, and often helped them subtly to avoid strict surveillance and severe punishments.⁶⁶ In fact, these problems of local cadres were not unusual given the fact that most of them were just recruited around 1949 from ordinary farmers, who had never been tested of their faith in the communist ideology and Party disciplines. In the viewpoint of Party leaders, however, it was nothing but landlords' "rotten thoughts" that had corrupted these cadres.

In response to the problems uncovered by the examination teams, the Party leaders of Northern Jiangsu decided to further the land reform movement in three lines: to intensify the struggle against landlords, to strengthen the mobilization of masses, and to "purify" local cadres. Consequently, intensive supervision was imposed on every landlord, including those "potential troublemakers," and landlords might be punished severely for any careless behaviors at any time, especially when cadres were eager to further stimulate mass participation in the movement.⁶⁷ In this stage, new forms of mass meetings were developed to combine class struggle with the daily work of farmers. In Taizhou Prefecture, for example, landlords were forced to join farmers in the construction

⁶⁶ "A report on the consolidation work of first-round land reform at Dasi, Tangwan Districts of Tai County," YZA, B1-3-19; "苏北人民行政公署泰州专员公署为反对地主思想坚决惩治不法地主保卫土地改革运动胜利完成的指示" [Directive by Taizhou Commissioner's Office on opposing landlord thoughts, punishing lawless landlords and securing the success of the land reform movement], YZA, B26-1-17; "杜文白同志在县委会上关于贯彻土改检查工作的讨论小结摘要" [A summary by Comrade Du Wenbai at the meeting of county Party committee on the discussion about implementing the examination work of land reform], YZA, B1-3-20.

⁶⁷ "Directive by Taizhou Commissioner's Office on opposing landlord thoughts, punishing lawless landlords and securing the success of the land reform movement," YZA, B26-1-17.

of dikes; during working breaks, however, cadres would divide farmers into groups to denounce these landlords. In Baoying County, more than 40,000 farmers were organized to participate in this form of mass meetings, during which 15 landlords were executed as counter-revolutionaries.⁶⁸ The Party leaders of Northern Jiangsu highly praised this invention for greatly increasing the “revolutionary fervor” of farmers but not distracting them from work.⁶⁹

At the same time, the purge within the Party also escalated. The main targets certainly were the cadres born to the landlord families, but those who had once joined the Nationalist Party or its affiliated organizations would be purged too. In Jiangdu County, even sixteen poor-farmer cadres were also expelled, merely because they had been private tutors or civil servants who were considered as exploiters by the CCP.⁷⁰ These “impure” cadres were widely recruited by the local governments for their experience or capability to help with administration, but it turned out that they had never been trusted by the Party leaders. At the same time of political purge, however, the government had to hire more employees to fill the empty offices. Compared to those being purged, many new cadres came from “clean” backgrounds as poor farmers, but most of them still maintained personal connections with landlords and lacked the basic knowledge of official ideologies, and even worse, they were less educated and thus probably more

⁶⁸ “A primary summary by CCP Taizhou Committee on the examination movement of land reform in February and March,” YZA, B1-1-11.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Directive by Taizhou Commissioner’s Office on opposing landlord thoughts, punishing lawless landlords and securing the success of the land reform movement,” YZA, B26-1-17.

incompetent than their predecessors. Consequently, when the examination teams returned, the same problems would be found remaining, hence more purges of cadres and further escalations of class struggle and mass mobilization. As the endless cycle of examinations and escalations continued, the summer of 1951 was already approaching.

An Unfinished Completion

The summer months in Northern Jiangsu, usually from July to September, were the most crucial season for both farmers and cadres. For farmers, these three months determined if there would be a good harvest in the fall and plenty of food in the winter and next spring; for cadres, the situation of harvest also determined if they could fulfill the duty of collecting grain tax. In summer 1951, therefore, most farmers and cadres hoped to transfer their focus from political campaigns to agricultural production as soon as possible. In reality, however, farmers had to attend endless political meetings and studies, and more frustratingly, they had not received new land certificates even half a year later since the completion of land redistribution. Feeling insecure in their land ownerships, many farmers were reluctant to invest their time and energy in farming. At the same time, intense disputes frequently arose between former and new landowners about who should claim the crops that had grown in the field before land reform started. Without clear regulations, these disputes often ended in no agreement, and the crops would be left to die without the management of either side.⁷¹

⁷¹ “江都县委关于夏季结束土改工作综合报告” [A comprehensive report by CCP Jiangdu County Committee on the work of completing land reform in summer], YAZ, B1-3-20.

In spite of the suspension of agricultural production due to the delay of issuing land certificates, the Party leaders of Northern Jiangsu insisted that political issues should be taken as priority. It seemed that the recurrent examinations had provided plentiful evidence to support their views. For example, it reported that many tenant farmers still paid rent to former landlords; the operation of village administrative organizations were generally inefficient; many cadres were tired of political movements and daily work, and still maintained close relations with landlords, or even expected the restoration of the Nationalists. Corruption, gambling, and sex scandals had commonly damaged the reputation of village cadres, and the frequent purges further dampened their morale. All this encouraged some landlords to express their resentment openly by destroying trees and houses, posting anti-communist slogans, or retaliating on land reform activists.⁷² On the other hand, class struggle began to expand to all classes. For example, among the twelve victims of the mass struggle meetings held in a village of Baoying County in summer 1951, except three middle farmers, all the rest were poor farmers.⁷³ All these evidence made the Party leaders firmly believe it was still far from achieving the political goals of land reform.⁷⁴

Even in the areas where land reform had been reported to progress smoothly, cadres also encountered with unexpected problems. First, cadres found it was impossible to accurately transfer the traditional land measurements to the new system within a short

⁷² "A comprehensive report by CCP Jiangdu County Committee on completing land reform in summer," YAZ, B1-3-20.

⁷³ Directives on land reform by CCP Taizhou Committee, YZA, B1-1-11.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

time, and almost any minor miscalculation would cause strong complains from farmers. Secondly, in order to pay less grain tax and to lower their class levels, farmers were often inclined to conceal the true amount of their land in registrations. This happened so commonly that it was difficult for the outside land reform cadres to find all mistakes.⁷⁵ To make it even more complicated, as most farmers and “good-background” cadres were illiterate, the government had to hire “politically untrustworthy” landlords to help fill a large number of land certificates. As a result, some landlords reportedly seized the opportunity to put the confiscated land back under their own names.⁷⁶ All these problems resulted in the invalidation of countless land certificates. In some villages of Jiangdu County, for instance, 60-100 percent of land certificates were declared invalid.⁷⁷ This further delayed the completion of land reform and caused huge resentment among farmers.

As new problems emerged while the old ones remained, the Party leaders had more reasons to postpone the completion of land reform. But they also realized that any further prolonging of the movement would seriously hurt farmers’ enthusiasm for farming, and consequently would reduce the amount of grain tax. Facing the dilemma, the Party leaders of Northern Jiangsu had no better alternatives than sending more cadres to villages in hope of accelerating the completion of land reform. In Taizhou Prefecture,

⁷⁵ Reports of CCP Taizhou Committee submitted to CCP Northern Jiangsu Committee on the work of completing land reform, YZA, B1-1-11.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “江都县关于河北九月份贯彻结束土改情况的报告” [A report by Jiangdu County Committee on the situation of completing land reform in September in the areas north to the river], YZA, B1-3-20.

for instance, additional 1,000-2,000 cadres were thrown into the villages.⁷⁸ As a result, land reform was summarily declared completed in most part of Northern Jiangsu in the end of 1951. However, many problems caused by this movement remained unsolved, especially in those areas once ravaged by the war between landlord restitution corps and the communist guerrillas—in these areas, class struggle was increasingly going out of control when farmers continued to beat and kill landlords in revenge for the death of their family members in Civil War.⁷⁹

Conclusion

Historians traditionally described the communist land reform in China as a win-win process during which the poor farmers obtained more land while the communists gained popular support. Yet the study on the primary sources of Northern Jiangsu suggests that this viewpoint may be based on an incomplete interpretation of some basic facts.

First, it is commonly accepted that the main motive for the CCP to launch land reform, or to use land reform as a means to win popular support, was to meet farmers' demand for land. This observation might reflect the reality in North China, but is not applicable to Northern Jiangsu. In Northern Jiangsu, what farmers wanted the most in the late 1940s and early 1950s, especially in the time of famines, was to find food

⁷⁸ “泰州地委九月份结束土改工作的综合报告” [A comprehensive report by CCP Taizhou Committee on the work of completing land reform in September], YZA, B1-1-11.

⁷⁹ Ibid; “Directives on land reform by CCP Taizhou Committee,” YZA, B1-3-19.

immediately to meet their basic needs for survival, not to wait weeks or months for land to be distributed, or even to wait longer time for the ripening of new crops on the land — in fact, most poor farmers had no seeds, tools or livestock for farming at all. This was evident in 1946 when the hungry farmers attacked individual landlords who preserved more grain than others, and again in 1950 when they turned their target to the state granaries after large amount of grain had been collected by the state. Throughout the period of land reform, the most urgent demand of farmers was always food rather than land.

In fact, this study shows that land reform was largely a top-down movement whose policies were made solely by the communist leaders who claimed to represent the interests of farmers, while ordinary farmers indeed had little chance to influence the decision-making process. Although some famine refugees spontaneously attacked landlords in 1946, their initial targets were only those individuals with bad reputations instead of the whole landlord class, and their purpose was to take away their food instead of land or lives. In other words, farmers' activities were mainly motivated by short-term economic desires and moral considerations; the motives of the communist land reformers, however, were basically military and political oriented. The communist leaders certainly were well aware of the differences. Therefore, they insistently emphasized the leadership of the CCP in the movement, and never really allowed farmers to act freely in their own interests. Consequently, farmers were forced to risk their lives in the civil war to accept the land confiscated from landlords, and later in the early 1950s were required to join the cruel attacks against landlords at mass meetings; in the meantime, their routine life was

disturbed by confusions, worries and fears, and their communities torn up by fights, hatreds and killings. In short, throughout the land reform movement, class struggle dominated the entire process and the economic reforms had been largely subverted by political campaigns.

Nevertheless, due to the limited sources of information, many outside researchers had to rely on the official data released by the CCP historians to evaluate the outcome of land reform, and therefore believed that this movement, if not so great as the communists declared, at least helped alleviate the poverty of a large number of poor farmers. The statistics of Northern Jiangsu, however, shows that land reform actually contributed little to improve farmers' living conditions. Compared to 1950, for instance, the rice yield in Taizhou Prefecture dropped by 26.2 percent in 1951, and further by 12.7 percent in 1952. Despite the increasing number of land opened for cultivation, agricultural productivity kept declining throughout the movement and the total grain yield in 1952 therefore decreased by 0.15 percent than 1950.⁸⁰ The situation of Taizhou was not an exception in Northern Jiangsu. Considering the severe damage of famine in 1950, it is not difficult to imagine how tough life would be for the farmers of Northern Jiangsu when land reform ended up in less food supply. In fact, the top CCP leaders had predicted this result. For example, Liu Shaoqi, the vice chairman of the state, once pointed out in an address on June 14, 1950 that it would be unrealistic to expect land reform to settle "all the problems of rural poverty," and only if "the industrialization of new China ha[d] been achieved" and "the living standards of all Chinese ha[d] increased," could farmers shake off poverty

⁸⁰ "Statistics of Taizhou Prefecture 1951-52," YZA, B26-1-19.

eventually.⁸¹ By asking poor farmers to place their hope in an indefinite future, the communist leaders actually implied that the specific interests of farmers might not have been a major and urgent concern of the policy-makers of land reform.

Now back to the issue of popular support. As the above discussion indicates, the land reform movement influenced the lives of all rural groups in different ways. Landlords lost their properties and lives, becoming the “class enemies” of the state. Rich farmers suffered the same terror in the civil war as landlords did; although they were spared of severe punishment in the early 1950s, they had never stopped worrying about being the target of another political movement. Middle farmers were affected least by land reform, but they also had to manage to survive the civil war, and some lost part of their land too; in the early 1950s, they were also required by Party cadres to attend countless mass meetings and political studies, which occupied most of their time and energy for farming. Compared to these groups, only poor farmers could benefit from land reform and therefore were most likely to support the CCP. Nevertheless, what actually happened in Northern Jiangsu was a considerable number of poor farmers joined landlord restitution corps in the late 1940s or looted the state granaries in the early 1950s. This was mainly due to the cruelties of war, the lack of adequate land for equal distribution, and the limited production resources available to poor farmers. Consequently, land reform not only failed to mobilize farmers as powerfully as the communists had expected, but also helped little to improve their lives. At the same time, it turned out that, facing the complex situation in the countryside, the communist cadres often had no effective means

⁸¹ Liu Shaoqi, p.34.

other than using force to make farmers side with the Party. This suggests the effectiveness of CCP's mass mobilization might have been overestimated, and the diverse responses of farmers (especially the stories of the numerous dead) have been oversimplified or overlooked in traditional accounts. Based on the study of Northern Jiangsu, it is reasonable to suspect that, at least in the vast regions outside the communist-controlled base areas in North China, the popularity of the communist revolution among farmers was largely a delusion resulting from CCP's manipulation of rural populations and historiography.

CHAPTER II
THE IMPOSED COLLECTIVIZATION:
THE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION MOVEMENT, 1953-1957

In 1952 immediately after the completion of land reform, the newly established communist regime in China launched another nationwide movement of agricultural cooperation. This movement was carried out generally in three steps. At first, mutual aid teams (MATs) were formed among several households to share manpower, livestock and working tools; on this basis, MATs were merged into primary agricultural cooperatives, where farmers worked collectively by pooling their land and other production resources; and then, a further step upgraded primary agricultural cooperatives to advanced ones, not only involving more farmers, but transferring their ownerships of private resources to the collective. At the same time, policies were also implemented to establish state monopoly on grain distribution. Consequently, by organizing individual farmers into collective units, and putting all aspects of grain production and marketing under the state's control, this movement terminated the traditional self-sufficient economic pattern in rural China, and fundamentally altered the lives of hundreds millions of Chinese farmers. In an attempt to further the understanding of this important part of the Chinese socialist transformation, this chapter will explore the agricultural cooperation movement in Baoying County of Jiangsu Province.

Based on some overall discussions on this movement, as well as a few regional studies focusing on North China, some scholars believe the cooperation reform helped increase agricultural productivity and successfully absorbed farmers into the state system without serious conflicts. Some others, however, criticize this movement for violating the

wish of farmers and damaging Chinese agriculture in the long run.⁸² All these studies certainly deepened our knowledge of this movement, and also raised new problems. For example, most existing studies are based on the sources published officially in China, which are subjected to censorship and might not reflect the whole picture of this movement. Furthermore, as many researchers show more interest in the political and economic sides of this movement, such as the decision-making process of top leaders and the pros and cons of collective farming, it remains unclear how the state policies were implemented on the ground and how farmers reacted to the reforms. This chapter will examine the agricultural collectivization movement in Baoying County in a hope to explore these problems that have been less studied in previous literature.

The Loose Coalitions

By late 1951 and early 1952, land reform had been declared completed in most areas of the mainland China. With the land distributed by the government, the Chinese farmers seemed able to resume household farming, and to improve their living conditions through hard work and thrift. The top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), however, had another plan in mind. They preferred to organize individual farmers into groups called mutual aid teams, in which farmers would provide mutual support of manpower, livestock and other farming tools. The practical experience of MATs was mainly from a few communist base areas in North China, where land reform had been

⁸² A detailed discussion see 叶扬兵[Ye Yangbing], 中国农业合作化研究[A Study on the Agricultural Collectivization in China] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Press, 2006), especially pp. 5-20.

carried out in the early stage of the civil war and MATs were formed thereafter in the late 1940s. In these areas, MATs were said to develop from a traditional custom of *huangong*, or “labor exchange,” that allowed farmers to provide voluntary mutual-support in busy farming seasons. In late 1951 and early 1952, a small number of MATs began to appear in China under the government support. By granting these MATs privileges to obtain bank loans and rare materials, the Party leaders intended to show farmers that collective farming was more productive and profitable than traditional household farming.⁸³

Like its counterparts across the nation, the county government of Baoying also supported a few MATs. This did arouse the interest of many farmers, who were only lured by special privileges to compete for limited loans and rare resources.⁸⁴ Soon, these farmers formed a number of MATs throughout the county, in hope to become qualified for the government’s preferential treatment. However, these MATs were in name only, and farmers remained working independently within each team. At the same time, rich farmers only allied with other rich farmers, and middle farmers with other middle farmers, because none of them really prepared to share their resources with others. Consequently, poor farmers were excluded from all these teams, though they were the ones who needed

⁸³ See Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University, 1991).

⁸⁴ 唐汉如[Tang Hanru] MAT. A Mutual Aid Team usually is named after the head of the team, “县委工作组在曹甸区李沟乡组织互助组工作的典型汇报”[Representative report by the work team of county committee on its work of organizing mutual aid teams in Ligou Xiang of Caodian District] (Apr. 1, 1952), BYA, 301-2-17.

support the most. Feeling humiliated, some poor farmers tried to create their own MATs, but soon aborted due to the lack of funds and resources.⁸⁵

However, the loose coalitions of rich farmers and middle farmers only maintained a short time, because the county government was unable to extend equal privileges to all these teams. For example, in Ligou Xiang where the model Tang Hanru Team was located, the official supply of flour was reduced from 30,000 jin to 4,000 jin so that more flour would be distributed to other villages. As a result, without special support from the government, the model MATs gradually lost their advantages in farming, and seeing little benefit from forming MATs, farmers also lost interest to maintain the nominal coalitions. Consequently, nearly all teams dissolved as rapidly as they appeared.⁸⁶

Just when the cadres of Baoying were frustrated in promoting MATs, the CCP Central Committee enacted a “Resolution on Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperation” in February 1953. Taking the examples of “labor exchange” in North China and Manchuria (Northeast China), this resolution tried to prove that agricultural cooperation had a traditional basis in China, and therefore it would meet farmers’ desires to increase productivity and incomes. It further described three forms of agricultural cooperation: the temporary MATs joined by small number of farmers in busy farming seasons, the long-term MATs created on the basis of constant and close cooperation, and agricultural cooperatives in which farmers not only worked together, but also pooled their land and other production resources. According to this resolution, in the areas such as Baoying

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

where the cooperation movement was less developed, local cadres should organize large numbers of temporary MATs, and then develop them into long-term teams.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, neither farmers nor cadres of Baoying welcomed the instruction of the central government. In the viewpoint of farmers, the severe natural disasters in spring 1953 had destroyed nearly all crops;⁸⁸ therefore, they saw no hope in forming MATs to prevent crops from dying, let alone to increase productivity and incomes.⁸⁹ To local cadres, the resolution made by the central government had ignored regional differences, because the farmers of Baoying had neither customary tradition of “labor exchange” nor apparent demands for agricultural cooperation. Therefore, except to merely execute the orders of the central government, these cadres had no reason to bother imposing a new production mode on farmers.⁹⁰ As a result, although 24 percent of the rural populations of Baoying were reportedly organized into 3,206 MATs in 1953, at least more than half were temporary teams only loosely organized.⁹¹

The Beginning of State Monopoly in the Grain Market

⁸⁷ “中国共产党中央委员会关于农业生产互助合作的决议” [Resolution on Agricultural Mutual Aid and Cooperation] (February 15, 1953), 农业集体化重要文件汇编（1949-1957） [A Collection of Important Documents about Agricultural Collectivization (1949-1957)] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao Press, 1981), pp. 95-103.

⁸⁸ “宝应县五三年上半年互助合作运动情况报告” [Report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Baoying County in the first half of 1953] (July 15, 1953), BYA, 301-1-13.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

At the same time as promote MATs across the nation, the communist leaders initiated another effort to monopolize the grain market. The central government issued an “Order on the Implementation of Planned Purchase and Planned Supply of Grain” on November 23, 1953, thus began the implementation of a new policy of grain requisition called *tonggou tongxiao*, or “unified purchase and unified supply” (UPUS). This order required that, in addition to paying grain tax, farmers “should sell surplus grain to the state according to the state’s regulations on grain species, purchasing prices and the quotas of planned purchase,” and at the same time, the state would completely take control of the grain supply.⁹² Foreseeing enormous difficulties in implementing the UPUS policy, the CCP Central Committee warned Party cadres that to settle the grain problems would be “a fierce class struggle” against two main opponents: one was private grain merchants, and the other was those who refused to sell surplus grain to the state. To the private competitors, the government denounced their “capitalist thought” and “economic exploitation” on the one hand, and on the other hand, it adopted economic measures, such as tightening credits to private businesses, to limit their purchase power. In addition to these “soft” ways, the CCP Baoying County Committee also approved that big grain merchants could be prosecuted for speculation, in which case all their grain inventories would be confiscated by the government; in addition, small grain merchants would be subjected to detention and interrogation, and anyone who helped them transport

⁹² “政务院关于实行粮食的计划收购和计划供应的命令” [“Order by the Government Administration Council on the Implementation of Planned Purchase and Planned Supply of Grain”] (Nov.19, 1953), *A Collection of Important Documents about Agricultural Collectivization (1949-1957)*, pp.212-14.

or sell goods might also be fined or charged.⁹³ These measures did reduce the activities of private grain traders considerably, but were still far from stopping them entirely. To farmers, the county government resorted to a subtle tactic to detect their attitudes toward the UPUS policy: instead of simply assigning the requisition quotas to farmers, cadres first asked every household to report how much grain they could sell to the state. In fact, it did not really matter how much grain farmers were ready to hand over, because the county government had already decided to purchase 50-60 percent of farmers' "surplus grain"; but farmers' responses to the survey would imply to what extent they could accept the new policy. It turned out that a strong reluctance prevailed among farmers, who were commonly slow to answer cadres' inquiries, or directly refused to meet with cadres.⁹⁴

Actually, in addition to the noncooperation of merchants and farmers, an equal tough challenge for the UPUS policy was the limited purchase power of the state itself. This was because the central government published the policy so unexpectedly that the county government did not have sufficient time to raise enough cash for purchasing more grain, and the financial gap once reached 20.3 billion *yuan* at its peak.⁹⁵ Consequently, many farmers were only paid with IOUs instead of cash after selling their surplus grain to

⁹³ “粮食统购中的经济工作计划（草案）” [Plan of Economic work in the united purchase of grains (draft)] (Dec.12, 1953), BYA, 301-2-21.

⁹⁴ “宝应县五三年上半年互助合作运动情况报告” [Report on the mutual aid and cooperation movement in Baoying County in the first half of 1953] (July 15, 1953), BYA, 301-1-13.

⁹⁵ There was a currency reform in China in early 1955. Therefore, 10,000 yuan in 1953 only equaled 1 yuan after 1955.

the state.⁹⁶ In the mean time, the government began to outlaw the trading of grain and cooking oil by private shops or individuals, and regulated that all restaurants and food vendors should only purchase these products from the state-run stores with the official permission.⁹⁷ As a result, if a farmer followed the government order to sell surplus grain to the state, he might encounter many difficulties: at first, he had to transport grain miles away to a designated point of state purchase, and after hours waiting in a long line, he might be cheated by the purchasing clerks using inaccurate weighing instruments,⁹⁸ and finally he probably would be paid with an IOU; even if he was lucky to have cash, it could still be difficult for him to buy sufficient food in the market due to the supply restrictions. In fact, similar situations had already occurred in adjacent counties like Jinjiang and Taizhou. In early 1953, the farmers of these counties were ordered to sell nearly all pigs and cotton to the state, but the county governments could only afford to purchase 20 percent of the pigs and less than 70 percent of the cotton. Therefore, a number of farmers were paid with IOUs only. To make it worse, the grain price was keeping 12-30 percent higher than normal as a result of supply shortage. Eventually, farmers began to complain: “The CCP is worse than the KMT (Kuomintang, or the Nationalist Party),” “The people’s government is a government killing people...it cares

⁹⁶ “对实行粮食计划供应的意见” [Opinions on the planned supply of grains], BYA, 310-2-21.

⁹⁷ “粮食统购中的经济工作计划（草案）” [Plan of Economic work in the united purchase of grains (draft)] (Dec.12, 1953), BYA, 301-2-21.

⁹⁸ “江苏省不少农村基层合作社用高秤进低秤出剥削社员” [Many grassroots cooperatives in Jiangsu Province exploit cooperative members by cheating in weighing devices], 内部参考 [Internal Reference] (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1953) No.96 (Apr.28,1953)

nothing about the life and death of ordinary people.” An inner report by the state-run Xinhua news agency even described that a “riot” was already in sight.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, thanks to the activities of surviving private grain traders, as well as varied ways of farmers to hide grain, the situation of Baoying did not deteriorate so badly. But farmers’ uneasiness about the new grain policy had never been alleviated. Rumors prevailed regarding the real purpose of the government to monopolize the grain market. Some believed it was to equalize the rich and poor; some worried the state would not cash the IOUs; and those with more surplus grain were afraid of becoming the targets of another political campaign.¹⁰⁰ Although these farmers were not driven by panic to the edge of rebellion, various rumors that swept the county had revealed their anxieties.

“Hairy Water Monsters” and “Divine Water”

In summer 1953, farmers’ tension about the agricultural reforms was escalated by a terrifying rumor spreading quickly all around the county. It was said that some hairy water monsters were recently found in the region, who usually hid in rivers in the day and came out to kill passers at night. Some reported that they once saw bodies with opened chest cavities and missing organs, particularly eyeballs, women’s breasts or boys’ penises.

⁹⁹ “苏北农民卖不出猪仔、棉花,买不到粮食”[Farmers of Northern Jiangsu can neither sell out piglets and cotton nor purchase grains], *Internal Reference* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1953) No.17, (Jan.22, 1953)

¹⁰⁰ “中共宝应县委关于在农村中贯彻总路线教育、完成粮食统购统销工作部署初步意见” [Preliminary opinions by the CCP Baoying County Committee on the work of implementing the education of General Line and fulfilling the arrangement of united purchase and united supply of grains] (Dec.10, 1953), BYA, 301-2-21.

As the rumor reached more villages, more victims were said to be found and more details were added to the descriptions of these horrible monsters. Consequently, no one now dared to go out at night, and many even felt unsafe to stay at home. A number of farmers therefore decided to sleep collectively with other fellow villagers in houses guarded by male volunteers through the night. When sensing danger, the watchmen would warn villagers by blowing horns, beating drums and gongs, and shooting with home-made guns.¹⁰¹ As the panic intensified in some areas, farmers would not walk outside or work in the field even in the day, and some began to suffer insomnia or mental disorder.¹⁰²

In fact, the rumors of hairy water monsters had occurred not only in Baoying, but in dozens of counties of Jiangsu, Anhui and Shandong provinces, influencing the lives of tens of millions of people for over a year.¹⁰³ The interesting was, despite variations in details of their description, the political implications behind these rumors were clear.¹⁰⁴ For example, with regard to the origins of the monsters, some held that they had been dispatched by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), some believed they were fed by the government or cooperatives, others even suggested the monsters were actually sent out by the Soviet Union to collect specific human organs for producing atomic bombs. Based

¹⁰¹ “关于坚决迅速扑灭‘毛人水怪’谣言及防范流传的紧急指示” [Urgent directive for quickly extinguishing the rumor of hairy water monsters and preventing it from spreading further], BYA, 301-1-14.

¹⁰² “江苏、山东发现‘毛人水怪’谣言” [The rumor of hairy water monsters were found in Jiangsu and Shandong], *Internal Reference* (Beijing: Xinhua News Agency, 1953) No.179 (Aug. 3, 1953).

¹⁰³ 李若健[Li Ruojian], “社会变迁的折射:20 世纪 50 年代的‘毛人水怪’谣言初探”[A reflection of social changes: a primary study on the rumor of hairy water monsters in the 1950s], *社会学研究* [Sociological Studies] (2005:5), p.182.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

on these assumptions, many believed the monsters only attacked ordinary villagers, and would not harm the cadres above the *xiang* level.¹⁰⁵ In fact, despite the new elements like cooperatives, Party cadres, the Soviet Union, and nuclear weapons, the rumor of hairy water monsters shared a common mode of killing people and damaging their bodies, especially the sex organs, with those rumors that frequently occurred in Chinese history. A most recent example was during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when foreign missionaries were said to set up orphanages to kill Chinese children and use their body parts to make medicine.¹⁰⁶ It proves that such kind of rumors usually arose in times of social unrest caused by the outside intrusions, and the victims in the rumors, mostly from the weakest social groups like children and women, often symbolized the vulnerability of the locals under the threat of force. On the other hand, however, horrible rumors also motivated farmers to form a strong alliance to fight against intruders. Therefore, these rumors often reflected the panic of the believers about the external forces, as well as their desire to defend their own traditions. To the farmers of Baoying, if the outside impact was mainly from foreign missionaries about half a century ago, then since the mid 1940s, it was from the communist cadres who introduced many new reforms, such as land reform, MATs, cooperatives and the UPUS, that had placed a serious threat to the

¹⁰⁵ "The rumor of hairy water monsters were found in Jiangsu and Shandong," *Internal Reference*, No. 179 (Aug. 3, 1953).

¹⁰⁶ See 邵建[Shao Jian], "近代上海反教谣言的消解" [Clarification of the anti-Christian rumors in modern Shanghai], *社会科学* [Journal of Social Sciences] (2005:10); 苏萍[Su Ping], "近代教案中反教谣言的量化研究" [A quantitative study of modern anti-Christian rumors], 二十一世纪 (网络版) [Twenty-first Century (on-line edition)] (2003:1); *The First National Archives of China and the History Department of Fujian Normal University, eds., 清末教案* [Missionary Cases in Late Qing] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju Press, 1996-2000).

traditional way of life in the countryside. As ordinary farmers had no way to participate in the decision-making process of these top-down reforms, they inevitably became highly suspicious of the state's true purpose behind these frequently changed policies. But as open rebellions had become impracticable given the increasingly tightened social control of the state, farmers had to release their stress subtly by integrating the new frightening factors into the traditional framework of terrible rumors. At the same time, these rumors also provided farmers an opportunity to resist the reforms in the name of self-protection. In some cases, for example, farmers forbade Party cadres to enter villages, and sometimes even beat them under grounds that these cadres could be hairy water monsters disguised as humans.¹⁰⁷

Embarrassed by the rumors that demonized Party cadres, the county government declared hairy water monsters were created by "counter-revolutionaries" and folk religious groups for the purpose of disturbing social order and arousing farmers' resentment against the state. Consequently, the county government tightened the control over specific population groups like landlords and itinerant vendors; some rumor purveyors were announced as the actual killers who murdered the innocents and damaged their bodies, and a few merchants were also punished for promoting rumors purposely in order to sell more flashlights and lamp kerosene.¹⁰⁸ Eventually, at least 31 people were

¹⁰⁷ "The rumor of hairy water monsters were found in Jiangsu and Shandong," *Internal Reference*, No. 179 (Aug. 3, 1953).

¹⁰⁸ "An urgent directive for quickly extinguishing the rumor of hairy water monsters and preventing it from spreading further," BYA, 301-1-14.

arrested in Baoying County alone, and in the nationwide, more than one thousand were arrested for the rumor of hairy water monsters and over a hundred executed.¹⁰⁹

Almost at the same time when the farmers of Baoying were scared by the hairy water monsters, another widespread rumor gave them some hope. It was said that the Eighth and Ninth Masters in local religious cult, referring to the fox deities, had shown up to help farmers by distributing “divine water” to the sick; by paying about 1.5-3 jin of rice to a psychic agent for the fox deities, one would receive the water for drink or bath to cure illnesses. There soon emerged many self-acclaimed deity’s agents throughout the county, mostly female calling themselves “fairy girls.” They usually moved from a villager to another every three to five days, selling “divine water” and other self-made pills at home and wayside shrines, or just beside rivers. And the number of their clients varied from three or five to more than a thousand every day.¹¹⁰ In fact, not only in Baoying and nearby counties, similar rumors were circulating in vast regions including Zhejiang, Hubei, Hebei provinces and Manchuria. Despite some minor differences in details, all these rumors were about local deities distributing “divine water” and medicine to the sick, and all attracted large numbers of farmers in need of medical treatment.¹¹¹

The origins of these rumors were unclear—partly might be due to the plots of some witch doctors who wanted to earn extra rice in times of food shortage. However,

¹⁰⁹ Li Ruojian, pp.198,182.

¹¹⁰ “关于平息‘仙水’谣言的情况报告” [Report on extinguishing the rumor of “divine water”], BYA, 301-1-14.

¹¹¹ Reports on the rumor of divine water in Rehe, Zhejiang, Wuchang, Guisui and Hebei. *Internal References*, No.103 (May 8, 1953).

the government believed they were largely promoted by “counter-revolutionaries” in hope of confronting the official ideology with superstition.¹¹² Therefore, whenever the government found farmers assembled to ask for medicine, it would send cadres and police to disperse the crowds. But farmers often angrily inquired why the government tried to forbid the deities to help the sick, and sometimes they even would fight back when their water jars were broken by cadres.¹¹³ Eventually, despite many efforts of the government to suppress the rumors, such as arresting witch doctors and “fairy girls,” they kept spreading to more areas in the next few years.

It should not be a coincidence that both rumors of hairy water monsters and divine water occurred in the countryside when the state managed to promote its agricultural reforms. Farmers’ appealing to the supernatural world obviously reflected their anxiety and restlessness towards the unpredictable future, as well as the conflict between the traditional values of rural communities and the foreign-introduced ideologies of the state. As it later turned out, with the accelerated pace of agricultural reforms, both the sentiment and conflict would continue to accumulate and cause the farmer-state relations to deteriorate further.

