Land Reform in China (1911-1953)

Chen-hung Keong

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LAND REFORM IN CHINA

(1911 - 1953)

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Council of

The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Chen-Hung Keong

December 1967
All of my gratitude goes to Professors Vernon Iredell, Selwyn Geller, and Salo Engel for their helpful suggestions and valuable criticism.
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CHAPTER I

PEASANT PROBLEMS IN CHINA

China's peasant problem is as old as its civilization. Agriculture is so important to China that not only the people's livelihood but also the social and power structure have been closely linked with the land system. By utilizing the materials that are available, this thesis attempts to describe the realities of the Chinese peasant problems and the peasant movement in the period of the Republic (1911-1949); at the same time it attempts to examine the land reforms carried out from 1950 to 1953 in Communist China.

The significance of the Chinese land reforms consists in the elimination of the landlord-gentry class and redistribution of land among the peasantry. It is, therefore, necessary to evaluate the following matters, before discussing land reform itself.

1. Since Confucianism has dominated the Chinese minds for about two thousand years, it will be useful to examine its impact on both the landlord-gentry class and the peasantry.

2. In the Chinese history, the landlord-gentry class constantly played an important and active role in social, economic and political affairs. A study of its origin, development, and structure will undoubtedly help us to understand the landlord-gentry class of the period of the Republic, which was actually the extension of the ancient one.
3. The concentration of land ownership gave rise to the tenancy system. Overpopulation caused the peasants' suffering. A discussion of the peasant problems in terms of land maldistribution, tenancy system, overpopulation, and political instability, will tell us why land reform was urgently necessary.

Social stratification can be made by various criteria. Karl Marx, for example, asserted that society should be stratified in terms of the ownership of the means of production. There is, according to Karl Marx, a class distinction between the capitalist who owns the means of production and the proletariat who does not. In addition to the possession of economic means, Max Weber suggested two other criteria, namely, the external standard of living and cultural and recreational possibilities.¹

In contrast to those objectivists such as Max Weber and Karl Marx, there were certain subjectivists who believed that some subjective factors should be employed to divide the society. According to them, people who are analogous in income, occupation, education, or religious belief can easily get together.²

Social differentiation may be determined by social status rather than class. In this case, an individual's rights and duties are fixed; social mobility is entirely impossible. However, if

²Ibid. p. 533.
social differentiation is based upon class rather than status, there is no obstacle standing in the way of interclass mobility.\(^3\)

Although a lot of subjective or objective criteria have been provided by various writers, it is still difficult to draw a clear-cut line between classes, since social classes are not so rigid as a caste system. Perhaps the most important criterion is psychological. Members of a class share common ideas, attitudes and feelings, and regard themselves as belonging to one group.\(^4\)

Class distinction reflects in wealth, prestige and power. These three things are actually interrelated with one another. The wealthy people can easily obtain power; the powerful persons can easily become rich; and prestige seems to be monopolized by the rich and powerful persons.

In China, a theory concerning social classification was developed by Confucius. Under the aristocratic and feudal system of Confucius' time, which can be dated back to 1100 B.C., the farmers were ignorant persons who lived a primitive life. The Chinese farmers just like other ancient peoples, lived at the mercy of nature. However they were fortunate because humanism developed in the ruling, learned, and wealthy aristocratic class. It seems to be the oldest principle of ruling to treat farmers in a benevolent way. On the

\(^3\)Ibid. p. 531.

basis of this oldest principle, Confucius built his own theory according to which the functions of the aristocrat and the farmer were closely distinguished. The farmer should not play politics, while the aristocrat need not know how to cultivate the land. In other words, they were classified in terms of their functions. There were, according to Confucianism, only two classes, namely, the governing and the governed classes. In this respect, the Confucian social differentiation is similar to that of Karl Marx, although their bases are entirely different.

Confucius' viewpoint of the "men above" can be illustrated by the following story about his teaching. When one of his students asked him about farming, Confucius replied, "I am not as good as an old peasant." When this student went out of the classroom, Confucius told others, "What a nit-wit, that Fan (the name of the student who asked Confucius about farming). If the men above love the rites, no one of the people will dare be irreverent. If the men above love justice, none of the people will fail to conform. If the men above love veracity, none of the people will want to use mendacity. When the great one is like this, the people of the Four Squares (the world) will come to him with their children on their backs. What does he need to know about farming?"  

The farmers' attitudes might be indicated by the following folk song which prevailed in the Chinese countryside about 2500 years ago.