Rich Farmers Also Became Class Enemies

In spite of the obvious or implicit discontent of farmers toward the agricultural reforms, the communist leaders not only insisted on the new grain policy, but also

¹¹² “Report on extinguishing the rumor of ‘divine water,’” BYA, 301-1-14.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

extended the state monopoly to cotton and cloth in August 1954. During this course, the government began to focus more attention on rich farmers, who had become the wealthiest in the countryside after landlords were commonly deprived of private properties in the land reform movement. In early 1950s, the CCP spared rich farmers of punishments as a strategy to isolate landlords, but now when it desired to extract more resources from the countryside, rich farmers inevitably became the main target of the reforms.

In fact, on the contrary to the stringent policies of top Party leaders, rural cadres often preferred to treat rich farmers kindly. This was because, compared to other farmers, rich farmers not only rarely annoyed cadres by asking for special aid, but also contributed to a large part of grain tax. In many villages, therefore, cadres and rich farmers had indeed formed a cooperative relationship: the latter helped the former to fulfill the duty of tax collection, and the former would look after the interest of the latter within their ability. Sometimes, in order to help specific rich farmers keep more grain for themselves, cadres even made adjustment to the official quotas without any reference to their superiors; certainly, they would receive some minor benefits, such as a dinner, as a reward afterwards.¹¹⁴ Before 1954, the cooperation between rich farmers and village cadres had been tolerated by the county leaders under the condition that grain tax must be fully collected. Nevertheless, after the top Party leaders decided to target rich farmers to extract more rural resources, village cadres began to be criticized for having crossed the class line. In October 1954, Jiang Weiqing, the First Secretary of the CCP Jiangsu

¹¹⁴ “富农破坏活动材料” [Materials about the sabotage of rich farmers], BYA, 301-2-24.

Provincial Committee, pointed out in an address that rich farmers were “the capitalists in the countryside,” “the last exploitative class in the countryside,” and thus “the enemy class;” therefore, the proper policy toward them should be to “limit” and finally to “eliminate” their “exploitation.” In order to achieve this goal, he called for a powerful promotion of agricultural cooperation and the UPUS policy, in hope of reducing the overall advantages of rich farmers in hiring manpower, loaning money, purchasing materials and selling agricultural products. In addition, he also ordered to restrict rich farmers from joining cooperatives, and to expel those who had joined or put them under close supervision so that they could never have chance to dominate the leadership of cooperatives.¹¹⁵

Consequently, rich farmers also became class enemies “in addition to former landlords, counter-revolutionaries, reactionary superstitious and secret societies and bandits.”¹¹⁶ Just like the campaign against landlords, mass meetings were called in all districts to denounce the “exploitative crimes” of rich farmers, and more importantly, to force them to sell more grain to the state. According to an investigation of the 1,915 rich farmers of Baoying County, 1,434 were found to still have surplus grain for sale;

¹¹⁵ “继续贯彻党的七届四中全会精神，为做好今冬明春农村工作，进一步实现对农业的社会主义改造而奋斗！——江渭清同志一九五四年九月二十一日在中国共产党江苏省委第一次代表会议上的报告” [Continue to act in the spirit of Fourth Plenary Session of the Seventh Party Congress, and struggle to do good work in agriculture at the turn of this winter and next spring and to further implement socialist agrarian reforms!—speech by Comrade Jiang Weiqing at the First Representative Conference of CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee on Sep. 21, 1954], BYA, 301-2-22.

¹¹⁶ 高华[Gao Hua], 身份和差异：1949-1965年中国社会的政治分层 [Identities and Differences: the Political Stratification in Chinese Society 1949-1965] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2004), p.31.

therefore, each of them was assigned an additional requisition quota varying from 200 to 7,000 jin of grain. As a result, in addition to the 2.4 million jin of grain that had been taxed and purchased by the government, these rich farmers were required to sell nearly 470,000 jin more to the state. Furthermore, they were required to deposit about 377 million yuan to the state-owned banks, and to buy about 180 million yuan of government bonds.¹¹⁷ In doing so, the government expected to obtain more grain and funds from rich farmers, and to reduce their ability to compete with agricultural cooperatives at the same time.

Fearing that they would be treated violently in the mass meetings, most rich farmers chose to accept the additional burden imposed by cadres, but many of them only partially fulfilled their duties after meetings. When cadres went to urge them to make up the deficiencies, they would pretend to be sick or swear that they had no surplus grain to sell. The behavior of these rich farmers only invited the condemnation of the CCP county committee for their “insufferably arrogance” and “deceit.”¹¹⁸ A strict inspection therefore was enforced on all rich farmers, which revealed that many of them actually had concealed the remaining grain in straw piles or their relatives’ homes, and some grinded rice into particles to be cooked secretly at night, or just sold extra grain to other farmers who offered better prices than the state.¹¹⁹ In addition, further investigation reported

¹¹⁷ “中共宝应县委关于对富农斗争的报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the struggle against rich farmers] (Sep.18,1954) BYA, 301-1-16.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ “富农破坏的花样” [Various sabotages of rich farmers], BYA, 301-2-24.

more “misconduct” of rich farmers. For example, in order to sell less grain to the state, some of them bribed village cadres with dinners, cash, presents (such as rice, woolen coats, cigarettes and cloth), and even sex, and some others would seek to establish marital relations or nominal kinship ties with cadres. Consequently, 21 cadres were punished by the county committee during January to September 1954 for the reason of “being corrupted” by rich farmers.¹²⁰ More surprisingly to the county leaders, the investigation also found that some rich farmers even publicly denounced the government policies and leaders by saying: “The UPUS is like a knife killing people,” and “everyone will die if the New Fourth Army (referring to the CCP) stays here for two more years;” someone even swore to “scoop out the eyes of Chairman Mao to make yellow wine with rice.”¹²¹

Certainly, all the resentment and resistance of rich farmers, as well as the strategies they used to protect self-interest, were cited by the government as evidence of the “reactionary nature” of class enemies. The county committee therefore ordered cadres to intensify the attack against rich farmers. Consequently, more mass struggle meetings were held in all districts down to the xiang and village levels, and middle farmers and poor farmers were repeatedly mobilized to denounce rich farmers and force them to fulfill their grain requisition quotas. As a result, just like the landlords in the land reform movement, about 2, 5000 rich farmers—consisting of four percent of the population of

¹²⁰ “富农破坏活动材料” [Materials about the sabotages of rich farmers], BYA, 301-2-24.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

Baoying—were not only humiliated politically, but also isolated socially.¹²² Under huge psychological pressure, most of them finally gave in and did everything as required, including selling more grain to the state, depositing cash to banks, and purchasing the government bonds.¹²³ The government therefore obtained more resources and confidence to promote its reform programs.

“Three Fixed Quotas”

Through the struggle against rich farmers, the government further expanded its power in the countryside. But it had not been able to control the grain market completely, because a large part of grain was still in the hands of middle farmers. In 1955, three to four years after land reform, the number of middle farmers in Baoying had grown to nearly half of the rural population. In Shiqiao Xiang, for instance, the percentage of middle farmers increased from 44 percent (403 households) in 1951 to 60 percent (548 households) in 1955; at the same time, the percentage of poor farmers decreased from 52 percent (467 households) to 36 percent (322 households).¹²⁴ As a result of this change, a

¹²² “宝应县五三年上半年互助合作运动情况报告” [Report on the situation of mutual aid and cooperation movement of Baoying County in the first half of 1953], BYA, 301-1-13; “为提早完成单位面积产量 800 斤而奋斗（徐向东同志在全县第四次区书会议讨论毛主席关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题报告的总结）” [Struggle for achieving early an output of 800 jin per unit (a final report by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the Fourth Conference for District Party Secretaries on the discussion about Chairman Mao’s report on how to correctly handle the conflicts within the people)], BYA, 301-1-26.

¹²³ “中共宝应县委关于对富农斗争的报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the struggle against rich farmers] (Sep.18, 1954) BYA, 301-1-16.

¹²⁴ Statistics conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee, BYA, 307-1-1.

critical problem for the policy makers after the campaign against rich farmers was how to make middle farmers also surrender more grain to the state.

Instead of launching another campaign of class struggle, the government adopted a mixed strategy combining “soft” propaganda with “hard” regulations to deal with middle farmers. At first, an intensive propaganda campaign was carried out to justify the UPUS policy by arguing that it would benefit both the state and farmers. In numerous newspaper articles and broadcasts, the government told farmers that to sell more grain to the state would not only help the lives of workers, soldiers, and the refugees of natural disasters all over the nation, but also protect farmers from the exploitation of private grain traders, and therefore farmers could save more money to invest in production and to improve their livelihood.¹²⁵ The propaganda messages were delivered to every family not only through mass media, but also by local activists, who were trained to visit farmers house by house to discuss the policy and to investigate their responses.¹²⁶

Nevertheless, it turned out that, due to the different interests and concerns of the policy-makers and ordinary farmers, the official propaganda in fact failed to exercise much influence in the countryside. The basic concern for the policy-makers to introduce the UPUS policy was how to allocate the limited amount of grain among a huge population and, at the same time, to export as more as possible in exchange for money that was needed for industry and military. Most farmers, however, only thought of

¹²⁵ Reports on the purchase and requisition of grains in Xuetian xiang, BYA, 307-2-2.

¹²⁶ “三定到户会议总结” [Final report on the meeting about setting three fixed quotas for each household] (July 29, 1955), BYA, 301-1-18.

personal interests, and therefore disagreed with the policy-makers in many issues. For example, it was true that private grain traders made profit from their business, but unlike the government, farmers rarely saw normal profit as serious exploitation; in fact, they often benefited from the competition among private traders with better prices than the state offered. Furthermore, as private traders often went to villages in person, it saved farmers much time and cost to deliver their grain to designated places for the state purchase. As for the workers, soldiers and refugees all over the nation, they seemed too far away from the life of these farmers, not to mention that many of themselves were still in the struggle for survival.

Certainly, the policy-makers would not like to suspend their reforms until farmers changed their mind. In fact, a measure called “three fixed quotas” had been designed to promote the implementation of the UPUS policy. According to the new regulations, farmers would be assigned fixed quotas for the production of grain; and after harvest, except those reserved for regular tax, the basic needs of farmers, and other necessary reasons, all the left grain would be regarded as “surplus grain” subjected to the fixed state purchase quotas; at the same time, the grain supply would also be controlled by the state with strict quotas. When these regulations were put into effect in 1955, they exerted huge pressure on farmers, which was mainly from three aspects: first, the quotas for grain production were often too high due to the overestimation of productivity, and the influence of unexpected factors, such as natural disasters, were totally ignored,

sometimes even the wasteland was also considered as normal farmland.¹²⁷ In Weibei Xiang, for instance, the grain production quota assigned by the county government in 1955 was 5.7 percent higher than the average grain yield in the previous three years, and the overestimation percentage could be as high as 15 percent for some middle farmers.¹²⁸ Secondly, the grain rations were insufficient to meet the needs of farmers. For example, the county committee of Baoying regulated that each farmer could consume 400-500 jin of grain a year.¹²⁹ This standard was fairly basic in East China where rice was the main food. Even so, however, the government only referred to raw grain instead of processed grain. Therefore, the actually amount of edible grain for each farmer was even below the already low standard.¹³⁰ To make it worse, it was difficult for farmers to buy extra food in the market because the government insisted on the principle of supplying as little rice as possible.¹³¹ The third pressure for farmers was the high quotas of grain requisition that they could not afford. According to the order of the county committee of Baoying, 90-95

¹²⁷ “三定到户工作情况报告” [Report on the work of setting three fixed quotas for each household] (Sep.29, 1955), BYA, 301-1-18.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ See 曹树基[Cao Shuji], “国家、农民与‘余粮’:河南省桐柏县的统购统销（1953-1955）” [The state, farmers and ‘surplus grain’: the united purchase and united supply of grains in Tongbo County of Henan Province], *新史学* [New Historiography] (2011:6).

¹³¹ “三定到户会议总结” [Final report on the meeting about setting three fixed quotas for each household] (July 29, 1955), BYA, 301-1-18.

percent of the “surplus grain” must be sold to the state.¹³² The percentage was actually even higher in practice, and in many villages farmers were forced to surrender all their “surplus grain” to the state purchase.¹³³ As a result, what farmers lost was not only the right to deal with their own grain, but more importantly, the main opportunity of earning extra cash in a free market.¹³⁴

If the three fixed quotas had been implemented strictly, farmers would only have the duty of production, and lost the control over their own consumption. Therefore, it is understandable that these new regulations aroused great discontent among farmers. Foreseeing that more production would only mean more tax and higher quotas of grain requisition, many farmers decided to reduce the amount of farming.¹³⁵ And those short of food chose to leave their home villages for begging in the winter, saving the limited grain rations for next spring.¹³⁶ In more extreme cases, at least seven middle farmers

¹³² “中共宝应县委关于当前工作综合报告” [Summary report by CCP Baoying County Committee on current work] (Aug.29, 1955), BYA, 301-2-27.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Grain was the major agricultural product grown in Baoying County. In 1954, about 91 percent of the land (255,642 mu) was used to produce grain, and the percentage raised to 94 percent in 1955. See the survey conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee in Nov. 1955, BYA, 307-1-2.

¹³⁵ “三定到户工作情况报告” [Report on the work of setting three fixed quotas for each household] (Sep.29, 1955), BYA, 301-1-18.

¹³⁶ “台许农业生产合作社在生产上和思想上存在的问题和开始转入生产的情况” [The problems of production and thought in Taixu Agricultural Cooperatives and the situation of its production] (Feb.11,1955), BYA, 307-2-2.

committed suicide during December 1954 to February 1955 in attempts to resist the new grain policy.¹³⁷

The Climax of Agricultural Cooperation

In the viewpoint of the Party leaders, the main reason that farmers were able to challenge the regulations of three-fixed-quotas was they had not been organized by the state; if all farmers had joined agricultural cooperatives, the production and distribution of grain would be uniformly determined by cooperative cadres instead of by individual households, and the efficiency of grain collection would be increased considerably. Therefore, to accelerate agricultural cooperation was considered by the Party leaders as a prerequisite for promoting the new grain policies. As landlords and rich farmers were still banned in theory from joining cooperatives, middle farmers and poor farmers naturally became the main forces on which cadres could depend in the movement. To their disappointment, however, cadres found the majority of the about 350,000 to 400,000 middle farmers—accounting of 50-60 percent of the population in Baoying—had no aspiration for collective farming at all. In spite of the intensive propaganda of the government about the advantages of cooperatives, the ideal for most middle farmers in 1955 remained to live a self-sufficient life based on household farming, and to maintain a respectful relationship with the government while keep a distant from the state affairs. As some middle farmers described, their ideal was: “Owing no grain tax to the above

¹³⁷ Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the suicide cases that occurred during the UPUS movement (Feb.7, 1955), BYA, 301-2-25.

[government] and no favor to the bellow [ordinary people], having neither attention from the officials nor disturbance from the others, and being content with coarse clothes and simple food.”¹³⁸ However, fearing retribution, most middle farmers dared not directly refuse the advice of cadres; they often replied diplomatically that they had no intention or capacity to oppose the movement, but they would join cooperatives only by following others instead of taking the lead. As a result, in spite of the promise of a number of middle farmers to join cooperatives, few of them took actions in reality.¹³⁹ The reluctance of middle farmers in turn disappointed poor farmers, who had expected to share the tools and livestock of the former. At the same time, the few resources of cooperatives hence became so precious that poor farmers often had to work overly hard in exchange for the right of using them. Consequently, many poor farmers also lost interest in collective farming. For example, a survey among the 6,149 villagers of Mingbian Xiang showed that, except 28 CCP members and 9 Communist Youth League members, there were only 73 actively supporting the movement.¹⁴⁰ In the whole county, only four percent of the rural households had enrolled in cooperatives by September 1955.¹⁴¹ In fact, even the situation of MATs also “became worse year by year”, and most of them actually survived in name only in fall 1955.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ “上不欠公粮,下不欠私情,官不睬民不扰,粗布衣裳菜饭饱。” BYA, 301-1-19.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ “关于农业合作化运动情况报告” [Report on the situation of agricultural cooperation movement] (Nov.17, 1955), BYA, 301-1-19; “宝应县户口统计表” [Statistics of registered residence in Baoying County] (Nov. 1955), BYA, 397-1-2. In October 1955, Mao Zedong pointed out that agricultural cooperatives had enrolled 30-40 percent of the rural households in North China and Northeast China, and 10-20 percent in

Nevertheless, to the surprise of the cadres of Baoying who were frustrated by the slow pace of the movement, Mao Zedong made an address on July 31, 1955, declaring that a nationwide high tide of agricultural cooperation was about to arrive. He compared those in the government who were reluctant to support the movement to “foot-bound women,” and criticized them for delaying the reform. He demanded that all Party members “should lead this movement actively, enthusiastically, and thoughtfully,” and he finally alleged that: “This large-scale socialist revolutionary movement involving over 500 million rural populations bears extraordinary significance for the world.”¹⁴³ Echoing Mao’s call, Party conferences were held level by level from the top down to assign the work of accelerating the agricultural cooperation movement. In Baoying County, 739 cadres at the county, district and xiang levels attended a conference on September 20, 1955 to study Mao’s speech and to criticize the “conservatism” of some cadres. Consequently, the movement expanded promptly in the following twelve months: at first, the number of primary agricultural cooperatives soared from 186 to 3,339 during September to November 1955,¹⁴⁴ and then 257 advanced cooperatives were further

other areas of China. See Ye Yangbing, *A Study on the Agricultural Cooperation Movement in China*, p.397. However, the situation of Baoying County suggested that the real enrollment rate might be lower than officially reported.

¹⁴² BYA, 301-1-19.

¹⁴³ Mao Zedong, “关于农业合作化问题” [“On the Problems of Agricultural Cooperation”] (July 31, 1955), *A Collection of Important Documents about Agricultural Collectivization (1949-1957)*, pp.360-76.

¹⁴⁴ “Report on the situation of agricultural cooperation movement” (Nov.17, 1955), BYA, 301-1-19; “Statistics of registered residence in Baoying County” (Nov. 1955), BYA, 397-1-2.

created by the end of February 1956; ¹⁴⁵ half a year later, 334 more advanced cooperatives were founded. As a result, by August 1956, there had been 152,363 households enrolling in advanced cooperatives, and 10,837 households in primary cooperatives; in other words, about 97 percent of the rural households in Baoying had been organized by the state. ¹⁴⁶ It seemed that Mao's prediction of the coming high tide of the cooperation movement had been proved true.

In spite of the widespread foundation of cooperatives, however, the reality in fact did not conform to Mao's plan in many respects. For example, Mao demanded that poor farmers and the lower-middle farmers should be given the privilege of admission to cooperatives. ¹⁴⁷ But in reality, cadres commonly preferred to recruit wealthy farmers who could provide livestock, tools and funds that the newly established cooperatives needed badly. Consequently, many rich middle farmers were compelled to join cooperatives under the insistence of cadres, and a number of poor farmers were ignored instead. ¹⁴⁸ At the same time, the rapid expansion of cooperatives was only achieved at the expense of quality. A basic problem was, as more large-scale cooperatives were created, it became more difficult for the government to find competent cadres to manage numerous teams, brigades, and cooperatives. This was mainly due to the fact that the most of local cadres

¹⁴⁵ “关于高级社建社工作的简报”[Briefing on the work of creating advanced cooperatives] (Feb.24,1956), BYA, 301-2-36.

¹⁴⁶ “中共宝应县委生产合作部关于一九五六年夏季预分工作情况的报告” [Report by Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the work of preliminary income division in summer 1956](Aug. 22, 1956), BYA, 307-1-4.

¹⁴⁷ Mao Zedong, “On the Problems of Agricultural Cooperation,” *A Collection of Important Documents about Agricultural Collectivization (1949-1957)*, pp.360-76.

¹⁴⁸ Report by CCP Baoying County Committee dated on Nov.19, 1955, BYA, 301-2-27.

were farmers with little education. A survey in early 1956 showed that about 92 percent of the county and district cadres only received a junior high school education or less, and the situation was certainly worse at the xiang and village levels.¹⁴⁹ Due to the low quality of cadres, therefore, it was difficult to introduce some basic management methods to cooperatives, let alone to establish a whole administrative system. For example, among the 526 advanced agricultural cooperatives that had been founded by April 1956, 350 had no rules of financial management at all,¹⁵⁰ and some cadres even had to use beans to count farmers' work points.¹⁵¹ A more serious problem was the collective funds of a number of cooperatives were totally controlled by a few cadres, and the expenditure was often determined by their personal preferences instead of the needs of agricultural production. Consequently, a large part of the limited funds were spent on dining and luxury goods (such as cigarettes, recording machines, music records and expansive office supplies), and in spring festivals, a lot of money would be put into the performance of traditional drama, including the payment to performers, the construction of stages and the preparation of costumes and props.¹⁵² In the meanwhile, cooperative cadres certainly granted themselves many hierarchical privileges. In Huangjia Co-op, for instance,

¹⁴⁹ “关于一九五六——五七两年党的组织工作规划” [Plan for Party's organization work in 1956-57] (Mar.29, 1956), BYA, 301-1-24.

¹⁵⁰ “中共宝应县委生产合作部关于农业社财务工作情况报告” [Report by the Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the financial work of agricultural cooperatives] (Apr.12, 1956), BYA, 307-2-4.

¹⁵¹ “关于整社、冬季生产工作报告” [Report on the work of rectification and winter production in cooperatives] (Dec.25,1955), BYA, 301-2-27.

¹⁵² “Report by the Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the financial work of agricultural cooperatives” (Apr.12, 1956), BYA, 307-2-4.

compared to only about ten work points an ordinary farmer could earn for a whole day's work in the field, there was an annual bonus of 1,800 work points for each of the 5 cooperative heads, 1,500-1,600 work points for each of the 4 accountants, and 1,200 work points for each of the 51 team leaders.¹⁵³

Both the mismanagement of cooperatives and the corruption of cadres seriously frustrated ordinary cooperative members, and the rigid and unfair work-point system further made many of them lose the incentive to work. Under this system, all the farmers within a cooperative would earn equal points for each day as long as they went to the field, regardless of how much time and energy they had really devoted to farming. Consequently, many farmers would rather spare themselves hard labor and make soles for cloth shoes or play poker in the field; after "work," they would continue to play poker or just chat with each other until late night in the public houses of cooperatives, thinking nothing of the next day's work at all.¹⁵⁴

Consequently, partly due to the farmers who had neither experience nor incentives for collective farming, and partly due to the natural disasters, the wheat production in Baoying dropped severely in 1956. Among the 787 agricultural cooperatives, 737 (about 93 percent) saw the decrease of wheat yield,¹⁵⁵ and the decrease was about 40-60 percent

¹⁵³ County Committee Meetings Bulletin (No.3, July 6, 1957), BYA, 301-2-39.

¹⁵⁴ "五六年全年贯彻'三包'情况和今后改进意见" [The situation of implementing "Three Guarantees" policy and the opinions on how improve it hereafter] (Dec.29, 1956), BYA, 307-1-4.

¹⁵⁵ "Report by Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the work of preliminary income division in summer 1956" (Aug. 22, 1956), BYA, 307-1-4.

in 274 cooperatives, and more than 60 percent in 217 cooperatives.¹⁵⁶ The production decrease immediately led to a shortage of food. For example, in Shiqiao Co-op, 348 households, amounting to 33 percent of all, were reportedly short of food; in Zhongnan Co-op, 232 of the 397 households had no sufficient food; in Fuxing Co-op, the food storage of 30 percent households was only enough for less than two months.¹⁵⁷ In the meanwhile, 514 of the 787 cooperatives saw the decrease of farmers' incomes.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, a large number of starving farmers had no money either to buy food in the market. Under the pressure of survival, many of them had to beg in other areas, and some even desperately declared they would rather kill their own kids.¹⁵⁹ In this difficult situation, cooperative cadres could do nothing to soothe farmers, and many of them actually had lost interest to remain in their positions. In Huangjia Co-op, for instance, only one of the three cooperative heads still worked normally, and five of the seven team leaders decided to resign.¹⁶⁰ A sentiment prevailing among these cadres was: "Being afraid of the blame of high leaders for poor production, being afraid of the blame of cooperative members for decreased income, and being afraid of the blame of wives for

¹⁵⁶ Statistics conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee in Aug. 1956, BYA, 307-1-4. Even considering the possibility of concealing grain by cooperative cadres, the decrease rate was still unusual. This could be proved by the food shortage and farmers' resistance to agricultural cooperation movement in 1956-1957.

¹⁵⁷ "Report by Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the work of preliminary income division in summer 1956" (Aug. 22, 1956), BYA, 307-1-4.

¹⁵⁸ Statistics conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee in Aug. 1956, BYA, 307-1-4.

¹⁵⁹ "Report by Production Cooperation Department of CCP Baoying County Committee on the work of preliminary income division in summer 1956" (Aug. 22, 1956), BYA, 307-1-4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

difficult life.”¹⁶¹ Ironically, after a year of rapid expansion, agricultural cooperation disappointed both farmers and cadres for not demonstrating its advantages in increasing farming productivity or farmers’ incomes.

Farmers’ Resistance

Famine not only caused farmers to complain, but also provoked their resistance to the cooperation movement. During the fall harvest in October 1956, it became common for the farmers of Baying to decline turning over their grain to the state. In many cooperatives, farmers even formed voluntary teams patrolling and sleeping on the threshing floor to prevent cadres from moving the newly harvested grain to the state granaries. At the same time, cadres also watched the grain all day in order to stop farmers from sneaking it home.¹⁶² In Niunan Co-op, for instance, the confrontation between farmers and cadres persisted over twenty days; as a result, neither side could take position of the grain, leaving more than 10,000 jin of rice and 1,500 jin of straw to rot on the ground.¹⁶³ In other co-ops, hungry farmers surrounded cadres’ homes day and night, demanding for solutions to famine.¹⁶⁴ Sometimes, arguments would become violent when the protesters tied up cadres and sent them to the county government for

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*

¹⁶² “关于当前生产分配工作的情况报告” [Report on current situation of production and distribution] (Oct. 18, 1956), BYA, 301-2-36.

¹⁶³ “牛南社的混乱局面是怎样扭转的” [How was the disorder in Niunan Cooperative reversed] (Apr.17, 1957), BYA, 307-2-4.

¹⁶⁴ “关于部署全年生产研究春季正社工作的县委扩大会议情况报告” [Report on the enlarged County Committee meeting about arranging the production for the year and the rectification of cooperatives in spring] (Feb.22, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

punishment.¹⁶⁵ Farmers' accusation made many cadres feel ashamed and "cannot raise their heads" to face the angry protesters.¹⁶⁶ Some who were sympathetic to farmers therefore decided to conceal the actual grain yield from the county government so that farmers could keep more grain for self-consumption. For example, in a team of Xuqiao Co-op, farmers were acquiesced to divide more than 30,000 jin of grain; in Tongxin Co-op, 6 of the 15 brigades declined to publish the exact amount of grain yield; in Heping Co-op, cadres withheld more than 60,000 jin of grain without notifying the county government.¹⁶⁷ In Jinghe District, 15 of the 42 cooperatives declined to sell surplus grain to the state, and another 3 even failed to pay grain tax.¹⁶⁸

However, to store more grain would not necessarily improve the situation of those few cooperatives; sometimes it actually intensified the tension between farmers and cadres. For example, in Baishu Co-op of Sheyang District, the cooperative head stole 150 jin of seed rice from the storehouse on a night in April 1957. A villager rising to urinate happened to see the process and told it to others the next morning. This certainly angered the masses, who uncovered more misdeeds of this cadre. Consequently, over two hundred farmers besieged the home of the cooperative head, and about half of them broke down the door and looted his grain. The riot lasted a whole night, but no cadre dared to

¹⁶⁵ "Report on current situation of production and distribution" (Oct. 18, 1956), BYA, 301-2-36.

¹⁶⁶ "Report on the enlarged County Committee meeting about arranging the production for the year and the rectification of cooperatives in spring" (Feb.22, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

¹⁶⁷ "Report on current situation of production and distribution" (Oct. 18, 1956), BYA, 301-2-36.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

intervene.¹⁶⁹ Another serious incident happened in Huangwei Co-op, where 10,000 jin of grain were divided by cadres for their own consumption or for trading in the black market. To make it worse, after the exposure of these cadres' corruption due to their factional struggles, the xiang leaders began to suspect that more grain actually had been hidden by the cooperative members. Therefore, a house-by-house search was carried out among 334 households in two days, which certainly negated the assumption of xiang leaders. But the humiliating search had irritated farmers, and every household began to demand for food aid, and farming was totally suspended.¹⁷⁰ These examples suggest that, in addition to the decrease of grain production, the cadre-dominated administration also exacerbated the crisis of the agricultural cooperation movement in 1956-57.

The hardship of food shortage deteriorated further in February 1957, when Baoying was hit by heavy snow and severe cold. As a result, life became more unendurable for those hungry farmers without firewood or straw for heating. In Shanyang District, for instance, 4,560 people in 1,683 households had run out of food, and 2,276 households had to live without heating.¹⁷¹ At the same time, the extreme cold killed at least 143 cattle—many indeed had already been sick due to overwork and mistreatment in the prior year.¹⁷² Consequently, a number of cooperatives were languishing in despair.

¹⁶⁹ “中共宝应县监察委员会关于吕福喜同志擅自绑人错误的处分决定” [Decision by the Supervisory Committee of CCP Baoying County Committee to punish Comrade Lü Xifu for binding people without official permission] (June 16, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

¹⁷⁰ “高阳乡黄韦农业社翻粮事件的报告” [Report on the incident of searching for grains in Huangwei Cooperative of Gaoyang Xiang] (June 17, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

¹⁷¹ “工作简报（第一期）” [Work Briefing (issue 1)] (Feb.17, 1957), BYA, 301-2-44.

¹⁷² *ibid.*

A typical scene was reported by Panzhuang Co-op: 1,855 mu of wheat field were flooded, but nobody tried to pump the water out; 83 jars were full of night-soil, but nobody utilized them to fertilize the crops; 26,834 *dan* of pig manure were left outside and destroyed by wind and rain, and 1,050 *dan* of mud mired the paths, and nobody would use them to plaster walls and hearths anymore.¹⁷³

The famine made farmers realize that they not only could not depend on cadres in difficult times, but must compete with them for limited resources. Therefore, more and more farmers decided to disregard the cooperative rules and to take their own actions of self-rescue, such as dividing the rice seeds kept in the cooperative storehouses, and more importantly, reaping the wheat privately before the collective harvesting. In Jinghe District, for instance, at least 419 households of 17 co-ops took away totally 74,892 jin of rice seeds between January and April in 1957.¹⁷⁴ And in Nan'gang Co-op, about 120 farmers of 99 households privately reaped more than 100 mu of wheat on May 21-24—in fact, part of the wheat was destroyed by the cat-and-mouse chase in the field when cadres attempted to dispel the farmers.¹⁷⁵ In some cooperatives, cadres even planned to form petrol teams equipped with sticks to stop private harvesters, but they had to abandon the idea due to the opposition of most farmers.¹⁷⁶ Actually, as more and more farmers

¹⁷³ “工作简报（第三期）” [Work Briefing (issue 3)] (Mar.8, 1957), BYA, 301-2-44.

¹⁷⁴ “关于春季生产、整社情况的报告” [Report on the production and rectification of cooperatives in spring] (Apr.2, 1957), BYA, 307-1-5.

¹⁷⁵ “关于南港、中南、新杨三个社发生抹麦青事件的报告” [Report on the incidents of reaping wheat seedlings in Nangang, Zhongnan and Xinyang cooperatives] (June 5, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

participated in the unauthorized harvest, cadres had to give up the attempt to stop all of them, and their authority therefore was further disregarded by farmers. In Zuobao Co-op, for instance, cadres detained a widow of former Nationalist village head for reaping wheat privately. However, this action not only failed to intimidate farmers, but evoked their sympathy for the woman. Consequently, several dozen women rushed to the xiang government and rescued her by force, totally regardless of the fact that her husband had been executed by the CCP as a class enemy.¹⁷⁷

As the collective farming had been largely suspended in late 1956 and early 1957, and now the rules of collective distribution were also broken by the private harvesting, agricultural cooperatives indeed had become meaningless for most farmers; some of them therefore decided to withdraw from cooperatives by taking back their own tools and livestock. Among the first insisting to quit were those middle farmers who had initially been forced to join cooperatives. For example, a middle farmer household in Xinhe Co-op of Wangzhi District once had ten *mu* of land, six family laborers, a head of farm cattle, a pig, a boat, and some other necessary tools like plows, harrows, and even a waterwheel—all these resources had secured a fairly comfortable living for this family in normal years. After joining the cooperative, however, their tools and livestock were purchased by the co-op in low prices, their work points and wages were often deducted arbitrarily by cadres, and finally, even survival had become a problem.¹⁷⁸ Therefore,

¹⁷⁷ “关于社员闹事的总结报告” [Final report on the disturbance caused by cooperative members] (Apr.26, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

¹⁷⁸ “新河社六小队是如何解决潘龚氏潘周氏等六户闹退社的” [How did the sixth team of Xinhe Cooperative deal with the request of Pangong Shi and Panzhou Shi for withdrawing from cooperatives] (June 16, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

many middle farmers in similar conditions especially desired to regain their economic independence, and they were soon joined by more middle and poor farmers in early 1957. However, in spite of the government's promise that everyone would have the right of voluntary withdrawal,¹⁷⁹ the requests of these farmers for quitting cooperatives were always denied by cadres. Consequently, they had to stage protests frequently in hope to put pressure on the government. In Baoying County, there were 944 protest incidents formally reported in 401 cooperatives from October 1956 to April 1957.¹⁸⁰ In fact, similar protests also occurred nationwide, and sometimes presented serious challenge for the state. In adjacent Tai County, for instance, about 2,000 farmers crowded to the county government in May 1957, requesting the official recognition of their withdrawing from cooperatives.¹⁸¹ Therefore, as a result of the intensive resistance of farmers, the agricultural cooperation movement, as well as the authority of the state, came to a severe crisis in spring 1957.

The State's Counter-attack

¹⁷⁹ In the "Sample Rules of Agricultural Production Cooperatives" and the "Sample Rules of the Advanced Agricultural Production Cooperatives" enacted by the Standing Committee of the National People's Conference in March and June 1956, both ensured farmers the freedom to withdraw from cooperatives.

¹⁸⁰ "Final report on the disturbance caused by cooperative members" (Apr.26, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

¹⁸¹ "中共江苏省委关于正确处理农村人民闹事问题的指示" [Directive by CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee on how to correctly deal with the disturbance caused by the people of rural areas] (May 22, 1957), BYA, 301-2-38; also see 高化民[Gao Huamin], 农业合作化运动始末[A Full Account of the Agricultural Cooperation Movement] (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Press, 1999), pp.358-62; 叶扬兵[Ye Yangbing], 中国农业合作化运动研究[A Study on the Agricultural Cooperation Movement in China], pp.592-98.

Before the central government made a decision on how to deal with the crisis, the initial responses of the county leaders were relatively moderate. Although some farmers had been tied and beaten, it was only due to the decision of individual cadres, but not due to the formal instructions of the government. The main reason that the county leaders preferred to downplay the crisis was because the majority of the protesters were middle and poor farmers, who were both included by the CCP in the category of “the people,” and thus were exempt of the punishments prepared for class enemies. Therefore, the CCP Secretary of Baoying County Xu Xiangdong stated in April 1957 that the protests were the “conflicts among the people” instead the “conflicts between the enemy and us,” and their objectives were to struggle for economic interests, but not to oppose the CCP or socialism.¹⁸² This viewpoint was echoed by the CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee in its directive issued to the subordinate committees in May 1957. The directive even admitted that cooperative cadres should be responsible for the protests for their bureaucratic and arbitrary attitudes toward farmers, though it also blamed that the masses had not received sufficient “thought education.”¹⁸³ The statements of the county and provincial leaders thus set a moderate tone for the official policies toward farmers’ protests. Consequently, the county committee decided to invite some of the most stubborn protesters to a special

¹⁸² “Struggle for achieving early an output of 800 jin per unit (a final report by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the Fourth Conference for District Party Secretaries on the discussion about Chairman Mao’s report on how to correctly handle the conflicts within the people)” (Apr.7, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

¹⁸³ “Directive by CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee on how to correctly deal with the disturbance caused by the people of rural areas” (May 22, 1957), BYA, 301-2-38;

conference in July 1957.¹⁸⁴ However, when 191 middle farmers and 164 poor farmers received the conference notices, they commonly suspected that the real purpose of the government was to administer punishment on them. Therefore, some decided to bring the evidence of cadres' violence, such as the sticks and the torn clothes, some expected to demonstrate directly to the county leaders, some prepared to be put into jail or sent to labor camps, and a few even planned to commit suicide.¹⁸⁵ On the contrary to their expectations, however, the county leaders treated most of them with patience and kindness, and even encouraged them to complain about the deficiencies of cooperatives. And then, the county cadres suggested them to reconsider their decisions, and some cooperative cadres also made public self-criticism. As a result, when the conference was concluded six days later, nearly ninety percent of the farmer representatives had agreed to stay in their cooperatives. Some farmers therefore commented, somewhat satirically: "How great is the CCP! Even the dead might be persuaded back to life [by the communist cadres]." ¹⁸⁶ It in fact implied that, to a large degree, farmers' discontent toward cooperation also resulted from the rude and violent attitude of the cooperative cadres. Realizing this point, in the same month after this conference, the county committee called another seven –day conference attended by 1,044 cadres at county, district, xiang and

¹⁸⁴ “闹退社社员代表会议总结报告” [Final report on the meeting attended by the representatives of cooperative members who request for withdrawing from cooperatives] (July 25, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ “会议情况(第六期)” [Conference Bulletin (issue 6)] (July 9, 1957), BYA, 301-2-39.

cooperative (former village) levels. As a result, 952 cadres made public self-criticism and more were criticized by the county leaders for provoking the resentment of farmers.¹⁸⁷

The two conferences seemed to temporarily alleviate the crisis of cooperatives. Nevertheless, the county government did not follow up to make sure cadres would keep their promise to improve their attitude toward farmers. As a result, tension remained high between farmers and the cooperatives cadres when both sides insisted on their previous positions after returning from the conferences. However, it is understandable that to make any significant changes to the cooperative system, such as creating measures to promote the communications between farmers and cadres, had gone beyond the power of county and provincial leaders, and the primary concern of local governments was only to do their best to appease the protesters so as to maintain the survival of agricultural cooperatives. The top leaders of the CPP, however, had other concerns. In their viewpoint, the nationwide protests was a dangerous signal that should be taken seriously: if the government surrendered to the protestors, then more farmers might be encouraged to withdraw from cooperatives, and the agricultural cooperation movement would have to be aborted; without cooperatives as a device of social control, it would be definitely more difficult to implement the state-dominated grain policies; if the state lost its control over agricultural resources, then its industrialization plan might also fall through due to the lack of financial and market support. Therefore, in order to prevent this domino effect from occurring, the top state leaders had determined not to recede before the protesting

¹⁸⁷ “关于召开四级干部会议的情况报告” [Report on the meeting attended by the cadres of four ranks] (Aug.5, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

farmers; the only problem left to decide, at the turn of spring and summer in 1957, was to find a good reason to launch a powerful counter-attack.

Coincidentally, farmers' protests occurred almost at the same time when many Chinese intellectuals intensively criticized the communist government in the Hundred Flowers Campaign. Offended by the challenge from both villages and cities, Mao Zedong decided to fight back with the anti-rightist movement. Soon, he published his directives in July 1957, formally denouncing the critics of the agricultural cooperation movement as the "capitalist rightists."¹⁸⁸ On August 8, the CCP Central Committee enacted a resolution, calling on the Party committees all over the nation to "launch a large-scale socialist education campaign among the total rural population."¹⁸⁹ The incoming campaign was described by the People's Daily, an official mouthpiece of the CCP, as "a fierce fight in China between the capitalist road and the socialist road" and "between the Chinese proletariat and capitalists."¹⁹⁰ The county leaders of Baoying immediately organized all cadres to study these documents, and hereby confessed that, due to their negligence of "the class struggle among the people," the cadres of Baoying had being at a loss to handle the "sabotage of enemies" in the past months. The "enemies" certainly included former landlords and rich farmers, but were mainly referred to those middle and

¹⁸⁸ Mao Zedong, "一九五七年夏季的形势" ["The situation in summer 1957"], 毛泽东选集 (第五卷) [Selected Works of Mao Zedong (vol. 5)] (Beijing: Renmin Press, 1977), p.459.

¹⁸⁹ "中共中央关于向全体农村人口进行一次大规模的社会主义教育的指示" ["Directive by CCP Central Committee on launching a large-scale socialist education for all rural residents"] (Aug.8, 1957), *A Collection of Important Documents about Agricultural Collectivization (1949-1957)*, pp.700-01.

¹⁹⁰ "在农村中大放大鸣大争" [Airing one's views fully, speaking out freely, and holding great debates in the countryside], 人民日报 [People's Daily] Aug.10, 1957.

poor farmers who “shouted their discontent at the Party, refused to pay grain tax or to sell surplus grain [to the state], insisted to withdraw from cooperatives, or scolded cadres.” Now the Party leaders no longer mentioned the “progressive revolutionary potential” of poor farmers, but instead frequently emphasized their “backwardness” such as “selfishness” and “absolute egalitarianism.” As a result, all the farmers who had been convicted for “destroying agricultural cooperation” were labeled “bad elements,” thus followed landlords, rich farmers and counter-revolutionaries to become the No. 4 of the state’s enemies.¹⁹¹

Starting from late July 1957, the socialist education campaign was carried out in all the villages of Baoying, and the struggle against the “bad elements” also escalated accordingly. Cadres were told to injure the reputation and “crush the backbones” of the “hostile class,” and to induce farmers to turn their “discontent toward the state” into the “hatred toward the enemies.”¹⁹² Consequently, under the conduct of radical cadres, the new wave of class struggle soon exceeded the control of the county committee. In Sheyang District, for instance, 112 farmers were attacked although only 7 of them were officially convicted as “bad elements.”¹⁹³ In the whole county, 661 people, mostly middle and poor farmers, were attacked in 74 xiang within four days, and some even

¹⁹¹ “关于召开区委的党委会议情况报告” [Report on the meeting of the standing committee of district Party committees] (Aug.21, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

¹⁹² “关于开展社会主义思想教育运动反击敌对阶级猖狂进攻的指示” [Directive on launching the education campaign of socialist thought and resisting the furious attacks of class enemies] (Aug.2, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

¹⁹³ “关于社会主义思想运动中斗争情况报告(草稿)” [Report on the situation of class struggle in the campaign of socialist thought (draft)] (Sep.4, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

were punished for absurd “offenses” such as not attending political meetings or helping store the goods for unlicensed peddlers.¹⁹⁴ The punishments for the “bad elements” were not too different from those imposed on landlords and rich farmers, which included binding, hanging and beating. It was reported that some farmers were forced to stand in the sun nakedly or to be poured with night soil,¹⁹⁵ and several committed suicide by drowning or hanging themselves—though the exact numbers are unclear.¹⁹⁶ The intimidating effect of these punishments was obvious: in less than two months after the beginning of the socialist education campaign, cadres pleasingly found that “a harmonious situation” had appeared in the countryside, and all the complaints about food shortage, cooperatives or the CCP had disappeared.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, not only all protesters had dropped their requests for quitting cooperatives, but also 1,100 more households became the new cooperative members.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, only 138 households in the county still insisted on farming independently, but they had to suffer substantial limitations on the access to production resources, as well as various socio-political discriminations—even their title “individual farming households” had become curse words.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ “关于个体农民体表会议情况的报告”[Report on the meeting attended by the representatives of individual farmers] (Aug.24, 1957), BYA, 301-1-25.

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.*

To the government policy-makers, the attack against the “bad elements” was only a means to defend the cooperative system, and their ultimate purpose remained to promote the UPUS policy. Therefore, on September 2, 1957 when the effectiveness of class struggle had begun to emerge, the CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee ordered to launch a “debate” among farmers about the grain problems. Farmers were asked to discuss the problems like: “Is the UPUS policy good or bad?” “Is the amount of grain ration enough or not?” and “What is the proper attitude farmers should take toward the UPUS policy?”²⁰⁰ Certainly, there would be no real debate because most farmers preferred to keep silence out of fear of being labeled as “bad elements,” as some farmers said in privacy: “Now let you say aloud, later will suppress you severely—the old trick of the CCP; anyone doesn’t know yet?”²⁰¹ Consequently, in spite of the insistent urging of cadres, only a few with secure political status, such as poor farmers, lower-middle farmers and ex-soldiers, dared to express some discontent. Even so, they would be immediately refuted by cadres, who repeated the official viewpoint that the UPUS policy would benefit both industry and national defense, and would help stabilize the grain price and increase the grain yield and farmers’ incomes.²⁰² As for the pressing food shortage, the official viewpoint insisted that the really insufficient was not food but the political consciousness of those farmers, who did not know the “principles of good and wrong,” or

²⁰⁰ “中共江苏省委关于开展社会主义思想教育运动的指示” [Directive by CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee on launching the education campaign of socialist thought] (Sep.2, 1957), BYA, 301-2-38.

²⁰¹ “大放大鸣试点情况报告” [Report on the experiments of *dafang daming* (airing one’s views fully and speaking out freely)] (Oct.31, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

²⁰² “农村社会主义教育运动情况通报(第一号)” [Bulletin of rural education campaign of socialist thought (No.1)] (Sep.14, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

could not live a frugal life, or just pretended to be short of food.²⁰³ Consequently, the conclusion of the “debate” was farmers needed more political education. The process of further education was often lengthy and tedious. In Shaojia Co-op, for instance, it consisted of ten-hour group meetings and a two-hour general meeting.²⁰⁴

After the intensive “socialist education,” farmers had rarely dared to question the agricultural reforms publicly. Nevertheless, they had to withstand a severe test—the grain requisition—to prove that they had really given up attempts to challenge the state. After the fall harvest in September 1947, the county committee reported to the regional and provincial leaders that the farmers of Baoying not only had sufficient food, but had much surplus grain for the state’s purchase. Therefore, a requisition quota of about 192 million jin of grain was assigned to Baoying County.²⁰⁵ In order to fulfill the duty, the cadres of Baoying had to do their utmost to press farmers. In Qiaolou Xiang of Sheyang District, for instance, cadres searched 995 households, amounting to ninety percent of the total, for more grain, and even took away the old rice farmers had saved in previous years and the wheat seeds that would be used in the fall planting. As a result, “everyone was in anxiety,” and many of them were no longer in the mood of working, just weeping and worrying all the day.²⁰⁶ At the same time, in order to block the alternative channels of

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ “关于完成粮食征购任务的情况报告” [Report on the requisition and purchase of grain] (Oct.16, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

²⁰⁶ “农村社会主义教育运动情况通报(第四号)” [Bulletin of rural education campaign of socialist thought (No.4)] (Sep.19, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

grain trading, the county government launched a severe attack on the surviving private merchants. Four influential merchants in the black market were arrested, and another 43 small grain traders were also investigated or arrested soon after.²⁰⁷ With these high-handed measures, the grain requisition campaign was carried out more efficiently in 1957 than ever before. Compared to before the full implementation of the socialist education movement, the daily collection of grain soared from 2 million jin to 5.5-6.1 million jin in early September,²⁰⁸ and increased further to 7 million jin at the twenty-day climax of the campaign since September 15.²⁰⁹ Eventually, nearly 223 million jin of grain was collected by the end of the year, even exceeding the assigned quota by 20 million jin.²¹⁰

Nevertheless, the over-fulfillment of grain requisition actually alerted the county leaders rather than satisfied them. This is because they noticed that the total grain yield reported by cooperatives in 1957 was 42 million jin less than the planned target, which meant more grain was collected than expected, but in fact less had been produced.²¹¹ The county leaders believed this contradiction was due to the deceit of the cooperative cadres who purposely underreported grain yield so that they could keep more grain for their own cooperatives; therefore, the over-fulfillment of grain requisition was only a result of the high pressure of the socialist education campaign, which forced cadres to

²⁰⁷ "Report on the situation of class struggle in the campaign of socialist thought (draft)" (Sep.4, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

²⁰⁸ "农村社会主义教育运动情况通报(第三号)" [Bulletin of rural education campaign of socialist thought (No.3)] (Sep.19, 1957), BYA, 301-2-43.

²⁰⁹ "Report on the requisition and purchase of grain" (Oct.16, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Statistics conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee, BYA, 301-2-43.

surrender part of the concealed grain. Nevertheless, the charge of deceit was sternly denied by the cooperative cadres, who pled that the production targets set by the county committee were truly higher than the production capability of farmers, and it was entirely because of their double efforts and conscience that the duty of grain requisition was finally completed above expectation. However, the county leaders countercharged that it was a “rightist mistake of privatism and capitalism” to complain the production targets were unrealistic. Regarding cadres’ deceit as “a timed bomb that would destroy the achievements of grain work and impact the basis of cooperation,” the county committee ordered “the socialist education centering on the grain problems must continue.”²¹² Ironically, the Party leaders had to depend on the large number of cadres they distrusted to implement the political campaigns; therefore, they could not stop reminding themselves that “any progress would only be made through struggles.”²¹³

Conclusion

The socialist education campaign in the summer and fall of 1957 was a powerful counter-attack of the state on those who opposed the agricultural reforms. It finally ended in the firm establishment of the agricultural cooperative system and the state-dominated grain policies. Mainly due to the insufficiency of primary sources, however, the complexity of the agricultural reforms and farmers’ reactions has been largely oversimplified in most prior studies. Therefore, the study on the archives of Baoying

²¹² “Report on the requisition and purchase of grain” (Oct.16, 1957), BYA, 301-1-26.

²¹³ *ibid.*

County may present more details that could be useful for further discussion on some basic problems on the agricultural cooperation movement in China.

First, the defenders of agricultural cooperation often argue that this reform was based on the customary tradition of “labor exchange”, and it therefore complied with farmers’ desire to improve their farming productivity. Nevertheless, the situation of Baoying shows that “labor exchange” was not commonly practiced in the whole country, and collective farming was totally a new concept to the farmers in the areas without this tradition. As for farmers’ desire to increase productivity through cooperation, it actually varied by their economic conditions. As the study on Baoying indicates, at the initial stage of the reforms, most middle farmers and rich farmers, amounting to about half of the rural population, were able to maintain basic living standards through household farming, and they did not have any motives to cooperate with each other, not to mention help poor farmers. In the meanwhile, poor farmers, amounting to the other half of the rural population, did hope to join cooperatives so that they could share the tools and livestock of well-to-do farmers; however, when they found most middle and rich farmers had declined to join cooperatives, many of them also lost interest in cooperating with other poor fellow villagers. Consequently, only a part of poor farmers still maintained some interest in agricultural cooperation, but they eventually played little role in the implementation of the reforms due to their limited influence in the countryside. In fact, all farmers had been completely excluded from the decision-making process throughout the movement, and all the policies related to grain production (such as the MATs and agricultural cooperatives) and grain distribution (such as the UPUS and three-fixed

quotas) were only decided by the Party leaders alone. In addition, the operation of cooperatives was fully under the control of local cadres, and there were no formal channels for ordinary farmers to participate in the management. In short, from the formal proposal in 1953, through the climax in 1955-56 and crisis in 1956-57, and finally to the firm establishment in late 1957, the implementation of agricultural cooperation was mainly due to the insistence of the state rather than the voluntary demand of farmers.

Even so, however, farmers did not merely follow the government orders all the time. As this study shows, they explored every opportunity and various forms to express their real desires and to defend their own interests. For example, at the beginning of the reforms, farmers subtly released their resentment through traditional folk religions; as the movement went further their resistance became more open and forthright by beating cadres, concealing grain, reaping crops privately, and even denouncing the reforms publicly. Traditional studies often overlooked these resistances, and thus overestimated the capacity of the CCP to impose an authoritarian rule over farmers in the 1950s. On the other hand, some scholars have recently noticed the frequent records of rural conflicts during the agricultural cooperation movement, but they attribute them only to local cadres for violating the principles proposed by the top Party leaders, which emphasized “voluntariness” of farmers’ enrollment in cooperatives and the “mutual benefit” among cooperative members. This viewpoint neglect the fact that farmers’ resistance actually had exposed the paradox of these two principles: since farmers had neither been consulted in the process of decision-making, nor been given any chance to manage cooperatives, how could they participate in the reforms “voluntarily?” To combine all

farmers in a unitary system while disregard their different economic conditions and interests, how could it be “mutually beneficial” for all cooperative members? Hence, as long as the reforms were only imposed top-down by the state, and no effective communication had ever been established between farmers and cadres, there would be no real voluntariness or mutual-benefit, and farmers’ resistance would be inevitable.

Some scholars compared the agricultural cooperation movements in China and the Soviet Union, and argued that the Chinese reform was more successful in avoiding the violent revolt of farmers. As for the reasons of this “success,” they mainly attribute it to the stage-by-stage implementation of the movement. Nevertheless, the study on Baoying shows that, in spite of the gradual development from seasonal MATs and long-term MATs to the primary cooperatives and advanced cooperatives, the time interval between each two stages actually was too short for the government to consolidate the reforms, or for farmers to adapt to the changes. As a result, on the contrary to pacify the opponents, the frequently changed policies might make farmers mistrust the government and suspect the reforms. In addition, behind the widespread foundation of cooperatives, there were mismanagement and recurring crisis that could not be improved or settled within the existing institutional framework, and the agricultural production actually benefited little from the reforms. Therefore, the superficial popularity of cooperatives was far from proving a mature institution had been successfully established. Furthermore, during the course of the movement, class struggle also expanded step-by-step to turn rich farmers, private merchants, rich-middle farmers, and finally all those opposing the reforms into class enemies. This could be considered “successful” from the perspective of the state in

terms of preventing a united resistance of all potential opponents against its policies; to ordinary farmers, however, it only created a “terrible” panic that everyone could become the target of punishment.

In the long run, the suppression of dissent caused more serious results: on the one hand, encouraged by the continued success in quieting the dissenters, the policy-makers became more and more confident and ambitious, and the top-down process of decision-making was also increasingly reinforced; on the other hand, frightened and hit by frequent campaigns of class struggle, ordinary people had gradually lost the will and capacity to defend their own positions. Consequently, the last error-correction mechanism had become dysfunctional, and any wrong policy could be made and implemented without timely correction. At the same time, the farmer-state relations also changed fundamentally. If the CCP intended to play the role of liberator in the time of land reform by distributing land to poor farmers, then it had become a competitor to farmers in the early 1950s for the attempt to monopolize agricultural resources, and finally in 1957 by suppressing farmers’ resistance to the cooperative reforms, the CCP had made itself the master of farmers. Accordingly, Party leaders also changed their attitude toward farmers. For example, by late 1957, the county leaders of Baoying had formed a belief that food shortage was mainly due to the false report of cooperative cadres and farmers’ concealing of surplus grain; therefore, in order to maximize the state’s interest, it was justified to maintain a hard line on farmers. This prejudice would inevitably mislead their judgment when famine really occurred.

Of course, it still needs the study of agriculture and economics experts to determine the advantages and disadvantages of agricultural cooperation. But as for the agricultural cooperation movement in China during 1952-57, it was indeed a fierce political struggle more than an economic reform. As a result of this movement, political factors became dominant in all aspects of agriculture, and the state finally integrated all rural resources into the system of planned economy. Consequently, few options were left to Chinese farmers and agriculture, and abundant seeds of crisis had been sowed for the coming years.

CHAPTER III
THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD TO A GREAT FAMINE:
THE BAOYING INCIDENT, 1958-1960

By the end of 1957, most rural areas of China had completed the agricultural cooperation reform and thereby established a collective farming system. Soon after, Mao Zedong launched the Great Leap Forward Movement in 1958, which ended in a great famine claiming the lives of tens of millions of farmers. Due to the isolation of China from the outside world up until the 1970s, the famine was largely kept secret from the Western public, and within China, the government struggled to describe it as a “natural disaster.” It was not until the late 1980s that some cruel stories of the famine were reported by a few journalists and writers; this soon inspired the interest of more researchers in this event.²¹⁴ Thanks to their work, more information about the famine, in particular the massive deaths in several specific areas, was revealed during the following two decades. Nevertheless, under the strict control of media and archives by the Chinese government, most research on the Great Famine had to depend on fragmentary, sometimes unverifiable, sources. Only in recent years have historians published articles and books based on the newly available materials. Some managed to calculate the real number of deaths by using statistical methods; some utilized new sources to re-evaluate the general effect of the famine on different provinces, and some conducted micro-studies

²¹⁴ Such as 丁抒 [Ding Shu], 人祸: “大跃进”与大饥荒 [*Man-made Calamity: “Great Leap Forward” and the Great Famine*] (Hong Kong: Jiushi Niandan Zaizhishe Press, 1991); Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao’s Secret Famine* (New York: The Free Press, 1996).

at the village level and presented in-depth studies through field research.²¹⁵ All these researches have come to the conclusion that the Great Famine was a human-made tragedy instead of a natural disaster, and it was one of the most terrible catastrophes in human history given the huge death toll in a single famine.

Nevertheless, despite a new law in China allowing the declassification of archives more than thirty years old, large numbers of documents pertaining to the famine are still restricted to general researchers for political reasons. This leaves plenty of room for further discussions of some less studied problems, such as the regional variations of the famine, the roles played by the Party cadres at different levels, and the responses of ordinary farmers towards the famine. In an attempt to explore these problems, this paper examines the Great Leap Forward Movement and the Great Famine of Baoying County, an area near Shanghai comprising over 1,000 villages and a population of nearly 500,000. With mild climate and substantial water resources, Baoying was traditionally known as “the land of fish and rice,” but the farmers in this region suffered massive deaths in 1959-1960. Until today, however, there has been no in-depth study of this incident. Based on some 2,000 pages of unpublished data in local archives, I will trace the development of Baoying’s famine and reveal how the tragedy came into being. Furthermore, large

²¹⁵ Such as 杨继绳[Yang Jisheng], 墓碑: 中国六十年代大饥荒纪实 [*Tombstone: A True Record of the Great Famine in 1960s China*] (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Ltd., 2008); Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: the History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010); Ralph Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); 林蕴晖[Lin Yunhui], 乌托邦运动: 从大跃进到大饥荒, 1958-1961 [*An Utopian Movement: from the Great Leap Forward to the Great Famine, 1958-1961*] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2008); Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer eds. *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: U.B.C. Press, 2011).

volumes of confidential documents also enable me to look at the incident from the inside perspectives of the Party cadres, and to examine the intricate interactions between the county leaders, commune cadres and ordinary farmers throughout the crisis.

On the Eve of the Great Leap Forward

In the Agricultural Cooperation Movement, not only landlords and rich farmers were attacked by the government as “class enemies,” but all middle and poor farmers opposing the movement were condemned as “bad elements” or “the class enemies within the people.” As a result, nobody dared to resist the movement openly and 99 percent of the rural population in Baoying County had enrolled in agricultural cooperatives by the end of 1957; the agricultural cooperative system therefore was firmly established. Given this achievement, most Party cadres from the central down to the grassroots level believed that “the period of rapid development of revolution” had come to an end, and in the next stage they should focus on consolidating the cooperative system so as to obtain “stable development” in agriculture.²¹⁶ This view was officially reflected in the “Outline of Agricultural Cooperation Development for 1956-1976” issued by the central government in August 1957. This blueprint pointed out that strengthening and perfecting the agricultural cooperative system would be a major objective of the second five-year economic plan for 1958-62; it further suggested that a twelve-year plan needed to be

²¹⁶ “中共江苏省委组织部关于贯彻执行‘中央关于今后干部工作方法的通知’的报告” [Report by the Organization Department of CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee on the implementation of the ‘notice by the Central Committee about future methods of the cadre-work ’] (Apr.12, 1957), Baoying Archives (BYA), 301-2-38.

made to promote agricultural mechanization and increase the grain reserves of all cooperatives in China.²¹⁷ Although the document only proposed general objectives rather than specific measures, it was obviously evident that, after seven years of intensive reforms, the economic planners of China had come to recognize the importance of a mid- and long-term planning for the steady and sustainable development of agriculture. Nevertheless, it turned out that most proposals mentioned in the outline were not put into practice in the following two decades. In Baoying, for instance, the county leaders were only attracted by one point of the outline, which was to increase the grain output in the areas south of the Huai River, where Baoying County was located, to 800 jin per mu in twelve years.²¹⁸ This inspired Xu Xiangdong, the Party boss of Baoying, to put forward a goal in his annual report of 1957 that this objective must be achieved earlier than planned.²¹⁹

Despite Xu's confidence and ambitions, however, a meeting called by the County Committee in January 1958 revealed that serious resentment was building up among farmers as the high grain requisition quotas for 1957 had reduced their grain rations to a critical point. Under intense pressure from the County Committee, the cooperative cadres

²¹⁷ “一九五六年到一九六七年全国农业发展纲要(草案的修改稿)” [Outline for national agricultural development from 1956-1967 (revised version)], BYA, 301-2-37.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ “为提早完成单位面积产量 800 斤而奋斗（徐向东同志在全县第四次区书会议讨论毛主席关于正确处理人民内部矛盾的问题报告的总结）” [Struggling for achieving an output of 800 jin per unit early (a final report by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the Fourth Conference for District Party Secretaries on the discussion about Chairman Mao's report on how to correctly handle the conflicts within the people)], BYA, 301-1-26.

had made every effort to extract as much grain as possible from every household; some even pointed their guns at farmers, demanding them to surrender part of their grain allotments.²²⁰ Eventually, the grain requisition for 1957 was over-fulfilled in Baoying; at the same time, it also caused a food shortage for many families in late 1957 and early 1958. According to the report of some cooperatives, 80 percent of the households could afford only two meals of rice gruel every day, and about five percent would run out of food by February 1958.²²¹ Consequently, many farmers were forced to suspend contact with their relatives and friends because they had no extra food to receive guests; some extremely poor families even had to adopt out their children at a price of 2-12 *yuan* each.²²² Meanwhile, many areas had seen a sharp increase in the stealing of food and money as well.²²³ Given these facts, it was understandable that farmers showed great resentment towards the grain requisitions, and many called the honorary certificates issued by the government for selling grain to the state as “killing knives” in private.²²⁴

This difficult situation prompted farmers to compare the rule of the Communists with that of the Nationalists. The Nationalist government had also imposed heavy grain

²²⁰ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第三期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)] (Jan.13, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²¹ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第六期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 6)] (Jan.16, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²² “四级干部正风会议简报 (第十期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 10)] (Jan.20, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²³ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第九期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 9)] (Jan.19, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²⁴ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 10)” (Jan.20, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

levies, but it never banned farmers from working in towns and cities to earn extra cash or purchasing additional food on the market. Under the system of agricultural cooperation, however, all farmers were tied to their collective units and thereby lost the freedom of movement. Furthermore, the strict control of the government over the grain market made it very difficult for farmers to purchase extra food outside cooperatives. Consequently, farmers had fewer alternatives to relieve themselves from a food shortage in the 1950s than in the Republican era. Based on personal experience, therefore, some farmers mocked: “The policy of the Communists sound good, but cannot guarantee sufficient food for the three meals every day; the rule of the Nationalists was bad, but a man at least could feed three generations of his family by taking odd jobs with a carrying pole.”²²⁵

In addition to feeling helpless, many farmers were alienated by the way the cooperative cadres treated them. For example, in an effort to forbid farmers from taking grain home, the cadres of many cooperatives sent boats directly to the paddy fields to collect rice on site,²²⁶ and anyone, regardless of class statuses, could become the target of class struggle for voicing any criticism of the state’s policies.²²⁷ Many farmers thus concluded that the communist cadres behaved no differently from the Nationalist officials

²²⁵ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 9)” (Jan.19, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²⁶ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第十一期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 11)] (Jan.21, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²⁷ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第八期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 8)] (Jan.18, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

and bandits; some poor farmers complained that the CCP was treating them even worse than former landlords did.²²⁸

In fact, a confidential document of the County Committee reported that many farmers considered the communist regime as one of the worst in Chinese history. For example, some accused that: “Even emperors and their officials could take care of the people like their own children, but the CCP treated the people just like cattle and horses.”²²⁹ And more farmers compared the communist revolution to two influential but failed rural rebellions in the 17th and 19th centuries, implying that the CCP revolution would be eventually suppressed by the Nationalists.²³⁰ However flawed their knowledge of history, these farmers’ attitude towards the CCP indicated that they still questioned the legitimacy of the throne nearly ten years after the foundation of the PRC. The report of many cooperative cadres also confirmed that a number of cooperative members, including some poor farmers, still anticipated the restoration of the Nationalist government in early 1958.²³¹

²²⁸ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 11)” (Jan.21, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²²⁹ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第五期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 5)] (Jan.15, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³⁰ The two great rebellions were led by Li Zichen in the 1640s and Hong Xiuquan in the 1850s-1860s respectively. “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 8)” (Jan.18, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³¹ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第十二期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 12)] (Jan.22, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28; “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 10)” (Jan.20, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

Besides food shortage, farmers were also frustrated by the growing gap in living conditions between ordinary farmers and cadres. The foremost differences, according to the report of the cooperative cadres at the county conference, were described vividly in a doggerel epigram among farmers: “The county chiefs wear leather coats; the district cadres wear sweaters; the *xiang* cadres wear cotton coats...and the common people only have worn clothes.”²³² Another doggerel read: “The County Committee cadres have two fried and two stewed dishes every day, and the district committee cadres eat milk and bread; in Spring Festival, the *xiang* cadres have steamed buns and rice cakes, but the ordinary cooperative members can only eat greens and potherbs.”²³³ The privileges enjoyed by cadres made many farmers complain that they had been cheated by the communists, who once declared to represent the interests of the poor but in fact cared nothing about farmers’ sufferings.²³⁴ Some even declared that the CCP was an agent of the capitalists and bureaucrats, and the real purpose of its agricultural reforms was to promote the interests of the capitalist class at the expense of poor farmers’ lives.²³⁵ Farmers’ suspicion of CCP’s nature revealed a paradoxical outcome of the socialist

²³² “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 9)” (Jan.19, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 6)” (Jan.16, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28; “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 11)” (Jan.21, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³⁵ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 8)” (Jan.18, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28. “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 9)” (Jan.19, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

agricultural reform: on the one hand, it lifted poor farmers from the bottom to the top of the rural political structure and encouraged them to turn the old society upside down through attacking landlords and rich farmers; on the other hand, however, it established a new hierarchical society in which many cooperative members who had been classified as “poor farmers” during land reform remained lowest in the economic scale. Consequently, the wide gap between the political and economic statuses further awakened the identity-consciousness of many poor farmers, and even stimulated them to use the rhetoric of class struggle to question the justice of the new social order they had helped create.