---

Sunrise to work,
Sunset to stop,
Dig wells to drink.
Till fields for crop.
The king's might to me what good 0?6

This division of function was made in accordance with the Confucian ethical system instead of the principle of division of labor. The rulers regarded the peasant problems as the center of their statecraft on the one hand, and treated the farmers as little nit-wits on the other. Revolution was allowed only on the condition that the ruler proved to be a tyrant. The Confucian idea of revolution provided the peasant rebellions with a theoretical basis.

In 206 B.C., China was unified by Chin. The unification indicated the collapse of the old feudal system as well as the end of the simple, primitive and ignorant peasant way of life. The concentration of land ownership started in the wake of the legalization of land purchase. Poor peasants lost their humanitarian guard, and had to face the new social realities - the rich became richer, the poor, poorer. The concentration of the land ownership gave rise to the landlord-gentry class which replaced the aristocrats and dominated Chinese politics until the Communist take-over in 1949. The new governing class continued to adopt the Confucian idea of functional division in order to justify its ruling position.

The original elements of the landlord-gentry class were the branches of the Chou nobility and the wealthy officials of the

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Chin and Han Dynasties. With the passage of time, some of them declined and were replaced by new elements such as rich merchants and militarymen. No matter what kind of persons they were, they, as the elements of the landlord-gentry class, shared the following characteristics: (1) The basic unit of the landlord-gentry class were families rather than individuals. (2) The financial support of the big families came from their large estates which were tilled by tenants. (3) They were the only literate persons and thus monopolized political enterprise. 7

Professor Wolfram Eberhard has vividly described how the landlord-gentry class associated itself with the officialdom. He wrote:

In a typical gentry family, another branch of the family is in the capital or in a provincial administrative centre in official position. These officials at the same time are the most highly educated members of the family and are often called the "literati" ... If difficulties arose in the estates either by attacks of bandits or by war or other catastrophes, the family members in official positions could use their influence and power to restore the property in the provinces. If, on the other hand, the family members in official positions lost their positions or even their lives by displeasing the court, the family branch could always find ways to remain untouched and could, in a generation or two, recruit new members and regain power and influence in the government. 8

The close association between the landlord-gentry class and the officialdom undoubtedly accelerated the concentration of land ownership, which, in turn, fastened the decline or rise of dynasties.

8 Ibid., pp. 72-73.
In Chinese history, we discover many means which were suggested for dealing with the peasant problems, various plans to mitigate the farmers' suffering. All of these reforms, however, were based upon the Confucian theory of functional division, and, thus could not thoroughly settle the problems. When they failed, there were social upheaval, and peasant uprisings.9

The Confucian intellectual monopoly started in the early years of the Han Dynasty and lasted until the 1920's. During this period, none dared to deny the truth of Confucianism, although there was a wide gap between the Confucian theory of functional division and the social realities. What the dissident intellectuals could do was to reinterpret Confucianism and give it new meanings. Reinterpretation, however, had its limits. It had to be done within the framework of the orthodox classics.

The first intellectual who attempted to change the existing land system by reinterpreting Confucianism was Wang Mang. As a relative of the Emperor, he was once the most powerful official in the Han Court. In 9 A.D. he established his own dynasty and put forward a series of economic and social reforms. Most of these reforms were carried out in the name of the classic Confucian books, especially The Rite of Chou. He reinterpreted these books and added many new ideas.10

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10 Eberhard, op. cit., pp. 93-95.
First of all he nationalized all the arable land and called it "the land of the Kingdom." Then he redistributed the "land of the Kingdom" to farmers. This land reform actually arose from a background of concentration of land ownership. Wang Mang's reform was defeated by both the resistance of the landlord-gentry class and the ignorance of the poor peasantry. The failure of the reform led China into a period of social upheaval. When the Han Dynasty was restored, concentration of land ownership started again.

The period of the Northern Dynasties marked a lasting power struggle between the rulers of the northern nomads and the Chinese landlord-gentry class. The Northern Dynasties which were established by the leaders of the northern nomads, adopted a system of land allotment as a means to derogate the landlord-gentry class. Under this system, one hundred mou of land were allotted to each male farmer, sixty mou to each female farmer. A part of the allotted land (about twenty mou) was regarded as private land, and thus could be inherited by their descendants. The rest of the land was returned to the government after the farmer's death. This system with a slight change, was also adopted by the Shi and Tang Dynasties.


12 "Mou" is the basic unit of land. The mou of the Northern Dynasties was smaller than the mou of the present system. According to the existing mou system, six mou equal one acre.

This system could work well only if there was a large supply of farmed land and a relatively small population. The aim of this system was, obviously, to mitigate rather than to abolish the concentration of landownership, since part of the allotted land was permitted to be inherited by the allottees' descendants.

In the eighth century, the concentration of land ownership reached a new peak, but no new allotment was made until the twentieth century. The peasant's situation in China deteriorated when concentration of land ownership combined with the problem of overpopulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unfortunately, these centuries also marked the decline of the Chinese Empire. It was a time when people still remembered past prosperity and stability on the hand, and faced current misery on the other. Chinese cultural superiority was still firmly believed in by the intellectuals. The West with its vanguard-gunboats, had to fight its way into the Chinese Empire.

So, China, in the early years of the twentieth century, was in a dilemma. She was forced to modernize herself on the one hand, and insisted to uphold some traditional principles on the other. A new formula was deliberately designed to deal with the new situation. According to this new formula, Chinese ideas should be regarded as essential principles and Western ideas as practical applications. Western gunboat policy gave the Chinese people the impression that

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military might was the essence of industrialization. This fallacious idea combined with the feeling of cultural superiority started China on a wrong pace toward modernization.  

A self-strengthening movement based on the above formula was fiercely advocated by both the government and the intelligentsia. The aim of this movement was mainly to build strategic industries for military purposes. This movement failed because its designers paid no attention to some basic changes which were the prerequisites of industrial development. Among these basic changes, land reform was and is the most important one in China. The prerequisite of a successful land reform in China was and is, undoubtedly, also the abolition of the Confucian theory of functional division. In other words, a successful land reform requires the positive participation of the peasants as well as the enlightened cooperation of the landlord-gentry class.

However, the land reform movement put forward in the period of the Republic proves how difficult it was to make a peaceful transfer of land ownership from the powerful landlord-gentry class to the ignorant farmers. Since economic power was identified with political power, the power structure in the countryside was bound to be changed by land redistribution. In the traditional Chinese society, the landlord-gentries were actually the rulers of the countryside. Land

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reform would undoubtedly provoke their resistance, since land reform would attempt to deprive them of their economic power as well as their political authority. The landlord question, therefore, has been the center of the Chinese peasant problem. The different attitudes toward landlords adopted by the nationalists and the communists reflect the main differences between their land policies.

Confucius' idea of functional division still dominated the minds of the nationalists, and formed the foundation of their land policy. They cooperated with the landlord-gentry class and the newly-emerged compradors. The large commercial cities along the coast became the main political centers. The welfare of the peasantry was actually neglected.  

In the countryside, Confucius' idea about revolution prevailed. It gave active and aggressive farmers an excuse for launching uprisings. This idea also help certain conservative farmers to wipe out ethical and moral obstacles. To the communists, it served as an exciting slogan.

Unless we know the role played by Confucian ideas in the Chinese society, we can hardly understand the peasant problems as well as the different attitudes adopted by the nationalists and the communists.

However, the Confucian idea of revolution does not coincide with the Marxist idea of class struggle. Their difference consists in the following points: (1) Marx regards the conflict between the

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governing and the governed classes as a scientific certainty, since those who own the means of production are bound to suppress those who do not. According to the Confucian idea of revolution, the conflict between the rulers and the people is avoidable. (2) In the Marxist point of view, class struggle is the result of economic exploitation; while Confucianist revolution is caused by human brutality and ethical immorality.

Although the Chinese Communist, called themselves disciples of Marxism-Leninism, they had to associate with the old Confucian idea of revolution in order to gain the support of the peasantry. This can be illustrated by the fact that the communists, when conducting an antilandlord campaign, always tried to disclose the wrong doings and brutal behaviors of the landlords.

According to the Chinese communists, landlords consist of those persons who own land but do not cultivate it.\textsuperscript{17} This definition is obviously different from the traditional one. The Chinese communists wanted to abolish not only the traditional landlord-gentry class, but also the parasites who lived by exploiting others. However, the traditional landlord-gentry class remained as the main target of the communist revolution.

In order to know how the peasants were exploited and why land reform was of urgent necessity, we have to examine the actual condition of the Chinese countryside in the period of the Republic.

The actual condition of the Chinese countryside in the period of the Republic (1911-1949) was characterized by the following factors: (1) The peasant problems were neglected by the urban ruling class which monopolized power for decades. (2) The maldistribution of land which gave rise to the landlord-gentry class continued to exist in this period. The landlord-gentry class, closely linked with the urban ruling class, actually dominated the countryside. The rise of the tenancy system was also the result of the concentration of land ownership. The tenants, as the most miserable segment of the rural population, lived at the mercy of the landlords. (3) So far as agriculture is concerned, China has its physical weaknesses. The amount of arable land in China is limited. A large part of Chinese territory is occupied by mountains, desert and eroded land. Overpopulation, since the eighteenth century, has been one of the main menaces to the people's livelihood.