Farmers’ resentment was echoed by many cooperative cadres, who testified at the county meeting that large numbers of farmers had been running out of money, grain and straw (for heating).²³⁶ Some cadres complained that the government not only failed to save those who “were now underwater,” but also acerbated their problems by dragging them down;²³⁷ others even warned that, if the government insisted on imposing heavy grain requisitions, the current situation might lead to a disaster that would make many people die and force the rest to rebel.²³⁸ Nevertheless, contrary to their expectations, the county leaders took farmers’ discontent as evidence that an intense struggle between the

²³⁶ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 6)” (Jan.16, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³⁷ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第七期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 7)] (Jan.17, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²³⁸ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 11)” (Jan.21, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28; “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 9)” (Jan.19, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28; “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 12)” (Jan.22, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

socialists and capitalists still existed in the countryside, and those cadres who sympathized with farmers were criticized for standing by the “rightists” and “bad elements” to “humiliate the Party.”²³⁹ The criticism against these cooperative cadres lasted about ten days, and everyone was interrogated on personal experiences, class background, and the motive to speak for farmers.²⁴⁰ Knowing too well the consequence and potential misfortune of being labeled “rightists” or “bad elements,” most cooperative cadres changed their position quickly. Some explained that what they had said about the food shortage and farmers’ resentment were only hearsay and did not reflect their own opinions; some even tried to show their support for the cooperative system by praising its advantages — though the reasons they could find, such as “one meal a day is better than begging after all,” were often less than convincing.²⁴¹ As a result, many cadres appeared to have become the enthusiastic advocates of agricultural cooperation, competing to pledge that the average grain productivity of 800 jin per mu would be achieved ahead of plan in their respective cooperatives.²⁴²

²³⁹ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第二十五期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 25)] (Feb.7, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28; “四级干部正风会议简报 (第十五期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 15)] (Jan.27, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²⁴⁰ “Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 15)” (Jan.27, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²⁴¹ “四级干部正风会议简报 (第十八期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 18)] (Jan.30, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

²⁴² “四级干部正风会议简报 (第二十四期)” [Briefing on the rectification meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 24)] (Feb.5, 1958), BYA, 301-1-28.

The People's Communes and the Great Leap Forward

The food crisis in Baoying lasted until August 1958 when the new rice was ready for harvest. Just around this time, *People's Daily*, the Party's main mouthpiece, published a report on August 18 about Mao Zedong's inspection trip in Henan and Shandong provinces, where he was introduced to a new form of rural organization called the people's communes. By quoting Mao's comment that "the people's communes are good," the reporter proclaimed that the institution of agricultural cooperation "had made another great stride forward" en route from socialism to communism.²⁴³ Probably unexpected by Mao himself, and even without any direction from the Politburo, this report soon inspired a groundswell of enthusiasm for communes.²⁴⁴ This was the first time the masses were directly mobilized by Mao's personal opinions published in newspapers. Consequently, the people's communes were created all over China after the pattern of Henan and Shandong provinces. A commune usually consisted of all the cooperative members within a xiang, and therefore had sufficient manpower to organize large-scale projects of agricultural production and water conservancy construction. Consequently, farmers were reorganized into production teams and brigades and were often required to work day and night for a consecutive period of time (days, weeks, or longer), just like fighting a battle.²⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in order to save farmers', especially

²⁴³ "人民公社好" [People's Communes are Good], 人民日报 [*People's Daily*] (Aug. 18, 1958).

²⁴⁴ Lin Yunhui, *An Utopian Movement: from the Great Leap Forward to the Great Famine, 1958-1961*, p.167.

²⁴⁵ "宝应湖人民公社建社工作小结" [Summary of the creation of Baoyinghu People's Commune] (Sep.22, 1958), BYA, 301-2-49.

women's, time from being wasted in housework, all commune members were required to eat together at the public canteens, and children and the aged would be looked after by kindergartens and rest homes respectively. In short, farmers' lives were further organized collectively than ever before, and the designers believed this semi-military organization would greatly enhance the agricultural productivity.

As in most areas in China, communes were rapidly founded in Baoying County, usually with ten days or several weeks.²⁴⁶ At first, a mobilization meeting was called in every cooperative, asking all households to write statements of determination to show their support for further collectivization. Then farmers were required to submit applications to join the future communes. The applications would be forwarded to the County Committee for approval as if it were farmers' spontaneous desire for collectivism that initiated the campaign. Soon after, the public canteens, kindergartens and rest homes were established one after another, and finally a large-scale mass meeting would be held to celebrate the foundation of the commune. Usually, the celebration meeting in a normal sized commune was attended by a crowd of 2,000-3,000 farmers and cadres, but the number of participants could reach 6,000-7,000 in some large communes. The meeting places were often decorated with red flags; some farmers were organized to play gongs, drums and trumpets, and others to perform traditional dances.²⁴⁷ To make it more like a festival, many farmers began to slaughter pigs and chickens—though their real motive

²⁴⁶ “关于卞塘人民公社经过情况小结报告” [Summary of the creation of Biantang People's Commune] (Sep.22, 1958), BYA, 301-2-49.

²⁴⁷ “Summary of the creation of Baoyinghu People's Commune” (Sep.22, 1958), BYA, 301-2-49.

was to consume the meat by themselves instead of hand them over to the communes as required by the government.²⁴⁸ A statistic conducted by the County Committee in November 1958 showed that there had been eleven communes founded in Baoying, among which the largest had more than 120,000 members and the smallest had nearly 40,000. In addition, 3,767 public canteens were opened to serve at least 90 percent of the commune members, and 3,248 kindergartens and 421 rest homes were also announced to be established.²⁴⁹ At the same time, over 740,000 such communes were founded all around China.²⁵⁰ Consequently, all the farmers of China had seemed to be assembled into a high-efficiency machine, being ready to bring a great leap forward for China's economy.

The communes soon displayed their high efficiency — in falsifying data, however, instead of enhancing productivity. In responding to the call of the central government for making great progress in agricultural production, from November 1958 the communes of Baoying began to compete with each other to report high grain yield. Inspired by the Soviet Union's success in launching two man-made satellites in 1957, the Chinese press commonly called this competition "sending satellites" in order to highlight its unprecedented achievements in Chinese history.²⁵¹ The commune cadres reporting the highest grain production were praised by the county leaders as being "loyal and honest"

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Statistics by CCP Baoying County Committee (Nov.18, 1958), BYA, 301-2-50.

²⁵⁰ "关于人民公社若干问题的决议(一九五八年十二月十日)" [Some resolutions on the people's communes (Dec.10, 1958)], BYA, 301-2-72.

²⁵¹ Lin Yunhui, p.133.

to the Party, and therefore were rewarded with red flags, honorary certificates, bicycles or cash; a few of them were selected to attend national award assemblies in Beijing or promoted to the positions of County Committee members.²⁵² On the contrary, the brigades and teams falling behind in the competition were given white flags as symbol of humiliation for holding back the Great Leap Forward Movement; sometimes a “politically backward” village would even be demolished entirely, and its residents be forced to move to other “red flag teams.”²⁵³ The cadres reluctant to overly exaggerate were publicly criticized by the county leaders as conservatives, and many were suspended from their duties or required to make self-criticisms repeatedly. A commune cadre, for instance, was locked in the hostel of the county government for several weeks in December 1958 to write confession letters; he was banned from returning home even if his child became seriously sick and his wife suffered a mental disorder. In great despair, he later admitted, he had thought of suicide for many times.²⁵⁴

As more activists of the Great Leap Forward were promoted to the County Committee and dominated its leadership, the voices of dissidents were largely suppressed, and the commune cadres wrote articles one after another to confess their own conservatism. Consequently, more “satellites” were sent and the grain yield reported by

²⁵² “四级干部会议情况简报(第三期)”[Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76; “四级干部会议情况简报(第四期)” [Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 4)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

²⁵³ “宝应县城镇公社的‘五风’记要” [Summary of the ‘five winds’ in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County] (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

²⁵⁴ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

communes soon skyrocketed from hundreds to thousands jin per unit. According to a statistics conducted in November 1958 among 168 production teams, 152 had declared average grain productivity between 3,000-8000 jin per mu, and 7 teams even reported a number above 10,000 jin.²⁵⁵ (Table 1) If judging from these official figures only, the grain production of Baoying had increased by 10-20 times in less than one year. Based on similar accomplishments reported from all over China, the CCP Central Committee proudly announced: “A new social organization is emerging like the rising sun in the eastern Asia.” And it further predicted that, as long as China followed this pattern of development, it would become “a socialist country with highly developed modern industry, modern agriculture and modern science and culture” within 15-20 years.²⁵⁶

Table 1: The number of brigades reporting high yield of grain per mu

Above 10,000 jin	9,999-9,000 jin	8,999-8,000 jin	7,999-7,000 jin	6,999-6,000 jin	5,999-5,000 jin	4,999-4,000 jin	3,999-3,000 jin
7	1	10	13	19	32	50	27

Source: the data compiled by CCP Baoying County Committee in November 1958, BYA, 301-2-50

²⁵⁵ Statistics by CCP Baoying County Committee (Nov.20, 1958), BYA, 301-2-50.

²⁵⁶ “Some resolutions on the people’s communes (Dec.10, 1958)”, BYA, 301-2-72.

Nevertheless, despite the optimistic propaganda in media, the actual effect of the Great Leap Forward on the rural economy and farmers' lives was more destructive than constructive. First, as the county leaders over emphasized large-scale collective farming, numerous manpower and resources were consequently expended in vain. In late 1957 and early 1958, for instance, the County Committee invested a number of land, seeds and able-bodied laborers from several communes into an experimental field, and even 1,000 students of Baoying High School were also organized to help plant rice seeds.²⁵⁷ The content of experiment, however, was only about deep ploughing and close planting, two measures advocated by the Central Committee as accessible alternatives to modern machines and chemical fertilizers to increase the productivity. According to cadres' orders, therefore, farmers dug the soil as deep as two *chi*, or about 2.2 feet, making neither tractors nor cattle able to work on the field full of trenches; even farmers would fall into them if they were not careful enough when working.²⁵⁸ Further, in order to plant 100,000 rice seedlings per mu as required by the county leaders, knotted ropes were lined up in the paddy field and farmers were required to transplant one seedling beside each knot. As a result, the speed of planting was considerably reduced, and many farmers

²⁵⁷ “四级干部会议情况简报(第二期)”[Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 2)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*

suffered skin ulceration due to the long time spent in water.²⁵⁹ Despite all these efforts, however, the experimental field only produced eighty jin of rice per mu, which was fairly low even by the traditional standard.²⁶⁰ But even so, few people dared to question the decisions of the County Committee, and similar experiments were conducted in more communes. In Zhangshi Commune, for example, more than 10,000 farmers and 400 cattle were put into an experimental field.²⁶¹ Meanwhile, the County Committee organized another labor force consisting of some 4,000 able-bodied men to construct water conservancy in the day and to work on a new experimental field at night.²⁶²

The emphasis on quantity over quality in the use of natural and human resources eventually resulted in a grain yield much lower than the commune cadres had announced. The average yield of rice per mu, for instance, was only 220-230 jin, or about 300 jin at most; in some areas, it was as low as 100 jin.²⁶³ The quotas of grain requisition, however, were still set by the County Committee on the base of the exaggerated figures. In Zhangshi Brigade, for instance, the actual rice yield was 500-600 jin per mu, but the brigade cadres reported 14,000 jin to the County Committee during the competition of “sending satellites.” As a result, an extra 10 million jin of grain requisition was assigned

²⁵⁹ “Summary of the ‘five winds’ in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County” (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

²⁶⁰ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 2)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

²⁶¹ “Summary of the ‘five winds’ in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County” (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ “内部资料(第一号)”[Internal materials (No.1)] (Jan.24, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

to this brigade in addition to its normal quotas. In order to fulfill the quotas, cadres launched a search in all production teams for the remaining grain and consequently took away additional 3 million jin of rice, most of which were the only food and seeds the farmers possessed. Soon after, the public canteens of Zhangshi Brigade had to suspend service due to the lack of grain. Similar situation commonly happened in other brigades and communes.²⁶⁴

In addition to grain requisitions, the County Committee also urged communes to contribute to the “great leap forward” of industry by creating various factories. Consequently, in order to collect wood for constructing factory buildings, large numbers of farmers’ houses were demolished and trees were felled. In Caodian Commune, for instance, 586 rooms were destroyed under the order of the commune cadres.²⁶⁵ In Huangpu Commune, more than 900 farmers were organized to cut down all the trees they could find in the commune’s domain. Eventually, these farmers produced some 3 million jin of timber after consuming more than 90,000 jin of grain in a week, leaving rivers blocked by the fallen branches and the local ecological system damaged irreversibly.²⁶⁶ Despite these preparations, however, most plans for new factories were abandoned eventually. But even so, cadres still found a way to achieve the “great leap forward” in industrial development: they ordered that all craftsmen, such as shoemakers and pen

²⁶⁴ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

²⁶⁵ Records of the meeting for the cadres of four ranks, 1960, BYA, 301-2-87.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*; “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

repairers, name their business stalls factories. In this way, many communes proudly announced they had “founded about a hundred factories overnight.”²⁶⁷

At the same time, farmers were forced to surrender their personal property to support a variety of collective projects. In the campaign of making steel, for instance, cadres collected nearly all metal appliances owned by farmers, such as pans, bronze basins, spades, spoons, shovels, hoes, ploughshares and even the wire bands on the wooden buckets, to be used as raw materials for producing steel, and countless wood pillars, furniture and waterwheels were also burnt as fuel in backyard furnaces.²⁶⁸ Meanwhile, some large-scale water projects consumed enormous resources and labor as well. In the course of dredging the Grand Canal, for instance, the county government requisitioned about 500 mu of land, 152 handcarts, 474 pieces of furniture, and more than 100,000 jin of timber from many communes. As a result, over 1,000 rooms of farmers’ houses were destroyed, leaving some 500 families homeless.²⁶⁹ To make it worse, farmers not only lost their personal properties without any compensation, but also had to work without pay because all their wages had been held back by the communes to be invested in the collective projects. In short, all the manpower, material, and financial resources in the countryside were subject to requisition whenever the Party cadres wanted.

²⁶⁷ “Summary of the ‘five winds’ in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County” (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

²⁶⁸ Ibid; “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 2)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

²⁶⁹ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 2)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

Feeling helpless and unable to resist, farmers lamented that they could only tremble in “the rain of communization” and “the thunder of [cadres’] command.”²⁷⁰

The Beginning of a Great Famine

The excessive grain requisitions for 1958 inevitably caused a food crisis in Baoying at the turn of 1958 and 1959, which was far more serious than the one in late 1957. In Baoyinghu Commune, for example, the average grain ration for each commune member dropped to 1.2 jin of raw rice per day, which was merely enough to make two meals of rice gruel, and the dry cooked rice was only available in the public canteens every four days.²⁷¹ In fact, many communes even could not maintain this minimum, and a number of public kitchens had exhausted all the remaining grain they had. A survey conducted by the County Committee in late January 1959 showed that at least 404 out of the 765 brigades in Baoying were suffering food shortages.²⁷² And, even worse, the limited amount of grain reserves further decreased due to frequent fires and increasing stealing. Between December 1, 1958 and January 10, 1959, for instance, there were 41

²⁷⁰ “四级干部会议情况简报(第六期)”[Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 6)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

²⁷¹ “Internal materials (No.1)” (Jan.24, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁷² Although agricultural cooperatives had been integrated into communes in late 1958 and were not involved in the formal administrative system of communes, they still remained as basic organizational units in practice in early 1959.

incidents of fire caused by carelessness or arson reported to the County Committee, which burned up about 2,500 jin of grain and 1,800 jin of straws.²⁷³

In fact, the food crisis in Baoying was replicated across China. Alarmed by this problem, both the central government and Jiangsu provincial government held meetings in January 1959 to warn the rural cadres of the possible riots staged by the hungry farmers.²⁷⁴ Consequently, the County Committee of Baoying decided to strengthen the surveillance on those “unstable elements,” including landlords, rich farmers, anti-revolutionaries, bad elements and the rightists, so as to prevent them from taking advantage of the famine to incite riots.²⁷⁵ Except this, however, the county leaders made no effective effort to alleviate the food shortages.

Despite the difficulties in the countryside, Mao Zedong positively commented on the Great Leap Forward at the second Zhengzhou Meeting in March 1959. He asserted that the achievements of the Great Leap Forward were much greater than problems. He drew an analogy that if the problem was one finger, then the achievements would be nine

²⁷³ “宝应县政法公安部关于当前农村治安情况的报告” [Report by the department of politics, law and public security on current security situation in the countryside] (Jan.10, 1959), BYA, 301-2-67.

²⁷⁴ Reference for the standing committee members of CCP Baoying County Committee (Jan.17, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁷⁵ The main measures included evaluating the performance of everyone monthly, seasonally, and annually, and at the same time to disintegrate them through different strategies, such as downgrading or increasing the degree of prosecutions and putting on house arrest or jails. “Report by the department of politics, law and public security on current security situation in the countryside” (Jan.10, 1959), BYA, 301-2-67.

fingers.²⁷⁶ After Mao set the tone for the official views on the Great Leap Forward, few people dared to openly question the movement any more. In May 1959, Xu Xiangdong, the Party boss of Baoying, echoed Mao's comment by addressing the cadres of Baoying that the Great Leap Forward Movement had achieved incomparable success in economic development throughout Chinese history.²⁷⁷ On this ground, the county leaders insisted that there was a great harvest of grain in 1958, and anyone still talking about food shortages would be considered to fool leaders for the purpose to conceal more grain for private consumption.²⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the Party leaders continued to view mass movements as the most effective way to achieve the objectives of social and economic reforms. In early 1959, for example, the government launched a campaign called the Patriotic Sanitation Movement to kill off flies, mosquitoes, mice and sparrows. The climax of this campaign came when all farmers were organized to stage "an all-out war" against sparrows, which were blamed for eating crops. Under the direction of the "Headquarter of Perishing Sparrows" consisting of the county leaders, more than 340,000 farmers were mobilized in Baoying to fight sparrows in various ways, such as scaring them by hooting, exhausting them by chasing, seizing them by nets, and killing them by gun and poison; even children were also taught to shoot sparrows with slingshots. As a result, about 75,000 sparrows were

²⁷⁶ "毛泽东同志在第二次郑州会议上的讲话" [Speech by Comrade Mao Zedong at the second Zhengzhou meeting] (Mar. 1959), BYA, 301-2-72.

²⁷⁷ "徐政委在县四级干部会议上的总结报告" [Final report by Political Commissar Xu at the county meeting for the cadres of four ranks] (May, 1959), BYA, 301-1-33.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*

reportedly killed by the two-day “shock action.” The actual number, however, might be less given the exaggeration in the official reports. For example, Caodian Brigade reported that its members had killed 8,000 sparrows, but in fact only 800 were verified.²⁷⁹ The campaign against sparrows, therefore, not only showed that the Great Leap Forward Movement was sliding further in the direction of irrationality, but suggested that blatant forgeries had become normal in the mass movements even for minor issues like the number of dead sparrows, and the officially published statistics could be unreliable even in the first place.

It turned out that the campaign against sparrows was actually the last mass movement many farmers could participate in their lives. The confidential documents of the County Committee show that deaths of starvation began to appear in Baoying around March 1959 when 984 out of the 4,560 public canteens had exhausted all their grain reserves.²⁸⁰ The closure of some public canteens left large numbers of farmers without stable sources of food. For example, among the 524 households in Shanyang Commune, 131 suffered starvations after eleven canteens were disbanded. The situation was no little better for those still having some food on hand, because the County Committee decided to impose an additional levy of grain in order to welcome the tenth National Day of the People’s Republic. Consequently, farmers were deprived of their last grain and had to

²⁷⁹ “中共宝应县委除五害爱国卫生运动领导小组关于 2 月 10 日—11 日灭雀总体战的报告” [Report by the leading team of CCP Baoying County Committee for the patriotic sanitary campaign of killing off five harmful elements on the total war against sparrows on Feb. 10-11] (Feb.15, 1959), BYA, 301-2-67.

²⁸⁰ “内部资料(第八号)” [Internal materials (No.8)] (Mar.27, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

look for food by themselves.²⁸¹ In Yangqiao Brigade of Shanyang Commune, for instance, only 44 out of 1,046 laborers still worked regularly in March 1959, and all the rest had to collect various potherbs every day.²⁸² In Fanshui Commune, the daily work for some 1,000 farmers was to search for food in the wild, and another hundred farmers simply fled their homes.²⁸³ After consuming all edible plants in their own regions, the army of the hungry would march to neighboring brigades or communes. Many farmers of Hongqiao Commune, for instance, had to set out before dawn to compete with others for the wild plants grown about nine miles away.²⁸⁴ Meanwhile, large numbers of cattle were also suffering hunger because their forage had been eaten up by humans and all the remaining straws had been burnt as fuel by the public canteens. Therefore, as more and more cattle became sick and died, and almost all rice seeds had been collected by the government or been eaten by farmers, the spring planting for 1959 was not carried out at all in many communes, which meant no harvest could be expected in the summer.²⁸⁵

Serious famine made children the first victims of starvation, and adults followed soon. In Ziyinghe Commune alone, seventeen kids died in Dugang Brigade within ten days; four children and fifteen adults of Lang'er Brigade starved to death in less than a

²⁸¹ “四级干部会议情况简报(第四期)” [Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 4)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

²⁸² “Internal materials (No.8)” (Mar.27, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁸³ “内部资料(第七号)” [Internal materials (No.7)] (Mar.24, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁸⁴ “Internal materials (No.8)” (Mar.27, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

month, and another twenty people died in Longhe Brigade.²⁸⁶ It turned out that someone wrote anonymously about the emergent situation to some newspapers, such as the *Workers' Daily*, but eventually these letters were only forwarded to the Party committee of Baoying. The reply by the County Committee was: they had ordered an investigation, which found that all those deaths were caused by diseases instead of starvation.²⁸⁷

Cadres' Dilemma

Despite the famine in spring 1959, the demand of the County Committee for high grain production remained unchanged, but the commune cadres also developed some strategies to retain as more grain as possible to deal with the famine. For example, they usually would report a grain yield less than the actual amount in hope of being assigned less quotas of grain requisitions, and sometimes they even ordered farmers to destroy high-yield crops before the county leaders made inspections to their communes.²⁸⁸ In addition, it was common for the commune cadres to prepare several versions of production reports so that they could have more room to negotiate with the county leaders about the grain yield and requisition quotas.²⁸⁹ However, there were also some cadres

²⁸⁶ "Internal materials (No.7)" (Mar.24, 1959) and "Internal materials (No.8)" (Mar.27, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁸⁷ "关于 1959 年上半年人民来信来访工作报告" [Report on the letters and visits from the people in the first half of 1959] (June 30, 1959), BYA, 301-2-67.

²⁸⁸ "关于当前工作情况的报告" [Report on current situation of work] (Aug.12, 1959), BYA, 301-2-67.

²⁸⁹ "中共宝应县城镇公社党员扩大会议总结报告" [Final report on the enlarged meeting for the Party members of Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County] (May 10, 1959), BYA, 301-1-33.

who had lost patience with the numbers game. They became reluctant to propagate the state's policies or regretted having joined the government, and some even went further to criticize the fever for rapid economic development. For example, in an effort to raise farmers' morale to overcome difficulties, there was a popular slogan in the official media, which read "Beat the tigers of Southern Mountain and kick the dragons of Northern Sea;" some cadres, however, rephrased it into "Beat flies and mosquitoes and kick soft bean curds."²⁹⁰

Cadres' discontentment certainly drew the attention of county leaders. Xu Xiangdong, the Party boss of Baoying, published an article on the *Baoying Daily*, stating that the Great Leap Forward Movement actually reflected the "ideals and wills" of the Chinese people to construct a communist country. He not only blamed the critics of the movement for being too conservative and cowardly to meet the challenges, but confidently provoked them by saying that "those who laugh last, laugh best."²⁹¹ Nevertheless, the voices of discontentment kept rising within the commune cadres in late 1959, which irritated the county leaders so much that they launched a counter-attack at the county-wide cadre conference in December 1959. In the first days of the conference, the attendees from all communes were asked to discuss if the socialist transformation had

²⁹⁰ The tigers of Southern Mountain and the dragons of Northern Sea are traditionally used in China to describe tough obstacles. "关于贯彻主席六条指示、中央农业五条紧急指示的情况报告" [Report on the implementation of Chairman's six directives and Central Committee's five urgent directives on agriculture] (May 21, 1959), BYA, 301-1-35; "关于贯彻克服右倾情绪,厉行增产节约情况的报告" [Report on overcoming right-deviationist sentiments and strictly enforcing the policy of increasing production and practicing economy] (Aug.27, 1959), BYA, 301-1-35.

²⁹¹ 徐向东[Xu Xiangdong], "宝地定要胜天堂!" [The precious land (of Baoying) must be better than heaven!] (Aug.5, 1959), BYA, 301-2-70.

achieved great accomplishments since 1949 and if there was a great leap forward in agriculture since 1958. It turned out that many cadres from poor family backgrounds or who had had relatives killed by the Nationalists or landlord restitution crops were still deeply impressed with the improvement of their social statuses and living conditions in the early years of the P.R.C. When the discussion turned to the grain policies and the Great Leap Forward Movement, however, most commune cadres became dumb and speechless at once.²⁹² Further, when the county leaders pushed them to report the “actual grain yield” of the past two years, they would try to evade the topic in various excuses, such as they had not received complete data from brigades and teams, the natural disasters had damaged many crops, or simply pretending that they could not find their notebooks.²⁹³ In sum, the general atmosphere at the conference was that most commune cadres disagreed with the Great Leap Forward, but few dared to question the movement openly.

Nevertheless, there were still several cadres outspoken and not afraid to express their true opinions. For example, Liu Qingyun, the Second Party Secretary of Liubao Commune, pointed out that there was a decline in grain production in 1959 than in 1958, and many reforms, such as the public canteens, the collective raising of livestock and pigs, and the practice of deep plough and tight planting, only wasted more resources while

²⁹² “三级干部大会简报(第二期)” [Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 2)] (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

²⁹³ “三级干部大会简报(第三期)” [Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 3)] (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

lowering productivity.²⁹⁴ The daily report of the conference to the County Committee showed that Liu's comments resonated with many cadres who had been deeply impressed by the destructive outcome of the Great Leap Forward in their own communes and now witnessed the shortage of goods in the county-seat town. Some joined the criticism by complaining that it was unfair for the government to leave farmers alone suffering hunger while supplying more food to cadres, servicemen and workers; others even compared the Great Leap Forward to a heavily made-up prostitute subjected to the manipulation by the Party leaders, and many pessimistically believed the situation in the countryside would "deteriorate further year by year."²⁹⁵

Several days later after allowing the critics to voice their opinions, the county leaders decided to strike back on the second stage of the conference. Liu Qingyun, the highest rank cadre among the critics, was therefore picked out as a target of class struggle for his "crazy attacks" on the Party. The County Committee distributed copies of Liu's speeches under the title of "vicious comments" and "anti-Party and anti-Socialist lies" to all attendees, and required everyone to condemn Liu in group discussions and by writing big-character posters. After being attacked for nearly ten days, Liu reluctantly admitted that the food shortage was not due to the decline of grain production, but due to the plot of class enemies to conceal grain from the state. In his heart, however, Liu had never

²⁹⁴ "柳堡公社刘庆云同志对党的总路线、大跃进、人民公社的言行材料整理" [Collected materials of the speeches and behaviors of Comrade Liu Qingyun of Liubao Commune in regard to General Line, the Great Leap Forward and the people's communes], BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁹⁵ "关于三级干部整风会议的情况报告" [Report on the situation of the rectification meeting for cadres of three ranks] (Jan.4, 1960), BYA, 301-1-34.

given up his previous views. Caught in this contradiction, he received an inquiry as follows from Xu Xiangdong, the Party boss of Baoying, of his motives for criticizing the Great Leap Forward:

Xu: Do you admit there was a great leap forward or not?

Liu: Looking from what I said, there was no great leap forward in either 1959 or 1958. I really have no special motives for saying so.

Xu: Men must have some motives for doing anything. The difference between men and animals is: men not only have brains, but also have thought systems. What's your motive?

Liu: [My mistake is to] focus on minor problems.

Xu: Why do you focus on minor problems?

Liu: [Because] the socialist thought hasn't been established [in my mind].

Xu: Without an established socialist thought, how [can you] acknowledge the great leap forward?

Liu: I didn't admit it in fact.

Xu: Why?

Liu: Due to the help [from other cadres] in the past few days, I've had a new understanding about the Great Leap Forward.

Xu: Are a few days enough for you to establish the socialist thought?

Liu: No. [But] I now admit there was a great leap forward.

...

Xu: Why did you exaggerate the shortcomings of [Party leaders'] work? What's your purpose?

Liu: No purpose.

Xu: What's your purpose to say no purpose?

Liu: I've never thought of it.

Xu: ... Now putting aside your biases, do you admit there really was a great leap forward?

Liu: I deny it. I only focus on minor problems.

Xu: Why do you deny the great leap forward?

Liu: [Because] I think the quotas of grain requisitions are too high, and a large part of them haven't been completed.

Someone else: Is there any more grain in the communes?

Liu: Yes, there are. [But the grains] have been controlled by the capitalists.

Xu: The grain has been controlled by the capitalists, then why didn't you go to attack the capitalists? If you Liu Qingyun were unable to fight against the capitalists, why hadn't you asked for the help from the Party but attacked the Great Leap Forward instead? Are you honest [to the Party]?

Liu: I'm not.

Xu: Not honest, then why did you say you are an honest man?

...²⁹⁶

Obviously, this illogic inquiry was not helpful to figure out any facts, and the only purpose of the county leaders was to force Liu to confess his crime of “slandering the socialist reforms from the standpoint of capitalism.” Eventually, even in the absence of any evidence, the County Committee declared that Liu and his three colleagues of the same commune were class enemies belonging to an anti-Party clique.²⁹⁷ Meanwhile, all those sympathetic to Liu also received criticism for their “pro-capitalist inclination,” and 69 of them, including six commune Party committee members and 21 brigade Party cadres were selected by the County Committee as the “key targets” to be denounced publicly.²⁹⁸ The attack against these cadres was tightly controlled and well planned by the county leaders, who gathered the activists every day to discuss the tactics to be used in the next step, such as setting the commune cadres against each other and monitoring their dinner chat and sleep talking.²⁹⁹ Consequently, after nearly two weeks of intensive attacks, many cadres lost their appetite and were unable to sleep, dared not speak aloud, or even cried bitterly when being condemned, and soon most of them accepted all

²⁹⁶ “Collected materials of the speeches and behaviors of Comrade Liu Qingyun of Liubao Commune in regard to General Line, the Great Leap Forward and the people’s communes,” BYA, 301-2-70.

²⁹⁷ “Report on the situation of the rectification meeting for cadres of three ranks” (Jan.4, 1960), BYA, 301-1-34.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*; “关于宝应县委执行干部政策方面的检查报告” [Examination report on the implementation of cadre policies by CCP Baoying County Committee] (June 18, 1960), BYA, 301-1-44.

²⁹⁹ “三级干部大会简报(第十七期)” [Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 17)] (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

accusations and made public confessions.³⁰⁰ Even so, they were not spared by the county leaders, who mocked them for “trying to win sympathy with a few drops of tears” and called for more “merciless struggle” to prevent them from one day “picking up whips” and “restoring capitalism.”³⁰¹ Meanwhile, the County Committee showed several propaganda films and staged an exhibition on landlords’ crimes, in hope of defending the Great Leap Forward and the people’s communes by stressing CCP’s contribution to farmers’ “liberation.”³⁰² At the end of the conference, the County Committee conducted a survey and declared that 934 of the 1,500 commune cadres presented at the conference had come to recognize the correctness and achievements of the Great Leap Forward Movement, and the rest still needed more political education.³⁰³

The cadres’ conference lasted about twenty days from late December 1959 to early January 1960, setting an example of dealing with the Party cadres who were critical of the Great Leap Forward Movement. In order to distinguish them from the non-Communist rightists, these cadres were called “the opportunists leaning to the right,” and their crime was to conspire with “the petty proprietors” — referred to some middle

³⁰⁰ “三级干部大会简报(第十一期)” [Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 11)] (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

³⁰¹ “三级干部大会简报(第十六期)” [Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 16)] (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

³⁰² The films were: 第十个春天 [The Eighteenth Spring], 三八河边 [Beside the River of March 8th], and 江山多娇 [The Land Rich in Beauty]. “Report on the situation of the rectification meeting for cadres of three ranks” (Jan.4, 1960), BYA, 301-1-34.

³⁰³ “Report on the situation of the rectification meeting for cadres of three ranks” (Jan.4, 1960), BYA, 301-1-34.

farmers — to “crazily attack the Party’s General Line [of socialist transformation]” from the capitalist standpoint.³⁰⁴ The County Committee therefore proclaimed that the class struggle between the communists and capitalists was growing more intense in the countryside, and now it was time to “send the vile enemies into their coffins forever,” to destroy their reputations “whenever they [were] alive or dead,” and to strike them “wherever they [went] — even if they [went] to the United States.”³⁰⁵ Consequently, a number of commune, brigade and team cadres were purged and punished, and none of the surviving cadres dared to question the movement anymore. Meanwhile, the county leaders also emphasized that the public canteens and people’s communes were the essence of the socialist system that should be maintained and further developed.

Crisis Worsened

The suppression of criticism removed a major obstacle for the county leaders to promote the Great Leap Forward. They soon forced all communes once again to revise the quotas of grain production for 1959 upwards. But each time when the new figures were submitted, the County Committee would reject and demand greater increase. Eventually, after six rounds of revisions, the official statistics of grain yield for 1959 rose from the initial 595 million jin to 702 million jin, far exceeding the actual number. Even so, the county leaders still believed some grain had been concealed by the commune

³⁰⁴ “Bulletin of the conference for cadres of three ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1959), BYA, 301-2-60.

³⁰⁵ “徐向东同志在县委三级干部会议的报告” [Speech by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the county committee meeting for cadres of three ranks] (Dec.25, 1959), BYA, 301-1-34.

cadres. At the same time, by overestimating the productivity and looking forward another “greater leap forward” in agriculture, the County Committee set up a production quota of 830 million jin for 1960.³⁰⁶

Despite the ambitions of county leaders, however, it turned out the actual grain yield for 1959 was twelve percent less than 1958, ranked the third lowest during the past decade. As a result, the communes of Baoying commonly failed to complete their quotas of grain requisition for 1959.³⁰⁷ A report by the County Committee further admitted that at least 3,000 of the 3,839 public canteens had been disbanded in late 1959 and early 1960, and the numbers of kindergartens and rest homes dropped from 2,059 to 735 and from 337 to 135 respectively.³⁰⁸ Meanwhile, more than 10,000 farmers fled their homes to adjacent counties and cities, and deaths had been reported in some communes.³⁰⁹ Nevertheless, the county leaders attributed all problems to the fact that the state’s policies had not been implemented resolutely by cadres.³¹⁰ In fact, they knew well that it would be very hard to achieve the goal of Great Leap Forward, but they insisted that:

³⁰⁶ “中共宝应县委书记处书记黄国桢同志在四级干部誓师大会上的报告” [Speech by secretariat of CCP Baoying County Committee Comrade Huang Guozhen at the oath-taking rally for cadres of four ranks] (Mar.18, 1960), BYA, 301-1-39.

³⁰⁷ “县委第一书记徐向东同志代表县委作关于一九五九年工作检查报告” [A Critical report on the work in 1959 given by the First Secretary of County Committee Comrade Xu Xiangdong representing the County Committee] (Mar.12, 1960), BYA, 301-1-35.

³⁰⁸ “徐政委在县委三级干部大会上的报告” [Speech by Political Commissar Xu at the county committee conference for cadres of three ranks] (Dec.5, 1959), BYA, 301-1-34.

³⁰⁹ “A critical report on the work in 1959 given by the First Secretary of County Committee Comrade Xu Xiangdong representing the County Committee” (Mar.12, 1960), BYA, 301-1-35.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*

“Difficulties are like springs; they are strong only if you are weak.”³¹¹ When the county leaders decided to press the springs firmly from above, therefore, ordinary farmers were doomed to endure the high pressure at the bottom.

By late 1959 and early 1960, the County Committee had entirely fallen under the control of Xu Xiangdong and his followers. All their decisions were based on two assumptions: first, most of the deaths were due to natural reasons like diseases, but the class enemies and bad elements lied that many people had died of starvation for the purpose to discredit the Great Leap Forward Movement. Therefore, anyone continuing to report the incidents of death to the County Committee would be criticized for disturbing leaders, or even be charged of conspiring with the class enemies to attack the Party. Even after the county leaders had personally seen the bodies of the dead and received a report about the death of some 100 children in orphanages, they still insisted uncompromisingly on this assumption.³¹² As a result, the death due to famine became a forbidden topic for the commune cadres, who had to struggle to hide the truth. In Huangcheng Commune, for instance, 1,800 out of 23,000 farmers had died by early 1960, but cadres only reported

³¹¹ “Speech by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the county committee meeting for cadres of three ranks” (Dec.25, 1959), BYA, 301-1-34.

³¹² “徐向东同志在县直和三级党员干部会议上的检查发言” [Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks] (May 9, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

that 700 people fled to other regions.³¹³ In some other communes, cadres even forbade farmers to wear mourning for their deceased family members.³¹⁴

Another assumption the county leaders took for granted was all communes had underreported the amount of grain yield, and must be pressured to surrender more grain to the state. This assumption was reinforced by a report from Chengzhen Commune, whose leaders tried to flatter Xu Xiangdong by admitting that they had uncovered some four million jin of grain concealed by brigades and teams.³¹⁵ As a result, despite the reports from other communes indicating a grain shortage of at least 40,000 jin, the County Committee insisted that there must be tens of millions jin of grain concealed by all the 33 communes of Baoying.³¹⁶ Based on this assumption, the County Committee took several actions in order to extract more grain from communes. At first, it called all communes heads to the county government and forced them to stay there until they had admitted higher amounts of grain yield. Since the minimum expectation of the county leaders far exceeded the actual production, these commune cadres were thrown into a high-pressure situation, and some even thought of committing suicide. But eventually

³¹³ “四级干部会议情况简报(第三期)” [Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

³¹⁴ “中共扬州地委关于宝应县发生严重人口死亡事件的报告” [Report by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee on the serious incident of human deaths in Baoying County] (July 15, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

³¹⁵ “Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks” (May 9, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

most of them had to give up, and a few commune cadres refusing to yield were labeled as anti-Party elements on site.³¹⁷

To admit higher grain yield was only the beginning of the troubles the commune cadres would face. After being released by the county leaders, they were soon haunted by higher quotas of grain requisition allocated by the County Committee, and anyone declining to accept the quotas would be punished as “anti-Party opportunists.” In December 1959, for instance, 69 commune cadres were criticized by the County Committee, and 25 were detained in the county government hostel throughout the spring festival to write confession letters; some of them had to revise their letters for seventeen times.³¹⁸ Further, many cadres were abused more seriously while being interrogated by the County Committee of their “anti-Party activities.” For example, they were forced to stand still and lower their heads when answering questions, and sometimes they would be bound and beaten by the interrogators, or even be sentenced to years in prison as class enemies.³¹⁹ Unable to bear the pressure, some cadres eventually took their own lives.³²⁰

As a result of the purge, the remaining cadres were too frightened to disobey the orders from the County Committee. Meanwhile, the commune leadership fell under the

³¹⁷ “徐诚之同志在县直和三级党员干部会议上的检查发言” [Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Chengzhi at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks] (May 10, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³¹⁸ “Examination report on the implementation of cadre policies by CCP Baoying County Committee” (June 18, 1960), BYA, 301-1-44.

³¹⁹ “江苏省扬州市中级人民法院刑事判决书” [Criminal judgment by the intermediate people’s court of Yangzhou City of Jiangsu Province] (June 13, 1961), BYA, 301-1-40.

³²⁰ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

control of the newly promoted activists, who began to act unscrupulously to implement the plan of grain requisitions. For example, they frequently led militias to search for food house by house, taking away everything edible they could find. During the searches they commonly abused farmers in various ways, such as cursing, beating, and forcing them to stand naked in the public toilets. To those dying of starvation or committing suicide, these activists not only showed no mercy, but condemned them as the capitalists who used death to attack the Party and to avoid punishments.³²¹ Certainly, farmers hated these cadres, but were unable to resist effectively. They could only expressed their anger in private by comparing the cadres to bandits, and many lamented that the communists treated farmers even worse than “the Japanese fascists” and their Chinese cooperators did during the Sino-Japanese War.³²²

The Truth Revealed

Up until the beginning of 1960, Baoying’s famine had not attracted sufficient attention of the prefectural and provincial leaders, whose information sources were mainly from the reports of County Committees. On February 1960, however, the CCP Yangzhou prefectural committee dispatched a team to Baoying to examine the progress of the Great Leap Forward Movement. Much to their surprise, the team members found that some communes they visited had actually run out of food. After receiving a report

³²¹ “四级干部会议情况简报(第一期)” [Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 1)] (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

³²² *ibid.*

from the examination team, the prefectural committee proposed to offer 25 million jin of grain to help the refugees of Baoying, but Xu Xiangdong, the Party boss of Baoying, declined to accept it and insisted that what the examination team found was only exceptional cases.³²³ He even filed another report in March, declaring that 77 percent of the farmers of Baoying had resumed regular work and the number of public canteens had recovered to 3,739. He further optimistically predicted that all farmers would be offered three meals every day after April, and a grain production of 830 million jin in total would be expected for 1960. He even also proposed that Baoying would raise 600,000 pigs (50 percent more than the quotas assigned by the prefectural committee) and organized 12,000 laborers to complete 17 large-scale water projects in the rest months of 1960.³²⁴

Despite Xu's reassurances, however, a provincial investigative team arrived in Baoying in March and found that the problem of death was more serious than the County Committee had admitted. But even so, Xu still managed to convince the prefectural leaders that most deaths only happened in a few "politically backward" areas where class enemies had sabotaged the implementation of County Committee's orders.³²⁵ Only after

³²³ Ibid; "Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks" (May 9, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86; "Report by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee on the serious incident of human deaths in Baoying County" (July 15, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

³²⁴ "中共宝应县委书记处书记黄国桢同志在 60 年第二次三级干部会议上的总结报告" [Final speech by secretariat of CCP Baoying County Committee Comrade Huang Guozhen at the second meeting for the cadres of three ranks in 1960] (Mar.17, 1960), BYA, 301-1-39; "中共宝应县委书记处书记黄国桢同志在四级干部誓师大会上的报告" [Speech by secretariat of CCP Baoying County Committee Comrade Huang Guozhen at the oath-taking rally for cadres of four ranks] (Mar.18, 1960), BYA, 301-1-39.

³²⁵ "关于黄滕公社生活情况的调查报告" [An investigation report on the living conditions of Huangcheng Commune] (Apr.4, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

Jiang Weiqing, the First Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province, came to Yangzhou in late March and personally ordered further investigation, did the prefectural committee begin to take the issue seriously and sent more investigators to Baoying.³²⁶ The investigation, however, progressed slowly because most incumbent cadres were afraid of the revenge of the county leaders and thus declined to offer any help. As a result, revealing the truth of famine had to wait another two months when the investigators finally obtained the cooperation of former dismissed cadres.³²⁷

The truth was stunning. It turned out that deaths were occurring in all communes at an average rate around 6 percent of the population (but it could be as high as 15 percent or even 50 percent in some areas),³²⁸ including the people from various class backgrounds and all walks of life, and the majority of them were poor farmers and senior citizens, followed by middle farmers and the young and middle-aged adults. (Table 2) In Zhanglou Brigade of Wangzhi Commune, for example, 162 out of 1,948 farmers died between November 1959 and March 1960, including 121 poor farmers and 41 middle farmers. Among the dead, 36 were aged 16-50 and 79 aged above 50.³²⁹ In Zhulian Brigade of the same commune, 10 percent (145 farmers) of its population died between

³²⁶ "Report by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee on the serious incident of human deaths in Baoying County" (July 15, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

³²⁷ "Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks" (May 9, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³²⁸ "常委会议记录之十" [Standing committee meeting minutes, No.10] (May 8, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³²⁹ "关于望直公社张楼大队食堂情况的调查报告" [An investigation report on the public canteens in Zhanglou Brigade of Wangzhi Commune] (Mar.31, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

October 1959 and May 1960. They belonged to 113 households, consisting of 88 poor farmers and 44 middle farmers, and 27 were younger than 15 years old, 49 aged between 15 and 50, and 69 aged above 50.³³⁰ In another large commune named Zhangshi, population decreased by 15 percent (5,010 people) from 43,599 in 1958 to 38,589 in 1960, and 3,059 died in 1959 alone.³³¹ As for the reasons of death, the majority died of starvation. A common phenomenon was that the sick grandparents departed at first, and soon the second-generation couple followed, leaving their unattended children to die eventually, but some dying parents would take the lives of their infants personally so as to save them from more suffering.³³² In addition to starvation, however, many farmers died directly or indirectly of torture. For example, a survey among five brigades showed that 23 out of the 170 farmers who had ever been beaten by cadres died eventually.³³³ In Hongxing Brigade of Yanhe Commune, more than 40 farmers were punished corporally, and 12 of them died afterward. Among these 12 dead, two were livestock breeders, who were suspected by the brigade's vice Party secretary of stealing 30 jin of bran from the feed of pigs. As a result, the brigade cadres not only beat them harshly, but also forced them to stand outdoor, only in underwear, an hour in the cold winter. The one injured

³³⁰ “关于对朱联大队生产、生活情况的调查报告” [An investigation report on the production and living conditions in Zhulian Brigade] (May 13, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

³³¹ “关于獐狮荡公社劳动力情况的调查” [Investigation on the labor force of Zhangshidang Commune] (1960), BYA, 301-2-91; “Standing committee meeting minutes, No.10” (May 8, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³³² “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 1)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

³³³ “Report by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee on the serious incident of human deaths in Baoying County” (July 15, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

more seriously died five days later, and soon his wife also died of grief, leaving three children behind; the other breeder also died about two months later.³³⁴ In addition, there were many reports about the farmers who committed suicide unable to bear the tortures. Several farmers of Wangzhi Commune, for instance, drowned themselves with bricks tied to their backs.³³⁵ As a result of massive deaths, the investigators reported that they could see people everywhere crying and wearing white mourning hats or white head cloth; carpenters were needed badly to make coffins, and a lot of abandoned coffins were laid on the road with the bodies inside.³³⁶

Table 2: Deaths in Baoying County, October 1959-April 1960

Total amount	Aged 51 and above	Aged 15 and below	Aged 16-50	Poor and lower-middle farmers
35,391	17,160	9,103	9,128	21,525

Source: the statistics reported by brigades and communes and compiled by CCP Baoying County Committee in May 1960, BYA, 301-1-40

In addition to the dead, more farmers were suffering various illnesses, especially generalized edema, nitrite poisoning and digested problems resulting from long-term

³³⁴ “中共宝应县委监察委员会决定” [Resolution by the Supervisory Committee of CCP Baoying County Committee] (Sep.7, 1960), BYA, 301-2-88.

³³⁵ “Standing committee meeting minutes, No.10” (May 8, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

³³⁶ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77; “Summary of the ‘five winds’ in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County” (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

malnutrition or the eating of earth and rotten leaves. In Sheyang Commune, for instance, 1,200 out of some 1,700 sick farmers had generalized edema.³³⁷ To make it worse, few patients had received any treatment due to the extreme shortage of medicine. Some were lucky to be admitted to the local clinics, but doctors usually did nothing other than ask them to rest all day or provide them a little extra food. And several days later when the “recovery time” set by the commune cadres had expired, all hospitalized farmers would be declared recovered and be forced to return home.³³⁸ Consequently, a large number of patients could only stay home, waiting for the end of life. In Zhangshi Commune, more than half of some 12,000 patients therefore died in spring 1960.³³⁹

In addition to famine, overwork also damaged farmers’ health. The working hours suggested by the provincial committee were ten hours per day and a half-day off every ten days or two weeks. Nevertheless, even this exhaustive schedule was not followed by most communes. In fact, the commune cadres often required farmers to work day and night for months with no off day during the production competitions with other communes. As a result, over exhaustion plus malnutrition made numerous farmers and women in particular highly vulnerable to illnesses. In Fuxing Brigade of Sishui Commune, a survey among the 272 women aged 18-45 showed that 151 had irregular menses and the periods of 109 had stopped completed; 80 percent of them had been ill for

³³⁷ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 3)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-77.

³³⁸ “An investigation report on the production and living conditions in Zhulian Brigade” (May 13, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

³³⁹ “Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 2)” (Dec. 1960), BYA, 301-2-76.

more than a year, often feeling tired and suffering abdominal pain or distension.³⁴⁰ As a result, the birth rate appears to have dropped during the years of the Great Leap Forward, as shown by another survey that only about 2 percent (7 out of 298) of recently married women became pregnant.³⁴¹

As farmers died or became ill in substantial numbers, collective farming ground to a complete stop. In Zhanglou Brigade of Wangzhi Commune, for instance, only 30 out of 937 farmers were still able to work irregularly in early 1960. Meanwhile, without basic maintenance, countless tools were damaged and livestock died. A survey conducted in April 1960 indicated that the county had lost at least 5,000 boats, 5,000 waterwheels and windmills, some 1,000 cattle and numerous other production resources.³⁴²

In general, the investigation revealed that about 35,000 people died in Baoying County between October 1959 and April 1960, amounting to 6.2 percent of the whole population, and at least 65 percent of them were officially recognized as “abnormal deaths.” In addition, 927 abandoned infants, including 153 dead, were found in the county-seat town.³⁴³ The morale of the surviving farmers had fallen to its lowest, with more than 80,000 suffering various illnesses and another 30,000 fleeing to other

³⁴⁰ “内部资料(第四期)” [Internal materials (issue 4)] (Aug.31, 1960), BYA, 301-2-78.

³⁴¹ “Investigation on the labor force of Zhangshidang Commune” (1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

³⁴² Statistics by CCP Baoying County Committee (top secret) (May 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

³⁴³ “Criminal judgment by the intermediate people’s court of Yangzhou City of Jiangsu Province” (June 13, 1961), BYA, 301-1-40; Party History Office of CCP Jiangsu Provincial Committee, ed., 中共江苏地方史(第二卷)[Local History of the CCP in Jiangsu (vol.2)](Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Press, 2001), p.365.

regions.³⁴⁴ The mood prevalent among farmers, as reported by the investigators, was: “The aged hate that they had not died earlier, and the young hate that there is no hope for the future.”³⁴⁵

Attempted Remedies

In the official documents of the CCP, the tragedy of Baoying County was referred to as the Baoying Incident, for which the county’s Party boss Xu Xiangdong and his followers were held to be fully responsible. The investigation report by the Yangzhou Prefectural committee described Xu as “an agent of the capitalists within the Party” and “an opportunist” intending to “conceal his extreme rightist nature with over-leftist activities.” As a result, Xu was expelled from the Party and sentenced five years imprisonment by the Yangzhou intermediate court. Two of his major assistants also received punishments: the Second Party Secretary of Baoying was dismissed from his post and put on two-year probation, and the deputy head of the county government was deprived of all positions within the Party.³⁴⁶

Nevertheless, punishment could not help alleviate famine. Further, as more incidents similar to or more serious than that of Baoying were revealed all over the country while at the same time that the state’s grain reserves decreased by about 10

³⁴⁴ Statistics conducted by CCP Baoying County Committee (top secret) (May 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

³⁴⁵ “内部资料(第十三期)” [Internal materials (issue 13)] (Oct.13, 1960), BYA, 301-2-78.

³⁴⁶ “Report by CCP Yangzhou Prefectural Committee on the serious incident of human deaths in Baoying County” (July 15, 1960), BYA, 301-1-40.

billion jin in July and August 1960 compared with the last year; it was nearly hopeless for the farmers of Baoying to obtain any meaningful assistance from the central government. Therefore, the County Committee had to return the remaining grain in the county's granaries to each commune, and imposed a per capita grain ration of no more than 300 jin for the next twelve months beginning from May 1960. In practice, however, about half of the available grain had already been consumed in the first four months. This forced the County Committee to further decrease the amount of grain rationing, which varied for each month and different age groups.³⁴⁷ With these limited supplies, many public canteens were able to provide one meal of rice gruel every day, but about 600 canteens remained closed by November 1960 due to the lack of fuel.³⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the central government relaxed its control over the economy in late 1960, allowing farmers to restore family farming and sideline production to a limited extent, as well as to trade their products in the rural market.³⁴⁹ But due to the lack of seeds, tools and livestock, these policies helped little in reality.

In fact, the major effort by the government to alleviate the famine was to launch a campaign of collecting and making "substitute foods," including leaves, roots, stems and other edible parts of wild plants. Farmers were told that to eat more leaves of some

³⁴⁷ "关于今冬明春社员生活安排规则的报告" [Report on the arrangement plan for the life of commune members in this winter and next spring] (Oct.30, 1960), BYA, 301-1-44.

³⁴⁸ "内部资料(第十八期)" [Internal materials (issue 18)] (Nov.24, 1960), BYA, 301-2-78.

³⁴⁹ "中共中央关于农村人民公社当前政策问题的紧急指示信" [A letter of urgent directives from CCP Central Committee on current policy problems about rural people's communes] (Nov.3, 1960), BYA, 301-2-71.

specific plants containing protein amino acid would help prevent the illnesses of malnutrition. The other main category of substitute food included some types of fungi and alga. A specific kind of yeast named *Geotrichum candidum*, for instance, was especially recommended by the government by the name of “artificial meat essence,” because it was believed to be richer in protein than pork and even have some vitamins that were rarely found in meat and grain. In addition, some other alga like *chlorella* were also said to contain abundant fat and protein and thus were strongly recommended by the government, although they were only used to feed pigs before the famine. The scientists of the Chinese Science Academy even suggested that some “small-sized, highly nutritional, and rapidly reproductive” microbes and planktons be produced systematically. Citing the research of anonymous British scientists, the Chinese scientists declared that every 10 tons of yeast contained the same amount of protein as 10,000 jin of pork had; on this basis they optimistically predicted that “the need of all commune members for protein and fat [would] be satisfied as long as every commune in cities and countryside [had] constructed one or two not-very-large plants to produce artificial meat essence and *chlorella*.”³⁵⁰ As a result, *Geotrichum candidum* and *chlorella* were intensively advertised in the official media as a substitute food not only more nutritional than grain but also useful to prevent and cure various illnesses of malnutrition.³⁵¹ Meanwhile, a variety of methods were reportedly invented all over China to make the food look bigger

³⁵⁰ “中共中央关于立即开展大规模采集和制造代食品运动的紧急指示” [An urgent directives from CCP Central Committee on immediately launching the movement of massive collection and production of substitute foods] (Nov.14, 1960), BYA, 301-2-71.

³⁵¹ *ibid.*

without using more grain. These cooking techniques were also highly recommended by the government as “the incremental methods of consuming grain”.³⁵²

Certainly, no substitute food or cooking techniques could effectively prevent the famine from deteriorating further. An investigation conducted by the Baoying County Committee in December 1960 showed that about half of the 500,000 population had no “substitute food” at all; 1,100 out of the 3,839 public canteens had not restored regular service, and in the rest of the canteens only one or two meals of rice gruel were provided every day. To make it worse, a cold snap accompanied by a rainstorm not only left some 48,000 farmers without enough winter clothes, but toppled nearly 1,200 rooms of farmers’ houses and flooded vast areas of wheat field.³⁵³ As a result, hunger and cold made numerous farmers suffer from an aggravation of their diseases, and many died quickly. A statistics showed that the number of patients reached 34,000 at least in November and December 1960, and 2,492 died in the meanwhile.³⁵⁴ At the same time, due to a decision by the central government to reduce the burden of supplying food to the residents of cities and towns, about 30 percent of the county-level cadres of Baoying were sent down to the countryside, appointed as the commune or brigade cadres who had to be responsible for the food of their own families. Seeing no help from the state and even feeling abandoned by the Party, these lower level cadres began to make every effort

³⁵² See 高华[Gao Hua], “大饥荒中的‘粮食食用增量法’与代食品” [Food augmentation methods and substitute foods in the Great Famine] 二十一世纪 [The Twenty-First Century] (issue 8, 2002).

³⁵³ “Internal materials (issue 18)” (Nov.24, 1960), BYA, 301-2-78.

³⁵⁴ “当前社员生活安排情况的报告” [Report on current arrangement of the life of commune members] (Dec.31, 1960), BYA, 301-1-44.

to survive. Consequently, the limited remaining grain was largely detained by cadres, and ordinary farmers had to submit to their fate.

Conclusion

When reflecting on the Baoying Incident, a key question is: who should be responsible for the tragedy? The County Committee led by Xu Xiangdong certainly should take the direct blame. Xu was a veteran communist who joined the CCP in 1938. The long history of “revolutionary experience” not only helped him survive the brutal purges within the Party, but eventually made him the Party boss of Baoying County in 1957. Some county and commune cadres later revealed that, as the highest leader of the county, Xu enjoyed absolute authority over his colleagues who were his junior in terms of years of service.³⁵⁵ He usually stayed far from the common people and made decisions only according to the report of his subordinates. Not surprisingly, those always delivering good messages and supporting his decisions would become Xu’s henchmen and be promoted to important positions, while anyone telling unpleasant truth was subjected to arbitrary criticism and punishment by the Party boss. Since the beginning of the Great Leap Forward until early 1960, therefore, the County Committee had been firmly controlled by a group of radical activists and opportunists, who endeavored to enforce any orders from Xu so as to maintain their own power and privileges, and many other cadres who disagreed with them would rather to keep silent for the sake of self-protection.

³⁵⁵ “Self-criticism by Comrade Xu Xiangdong at the meeting for the Party members and cadres of county and three ranks” (May 9, 1960), BYA, 301-2-86.

Consequently, in addition to ordinary farmers who had never been allowed to participate in the decision making process, many county and commune cadres also lost their right to free speech, and the tyranny of the Party boss was thus established in Baoying. Given this fact, it was reasonable for the court to denounce Xu for “cheating his superiors and oppressing his subordinates.”³⁵⁶

However, it was ironic for the court to condemn Xu for “destroying Party’s policies” because what Xu and his followers had struggled to implement were exactly the policies made by the CCP Central Committee. Furthermore, Xu would not have been able to dominate the power without the help of the Party system, in which one’s “revolutionary background” was more valued than actual ability, and bureaucracy had impeded the flow of information within the government. As some cadres said: “The First Party Secretary is the local leader, and to disobey him is to oppose the Party,”³⁵⁷ Xu’s dictatorship actually just reflected the unprecedented expansion of the Party-state’s power in rural society, as well as the strong personal dependence of cadres on their superiors. For this reason, it was the state’s policies and the party system per se that should be questioned more thoroughly than the behaviors of individual cadres. In the official rhetoric, however, only the county and commune cadres were described as corrupt and negligent, and the Great Leap Forward Movement was said to be “increasingly proved correct” by “the great and unprecedented accomplishments in all fields,” and the Great

³⁵⁶ “Criminal judgment by the intermediate people’s court of Yangzhou City of Jiangsu Province” (June 13, 1961), BYA, 301-1-40.

³⁵⁷ Materials exposing the misconducts of some county committee members (1960), BYA, 301-2-87.

Famine was considered as “a temporary difficulty” that would not harm the “generally excellent situation”.³⁵⁸ The purpose of doing so was certainly to maintain the reputation of Mao Zedong and his followers who had designed the movement, but it was obvious that to merely blame individual local cadres could not explain the famine and massive deaths occurring all over the country, and to scapegoat the policy executives would not help repair the mistakes committed by the policy-makers, not to mention prevent more wrong decisions from being made.

Another question regarding the Great Famine is why hungry farmers did not rebel— after all it was not unusual in Chinese history for farmers to rebel in time of famine, and there had always been direct or indirect resistance from the farmers of Baoying toward the socialist agricultural reforms. During the famine of the Great Leap Forward, however, no record was found even on minor protests. In the whole Jiangsu Province, only a small uprising attended by 18 local cult members was reported by Xuzhou prefecture on January 31, 1960.³⁵⁹ One reason for this contrast was obvious: farmers possessed neither sufficient food to support a long-term rebellion, nor modern weapons that would enable them to launch a meaningful attack against the government. The rebels of Xuzhou, for instance, only had knives, spears and forks, and therefore were soon suppressed by police and a platoon of soldiers.³⁶⁰ Besides food and weapons,

³⁵⁸ “A letter of urgent directives from CCP Central Committee on current policy problems about rural people’s communes” (Nov.3, 1960), BYA, 301-2-71.

³⁵⁹ Jiangsu Gazetteers Editing Commission, “江苏省志: 公安志” [*Gazetteers of Jiangsu Province: Public Security*] (Nanjing: Qunzhong Press, 2000) p.36.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

however, a probably more essential resource farmers lacked was leadership. It has been proved that almost all influential farmers' rebellions in Chinese history were led by rural literati, who usually came from the families of middle farmers or petit landlords. By the time of the Great Leap Forward, however, most rural literati had become victims of the communist revolution and thereby had neither reputation nor influence to unite farmers around them; some of them even had hostile relations with many farmers who had attacked them in the civil war or various political campaigns. Consequently, by controlling food and weapons, and more importantly, by depriving the rural community of its own leaders and creating conflicts among different groups of farmers, the state finally imposed totalitarian control over the rural population and reduced the possibility of rebellion to minimum.

Another thing that should be mentioned is the Great Famine also left a lasting psychological impact on farmers in addition to the physical harms. Being the producers of grain, farmers should have naturally enjoyed the advantages in obtaining food, but in reality they were ranked the lowest in the grain ration system behind cadres, workers, soldiers and many other population groups whose food supplies were guaranteed by the government. In some special occasions, such as the National Day of 1959 and the Spring Festival of 1960, farmers were even forced to turn in all of their poultry and eggs so as to ensure the supply to urban residents.³⁶¹ Furthermore, throughout the Great Leap Forward Movement, farmers were commonly abused by cadres in various ways, such as scolding,

³⁶¹ "Summary of the 'five winds' in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying County" (Dec.30, 1960), BYA, 301-2-91.

beating, being fined or denied of access to food. Even the poor farmers who enjoyed high political status in the rhetoric of official propaganda could not escape the misery, constituting more than half of the dead. The Great Famine, therefore, not only ruined the health and lives of farmers, but also destroyed their dignity with open discrimination and neglect. This made large numbers of farmers, and the young generations in particular, lose faith in the official propaganda and feel hopeless for their future. This sentiment lasted throughout the rest years of Mao's era and greatly hindered the development of Chinese agriculture.

CHAPTER IV
PRELUDE TO THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION:
THE SOCIALIST EDUCATION MOVEMENT, 1961-1965

In response to the Great Famine across China in the early 1960s, the Central Committee of the CCP made two major adjustments to its rural policies. First, the government somewhat relaxed its control over the rural economy, allowing some public kitchens to be dissolved and the rural markets partly resumed, and even giving its acquiescence to the limited restoration of household farming in some areas. Though unable to make the situation better off promptly, these measures did help prevent the famine from deteriorating further. On the other hand, however, the top leaders of the CCP began increasingly to stress the importance of class struggle in their speeches, in an attempt to blame class enemies and corrupt officials for the outbreak of the Great Famine. Thereafter, the CCP Central Committee launched a series of political campaigns to find out and punish corrupt grassroots cadres. These campaigns gradually overwhelmed the economic adjustments and developed into a major campaign called “Four Cleanups” (clean politics, clean economy, clean organization and clean thought) in 1963. It turned out that these campaigns, which were collectively called the Socialist Education Movement, not only ignored the institutional reasons for the Great Famine, but also created and exacerbated the conflicts within the top leadership of the CCP, and eventually led to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. The study of the Socialist Education Movement, therefore, is helpful for understanding how the Chinese history evolved from the Great Famine to the Cultural Revolution.

Thanks to the newly available sources, scholars in recent years have been able to learn more about the Socialist Education Movement than ever before, especially about

the power struggle within the core of the Party's leadership.³⁶² Despite this, however, large numbers of archives related to the early 1960s remain unavailable to the public, and many problems about the Socialist Education Movement, such as how this movement was carried out at the county level and how farmers and rural cadres responded to this movement, are still unclear. This chapter is an attempt to address these issues by focusing on the Socialist Education Movement in Baoying County. Based on more than one thousand pages of unpublished archives, it traces the development of the Socialist Education Movement in Baoying County from its origin in the early 1960s through the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Hopefully, it will help reveal a real picture of rural China in the early 1960s, in particular the hardship of farmers' lives, the widespread corruption among grassroots cadres, and the tensions in the rural communities arising from the constant changing policies of the government.

Famine Continued

The famine of Baoying was first uncovered in March 1960. Since then, more details began to be revealed, which proved that the famine was actually much more serious than outsiders had imagined. In a confidential document, the County Committee

³⁶² Suh as 高华[Gao Hua], "大灾荒与四清运动的起源"[The Great Famine and the origin of the Four Cleanups Movement], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-first Century], (2000:60); 郭德宏[Guo Dehong] and 林小波 [Lin Xiaobo], 四清运动实录 [A True Record of the Four Cleanups Movement] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin Press, 2005); 戴安林[Dai Anlin], 湖南四清运动史[History of the Four Cleanups Movement in Hunan](Beijing: Yanjiu Press, 2005); 高华[Gao Hua], "在贵州'四清运动'的背后" [Behind the Four Cleanup Movement in Guizhou], 二十一世纪 [Twenty-first Century] (2006:2); 李若建[Li Ruojian], "安全阀:四清运动的潜功能" [Safety valve: the underlying function of the Four Cleanups Movement], 开放时代 [Open Times], (2005:1); 任庆银[Ren Qingyin] and 王颖超[Wang Yingchao], "'四清'运动问题上中央高层的分歧探微" [Exploring the internal disputes within the top leadership of the CCP regarding the Four Cleanups Movement], 社会科学论坛 [Social Sciences Forum] (2006:2).

admitted in July 1962 that, due to the over requisitioning of grain in 1959, “[farmers’] rice seeds and grain rations had all been purchased by the state...causing a serious shortage of food in the winter [of 1959] and the spring [of 1960].” The investigation by the County Committee showed that 60-80 percent of the population in most communes and all farmers in a few specific communes had been running out of food during the three months in late 1959 and early 1960. The food crisis made large numbers of farmers ill or die, and forced others to flee their homes. The worst situation occurred in March and April of 1960, when the robbery of food commonly happened and the abandoned infants and dead bodies could be seen everywhere in the county seat, and in the countryside farmers had ate up all edible and inedible things, such as vegetable roots, grass roots and tree barks. “Everyone is as thin as firewood;” the investigators reported, “young men can walk only with the help of canes, and the old and children have to stay on the bed for being too weak to walk. Patients are common, and those wearing white mourning can be seen at every village. People are crying everywhere, and the scene is sad.”³⁶³ Although having realized how serious the famine was, the County Committee nevertheless made little effort to remedy the crisis effectively, and the famine continued after the spring of 1960. Between March and December, the County Committee reported about 20,000 more deaths, and thus brought the death toll to nearly 50,000 by the end of 1960.

The massive deaths caused irreversible damages on farmers’ lives. Many families were perished in the famine, and at least 5,000 orphans were left behind across the county.

³⁶³ “关于几年来农村生产生活变化及当前存在问题和今后恢复发展生产的情况汇报” [Report on the changes in rural production and life in recent years and on current problems and future restoration of production] (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-57.

For those survived, they had to adapt themselves to the reality and eventually became cold and indifferent to death. The county investigators reported: “In the beginning, family members and neighbors still went to bury the bodies of the dead. But when the number of patients increased rapidly and more people died every day, farmers were unable to take care of themselves, not to mention help others. Consequently, some lay dying at home for days without anyone noticing, leaving their bodies to rot and be bitten by rats and maggots.” A woman in Chengjiao Commune, for instance, lay dead in bed for four days; her ears and face had been ravished by rats when the body was found. Those who died early were still buried in coffins made of the wood from doors and beds, but most bodies were merely wrapped in straw mats or simply buried naked. The report by the County Committee especially mentioned the story of a father and his two children. The father died at first and was buried by neighbors or relatives; the daughter followed soon, her sick brother pulled her body to the manure pit behind their house and buried her there. In a couple of days the son also died, but nobody went to bury him. To those refugees, it was also a cruel choice between humanity and survival. As a result, “the old cared nothing about the young, and parents and children did not take care of each other;” “numerous people were separated from their wives and children, or had to sell their sons and daughters; some young couples were forced to break up so that the wives would be able to re-marry others and the husbands be adopted by other families.”³⁶⁴ The normative family relations and codes of conducts were completely destroyed.

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*

The Great Famine of Baoying continued into 1961, although the grain output increased a little to 263 million jin from 229 million jin in 1960.³⁶⁵ The economic recovery, however, suffered a sharp setback in 1962 due to the most damaging natural disasters Baoying had experienced since 1949. At first there was a severe drought lasting from mid May to the end of June. It was followed by three weeks' heavy rain in mid July and a typhoon in early September. Consequently, the grain output in 1962 dropped sharply to 184 million jin, which was 53 percent lower than 1957, and the per capita allotment of grain for 1962-63 decreased proportionally to 163 jin, the lowest point since 1960.³⁶⁶ By the end of September 1962, about 60 percent of Baoying's half a million of population were running out of food, and the rest only had an average per capita grain ration of 58 jin for the next eight months, which could hardly meet the basic needs for a child to survive.³⁶⁷ The County Committee admitted in a confidential document that such a food shortage had never occurred in the harvest season in Baoying's history, even neither in 1959 or 1960. "If the current problem cannot be resolved as soon as possible," the county leaders warned, "the tragedy in the spring of 1960 will happen again, and there will be the devil to pay."³⁶⁸

In fact, the signs of another tragedy had already appeared. The County Committee reported confidentially in April 1962 to its higher authorities that the numbers of dead

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶⁶ "中共宝应县委员会关于六二年受灾情况的综合报告" [A comprehensive report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the situation of natural disasters in 1962] (Oct.12, 1962), BYA, 301-1-56.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

and sick farmers were growing rapidly since March. A census conducted by the County Committee showed that there were at least 23,480 patients across the county, accounting for nearly five percent of the population of Baoying. Among these patients, 1,261 were severely ill, and more than 14,000 had a recurrence of edema and marasmus. Meanwhile, 1,567 deaths were reported during the three months from January to March, with 659 died in March alone. The mortality of those production brigades seeing the greatest decrease of grain output averaged 1-2 percent, and even reached 8.3 percent in some areas. In addition, more than 5,000 farmers fled their homes to adjacent areas like Huaiyin, Yancheng and Anhui Province.³⁶⁹ Those staying home had to make every effort to obtain minimum resources to survive. About 120,000 farmers of 40,000 households destroyed their houses so as to use the wood as fuel, and sold furniture for cash to buy extra food; after selling all their belongs, they began to feed themselves with water plants.³⁷⁰ As a result, many poor farmers lost not only the property they obtained from land reform, but all they had had before 1949. In Kuaijia Brigade, for instance, 30 percent of families lived in shabby thatched cottages which could not protect them from the wind and cold; 20 percent of families lacked even permanent shelters because their houses had been demolished during the Great Leap Forward, and more lived without beds, tables, pans, bowls or other basic furniture and household items. A family with two members was found to have only two sets of clothes and miscellaneous items worth three yuan in

³⁶⁹ “中共宝应县委员会关于人口外流、病人、死亡情况的报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the situation of refugees, patients and deaths] (Apr.4, 1962), BYA, 301-1-56.

³⁷⁰ “Report on the changes in rural production and life in recent years and on current problems and future restoration of production” (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-57.

total, and only 27 of the 81 infants born in and after 1959 was still alive by July 1962.³⁷¹ Even so, there were plenty of other brigades whose situation was worse than Kuaijia Brigade.³⁷²

The situation was no better in 1963, when 98 percent of brigades experienced further decrease in grain production and the wheat output reached the lowest point in Baoying since 1949. As a result, after fulfilling the grain requisition quotas, each person only had 48 jin of grain averagely for the next twelve months, and the allotment was even as low as 8 jin in some extremely poor areas. This forced even more farmers to sell their remaining properties—if they still had any, and more people to flee, at first women and children so as to save all of the grain allotment for the male laborers, but soon men followed because there was no food left. Eventually, some 12,000 refugees fled Baoying from June through September—averagely 340 each day, and half of them went travelled farther than before to other provinces such as Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, Zhejiang and Shandong.³⁷³ On the way of fleeing, more than 150 farmers, mostly women, were reportedly cheated and sold by human traffickers.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ “广洋湖公社蒯家大队调查汇报提纲” [A report outline on the investigation in Kuaijia Brigade of Guangyanghu Commune] (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-55.

³⁷² *ibid.*

³⁷³ “中共宝应县委员会关于今年夏季以来社员生活安排情况的报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the arrangement of commune members’ life since this summer] (Sep.16, 1963) BYA, 301-1-66.

³⁷⁴ A speech by county leaders at the conference for county cadres (Oct. 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

Facing the cruel reality, many farmers could not help recalling their lives before the coming of the communists, and some poor farmers even missed the days working for landlords and rich farmers. For example, a poor farmer lamented as reported by the County Committee in a confidential document: “In the past, I operated water wheels [to pump water] for others, [they offered me] sweet rice stirred with sesame oil in the morning, meat for lunch, cakes for the afternoon snack, and still rice at night. But what a life it is now!”³⁷⁵ Even some veteran Party members also complained they had never expected that to join the CCP would really make them lose everything and become “the class without properties;” some told others angrily: “You shouldn’t call me a Party member; just call me ghost.”³⁷⁶

“Three Antis” and Anti-Five Winds Campaign

In response to the prolonged famine during 1959-1963, the Party leaders resorted to pragmatic measures, such as importing foreign grain and making “substitute foods,” to relieve the food shortage. But their economic concern was gradually overwhelmed by political considerations, which was centered on a key question: who should be blamed for the Great Famine? The CCP Central Committee proposed its first answer to this question by issuing a notice on May 15, 1960, calling for launching a Three-Anti Campaign (anti-corruption, anti-waste and anti-bureaucracy) in the countryside. In the notice, the Central

³⁷⁵ “广洋湖人民公社崩家大队农村情况典型调查报告” [An investigation report on rural situation as represented by Kuaijia Brigade of Guangyanghu People’s Commune] (June 20, 1962), BYA, 301-1-55.

³⁷⁶ “A report outline on the investigation in Kuaijia Brigade of Guangyanghu Commune” (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-55.

Committee at first acknowledged that “the majority of rural cadres [were] good,” and even praised their performance in leading the Great Leap Forward and implementing the policies of the Party. It then pointed out some of the cadres exhibited two types of faults, which were “lacking the communist consciousness” and “committing relatively serious mistakes of corruption, waste and bureaucracy.” But it immediately added that those committing serious mistakes were a “minority” among rural cadres and those who were really bad were “extremely few.” As for how to deal with the cadres with faults, the Central Committee declared that the cadres “lacking the communist consciousness” should still be considered “basically good comrades;” they should be seriously criticized and educated, but no further punishment would be imposed on them. Cadres having the second type of fault must be subjected to Party discipline while “a few committing extremely serious mistakes which caused great public resentment should be dismissed from their posts forthwith (and expelled from the Party if they [were] Party members) or even be arrested and sentenced.” However, the Central Committee made a rule that the number of those to be criticized and punished should be less than three percent of all rural cadres; less than one percent might be stripped of positions and Party memberships; and only very few could be arrested.³⁷⁷ The message delivered by the Three-Anti Notice was therefore vague in its purpose. It showed a dilemma the Central Committee faced in 1960: on the one hand, it planned to blame rural cadres for mistakes in carrying out their duties

³⁷⁷ “中共中央关于在农村中开展‘三反’运动的指示” [Directive by CCP Central Committee on launching the ‘Three Antis’ movement in rural areas] (May 15, 1960), National Agricultural Committee of the PRC ed., 农业集体化重要文件汇编(下册) [A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization (vol.2)] (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Press, 1982), pp.325-28.

and thereby caused the Great Famine; on the other hand, it had to depend on the same cadres to deal with the crisis of famine. Furthermore, as the Great Leap Forward still remained fresh in the memory of rural residents, it was simply not plausible, and would probably alienate more cadres, if the top Party leaders shrugged off all their responsibilities as the policy-makers. For these considerations, the Central Committee decided to restrict the scope of the Three-Anti Campaign to the minimum so as not to provoke more unrest in the countryside. As a result, this campaign had little impact on Baoying County.

Nevertheless, a question remained. How could the Party leaders convince the whole nation that it was “very few” bad cadres who should take all the responsibilities for such a nationwide catastrophe? The answer proposed by the Three-Anti Notice was certainly not likely to convince very many people, and more people must be made to share the blame. Consequently, the Central Committee launched its second campaign against rural cadres on November 15, 1960, which was called “Anti-Five Winds.” The “five winds” were the wind of communization, the wind of exaggeration, the wind of compelling, the wind of privileges and the wind of blind commanding.³⁷⁸ In other words, these five winds actually detailed the “faults” and “mistakes” which were vaguely mentioned by the Three Antis Notice, and condemned some bad cadres for misunderstanding the intention of the policy-makers in the first place, cheating their

³⁷⁸ “中共中央对省、市、区党委的指示——关于彻底纠正五风问题” [Directive from CCP Central Committee to the party committees of provinces, cities and districts—on completely correcting the problem of five winds] (Nov.15, 1960), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.391-93.

superiors by filing fake reports, using force to enforce their unreasonable orders and abusing power to seek personal profit. The Central Committee asserted that these wrong behaviors had spread like wind among rural cadres, causing the incorrect implementation of the Party's policies and eventually causing the Great Famine.

Because the Central Committee had sent a second, stronger signal by proclaiming that the five winds were common among rural cadres, the County Committee of Baoying could no longer ignore the Anti-Five Winds Campaign as it did the Three Anti Campaign. A conference was convened from December 1960 to January 1961 to reveal the problems of local cadres. The first and foremost target was Xu Xiangdong, the former Party boss of Baoying County who had been sentenced to prison for the massive deaths during his rule. According to the discussion at the conference, the County Committee filed a confidential report to the prefectural and provincial committees, exposing many details about how Xu and his followers "blindly pursuit the bourgeois lifestyle" during the Great Leap Forward Movement. For example, from 1959 to October 1960, the County Committee spent 6,107 yuan and consumed nearly 6,000 jin of grain to entertain guests. This expenditure included the cost of inviting a Peking Opera troupe (about 800 yuan), purchasing famous branded cigarettes, such as "Peony" "Shanghai" "Heroes" and "Great Front Gate," and various liquors like wine, brandy and Chinese white spirits, as well as making delicate snacks with rarely available materials like flour, milk, crab, pork and ham. Furthermore, the county-owned medicine company even purchased ginseng, scallop, bird's nests and other expensive invigorants especially for Xu and several other county leaders. After hearing that Xu's wife needed a watch, the county's Commercial Bureau took her desire

as a political duty that must be fulfilled; it therefore wired 21 telegrams to its counterparts in big cities to check their watch inventory, and even sent staff members to Shanghai, Suzhou and Hangzhou to make a very careful selection. Meanwhile, several construction projects were launched during the time of famine. In 1959, for instance, the County Committee built two one-story office buildings (one of them housed the propaganda department with Xu's wife as the head), and only the painting of one building's outside wall had already cost 1,500 yuan. In the spring of 1960, the County Committee invested some 120,000 yuan in the building of a 1960-seat auditorium, but eventually had to abandon the plan due to the lack of funds. At the same time, it spent another 4,100 yuan to build two greenhouses and purchased numerous flowers, miniascapes, jade and porcelain articles and various antiques for decoration. And even more, the County Committee purchased a car costing 6,000 yuan, but ironically spent 8,000 yuan to fix it. Following the example of the county leaders, therefore, it became common for the rest cadres of Baoying to squander public funds in the pursuit of material comforts. For example, the Commercial Bureau spent more than 1,300 yuan on dinners during the first ten months of 1960. The dinners were often held on various far-fetched pretexts, such as farewell dinners for those departing for business trips, welcome and farewell dinners for guests, celebration dinners for festivals, and even "reconciliation dinners" for mediating the conflicts among the bureau staffs. Consequently, when traveling outside the county, the cadres of Baoying would habitually compete with their counterparts from other counties in extravagant consumption.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ "中共宝应县委关于县级机关三反运动第一阶段的报告" [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee

Apart from the problems of the county-level cadres, the county and provincial committees dispatched nearly 1,000 investigators to every commune of Baoying and thereby uncovered numerous “mistakes” and “faults” committed by the commune cadres. For example, in Tianping Commune where 2,767 farmers died from September 1959 to April 1961, the investigators were surprised to find that “it was common [for the local cadres] from top to the bottom to go dining, wining, whoring and gambling.” They further reported that “corrupt cadres had formed factions; dining and wining [were] common practices; whoring and gambling [had] become their habits, and they greet[ed] each other with cascades of flattering remarks.” What caught the attention of investigators at first were the widespread sex scandals of the commune cadres. The Party boss of Taiping Commune, for instance, was found to have eight mistresses; he even once fought with his deputy for a woman they both liked. The commune accountant was caught on site in his office having sex with the deputy chief of the commune orphanage during the spring festival of 1961. Among the 41 cadres of the supply and marketing cooperative, 14 were found to have improper sexual relations, and the chief of the cooperative even earned himself a nickname “the King of Decadency” for maintaining relations with eight or nine women. The young girls recruited by the commune factory during the Great Leap Forward Movement were said to hang around with heavy make-up in the day and pass in and out the commune offices freely at night. “The obscene noise

on the first stage of Three Antis Movement in the county government] (Oct.28, 1960), BYA, 301-1-41.

could be heard at midnight, and the commune offices had become ‘a vice establishment,’ ” the investigators thus reported.³⁸⁰

The investigators also found abundant examples of dining and wining. For example, the Party boss of Taiping Commune personally controlled 14,000 jin of grain for any purpose he desired, such as self-consumption, receiving guests or bribing superiors. On the second day of the spring festival of 1960, despite the worsening of the famine, he still gathered a group of cadres to eat and drink, which cost 561 yuan just for a meal. They drank so much that 27 cadres fell drunk to the ground on site. According to the report of farmers, the commune cadres usually enjoyed their special dinners at fixed locations. The farm of Luochao Brigade was such a place, which was called “the nest of bandits” by local farmers. The record of the farm’s employees showed that local cadres consumed 33 out of the 40 pigs raised by the farm, as well as more than 10,000 duck eggs between January 24 and April 26 in 1961. In a single night of August 16, 1960, 16 chickens, 15 ducks, 2 lambs and numerous fish were slaughtered to serve the cadres.³⁸¹ One night of April 1961, some cadres of Luochao Brigade even caused a fire when cooking their late supper; the fire burned thirteen houses to the ground, leaving their owners homeless.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ “天平公社落潮大队情况汇报” [Report on the situation of Luochao Brigade of Tianping Commune] (May 1961), BYA, 301-1-51.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² *Ibid.*

Apart from food, another thing cadres cared about very much was their appearance, which often made them look different from other ragged farmers. They usually spent a large part of their income on making clothes. During the spring festival of 1961, for instance, the cadres of Luochao Brigade made many new clothes for themselves and their family members. The brigade chief alone ordered a khaki pant, a cotton sport pant, a piece of corduroy pant, a poplin pant, two short pants, a poplin shirt, a set of khaki Mao suit, a corduroy coat, a Mao jacket, a female shirt and three children's clothes.³⁸³

That cadres could afford better lives was mainly because their income was much higher than ordinary commune members. In Luochao Brigade, for example, the average annual income during 1959-1961 was 188 yuan for the Party secretary, 180 yuan for the brigade chief, 99 yuan for the other 12 cadres, but only 14-15 yuan for each ordinary household. In fact, cadres firmly controlled the financial power of communes, and all the decisions about the division of income would be made by them behind the closed door. Consequently, even their parents, spouses and children could also earn high work points and income without the need to work.³⁸⁴

In addition to the regular income, cadres still earned extra cash by imposing fines on those they deemed to violate the rules of communes. For example, the investigators found that many farmers collected roots of lotus for self consumption or made straw mats to exchange for grain in the market. These behaviors, however, were banned by many brigades because cadres considered all natural resources as the collective properties that

³⁸³ *ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*

only they could appropriate, and anyone violated this rule would be penalized to pay cash or grain to brigades. It was not long before cadres realized that they could earn quick money by enforcing the rule arbitrarily. They therefore not only intercepted farmers on their way of collecting foods or selling their products, but more frequently intruded into farmers' homes to search for banned objects. In Luochoo Brigade, for instance, the investigators reported that "cadres almost went mad conducting search, and 292 of the 600 households had been searched. Cadres rushed into the homes of the commune members both day and night to search everywhere even including beds, areas within the wall, toilets and quilts." Rapes were common. "Women were forced to take off clothes to be checked. The storekeeper of the brigade [Mr. You] could touch women's breasts and private parts at will, but the commune members were not allowed to resist. The security chief of the brigade [Mr. Tang] rushed into the home of a commune member [Miss. Tang] (a girl of twenty years old) in midnight, forcing her to agree to sleep with him so that he would promise not to search her home anymore."³⁸⁵ It was also commonly for cadres to locked up farmers, and tie, hang and beat them; some therefore died of torture or committed suicide. For example, the Party Secretary of Jinghe Brigade hounded a head of production team to death only to condemn him for committing suicide to escape punishment. The Party Secretary of Pingjiang Brigade hung and beat more than 30 farmers, leaving two of them unable to perform physical labor. In Yanhe Commune, 13 out of the 14 brigade Party secretaries were found to have beaten farmers. In Zhangshi

³⁸⁵ "关于天平公社的情况报告" [Report on the situation in Tianping Commune], BYA, 301-1-51.

Commune, 35 of the 110 cadres had beaten 119 farmers.³⁸⁶ As a result, farmers had little chance to resist and had to pay the fines imposed on them. Luochoo Brigade, for instance, collected more than 4,800 yuan of fines for 1960 alone, making up one third of the annual income of the brigade. The proceeds of the fines most certainly divided among cadres, while many farmers found that they owed the brigade more than what they had earned; some therefore died of extreme stress.³⁸⁷

Despite the serious problems disclosed by the investigators, the County Committee nevertheless declined to impose harsh punishment on the corrupt cadres because there were no such instructions from the Central Committee. It even concluded that ninety percent of the cadres of Baoying were “good” or “reasonable;” those with “incorrect thought and work style” should only receive “positive education” instead of severe punishment. It also concluded that the problems found by the investigators ought to be recorded and reported to the County Committee, but would not be revealed to the public.³⁸⁸ It further decided that the dismissal of any cadre at or above the brigade level must be approved by the County Committee beforehand, and even the dismissal of a public kitchen cook should be approved by the commune leaders.³⁸⁹ As a result, most

³⁸⁶ “四级干部大会情况简报(第十二期)” [Briefing on the meeting for the cadres of four ranks (issue 12)] (Jan.8, 1961), BYA, 301-2-77.

³⁸⁷ “Report on the situation of Luochoo Brigade of Tianping Commune” (May 1961), BYA, 301-1-51.

³⁸⁸ “关于农村整风运动前一阶段情况和今后意见” [The situation of previous stage of rural rectification movement and the opinions on its further development] (Feb. 25, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

³⁸⁹ “中共宝应县委员会关于开展整风整社运动的部署” [A plan of CCP Baoying County Committee for launching the movement of rectification and consolidation of communes] (Jan.14, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

cadres were allowed to remain in their positions after making self-criticisms. And even the self-criticisms were mostly superficial because cadres simply copied confession letters from each other and reiterated the formulaic passages from the official documents while mentioned nothing about specific issues.³⁹⁰

Problems Remained Unsolved

The mild policies adopted by the Party might have helped to maintain political stability in the countryside, but failed either to ease the tension between farmers and cadres or to improve the living conditions of the poor. The government did provide extra grain to relieve the famine, but it was not free and communes had to purchase it themselves. As a result, many communes had to take out loans from the state-run banks, and every commune member thus had to share the debt burden. A statistics showed that the whole county owed banks a little more than 16 million yuan in total, plus an annual interest of 900,000 yuan. The amount was so high that even if putting the annual net income of all communes together it was still less than enough to pay it off.³⁹¹ Besides the food shortage and the lack of funds, severe inflation further reduced farmers' income while increased the production cost considerably. In Xiashe Brigade, for instance, the value of each work point dropped from 8 cents in 1957 to 3.4 cents in 1959 and further to

³⁹⁰ "The situation of previous stage of rural rectification movement and the opinions on its further development" (Feb. 25, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

³⁹¹ "中共宝应县委员会关于几年来农村生产生活变化以及当前存在问题和今后恢复发展生产的情况汇报 (绝密)" [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the changes in recent years in rural production and life and on current problems and future restoration and development of production (top secret)] (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-57.

3.1 cents in 1960. And other brigades also saw an average decrease of 30-50 percent for the value of work points.³⁹² On the contrary, the production cost kept growing in the early 1960s. For example, the price of an iron shovel increased from 2.09 yuan in 1957 to 3.46 yuan in 1961; at the same time, the price of a plow increased from 11.5 yuan to 14 yuan, a ship increased from 80-100 yuan to 250-300 yuan, a waterwheel increased from 50 yuan to 130 yuan, and the price an ox even increased by ten times from 200-300 yuan (or about 4,000 jin of rice) to 2,500-3,000 yuan (or about 40,000 jin of rice).³⁹³ Due to the sharp increase of production cost, many brigades could not afford to buy an ox, some sold off farmers' grain rations for extra cash, and some even dig out coffins and reused the wood to make tools.³⁹⁴

As the economic reconstruction went well beyond the ability of any individual commune to manage, it was understandable that many communes adopted egalitarian measures as a quick solution to alleviate the famine. Consequently, those relatively better-off production teams were required to share their resources, in particular grain reserves, livestock and manpower, with the poor ones, and all farmers in the same brigade would be given the same amount of food no matter how much they had produced.

³⁹² “关于‘纠正两个平均主义’‘如何提高工资分值’的调查报告” [An investigation report on ‘correcting the two types of equalitarianism’ and ‘how to increase the credit value of wages’] (Apr.30, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

³⁹³ *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ “Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the changes in recent years in rural production and life and on current problems and future restoration and development of production (top secret)” (July 2, 1962), BYA, 301-1-57.

³⁹⁵ Meanwhile, all farmers would obtain the same work points regardless of their job and how much energy and skill they in fact devoted to their work. And to make it more unfair, the amount of work points was simply determined by scorekeepers without consulting with farmers. Consequently, scorekeepers customarily gave favorable treatment to themselves and relations, while many farmers received low points despite their honesty and hard work. ³⁹⁶ These measures somewhat benefited some families short of labor, but caused strong resentment among the majority of the producers. Many farmers therefore complained: “I work so hard, but still have to endure hunger; yet the people doing nothing will be taken care of by the state.” ³⁹⁷ Even so, each production team was required to turn in the majority of their income to brigades and communes. For example, a production team of Xinming Brigade earned 2,410 yuan in 1960 by selling basketry and aquatic products, but only 200 yuan were finally left for the dividing among farmers. ³⁹⁸

All these economic and institutional problems were barely touched in the Anti-Five Winds Campaign. Furthermore, the government continued to impose discrimination policies against farmers, especially in its food supply system. In the Spring Festival of 1962, for instance, Baoying County was required by higher authorities to provide extra food to nearby towns and cities, which included 400 pigs, 4,000 chicken eggs, 25 cattle, 160 lambs and 3,500 *dan* of aquatic products. At the same time, however, the amount of

³⁹⁵ “An investigation report on ‘correcting the two types of equalitarianism’ and ‘how to increase the credit value of wages’” (Apr.30, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

food assigned to farmers was far less than that assigned to the residents of towns and cities. An incomplete list of food supply is as following: meat: 1.5 liang for each city resident, 1 liang for each town resident, and no supply to farmers; fish: 1 jin for each city and town resident, and no supply to farmers; liquor: 1 jin for each cadre, 1 jin for each city and town resident, 0.5 jin for each farmer household; sugar: 1 liang for each person in cities, towns and rural areas; Tofu: 4 pieces for each city resident, 3 pieces for each town resident, and 1 piece for each farmer; snacks: 1 jin for each city resident and each government employee and each factory worker, 0.5 jin for each town resident person, and 1 jin for each farmer household.³⁹⁹ This food supply plan indicated that hierarchical unfairness existed not only inside communes but also between the rural and urban areas, but the policy makers had never seriously take this problem into consideration even after the Great Famine. Instead of making a reflection on the institutional flaws in the collectivized agricultural system, the Central Committee only planned to attribute all problems to the poor quality of grassroots cadres and preferred to deal with the crisis through political means rather than economic measures. This attitude certainly would not help much to improve the situation in the countryside, but had become more and more dominant among the leadership of the CCP.

Movement Escalated

³⁹⁹ “关于加强当前市场工作的指示” [Directives on strengthening current work of market regulation] (Feb.6, 1961), BYA, 301-1-51.

At the end of 1961, just when the Anti-Five Winds Campaign came to its end, the Central Committee issued a new notice, calling for launching another round of Socialist Education Movement in rural areas. According to this notice, the emphasis of the socialist education was to secure farmers' continuous support for the collectivized agricultural system by telling them not to take cadres' mistakes as the flaws of the commune institution. Nevertheless, the Central Committee advised rural cadres not to carry out this campaign separately from other work duties and not to adopt radical methods, such as calling mass meetings or posting big-character posters, to promote it; it even decided not to use the press to publicize the campaign.⁴⁰⁰ Consequently, the Socialist Education Movement was kept in a low-profile from late 1961 to late 1962.

These developments made Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, more and more dissatisfied. At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth CCP Central Committee convened in September 1962, he voiced his discontent by asserting that, "during the whole period of the proletarian revolution and proletarian dictatorship" and "the whole transitional period from capitalism to communism (which could be several decades or longer)," there would always exist "the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeois" and "the struggle between the socialist road and the capitalist road." He further pointed out that the class enemies abroad were imperialists, reactionaries and revisionists who were opposing socialist revolutions, and domestically were landlords and capitalists who were looking for any chance to restore their power. Mao especially

⁴⁰⁰ "中共中央关于在农村进行社会主义教育的指示" [Directives from CCP Central Committee on launching the socialist education in rural areas] (Nov.13, 1961), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.528-32.

expressed his suspicion on farmers, saying that “due to the persistent influence of the old force of habit, some of them [would] abandon socialism and walk the capitalist road as long as they have a chance.” In summarizing his viewpoint, Mao concluded: “The current class struggle and the struggle between the two roads are very clear and very intense.”⁴⁰¹ After the conference, Mao began to take all opportunities to emphasize the urgency of preventing the restoration of capitalism; he even proposed a later well-known slogan that “class struggle must be talked about every year and every month.” This situation persisted until February 1963 when Mao gave a speech at a meeting of the Central Committee. Taking the chance of discussing the reports on the Socialist Education Movement in Hunan and Hubei provinces, Mao once again made a high-profile speech, reminding all Party members that they “must not forget class struggle” and declaring that “once class struggle is grasped, all problems can be resolved.”⁴⁰²

Soon, under Mao’s insistence, the Socialist Education Movement moved up to the top of the agenda of all Party committees across China. The County Committee of Baoying therefore launched a campaign in May 1963 among 4,777 government employees with a purpose to “delimit the border between the two roads in the mind of all

⁴⁰¹ “关于阶级与阶级斗争学习的动员报告” [A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle] (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

⁴⁰² “社会主义教育运动(上)” [The record of Mao’s speech at the work meeting of CCP Central Committee (I)] (Feb .28, 1963), 毛泽东传 [Biography of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian Press, 2003), pp.1309-344.

staffs” and “purify the organizations and cadres of the Party” so as to “completely smash the savage attacks from the capitalists and prevent the restoration of capitalism.”⁴⁰³

Meanwhile, the County Committee chose Huangpu Commune as an experimental field for an escalated Socialist Education Movement. According to the arrangement by the County Committee, the experiment would be carried out in three steps. The first step was to hold meetings for cadres and farmers and mobilize them to participate in class struggle, but those labeled as landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries and bad elements would be banned to attend these meetings. In the second step, the work team sent down by the County Committee would examine the account books and require cadres to confess their problems and inform against each other, and ordinary farmers would also be encouraged to disclose cadres’ misbehaviors. At the same time, the work team would review the performance of the four types of class enemies and determine who should be further punished. If one was perceived as a subversive, the work team would call mass meetings to “beat him down, destroy his reputation and fight him uncompromisingly.” In the final step, 20-30 percent of the poor and lower middle farmers would be selected to form a special organization to supervise the behavior of cadres and the running of production teams as well.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰³ “中共宝应县委员会关于县直机关开展增产节约和五反运动的部署报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on launching the campaigns of increasing production and practicing economy and Five Antis in the county government] (Apr.13, 1963), BYA, 301-1-69.

⁴⁰⁴ “运动到群众的初步计划” [Preliminary plan for implementing the movement among masses] (Oct.22, 1963), BYA, 301-1-70.

According to the report of the work team, the cadres and farmers of Huangpu Commune were “greatly shocked” by the sudden escalation in tensions which lasted for three months. The most excited were recently appointed cadres after the Great Leap Forward, who had a relatively clean record and saw the Socialist Education Movement as a chance to show their loyalty to the Party. They therefore closely cooperated with the work team to attack their superiors in hope of removing obstacles to their own promotion. To those who had served in their posts for a long time, however, the arrival of the work team alarmed them so much that they now began to work in the fields all day so as to avoid meeting with the work team staff; when encountering them, they would only make self-criticisms repeatedly. Certainly, the most nervous were those who had serious problems. A few of them simply made excuses for leaving the commune, but more kept watch on the activities of the work team staff, and even tailed them or eavesdropped on their conversations. At the same time, they also threatened farmers not to cooperate with the work team, and conspired with each other to resist investigations. Of course there were a few who had intended to give themselves up, but none really did so for fearing the severe punishment they might receive.

The responses from farmers were also diverse. Fearing that the Socialist Education Movement would become a movement similar to the agricultural collectivization or the Great Leap Forward during which all their food had been taken away, many farmers not only lost all interest in working, but began to kill and sell the poultry they bred and eat up all the remaining grain they had. Some old farmers who had been categorized as poor farmers and farm hands in the early 1950s did welcome the

arrival of the work team and expected for another movement like land reform, but most of them chose to wait and see for worrying that cadres would revenge on them after the work team left. The middle farmers also would rather to keep silent because they were afraid of the possible changes of the Party's policy that would make them the next target of the movement. The most interesting response was from the youth, who were commonly indifferent to the concept of class struggle. For many young farmers and some young cadres as well, those old landlords and rich farmers were too poor to be hateful. They mocked that the demarcation between landlords, rich farmers, middle farmers and poor farmers had become history, and now there were only new four types of farmers: male farmers, female farmers, good farmers and bad farmers. "What's point of talking about class struggle now?" they asked.⁴⁰⁵

Evidence of Class Struggle

In early October 1963, as if to refute the suspicions of the youths, the County Committee publicized a document entitled "The Central Committee's Resolution to Some Problems of Current Rural Work." In this document, the Central Committee not only re-confirmed the correctness of all the policies it had made prior to the Great Famine, but also declared "the situation [was] getting better and better every year." As for the reasons for current economic recession in agriculture, the Central Committee mentioned many factors, such as the severe natural disasters, the lack of live stock, tools and funds, but

⁴⁰⁵ "黄浦公社社会主义教育运动第一阶段工作总结" [Summary of the first stage of socialist education movement in Huangpu Commune] (Oct.11, 1963), BYA, 301-1-70.

particularly it attributed the crisis to the “rampant attack” of “two reactionary forces: capitalism and feudalism.” For this reason, the Central Committee called for resolving current problems by launching a nation-wide Socialist Education Movement focused on class struggle.⁴⁰⁶ Echoing the call by the Central Committee, the County Committee of Baoying also proclaimed that the situation of class struggle was “very intense” in Baoying and “the class enemies had never given up their reactionary positions.” The Party boss of the county reminded cadres in a speech: “Whenever our economy is temporarily in difficulties or there are international tensions, these evil people of all kinds [*niu gui she shen*, literally means: ox devils and snake spirits] will be ready to make trouble and act boldly and aggressively.” He even emotionally warned: “Comrades, the enemies have been insufferably arrogant. [If we are] still incautious, our heads will fall to the ground.”⁴⁰⁷ Suddenly, due to the repeated emphasis by the county leaders, the concept of class struggle, which had faded out from the mind of many farmers and the young generations in particular, again dominated the daily lives of rural residents.

Soon, under the arrangement of the County Committee, all communes began to collect evidence to support the claim that class struggle was still intense, and all evidence was immediately and confidentially reported to the County Committee. The content of the evidence was usually trivial and fragmentary, but there were several types of issues commonly mentioned. The first type was about some old “class enemies” expressing

⁴⁰⁶ “王树栲同志在黄浦公社三级干部扩大会议上的报告” [Speech by Comrade Wang Shukao at the enlarged meeting for the cadres of three ranks in Huangpu Commune] (Oct.4, 1963), BYA, 301-1-71.

⁴⁰⁷ “A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle” (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

resentment towards the government and Party leaders. For example, in 1962 when a crisis broke out across the Taiwan Strait and the Party called people to prepare for a war against the KMT, the owner of a bicycle store was reported to pierce the eyes of Mao's portrait with a needle. In addition, some landlords dug up their previous title deeds, expecting to reclaim their land after the Nationalists returned to the mainland; rumors also appeared, saying that the Nationalist troops had landed on the eastern coast cities like Qingdao and Yancheng and was about to use atomic bombs to attack the communists; another gossip even declared Mao had died.⁴⁰⁸ Several communes reported that they found "counter-revolutionary slogans," such as "Down with the CCP," on the back of propaganda posters.⁴⁰⁹ Besides these, any other complaints about cadres, communes or famines were all labeled as "plotting to restore capitalism," "threatening cadres in public," "humiliating leaders" or "fabricating rumors to sabotage [the socialist institutions]," and thus reported to the County Committee as the evidence of class struggle.⁴¹⁰

The second type of evidence was about the "restoration of capitalism." It actually showed how farmers and town residents struggled to maintain a basic livelihood by taking advantage of the loopholes in the planned economic system. For example, according to an investigation conducted by the County Committee, there were nearly 2,000 people involved in the black market in the county seat. They traded grain, cooking

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ "射阳公社关于阶级斗争的专题材料" [Specific materials about the class struggle in Sheyang Commune] (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

⁴¹⁰ "宝应城镇阶级斗争情况的典型材料" [Materials of typical examples of class struggle in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying] (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

oil, sugar, salt, liquor, cigarettes, chemical fertilizers, rubber overshoes, knitted undershirts, various coupons, silver, gold and numerous other goods obtained from a variety of sources. A major source was from the employees of the state-run stores, who stole the goods from their own “work units.” In 1963, for instance, several theft rings were uncovered within the grain units of the county government, who were responsible for the stealing of more than 10,000 jin of grain.⁴¹¹ In another case uncovered in Huangpu Commune, 10 cadres of the supply and marketing cooperatives stole 20,000 jin of grain which they sold for 2,000 yuan on the black market.⁴¹² In addition, there were individuals purchasing grain, vegetable oil and other materials directly from farmers. Besides food, various coupons were also popular in the black market. A trader caught by the police, for instance, was found to have sold 3,439 jin of grain coupons, 1,648 yards of cloth coupons and 375 cartons of cigarettes. The people participating in the coupon trade were from a diverse background. Some were the employees of the state-run shops, some were teenage apprentices of factories, some were old women selling tea in front of their own homes, and some certainly were jobless. Most of them just acted within Baoying County, but a few sophisticated traders were able to expand their operations to nearby counties. After making money, they usually went to buy food and liquor or practice usury, but some even dared to invest in private businesses. In 1963, for instance, the County Committee was surprised to find that there were 104 small private shops doing business

⁴¹¹ “Preliminary plan for implementing the movement among masses” (Oct.22, 1963), BYA, 301-1-70.

⁴¹² “黄浦公社阶级斗争初步揭发的材料” [Preliminary materials on the class struggle in Huangpu Commune] (Aug.13, 1963), BYA, 301-1-72.

openly in the county seat. And more ironically, despite the regulations against private business, many individuals still managed to purchase equipment, such as the grain crushing machines, from the state-run shops, and some even regularly paid taxes to the government.⁴¹³ Meanwhile, the county leaders found that numerous private food stalls had reappeared on the street, whose flour and cooking oil were surely obtained from the black market.

Compared with food and coupons, the private trading of silver and gold was small-scale because most precious metals had been controlled by the state; on other hand, however, due to the very limited supply, the illegal trade of silver and gold was so profitable that it tempted some individuals to utilize all their special skills to meet the black market demand. An old craftsman, for instance, sent his son-in-law to Shanghai to collect golden pen points and then extracted gold from them. Another man managed to steal 50 jin of silver powder from a pharmaceutical factory in Shanghai and processed them into 800 liang of silver, which valued 7,000-8,000 yuan in the black market. In the whole county, there were 14 people caught for selling 165 liang of gold, 1,200 liang of silver and 2,500 pieces of silver coins.⁴¹⁴

In addition to “the attacks of class enemies” and “the restoration of capitalism,” the third type of evidence was about “the resurgence of the feudal superstition.” In the communist vocabulary, “the feudal superstition” was mainly referred to traditional

⁴¹³ “A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle” (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

⁴¹⁴ “Materials of typical examples of class struggle in Chengzhen Commune of Baoying” (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

customs and folk religions. The practice of these traditions had been strictly suppressed since the early 1950s by the communists who were eager to promote their own ideologies, but in the early 1960s when the government had to focus more on economic problems and somewhat relaxed its control over thought, traditions returned rapidly to the rural lives. This phenomenon, however, was seen by the Count Committee as a result of the manipulation by class enemies who planned to “promote reactionary and backward thoughts, cheat people for money and materials, sabotage the collective production and commit other forms of crimes.”⁴¹⁵

An obvious sign of the revival of traditions was that witches, wizards, geomancers and fortuneteller commonly resumed their businesses, and monks also re-appeared in Buddhist funeral rituals.⁴¹⁶ Meanwhile, shrines for local deities were rebuilt all around the county in 1962 and 1963.⁴¹⁷ In Huangpu Commune, for instance, farmers not only used bricks, which were rare and expensive then, to build a new shrine for the local earth deity, but also held a special ceremony after the construction was completed. The ceremony was presided over by the cadres of production teams, and a banquet of more than ten tables was served for the participants who consumed 48 jin of pork meat and numerous chicken, fish and vegetables. According to the traditional customs, the ceremony began at 11 pm so the deity would not be offended by noisy women and children; and in order to show their sincere respect to the deity, the accountant of the

⁴¹⁵ A speech by county leaders at the conference for county cadres (Oct. 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

⁴¹⁶ “Specific materials about the class struggle in Sheyang Commune” (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

⁴¹⁷ “A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle” (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

production team kneeled before the shrine representing all attendants for half an hour in the chilly wind. In another production team of the same commune, 13 households created an organization to worship the deity of fire, praying not to be harmed by fire. The members of this organization included both ordinary farmers and the cadres of the CCP and the Young Communist League. In the opening rite of this organization, they lighted candles and burnt incense, and then sincerely kowtowed to a wood tablet, which the name of the deity was inscribed. A special article was finally read out to show their respect to the deity, which contains the name of the Nationalist regime, the Republic of China. It turned out that the deity of fire played an irreplaceable role in farmers' lives. For example, when a conflict arose between two farmers, cadres would bring them to the shrine and asked them to burn incense and kowtow to the deity; this usually would make both parties cool down and reconcile quickly.⁴¹⁸

Besides the emergence of new shrines, old customs also revived in many farmers and cadres' homes. For example, Mao's portraits were replaced by the paintings of Guangong and other folk deities, and the red paper with traditional blessing words, such as *Fu, Lu, Shou, Xi* and *Cai*, were also posted on doors and walls, expressing farmers' desires for good fortune, wealth, longevity and happiness; some even wrote that they wished to be given more individual land for household farming. All these wishes,

⁴¹⁸ "Speech by Comrade Wang Shukao at the enlarged meeting for the cadres of three ranks in Huangpu Commune" (Oct.4, 1963), BYA, 301-1-71.

however, were condemned by the County Committee for being “full of the desires for achieving personal prosperity and returning to the old days.”⁴¹⁹

The evidence of class struggle also reportedly existed in many other circumstances. For example, the County Committee found that 41 out of the 229 non-governmental sponsored elementary schools still worshiped Confucius, and 56 used Confucian classics, such as *Three-Character Scripture*, *Thousand-Character Article*, *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean* and *Scripture for Girls*, as their textbooks; a few schools even still used the textbooks published in the Republican era. In the field of entertainment, the county leaders criticized that farmers still favored “stale and poisonous feudal stories” about “intelligent young men and pretty girls, emperors and their officials, ox devils and snake spirits” but had not yet fostered interest in the literature about workers, farmers and soldiers. The County Committee also blamed the local drama troupes, which still performed traditional dramas, for “simply emphasizing the importance of profit while ignoring their duties of working for politics and production.”⁴²⁰ In the field of social networking, the county leaders were alarmed by the common practices of compiling clan genealogies and forming nominal kinship regardless of class backgrounds. In Sheyang Commune, for instance, the Party Secretary of Liaoxu Brigade gathered all brigade members bearing the same family name on the day of

⁴¹⁹ “Specific materials about the class struggle in Sheyang Commune” (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67; “在落后队的集体生产上阶级斗争、两条路线斗争相当尖锐” [The class struggle and the struggle between two roads are very intense in backward brigades] (June 19, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

⁴²⁰ “中共宝应县委检查初稿（第三稿）” [Draft of self-criticism by CCP Baoying County Committee (3rd version)] (Aug.8, 1963), BYA, 301-1-66.

Qingming Festival, a traditional festival for paying tribute to ancestors. The names of their ancestors of the recent ten generations were posted on the wall in a school classroom, and all clan members were required to burn incense and kowtow to them; even fourteen clan rules were announced after the ritual. In another case in Fanshui Commune, 20 out of the 22 households of a production team had either blood relationship or nominal kinship, and many local cadres maintained close relations with those labeled landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries or middle farmers. Consequently, they were condemned by the County Committee for “mixing the class lines” and “creating an unhealthy atmosphere” in the community.⁴²¹

More Problems Uncovered

In addition to the above issues, the Socialist Education Movement discovered more corruption and decadence of rural cadres. It turned out that a new group consisting of rich cadres had emerged in all the communes of Baoying County. By dominating the process of income division, imposing fines on farmers, stealing and selling grain, straw, livestock manure, and many other collective resources, many cadres of brigades and communes had become so wealthy that they could not only secure enough food and clothing for their families, but also afford luxury goods like bicycles and watches, and some even were able to build new houses. In Huangpu Commune, for instance, the county work team found in December 1963 that 88 percent of the 728 cadres had been

⁴²¹ “The class struggle and the struggle between two roads are very intense in backward brigades” (June 19, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

involved in corruption by embezzling at least 109,452 jin of grain, 49,720 yuan of cash, 5,000 yards of cloth coupons and 4,000 jin of grain coupons.⁴²² Given this fact, no wonder why farmers reportedly called these nouveaux riches “big boss” and “new landlords.”⁴²³

Certainly, cadres’ desires were not limited to food, clothing and housing. The investigation conducted by the County Committee also found numerous sex-related offenses involving the cadres at all levels. A prominent case occurred in Ziyinghe orchard of Huangpu Commune, where the local cadres reportedly “led a life of debauchery and spent all the time in dining, wining, whoring, gambling, embezzling and stealing.” The investigators especially mentioned a cadre of the orchard who raped 31 women, including orchard workers, wives of other cadres and ordinary commune members; the youngest victim was only sixteen years old. These rapes happened at different locations, such as rice field, pig pens, cattle pens, toilets, silkworm rooms, bushes and vegetable gardens, and the women living nearby were so scared that few dared to leave home at night.⁴²⁴ In another example, four out of the five cadres of Xinnan Brigade in Sheyang Commune were found to have improper sexual relations. Among them, a deputy Party Secretary confessed to have sexual relations with 11 women, even including his own aunt and

⁴²² “四清工作小结” [Summary of the Four Cleanups work] (Dec.16, 1963), BYA, 301-1-72.

⁴²³ “Preliminary materials on the class struggle in Huangpu Commune” (Aug.13, 1963), BYA, 301-1-72.

⁴²⁴ “A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle” (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

cousin; another deputy Party Secretary had 15 mistresses. This situation was so common that some cadres even boasted: “No whoring or gambling, no real cadres.”⁴²⁵

Data shows that the population of Baoying was about 500,000 in 1963, while the number of cadres at and above the production team level had amounted to 17,000 at least. In other words, averagely every 28 farmers had to pay the salary of one cadre.⁴²⁶ The actual burden of farmers should be higher given the widespread corruption of cadres. A direct result of the large numbers of cadres was the soaring administrative expenditure and increasing bureaucracy. For example, when telephones were still rare in 1960s China, there were 61 telephones installed just in the offices of the County Committee, which cost 43,568 yuan during the 18 months from 1962 to mid 1963.⁴²⁷ Besides this, an incomplete data from 1962 to February 1963 showed that the County Committee and the county government spent at least 1,300 yuan for entertaining guests, and 16 subordinate units spent another 10,662 yuan on dining and gifts.⁴²⁸ Meanwhile, the renovation of the county government’s hotel cost more than 1,000 yuan, and the improvement of cadres’ dormitories and the homes of a few high-level cadres were also paid by the county government.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁵ “Specific materials about the class struggle in Sheyang Commune” (June 15, 1963), BYA, 301-1-67.

⁴²⁶ “A comprehensive report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the situation of natural disasters in 1962]” (Oct.12, 1962), BYA, 301-1-56; “关于清理、结算三年分配工作的情况报告” [Report on the work of clearing and settling the distribution of incomes in recent three years] (May 8, 1961), BYA, 301-1-49.

⁴²⁷ “Draft of self-criticism by CCP Baoying County Committee (3rd version)” (Aug.8, 1963), BYA, 301-1-66.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

Such a high expenditure, however, did not produce high efficiency. Most county cadres preferred to stay in their comfortable offices rather than being bothered to visit communes in person. Consequently, the communication between the county leaders and grassroots cadres were highly dependent on paperwork and telephones. The record showed that, from 1962 to the first half of 1963, there were totally 9,833 documents issued by 19 units of the county government—averagely about 20 pieces per day. Meanwhile, 1,109 forms were sent out to communes to collect the data for 18,649 statistical items. Furthermore, despite the huge volume, many documents were full of trivia and the directives from the county government often were nonsensical. For example, one document even asked all communes to conduct a census on the number of male and female saplings; as a result, the commune cadres had to concoct numbers to meet the demand from the county government.⁴³⁰ Meanwhile, the county leaders also frequently called telephone meetings with commune cadres, which usually lasted for hours and even from morning till midnight sometimes. On April 25, 1960, for instance, eight telephone meetings were held; when the last one was ended at 3 a.m., the commune cadres on the other side of the phone had nearly fallen to sleep. Having become used to the bureaucratic work style, many cadres therefore assumed that all their duty was to issue documents and attend meetings; if there was no meeting scheduled, they would prefer not to stay in office.⁴³¹ Ironically, the “mountain of documents and sea of

⁴³⁰ “Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the first stage of Three Antis Movement in the county government” (Oct.28, 1960), BYA, 301-1-41.

⁴³¹ A speech by county leaders at the conference for county cadres (Oct. 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

meetings” made cadres look busy every day, but in fact the efficiency of the government was fairly low.

Despite the increasing bureaucracy, however, the county leaders found there was another problem worthy of more attention from them: the theory of class struggle had become less and less appealing to farmers and grassroots cadres. In the official propaganda, all problems in the countryside were resulted from the sabotage by class enemies: the grain output dropped because the production tools were intentionally damaged by landlords and rich farmers; large numbers of refugees fled their homes because they were agitated by counter-revolutionaries; farmers wanted to retain more land for household farming because they were incited by class enemies.⁴³² In reality, however, the majority of former landlords and rich farmers had been reduced to the poorest groups in the rural population, and their living conditions often aroused sympathy, instead of hatred, from many youths. Even many grassroots cadres also held the same standpoint. For example, a document of the County Committee reported in November 1963 that the cadres of Huangpu Commune commonly agreed: “Those living in the poor and lonely conditions are landlords and rich farmers; those who are honest and behaving themselves well are middle farmers, and those who only make troubles are poor and lower-middle farmers.” Some made a further conclusion: “Landlords and rich farmers are smart; middle farmers are skilled [in farming], and poor farmers are stupid.” They even suggested that the commune should depend on those who were smart and skilled to help

⁴³² “A mobilizing speech on the study of class and class struggle” (June 25, 1963), BYA, 301-1-68.

restore its economy.⁴³³ These viewpoints certainly were criticized by the county leaders for “losing the proper class position,” and the County Committee also harshly pointed out that, despite their political status as the Party members, the thought of many cadres were still non-proletarian.⁴³⁴

In order to remind farmers and cadres of the “wickedness” of class enemies and, at the same time, simulate the youth’s hatred against landlords and rich farmers, the County Committee turned to mass meetings again, requiring elder farmers, in particular old women, to publicly tell miserable stories about the “old society” and class enemies—it was called “conveying bitterness.” Although showing no interest in the arrangement, many old women eventually were forced by cadres to attend the meetings and give speeches about how landlords and rich farmers had exploited them before 1949, how poor their lives had been before the land reform movement, and how the KMT had forced young men to join the Nationalist army during the Civil War. After listening to the speeches, the youths would be asked to repeat the stories they had been told and then make comparisons between the “old society” and the “new society.”⁴³⁵ It is understandable that such meetings were especially embarrassing to the children of class enemies. They not only were forced to be present to “receive education on the filthy

⁴³³ “黄浦公社社会主义教育运动中整顿党的基层组织的情况小结” [Summary of the situation of rectifying grassroots Party organization of Huangpu Commune in the socialist education movement] (Dec.28, 1963), BYA, 301-1-70.

⁴³⁴ *ibid.*

⁴³⁵ “和平大队加强对成年妇女的阶级教育” [Heping Brigade strengthened the class education of mature women] (Nov.11, 1963), BYA, 301-1-72.

exploitative history of their families,” but also were required to turn against their parents and confess their own problems so as “to betray the interest of their own class and change their positions to stand with the people.”⁴³⁶

Nevertheless, it turned out that the re-education of class struggle was less effective than the county leaders had anticipated. Farmers commonly showed little enthusiasm to the campaign, and many still declined to utilize the theory of class struggle to explain everything. This was evidenced by an investigation conducted in all communes, which was aimed to compare the political attitude and performance of each head of household (mostly male) before and after the Socialist Education Movement. The result of the investigation showed that there were no significant changes in farmers’ thought throughout the campaign. Most farmers were remarked by cadres as “normal” in the evaluation forms, and very few were given the comments like “loyal and honest” or “actively fight against enemies.” Ironically, it was not unusual to find farmers who “commented negatively [about the campaign],” or “dared not fight against enemies,” or “[were] deeply influenced by the bourgeois thought;” even many poor farmers were also considered backward in thought for refusing to attend meetings or give speeches.⁴³⁷

Furthermore, many cadres who had been forced to make self-criticism also complained that they were treated unfairly by the County Committee. Regarding the charges of corruption, they argued that their problems were insignificant compared to

⁴³⁶ “台许大队召开四类分子子弟会议进行感化教育” [Taiqu Brigade held meetings to educate and influence the children of four types of elements] (Nov.12, 1963), BYA, 301-1-72.

⁴³⁷ Investigations conducted by the brigades of Huangpu Commune in Dec. 1963, BYA, 301-1-73; 9280

some higher-level cadres who were wealthier and enjoyed better living conditions.⁴³⁸ As for stealing grain and selling them in the black market, they argued that they were forced to do so by the high pressure of life; as for participating in “feudal superstitious activities,” they argued that the Party should respect the traditional customs of farmers and give people the freedom of religious beliefs; as for why let middle farmers and rich farmers play more active roles in production, they argued that it was because these groups of farmers were more experienced than poor farmers in farming; as for why they maintained close relations with landlords and rich farmers, they swore relations were only personal and had nothing to do with politics.⁴³⁹ In short, the responses of both farmers and cadres towards the Socialist Education Movement suggested that they had become increasingly tired of the old-fashioned propaganda of class struggle. This mood kept growing through the early 1960s, making it more and more difficult for the Party to maintain its authoritarian control over the rural population than in the late 1950s.

The Turning Point

Sensing the passive resistance to the Socialist Education Movement from the grassroots, the Central Committee decided to act to prevent its rule from being weakened further. In June 1964, Liu Shaoqi, the Chairman of the PRC, was appointed to take charge of the Socialist Education Movement. He soon made an inspection to several

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*

⁴³⁹ “Summary of the first stage of socialist education movement in Huangpu Commune” (Oct.11, 1963), BYA, 301-1-70.

provinces and arrived in Jiangsu in July 1964. He bluntly expressed his dissatisfaction with the situation in the rural areas of Jiangsu, and even argued fiercely with Jiang Weiqing, the First Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province. The main dispute between Liu and Jiang was about how to assess the current situation in the countryside and how to conduct the Socialist Education Movement in the next stage. Liu's viewpoints about the Socialist Education Movement were largely influenced by his wife Wang Guangmei, who once conducted the campaign in Taoyuan Brigade of Funing County in Hebei Province. Based on Wang's report, Liu developed his own ideas named the "Taoyuan experience" [*Taoyuan Jingyan*]. The main points of the Taoyuan experience are: it was the majority, not a small group, of the rural cadres were corrupt, and the reason that they could still remain in office without being punished meaningfully was because they were blessed by a network of protectors, which included the cadres in the county committees, prefectural committees, provincial committees and even the Central Committee as well. Liu therefore believed the Socialist Education Movement must be carried out more thoroughly so as to weed out all corrupt cadres within the Party and government. As the first step to reach the goal, Liu required that more work teams be sent down to communes directly from the county committees or higher authorities, and the leaders at and above the county level should personally lead the work of these teams; he also instructed that, instead of cooperating with the local cadres, work teams should only depend on poor and lower-middle farmers throughout the campaign so that they could really disclose the corrupt activities of local cadres. Although Liu struggled to promote his "Taoyuan experience" all around China, he encountered substantial resistance from many regional

leaders, such as Jiang Weiqing. As the highest leader of Jiangsu Province, Jiang certainly was reluctant to admit that corruption was rampant in the province he ruled. He therefore firmly opposed the idea of Liu to mobilize ordinary farmers to attack cadres, arguing that Party cadres should not be treated in the same way as landlords and rich farmers had experienced. Jiang's argument, however, was harshly criticized by Liu Shaoqi. Eventually, under the increasing pressure from the Central Committee and in particular Liu himself, the Provincial Committee of Jiangsu Province called a meeting for prefectural and municipal Party cadres on July 27, 1964 to announce the latest directives of the Central Committee; it marked the beginning of a new stage of the Socialist Education Movement in Jiangsu Province.⁴⁴⁰

The new directives of the Central Committee and the Provincial Committee were conveyed to Baoying in August. The County Committee immediately held a conference, and the Party boss gave a keynote speech about how to view the current political situation. The basic judgment made by the Central Committee was that the leaderships in a large number of factories, schools, government units and communes had already fallen into the hands of capitalists; although these capitalists were still too weak to stage a meaningful rebellion against the CCP, it was not impossible for them to assist in the "peaceful evolution" of the communist regime by secretly cooperating with the foreign rivalries of China. The Central Committee even cited the failure of the Paris Commune and the Hungarian Soviet Republic to prove that, without a resolute suppression of class enemies,

⁴⁴⁰ See 江渭清[Jiang Weiqing], 江渭清回忆录[Memoir of Jiang Weiqing] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Press, 1996), pp.464-507.

there would also be the restoration of capitalism and the overthrow of the communist regime in China. Based on this judgment, the Central Committee decided that the “proletarian dictatorship” must be further strengthened and, more importantly, measures should be taken to uncover those corrupt cadres who disguised themselves as the supporters of socialism and Marxism but in fact desired for the return of the KMT and the restoration of capitalism. It even declared that some Party members and cadres had already degenerated into the “Nationalists, exploiters, little despots, hooligans and the revisionists” who attempted to bring about “peaceful evolution” in China unnoticeably and gradually.⁴⁴¹

To those who had experienced numerous political campaigns, the new directives from the Central Committee sent out a strong signal that the Socialist Education Movement had been given more significance in preventing the capitalist restoration and “peaceful evolution,” and more noticeably, the Party leaders began to perceive grassroots cadres in an unusually negative way. These trends became more prominent in the following months. For example, on October 24, 1964, the Central Committee issued “Directives on the Problem of Struggling to Seize Power during the Socialist Education Movement.” This document introduced the experience of the Xiaozhan district of Tianjin. It reported that the leadership of Xiaozhan had long been controlled by counter-revolutionaries and thus hampered the implementation of the Socialist Education Movement; after the work team captured political power from the local cadres, however,

⁴⁴¹ “县委三级干部会议日志” [Journal of county committee meeting for the cadres of three ranks] (Aug.31, 1964), BYA, 301-1-75.

large numbers of corruption cases were finally uncovered. Taking Xiaozhan as an example, the Central Committee concluded that the current struggle in the rural area was actually “a conflict between us and our enemies” which appeared in the form of “the conflicts within the people or within the Party.” It further pointed out: “In the past, when talking about the struggle against enemies, some comrades only emphasized the struggle against the four types of elements [landlords, rich famers, counter-revolutionaries and bad elements] while ignored the enemies within the people and the Party; they even asked those hidden enemies and their agencies to fight against our enemies. Consequently, they could neither really defeat the enemies, nor resolve the conflicts within the people, but instead hurt good people sometimes. The purpose of the Socialist Education Movement therefore was not achieved. This is a lesson we should learn.” The Central Committee thereby ordered: “In all the areas where the leadership has been controlled or seized by enemies or corrupt cadres, [we] must fight to take power back; otherwise, [we] will make serious mistakes.”⁴⁴²

Less than a month later, the Central Committee issued another document on November 12 entitled “Written Comments on Letting Poor Farmers’ Associations Exercise Power in the Areas with Serious Problems.” This document instructed that, after stripping local cadres of their power, all the political power in the rural areas should be

⁴⁴² “中共中央关于社会主义教育运动夺权斗争问题的指示” [Directive from CCP Central Committee on the problem of seizing power in the socialist education movement] (Oct.24, 1964), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.778-80.

shifted to poor farmers' associations.⁴⁴³ Soon, on December 3, the Central Committee for the first time clearly declared that the focus of the Socialist Education Movement was "four cleanups," which meant clean politics, clean economy, clean thought and clean organization. It once again called on "all counties, districts, communes, and brigades" to carry out the Four Cleanups Movement and ordered that all county committees, district committees, commune committees be reorganized."⁴⁴⁴

At the end of 1964, therefore, the Socialist Education Movement came to a turning point. Under the advocacy of Liu Shaoqi, the Central Committee had rejected the previous claim that more than ninety percent of grassroots cadres were basically good, and began to suspect the majority of being corrupt and disloyal, and even excluded them from the category of "people" by calling them "hidden enemies;" meanwhile, the focus of the movement shifted from economic corruption to ideological and political problems, and consequently the target of struggle also shifted from the old four types of class enemies to the incumbent cadres within the Party and government. All these changes indicated that the Socialist Education Movement was developing into a political purge appearing in the form of class struggle.

A Dramatic Ending

⁴⁴³ "中共中央关于在问题严重的地区由贫协行使权力的批示" [Comments from CCP Central Committee on the practice of letting poor farmers' associations to exercise power in the areas with serious problems] (Nov.12, 1964), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.781-82.

⁴⁴⁴ "王任重同志在农村社教工作会议上的讲话记录稿(节录)" [Transcript of the speech by Comrade Wang Renzhong at the meeting of rural socialist education work (excerpt)] (Nov.15, 1964), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.783-95.

As the Central Committee displayed resolute determination to carry out its plans, the regional cadres who had been half-hearted about the Socialist Education Movement could no longer remain indifferent. On November 24, the Party boss of Baoying instructed the Standing Committee members of the County Committee to make a self-criticism at a meeting attended by county and commune cadres. He soon made a second self-criticism on December 4, and a third one on December 12. He repeatedly confessed that the County Committee had committed severe mistakes in several issues: first, it put agricultural production before the Socialist Education Movement and thus undervalued the “fundamental importance of class struggle;” secondly, despite many problems that had been uncovered in previous campaigns, it only related them to cadres’ styles of thinking and working, but never realized that they could be the indication of “peaceful evolution;” thirdly, worrying that cadres would throw up their jobs, the County Committee had never imposed severe punishment on corrupt cadres, and the Socialist Education Movement was always carried out in a “peaceful” way in Baoying. In short, the County Committee admitted that it had “lost a battle” to class enemies.⁴⁴⁵

The self-criticism of the County Committee just confirmed the judgment made by the Central Committee regarding the current situation of class struggle. And the next step, as the Central Committee required, was to launch an in-depth investigation about the corrupt deeds of grassroots cadres. As a result, all work units in both towns and communes began to re-examine the class background of everybody, intending to find out

⁴⁴⁵ “中共宝应县委常委关于右倾错误的检查报告” [Self-criticism by the standing committee of CCP Baoying County Committee on rightist mistakes] (Dec.12, 1964), BYA, 301-1-75.

the class enemies who had managed to escape the punishment in previous political campaigns. The re-examination was so strict that it revealed many “hidden enemies” who were allegedly former KMT members, officers of the Nationalist army, landlords, rich farmers, counterrevolutionaries and other types of “bad guys;” in some brigades, even all poor farmers were deemed to have “unclean” backgrounds.⁴⁴⁶ Meanwhile, a large scale Four Cleanups Movement was launched in all communes, among which Sheyanghu Commune was chosen by the County Committee as a key spot for intensive examinations.

From the winter of 1963 until the end of 1964, Sheyanghu Commune had already experienced several rounds of Socialist Education Movement. Despite this, a special work team consisting of 120 staffs still found plenty of problems in this commune. The work team eventually declared that 11 out of the 13 commune cadres and 33 out of the 70 brigade cadres were “unclean,” and on the average had embezzled 225 jin of grain, 104 yuan of cash, plus numerous other things like wood, cloth coupons and work points.⁴⁴⁷ Among all the units of Sheyanghe Commune, the work team singled out Qiaodong Brigade and asserted that it “had completely become a base for the restoration of capitalism.” The main evidence for this conclusion was the huge gap between the rich and poor in this brigade, which initially occurred in 1961 when the state somewhat relaxed its control over the rural economy. In that year, the brigade decided to rent out

⁴⁴⁶ “Journal of county committee meeting for the cadres of three ranks” (Aug.31, 1964), BYA, 301-1-75; “公社三级干部会议综合情况(第一期)” [General situation of the conference for commune cadres of three ranks (issue 1)] (Dec.21, 1964), BYA, 301-1-77.

⁴⁴⁷ “中共宝应县委员会关于射阳公社三级干部会议情况的报告” [Report by CCP Baoying County Committee on the meeting for cadres of three ranks in Sheyang Commune] (Nov.27, 1964), BYA, 501-1-76.

some marginal land to individual households, and after delivering its quota of grain to the state, farmers would be allowed to keep the surplus harvested from the contracted land. This measure certainly gave farmers a chance to obtain extra food and income to supplement their limited food allotments, but who would have the chance to enjoy the benefit was entirely determined by the brigade cadres. Eventually, 167 out of the 248 households obtained contracted land and thereby increased their income considerably. For example, each of the 6 brigade cadres acquired on average 0.9 mu of land and increased their average annual income to 375 yuan; each of the 16 cadres of production teams acquired on average 0.83 mu of land and increased their average annual income to 385 yuan; each of the 145 ordinary farmers acquired on average 0.67 mu of land and increased their average annual income to 165 yuan. At the same time, the rest 81 households having no contracted land only earned 40 yuan averagely a year. Consequently, the rich were able to afford farmhands to work for them. The Party Secretary of the brigade, for instance, hired several poor farmers to till his own contracted land; as a result, he only spent 26 days to work on the field personally in 1963, but still earned 4,186 work points and 451 yuan of income. On the contrary, a poor farmer who neither had contracted land nor could afford farmhands only earned 200 work points and 22 yuan of income—the income gap between the richest and the poorest therefore was about 20 times. Furthermore, in addition to the regular income, cadres also benefited from selling firewood, straw, pampas grass and other collective resources outside the brigade. In 1962-63, for instance, the trade of these materials produced a profit of 1,280 yuan, which was all divided by the 22 brigade cadres and their trade partners. The wealth

therefore was increasingly concentrated in the hands of powerful cadres while many poor families were forced to sell out all their properties and finally flee their homes.⁴⁴⁸

In fact, the main reason for the gap between the rich and poor in Qiaodong Brigade was the collectivized economic system in which the distribution of resources was determined by political power instead of the market. In the eyes of the work team, however, all problems could only result from the evil of capitalism and all corrupt cadres must have unclean backgrounds— either born to exploitative families or influenced by class enemies. In hope of finding evidence to support the judgment, the work team re-examined the dossiers of all brigade cadres, including their family backgrounds, historical experiences and current performance. The findings, however, was ironically inconsistent with the assumption of the work team. For example, the Party Secretary of Qiaodong Brigade was found to come from a family with three generations of poor farmers; he himself joined the PLA in 1945 and was cited for valor four times before he retired from the military in 1953. Since then, he had been serving as a rural cadre for ten years. The deputy chief of the brigade was also born to a family of poor farmers. He was an activist in the land reform of 1948, and later became a village head in 1953. Although had been dismissed twice and even was labeled “bad element” in 1960, he managed to stage a comeback and was promoted to the position of deputy chief of Qiaodong Brigade in 1963.⁴⁴⁹ It turned out that the experiences of these two cadres were

⁴⁴⁸ “集体经济的桥东大队完全变成资本主义复辟的阵地” [Qiaodong Brigade with its collectivized economy has completely become a front line of the restoration of capitalism] (Sep.2, 1964), BYA, 301-1-75.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*

not unique among the corrupt cadres. Instead of confirming the assumptions of the work team, the finding proved that the class status of rural residents, which were initially identified in the land reform movement, no longer reflected their real economic conditions in the early 1960s. Many of the former poor farmers, for instance, probably still lived in poverty or had died in the Great Famine, but others had secured positions in the Party or governmental organs and thereby belong to the emerging nouveau riche in the early 1960s. These findings clearly suggested the impossibility of applying the theory of class to analyze the social reality accurately and completely and that new socio-political institutions constructed on the basis of this theory may also produce corruption and social unfairness. Nevertheless, in the climax of the Four Cleanups Movement, there was only one officially recognized explanation of the phenomenon of Qiaodong Brigade, as the County Committee declared: “Capitalism had completely restored” and the social development “had returned to the old road before the liberation.”⁴⁵⁰

In order to deal with the problems uncovered in Sheyanghu Commune, the work team called three meetings in late December 1964, which were attended by some 22,600 cadres and the representatives of poor and lower-middle farmers. However, a confidential report by the County Committee showed that the meetings did not proceed as expected. Most grassroots cadres had not yet realized the growing tensions in current political situation, and still supposed that nothing serious would happen to them. They therefore remained indifferent to work team’s demand requiring them to confess their wrongdoings, but instead showed more interest in playing poker and Chinese chess during the breaks of

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*

the meetings. Meanwhile, despite the encouragement of the work team, most farmer representatives also declined to file charges against cadres because they had concluded from previous experiences that, after the work team had left, the corrupt cadres would remain in their positions and revenge on anyone who had attempted to reveal their wrongdoings. Consequently, the meetings resulted in nothing in the first week, except a small sum of illicit money and grain coupons returned by a few cadres.⁴⁵¹

The situation suddenly changed after the frustrated work team declared that the Four Cleanups Movement was a class struggle against the class enemies who were plotting to restore capitalism and carry out “peaceful evolution.” Shocked by the harsh rhetoric and fearing to be categorized into class enemies, cadres could no longer keep calm; many began to make confessions voluntarily—some even shed tears to show regret while reading confession letters, and more money, coupons and other materials were returned on site at the meetings. Inspired by this scene, many farmer representatives also began to recall how they had been abused by cadres; some could not help weeping and yelling for what they had suffered. As the days passed, farmers found the scheduled time of the meetings were too short to vent all their resentment. Under their request, therefore, the meetings were prolonged for another several days.⁴⁵²

The Four Cleanups Movement approached its climax in Baoying at the end of 1964, but a key confusion about the movement remained unanswered: how to deal with

⁴⁵¹ “公社三级干部会议综合情况(第六期)” [General situation of the conference for commune cadres of three ranks (issue 6)] (Dec.27, 1964), BYA, 301-1-77.

⁴⁵² “社会主义教育工作简报(第十六期)” [Briefing on socialist education work (issue 16)] (Jan.16, 1964), BYA, 301-1-77.

the corrupt cadres? Would they be allowed to keep their positions after making self-criticism—as had happened in the early period of the Socialist Education Movement, or would they be punished harshly as real class enemies? The County Committee waited for further instructions from above, and 1965 opened in an atmosphere of great uncertainty. On January 14, the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee finally convened a meeting to discuss the pressing problems, and published a document entitled “Some Problems Arising from Current Rural Socialist Education Movement.” This document included twenty-three resolutions and therefore was popularly known as the “23 Clauses.” It decreed that “the Socialist Education Movement in both cities and the rural areas [would] henceforth be called the Four Cleanups,” and more importantly, it for the first time proposed that the focus of the movement become “to fight against the capitalist roaders in authority within the Party.” As for who were “the capitalist roaders in authority within the Party,” the document did not provide a clear definition, but pointed out: “Among the supporters of those [capitalist-roaders] in authority, some are from the lower levels and others from the higher levels. Those from the lower levels include landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries and other bad elements who have either been identified or have not yet been revealed; those at the higher levels include some cadres working in communes, districts, counties, prefectures and even provincial or central units who are against socialism—some of them alien class elements from the beginning, some are degenerate elements, and others received bribes, worked in conclusion with each other and violated the law and discipline.”⁴⁵³ The wording of the document clearly implied that

⁴⁵³ “农村社会主义教育运动中目前提出的一些问题” [Some current problems arising from rural socialist

the top policy makers were shifting their target from the old four types of class enemies to the cadres within the Party, in particular those of high-rankings.

Nevertheless, although the Central Committee defined the nature of the Four Cleanups Movement as a struggle against class enemies, it also gave a fairly positive comment on the general quality of grassroots cadres by stating that “there are four types of cadres: good, reasonable, problematic, and seriously problematic. Generally speaking, the first two types are the majority.” As for how to carry out the struggle, the Central Committee required that work teams must “depend on the majority of the masses and cadres” instead of distrusting cadres and inciting farmers to attack them. Finally, regarding the problem of how to deal with the corrupt cadres, the Central Committee only endorsed to dismiss a small number of cadres who had committed serious problems, or to expel a few convicted of “extremely serious problems” from the Party and even to arrest them; but even so, those having been stripped of their positions and Party memberships would still be allowed to remain in communes as ordinary farmers. Meanwhile, to the majority of other problematic cadres, the Central Committee only required them to be “persuaded and educated” to correct their mistakes; it even proposed that these cadres, if they had made good confessions, could be granted more time to return illicit assets, or be allowed to return less amount than they had embezzled, or even be entirely exempted from doing so.⁴⁵⁴ In short, the “23 Clauses” described the threat of class enemies as

education movement] (Jan.14, 1965), *A Collection of Important Documents of Agricultural Collectivization* (vol.2), pp.819-28.

⁴⁵⁴ *ibid.*

unusually urgent, but strangely adopted a moderate stance towards the corruption of grassroots cadres. This contradiction made the document appear to a product of reconciliation, and more importantly, implied that grassroots cadres were not considered by top policy-makers as the main enemies in the new campaign of class struggle.

On January 27, 1965, thirteen days after it was proclaimed, the “23 Clauses” was conveyed to Baoying County, and most communes and brigades received the document on the same day; some immediately posted it on the wall at night. In the next two days, special meetings were held in most brigades to announce the latest instructions from the Central Committee. Many cadres read the document repeatedly and even copied the content they were most concerned about for further analysis. Certainly, most of them were eager to learn how the new policies would affect their fate, and few had any real interest in talking about the capitalist restoration and “peaceful evolution.” After reading the document, most cadres felt greatly relieved. For example, a confidential document of the County Committee reported that the deputy chief of Anfeng Commune commented on the “23 Clauses” “with a broad smile on his face.” He said: “Previously I was scared to death because I was unsure about the policies. And now, according to the document, there’s still hope as long as I return the stuff.”⁴⁵⁵ Some cadres even came to the conclusion that the Central Committee had determined to downgrade the significance of the Four Cleanups Movement, and thereby attempted to withdraw their confessions. Those who had returned some illicit money and materials now felt regretful, and those

⁴⁵⁵ “社会主义教育工作简报 (第十八期)” [Briefing on socialist education work (issue 18)] (Feb.1, 1965), BYA, 301-1-77.

who had not done so decided to return as little as possible.⁴⁵⁶ At the same time, the “23 Clauses” disappointed ordinary farmers and made many of them very angry. Just a month ago, they were urged by work teams to denounce cadres; but all of a sudden, the table was turned and their accusations not only were in vain, but exposed them to the potential retaliation from the local cadres who remained in their positions. Many farmers therefore lost faith in the government and Party, swearing that they would “never ever say anything” in future political campaigns.⁴⁵⁷ In fact, the Party also lost credibility in some cadres. Seeing the policies of the Central Committee always in constant changing, they could not help lamenting: “Who knows there are how many clauses to be made in the future.”⁴⁵⁸

Conclusion

The “23 Clauses” did cool the fever of the Four Cleanups Movement, and many cadres therefore felt grateful that they had survived another political crisis. Nevertheless, few people realized that the abrupt changes of Central Committee’s policies were resulted from the division among the highest Party leaders. As Gao Hua has pointed out in his article “The Great Famine and the Origin of the Four Cleanups Movement,” it was in 1961 that Mao initially formed a judgment that the Great Famine was caused by the sabotage of class enemies; but as the famine was still underway and many other Party

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸ *ibid.*

leaders, such as Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, insisted that the priority was economic recovery, Mao had to suspend his plan to launch a new movement against class enemies. However, when the economic situation became relatively stable in late 1962, Mao once again put forward his idea about class struggle and managed to “force the core leadership of the Central Committee to accept his opinion.” As a result, the Four Cleanups Movement was formally launched in the spring of 1963.⁴⁵⁹ The research on Baoying also shows that the evolution of the Socialist Education Movement, and later the Four Cleanups Movement, underwent a complex process starting from the Great Famine. In the wake of the catastrophe, the top Party leaders were forced to take actions to save the rural economy on the one hand and, on the other hand, to determine who should be responsible for the crisis. In fact, under the leadership of Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and other practical leaders, the government did retreat somewhat from its earlier radicalism, but as few of them really dared to challenge the authority of Mao, no essential changes were made to mend the institutional problems of the commune system, and even all the concepts and practices proposed by Mao before the Great Famine, such as the Great Leap Forward, continued to be praised in the official propaganda. This inevitably led to a question: If Mao, the final decision-maker of the rural reforms, made no mistakes, then who on earth should take the blame for such a huge man-made disaster? There was only one answer left: those who had implemented the policy betrayed Mao’s original

⁴⁵⁹ Gao Hua, “The Great Famine and the origin of the Four Cleanups Movement”, *Twenty-first Century* (2000:60).

intentions. Consequently, the rural cadres were destined to be the scapegoat for the failure of the agricultural reforms.

To make the matter more complicated, those cadres were not entirely innocent. As mentioned above, during the Great Leap Forward Movement cadres who dared to question or criticize the government policies had already been purged. Consequently, the cadres who survived the purge would rather implement the orders of their superiors uncritically so as to maintain their positions, and at the same time take every opportunity to further personal interests so as to survive the difficult times. All this pushed corruption to new heights and eventually made it an integral part of the rural society, which had been exposed in a series of movements, such as the “Three Antis” “Anti-Five Winds” and “Four Cleanups.” Therefore, under the pretext that no essential changes could be made to the commune system, to punish corrupt cadres would help temporarily reduce the tension in the countryside accumulated throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, although it could not resolve the institutional problems in the long run. This was why Liu Shaoqi decided to increase the punishment for corruption after he took charge of the Socialist Education Movement in 1964. Nevertheless, Liu failed to secure the support from regional leaders who were reluctant to admit the existence of serious corruption in their ruling areas, and more importantly, he was opposed by Mao. Although to punish grassroots cadres was not to negate the Great Leap Forward itself, it had already been enough to embarrass Mao in front of the whole Party and nation; furthermore, after dismissing a large number of cadres who were loyal to Mao’s policies, Liu would surely replace them with his own supporters and followers and thereby firmly consolidate his

authority within the Party from the central down the local level. Therefore, sensing his power was seriously threatened by Liu, Mao did not hesitate to cool the fever of the Four Cleanups Movement by making the 23 Clauses, although the movement was initially launched under his insistence. By showing a more moderate and flexible attitude towards cadres, Mao actually denied the harsh policy advocated by Liu and prevented Liu's influence from further expanding. On the other hand, however, Mao never planned to play down the struggle against class enemies, and even unexpectedly pointed his gun to "the capitalist-roaders in authority within the Party." By pointing out new directions for the Four Cleanups Movement, Mao successfully took the initiative back, and paved the theoretical way for his counterattack against those he deemed as enemies. This strategy, however, was subtly hidden behind Mao's moderate attitude towards grassroots cadres in the 23 Clauses and therefore did not alert his competitors—they had to wait for another couple of years before realizing that the real target of class struggle was Liu Shaoqi, Chairman of the PRC, and his followers.

Despite the division between Mao and Liu, it should also be noted that what Mao opposed was Liu's leadership within the Party but not necessarily what Liu attempted to do in the Four Cleanups Movement. For example, Liu proposed to mobilize poor and lower-middle farmers to capture the political power from incumbent cadres and to substitute the rural government organizations with poor farmers' associations. This idea did not become true in the Four Cleanups Movement, but very likely inspired Mao in the Cultural Revolution to encourage the rebels to capture power from the government and Party leaders. In addition, many concepts and slogans conspicuous in the Cultural

Revolution actually had already been widely used in the Socialist Education Movement, such as “taking class struggle as the key link,” “preventing the restoration of capitalism,” “opposing revisionism,” “down with the capitalist-roaders in authority within the Party,” as well as the dehumanizing title of “ox devils and snake spirits” for class enemies.

Viewed a half century later, it is safe to conclude that the Socialist Education Movement was the prelude to the Cultural Revolution: it exacerbated the conflict within the top leadership of the CCP, prepared the explanation for launching another large-scale movement of class struggle, and also provided some practical methods to fight against “class enemies.” But back to early 1965 when the “23 Clauses” was just enacted and numerous cadres were celebrating for surviving the crisis, how many Chinese could feel another “revolutionary” storm brewing nearby?

CONCLUSION

The rural transformation in Baoying County discussed in this dissertation showed how the CCP established and consolidated its totalitarian rule step by step in the countryside, and how the rural residents were forced to submit to the expansion of the state's power while mounting resistance in various ways and with disparate consequences throughout the process.

To numerous farmers in Baoying County and many other places, the tremendous changes to their lives began in 1946 when the Communists launched the land reform movement in their villages. Although many farmers had little interest in politics, they were still deeply involved in the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. This study found that a number of farmers participated in land reform only involuntarily due to the high pressure from the Communist guerrillas, who actually could not protect them from the revenge of landlords as long as the Nationalist Party controlled the area. At the same time, many farmers attempted to seek the protection of landlords, and some even enrolled in the landlord-led armed forces. The fighting that accompanied the land reform movement, therefore, could not be interpreted satisfactorily by the theory of class struggle, because in many instances farmers of similar economic status engaged in deadly combat.

The Communists traditionally argued, and many scholars also agreed, that the land reform movement benefited poor farmers economically, which in turn helped the CCP win popular support in the civil war. If this observation reflects the truth in North China where the Communists maintained a strong military presence, the findings of this

research, however, reveal a different story in the areas where the CCP did not enjoy a military advantage over its rival forces. The outcome of land reform was more complicated in these areas: on the one hand, it incited terrible hatred and killings that made all population groups into the victims, causing huge casualties for both farmers and the Communist guerrillas; on the other hand, it allowed the Communists to introduce the concept and practices of class struggle into the rural areas for the first time in Chinese history and thus paved the way for a more comprehensive suppression of landlords and rich farmers in the early 1950s. Subsequently, in the nationwide land reform movement around 1950-52, all landlords and rich farmers lost their personal properties and individual freedom, and countless suffered various forms of tortures, both physically and mentally, or were executed summarily. As a result, the traditional social structure of rural China that had been dominated by local elites was completely smashed, and in its place a variety of grassroots organizations were founded under the absolute leadership of the CCP. This was the beginning of the Communists' attempt to establish total rule in the countryside.

Following the land reform movement, the building of the Party-state was pushed forward by the agricultural cooperation movement in 1953-57. At first, farmers were asked by the Party to share manpower, tools and livestock with each other, and later they were also required to surrender their land to cooperatives. This reform seemed to provide poor farmers access to more farming resources, but was unwelcome by many middle farmers, who were now the wealthiest farm families in villages after landlords and rich farmers had been deprived of their properties. Favoring the traditional way of household

farming, these middle farmers had no incentives to share their own resources or work together with others, particularly the poor who could offer little in return. Consequently, with neither the participation of middle farmers nor substantial material support from the government, many poor farmers also lost interest in agricultural cooperation.

To make matters worse, the government began to tighten the control of the grain market by enforcing the policy of United Purchase and United Supply, which deprived farmers of the freedom to deal with their own agricultural products. As the study on Baoying County shows, the aggressive reforms upset farmers so much that they displayed their resentment in the rumors of hairy water monsters and fox spirits, which demonized Communist cadres and justified their resistance to the agrarian reforms. The reaction of farmers, however, only prompted the government to take a firmer stance to control the grain market and force the enrollment of nearly all farmers into cooperatives in late 1957. But even so, massive demonstrations were still widely staged by those who demanded the right of withdrawal from the cooperatives. After their request was stubbornly refused by the government, the enthusiasm of many farmers, especially middle farmers, for agricultural production was greatly dampened. The CCP, however, took the chance to consolidate its totalitarian rule by controlling the production and distribution of grain.

The prominent features of one-party totalitarian rule were exploited to the fullest during the Great Leap Forward Movement, which was kicked off in 1958. In this movement, farmers, now commune members, were treated as parts of a giant machine that only acted as commanded by state authorities. The orders related to nearly every aspect of farmers' daily life, such as when to work, when to rest, what to plant and how

much to eat. Farmers were not even allowed to emigrate from their home villages, nor could they buy extra food freely in the market; their homes might be demolished if cadres considered this necessary, and the wooden furniture might be burned as fuel and all iron items melted to make steel; the natural environment was also damaged seriously as countless trees were felled. Rarely in Chinese history had a regime been able to exert such a tight and devastating control over rural society as the CCP accomplished in the late 1950s. And during this process, the autocracy of the state reached its peak while farmers' resistance was reduced to the minimum.

The reforms of agricultural collectivization and the Great Leap Forward Movement eventually resulted in a great human-made famine at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, which forced the Party to make some adjustments to its radical rural policies in the early 1960s. As a result, farmers were allowed to reclaim a limited amount of marginal land for their own cultivation, and the rural market resumed to some degree in many regions; with the disbandment of public canteens, farmers also regained some latitude in food consumption. Meanwhile, as the official control was somewhat relaxed, the black market and small-scale private businesses reemerged and soon prospered in the early 1960s; even the worship of Confucius, ancestors and local deities revived once again among many farmers and grassroots cadres. On the other hand, however, the Party launched various movements, such as the Socialist Education Campaign, in the early and mid 1960s, trying to save the collective farming system from collapse. But these movements only exacerbated the existing conflicts within the top leadership of the CCP, especially between Mao Zedong, Chairman of the Party, and Liu Shaoqi, Chairman of the

State. The power struggles of the Party leaders made the rural policies of the central government both controversial and unpredictable, though the commune system remained without major changes till the end of Mao's era.

If looking at the steps of China's socialist agrarian reforms separately, it is probably to find some positive aspects. For example, some scholars point out that the land reform of China was carried out in a gradual and cautious manner so that it did not arouse the fervent resistance from landlords and rich farmers as had happened in the Soviet Union; to distribute farmland to poor farmers met the economic demands of the majority of farmers, and to organize farmers together was one way to resolve problems that arose from the lack of production resources; some even argue that the Great Leap Forward Movement promoted the construction of the water conservancy facilities across China, some of which are still in use today.⁴⁶⁰

A balanced assessment of the effects of these reforms, however, requires considering all the movements together as a continuous process. To be more specific, without land reform, the CCP would not have been able to destroy the traditional power structure of rural society that had been dominated by local gentry for centuries; without establishing its own totalitarian rule, the Communist government would have been unable to force farmers to surrender their land and join communes; without firmly controlling the properties and freedom of farmers through a collectivized social system, it would

⁴⁶⁰ Vivienne Shue, *Farmer China in Transition :The Dynamics of Development toward Socialism, 1949-1956* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1980); John Wong, *Land Reform in the People's Republic of China: Institutional Transformation in Agriculture* (New York, Praeger,1973) ; Edward Friedman, Paul Pickowicz and Mark Selden, *Chinese Village, Socialist State* (New Haven: Yale University, 1991).

have been impossible for the government to drive farmers into the catastrophe of the Great Leap Forward Movement which caused the death of tens of millions. Some lamented that the catastrophic result should have been avoidable had the Communists not gone further beyond land reform, or if there had been no the Great Leap Forward Movement.⁴⁶¹ These scholars just ignore the inseparable connections among these movements, and fail to see that all problems actually stemmed from the determination of the CCP to establish a totalitarian socio-political system and a highly centralized planned economy. Driven by this imperative, the accomplishment of each step would spur the desire of the overconfident leaders to go further, and the domino effect would not stop until a tremendously destructive result occurred and finally forced the whole process to halt.

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Viewing the socialist agrarian reforms in China more than half a century later, we can draw many lessons from the failure of the Communists in their attempts to improve the rural conditions. For example, the reforms were carried out in a too hasty and radical manner; the policy-makers gave too much weight to collective interests while ignored the welfare of individual farmers; the economic planners violated basic market principles and

⁴⁶¹叶扬兵[Ye Yangbing], 中国农业合作化研究[A Study on the Agricultural Collectivization in China] (Beijing: Zhishi Chanquan Press, 2006); 高化民[Gao Huamin], 农业合作化运动始末[A Full Account of the Agricultural Cooperation Movement] (Beijing: Zhongguo Qingnian Press, 1999); 杜润生[Du Runsheng] ed., 当代中国的农业合作制（上）[The Institution of Agricultural Cooperation in Contemporary China (vol. 1)] (Beijing: Dangdai zhongguo Press, 2002).

thus unreasonably interfered with the agricultural production; the political leaders acted tyrannically, and no effective mechanisms had been built into the political system to check their power and prevent them from making disastrous decisions. Many of these conclusions have now become the consensus among most researchers, but there is a point that has largely been missed: the tragedy of the CCP-led agrarian reforms was doomed from the very beginning because the communists never succeeded in solving the most fundamental problems that had been haunting rural China since the early twentieth century. One useful perspective to approach these problems, as this study suggests, is to examine the changes at the county level.

Counties had always played an essential role in the sociopolitical structure of China. For a long time in the Qing Dynasty, counties were the place where the state and rural society met. The county magistrates were appointed by the central government, but they usually relied on local agents chosen from the villagers to help manage various affairs and communicate with farmers; even a large number of civil disputes among farmers were eventually resolved through the mediation by local gentry or clan heads instead of through the judgment by Mandarins. Below the county level, villagers enjoyed semi-autonomy in many respects. As long as they paid taxes and fulfilled their labor-service obligations to the government, the imperial court would like to leave most other issues, such as the construction of roads and bridges, the relief of refugees and the operation of schools, to be taken cared by local gentry and farmers themselves.⁴⁶² This

⁴⁶² See Bradly Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Philip Huang, *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

kind of rural-state balance was further reinforced by the cultural nexus between the rulers and the ruled, such as the worship of Dragon God and many other folk deities, which allowed the social leaders to manage the religious rituals and, at the same time, integrated the state's authority into the daily worship of farmers.⁴⁶³ Consequently, on the ground of mutual recognition of each other's core values, the rulers were able to secure the legitimacy of their reign and the ruled could also maintain their autonomy.

This traditional pattern of the rural-state relationship contributed to long-term socio-political stableness of China, but it could not prevent the occurrence of many problems, such as the increasing burden of population growth, the exhaustion of natural resources, and the decline of agriculture, which all fed the explosion of farmers' rebellions in the mid and late nineteenth century.⁴⁶⁴ Meanwhile, the strong provincialism that stemmed from the long-time semi-autonomy of rural areas made it very difficult for the central government to unite China as a whole to meet the military and economic challenges from the West. The mounting crisis eventually brought the Qing Dynasty to its end in 1911, and the rural situation deteriorated further in the early twentieth century. As Fei Xiaotong, one of the most influential sociologists in modern China, observed in the 1930s, there appeared a "social erosion" in rural China in the early 20th century: first, due to the urban development and the increasing disorder in the countryside, more and more village elites moved out to towns and cities, leaving their land behind to be tilled by

⁴⁶³ See Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

⁴⁶⁴ Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

tenant farmers. After collecting rent, they would spend it to pay the living cost in towns and cities instead of investing it in their home villages; the villages thus were drained of capitals. Secondly, as the imperial civil service examinations were abolished in 1905, most rural elites sent their children to the modern schools in cities or abroad. After graduating, however, few of these young people returned to their home villages where they would have no opportunities to apply what they had learned or earn social influence and personal prestige; the villages consequently were drained of intelligence. To make matters worse, the competition from foreign industries made farmers further lose their advantages in traditional household industry. All these led to the growing decline of rural economy and village autonomy.⁴⁶⁵

The situation did not improve much after the Nationalist Party came to power in 1927. By levying more taxes and fees on farmers and creating the ward and xiang governments below the county level, the Nationalist government projected the state power more strongly in rural areas than the Qing government had done, but it never succeeded in preventing the rural economy from further deteriorating throughout the twenty odd years of its rule.⁴⁶⁶ A key reason for its failure might be that the Nationalist Party consisted of large numbers of officials and officers from the well-to-do families in cities, towns and villages, and many of them once had studied abroad; they either had little knowledge about rural life or lacked motivation to change the status quo lest the

⁴⁶⁵ See Fei Hsiao-Tung, *Peasant Life in China: A Field Study of Country Life in the Yangtze Valley* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1939); David Arkush, *Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁴⁶⁶ Huaiying Li, *Village Governance in North China, 1875-1936* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

interests of their own families would be harmed.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, the unstable political condition made it difficult for the government to implement a comprehensive reform to deal with the complicated problems in rural areas. As a result, villages were increasingly left behind in the drive of modernization when most political, economic and intellectual resources were concentrated in cities.

Despite the neglect of government, a few intellectuals and social activists did try to find a way out for the rural problems. Among them, Liang Shuming was an outstanding model, who considered the education of farmers as the priority of rural reconstruction. In the counties he conducted experiments, schools were widely established, and the reformers also served as teachers to offer farmers the basic literacy education as well as the courses on practical production techniques; sometimes the reformers even replaced the government officials to help farmers develop household industry and administer local affairs. Liang's ultimate purpose was to turn villages into self-governed communities and eliminate the powerful control of the state below the county level. He and his followers achieved remarkable success in specific areas such as Shandong Province, but their influence was limited or nonexistent in other places, and once the socio-political condition became instable or the local leaders dropped their support, the reform projects would have to be suspended or abandoned.⁴⁶⁸ Soon when an all-scale war broke out between China and Japan in 1937, Liang had to stop all

⁴⁶⁷ Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

⁴⁶⁸ Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

experiments. Consequently, the majority of Chinese villages remained without any help from the Nationalist government or the civil activists, leaving a huge gap between the state and rural society, as well as plenty of room for the penetration of the Communists.

In its early years, the main effort of the CCP was to organize the workers in cities after the Soviet model. But after this policy failed in 1927, and especially after Mao Zedong took the leadership, the Communists gradually found hope in the countryside, in contrast to the Nationalists who established its base in the urban middle and high classes. Largely due to the shift from cities to villages, the Communists successfully survived the suppression of the Nationalist army, and even expanded its power during the Sino-Japanese War; this made many observers believe that the Chinese Communists were actually agrarian reformers whose appeals were focused on economy instead of politics. But as Yung-fa Chen has pointed out, in no way can we come to the conclusion that the Communists were agrarian reformers who fought for the benefit of farmers. No matter how the situation changed, the ultimate goal of the Communists remained the same, which was to exploit the rural resources to serve its political and military ends. Although they did reduce the dependence of farmers on rural elites in some regions, they actually imposed a stricter control over the rural area by the Party cadres.⁴⁶⁹ The pragmatism behind the agrarian reforms of the CCP and the strategy to cover its true intentions with moral appeals differentiated the Communists from other rural reformers in the 1930s,

⁴⁶⁹ See Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

whose purpose was mainly to revive the rural economy.⁴⁷⁰ In fact, these two features lasted throughout the whole process of China's socialist agrarian reforms until the 1960s, which has been revealed by this study.

The Communist-led agrarian reforms resulted in some fundamental changes in rural China. First, the rural population was reorganized. In this point, the plan of the Communists seemed not much different from that of many non-Communist rural reformers, such as Liang Shuming. Liang was not personally involved in the socialist agrarian reforms after 1949, and he actually disagreed with Mao in many matters, but in his later years Liang insisted that it was a right decision for Mao Zedong to promote collectivization in agriculture.⁴⁷¹ But their motives were different: the purpose of Liang's plan to organize farmers together was to use the collective force to resist the exploitation and erosion of the rural society by cities and modern industry, and the purpose of Mao's agricultural collectivization, however, was to extend Party control over rural society more strictly and effectively. Therefore, Mao's agrarian reforms only created a superficial unification of farmers, which in fact divided them into a variety of groups with different economic interests and political statuses; this kind of collectivization only weakened the ability of rural society to resist outside intrusions and made the already-weak agrarian economy more fragile to the erosion of urbanization and industrialization.

⁴⁷⁰ Guy Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity*; Charles Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁴⁷¹ 梁漱溟[Liang Shuming], *这个世界会好吗? [Will the World Get Better?]* (Tianjin: Tianjin Jiaoyu Press, 2011).

Secondly, the socialist agrarian reforms completely destroyed the gentry class in the countryside, and exposed individual farmers directly to the powerful intrusion of the state. Although many grassroots cadres were selected from farmers and should have been able to mediate the conflicts of interests between Party officials and their fellow villagers, it turned out that most of them actually were from the poor farmer background, lacking basic education, competence, consciousness or courage to fulfill this duty. What most concerned these grassroots cadres were their personal considerations, which not only drove them to compete with ordinary farmers for economic benefits, but also made them act selfishly against the demanding of absolute loyalty to the Party by their supervisors. As an outcome, they were trusted by neither farmers nor Party leaders, and thus could not serve as local leaders like the former rural elites had once played. Meanwhile, as many traditional religions and customs were criticized by the Communists as “feudalist” and “superstitious,” the cultural nexus that had helped harmonize the state-social relations and buffer their conflicts now disappeared; what was left was only political persecution and psychological terror that the rulers utilized to secure the unconditional submission of farmers to their authority.

The CCP achieved unprecedented control over rural society as the result of the socialist agrarian reforms, but this study also shows that there still were limitations to this control. For example, although the cadres at the county level and above were appointed by the central government and might be transferred to other places, most grassroots cadres in the county governments, communes, brigades and production teams were nevertheless recruited from the local areas. Due to the Party disciplines that stressed

submission to the Party leaders at all levels, the Party secretaries in various county committees, therefore, had full latitude to determine the fate of these grassroots cadres. As shown in this study, the Party boss of Baoying County could freely promote, dismiss, detain, interrogate, or even torture his subordinates without timely interventions from his supervisors. The tyranny of Party bosses at the county level was further reinforced by the highly bureaucratic system of the CCP, during which the prefectural, provincial and central governments gathered information about rural areas mainly through the reports by the county governments. Moreover, the directives from the central down to the prefectural governments usually read more like mission statements or principle guidelines at most: they only proposed the objectives that should be achieved while leaving the county governments to figure out specific ways to approach the objectives. Consequently, within the framework of one-party rule, the implementation of a policy designed by the central government could vary substantially from county to county, and the effectiveness of the totalitarian rule by the central government was also determined by many accidental factors, such as the personality and competence of county leaders. This may explain why the Great Famine caused massive deaths in some counties but not others.

The importance of county governments in the sociopolitical structure of the PRC has not been studied sufficiently because most existing research is focused on either high-level politics or individual villages. If focusing on top leaders and high politics only, one might overemphasize the centralization of the communist regime while disregard its internal flexibility and diversity; if approaching history from the village perspective, representativeness naturally becomes a question due to the regional variations in different

provinces, counties, and even villages; and moreover, farmers usually had little knowledge about the considerations of county leaders regarding the implementation of specific government policies. Given this dilemma, this study suggests that county can be an ideal choice to bridge the gap among the policy makers, policy implementers and policy takers. With both national scope and local experiences, more research at the county level may help scholars better understand how the socialist reforms were implemented on the ground and influenced the lives of ordinary Chinese.

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A brief review of the state-rural relations in the first half of twentieth century China shows the constant decline of rural society and the increasing expansion of the state. In fact, as early as in the 1930s, Lin Yutang, a prominent liberal Chinese scholar and writer, had expressed his worry about this trend in his book *My County and My People* — probably still one of the best books introducing the mentality of Chinese to the western readers. In a straightforward manner, Lin stated: “The Chinese people can always govern themselves, have always governed themselves. If the thing called ‘government’ can leave them alone, they are always willing to let the government alone. Give the people ten years of anarchy, when the word ‘government’ will never be heard, and they will live peacefully together, they will prosper...”⁴⁷² In other words, Lin believed the resolution to the problems of rural China was to stop the erosion of villages and the

⁴⁷² Lin Yu-tang, *My County and My People* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935), pp. 205-06.

growing intrusion of the government, and let farmers to resume their automatic, self-ruling status, or what he called “Village Socialism,” in which the only function of the government was to “collect taxes and render justice.”⁴⁷³ Certainly, Lin was well aware that it was unrealistic to expect the political, military and economic elites to give up their power or share interests with farmers. Therefore, he could only rest his hope on an imagined figure that he named the Great Executioner. This Great Executioner would use the sword of justice to remove all the obstacles on the way to ensuring social justice, and to kill all opponents who dared to resist and throw their heads into lakes. “And of those heads the Great Executioner chops off great is the number,” Lin described, “many of them from distinguished families, and the lake is dyed red with their blood of iniquity. And , strange to say, in three days the relatives of the distinguished families who have robbed and betrayed the people behave like noble gentlemen, and the people are at least let alone to live in peace and security and the city prospers.”⁴⁷⁴

The real world was more dramatic than Lin imagined, however. Within only fifteen years after his book was first published, there did emerge a great power smashing the old social structure with resolute determination and bloody violence. But contrary to Lin’s anticipation, the winner had no intention to put down his sword and let people alone to live in peace. The reality was the transition of political regime did not alleviate the social erosion of villages, but instead accelerated the speed of the state’s expansion in the countryside. It turned out that the new rulers not only failed to offer material and

⁴⁷³ Lin Yu-tang, p. 205.

⁴⁷⁴ Lin Yutang, pp.362-63.

financial support to boost the declining rural economy, but also broadened and institutionalized the urban-rural gap and brought unprecedented disasters to farmers. Although the CCP somewhat relaxed its rigid control over rural society in the wake of the Great Famine, and the commune system was finally dissolved in the early 1980s, some basic features of the totalitarian governance have remained and still dominate the rural-state relations of China today. This fact suggests that, beyond the change of governments, political parties or individual leaders, something more important and fundamental need to be pondered before any meaningful changes can be made to improve the conditions in rural China. In fact, if they wish, Chinese rulers can learn plenty of lessons from history, such as to really take into account the interest of farmers when designing policies, to provide and guarantee the basic education and technological training to the youths, to help cultivate competent local leaders and respect farmers' self-ruling capabilities, and etc. Unfortunately, the importance of these lessons seem not to have been fully realized by the policy-makers of the Chinese government, and nowadays numerous reports can be found about the increasing social unrest and severe crisis caused by the state-coerced urbanization and land requisition. All these indicate that the state-rural relations are far from reaching a new balance, and there is still a long way to go for the reconstruction of rural China, which to a large degree will also determine the future of China's modernization.

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