When Professor Liang Shih-Chiu visited the countryside of Shangsi Province in 1941, he was deeply surprised that the peasants living in the countryside were so ignorant about the outside world. They still used the national flag which had been abolished two decades ago. In a village of Shang country, he discovered that people still
kept the customs "which could only be found in the nineteenth-century novel, Ju-lin Wai-Shih." 18

Indeed, the inland villages of China have been little changed by the Western impact, which for more than one hundred years has exerted considerable pressure on self-confident Chinese Society. The coastal cities, as compared with the inland villages, have been westernized. The people living in cities have had more chances for contact with the West.

The Chinese people educated by the West have tried to absorb a great variety of doctrines in order to bring about national salvation. They seem to have overestimated or miscalculated the value of industrialization and technical progress, and to have put rural reform last. It is the urban class that dominated Chinese politics for more than one century. As a result, the rural area was completely neglected.

Mr. Chang Chi-luan, the most outstanding journalist of China once tried to remind his readers of the forgotten rural area. He said that Chinese politics could be regarded as "urban politics." Every doctrine or policy designed by the intellectuals was for the benefit of the urban population. Consequently, the living conditions of 90 percent of the Chinese population were ignored. In his notable article, "Where is the Chinese Civilization?" he reached the conclusion that "The Chinese politicians, industrialists and scholars did not know

the actual condition of China. This might be the very reason why the
current reform failed."\(^{19}\)

This respectable journalist, in 1930, sent the staff of his news-
paper (Ta-Kon Pao) to the countryside of Hopei to make a series of
studies of the rural villages of that province. He said these studies
were "for the purpose of encouraging the men in power to do something
for the benefit of the peasantry."\(^{20}\)

The separation between the modernized top stratum and the rest
of the Chinese people caused both external and internal misunderstanings.
Internally, it caused resistance of the peasantry to industrialization
and modernization. The peasantry began to suspect the revolutionary
doctrines as well as the imported systems, because they saw no prospect
for the improvement of their lot in the exciting and fierce slogans put
forward by the intelligentsia. Externally, it gave the world a wrong
impression about the actual conditions of China. "Our failure in under-
standing," wrote Professor Fairbank,

\[\ldots\text{springs partly from our mistaking the modern veneer of}
\text{China for the whole of Chinese life. This is particularly easy}
\text{because the modernized top stratum of Chinese Society--the moneyed,}
\text{officials, and literate classes--almost monopolize the machinery}
\text{of power in China today (the 1930's and 1940's).}\]"\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\) Wu Hsiang-hsiang, "Mr. Chang Chi-luan, China's Outstanding
Publicist," Biographical Literature, V (September, 1964), 27.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 27.

\(^{21}\) John King Fairbank, The United States and China (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 5-6.
According to reliable statistics, China had, before 1949, 1300 million mou of arable land, including about 100 million mou of public land. About 60 million households were engaged in farming. Information about the land distribution has been scanty at best. As a matter of fact, no nationwide survey was made in China before the 1950's. There is some material provided by various local surveys. These surveys conflict with one another, however. Some of them are tailored to support certain dogmatic theories.

The first description of land distribution was made by a noted Communist. Tang Ping-shen, who was the head of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Wuhan Nationalist Government in 1927. (At that time the Wuhan Nationalist Government still cooperated with the Communists.) This report is, as Tang said, based upon materials provided by "Russians and other foreigners." However, he made no further remarks about either the accuracy of the sources of the material or the method employed to collect it.

According to Tang's report, "land concentration in the countryside is extremely serious, the majority of the peasants (about 55 percent of the rural population) do not have, but desire to have their own land." The unique characteristic of this report is that the

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24 Ibid., p. 54.
criteria used to classify the peasantry were designed in an extremely radical way. Those who owned thirty to fifty mou of land (five to eight acres) were classified as rich peasants. Landlords were those farmers who owned more than one hundred mou of land.

After analysing the material by classifying the peasantry into six segments, Tang draws the following conclusions:

1. Seventy-five percent of the farmers were short of land or without land. This segment only owned 20 percent of the arable land in China.

2. Eleven percent of the rural population were middle farmers; they owned 13 percent of the arable land.

3. Fourteen percent of the rural population were classified as landlords and rich farmers. They possessed 81 percent of the total arable land.

Tang's report, although adopted as the statistical basis of the early Communist peasant movements, was modified in the Kiangsi Soviet period. The new statistics were relatively reliable, since they were based upon a series of local surveys made in the Soviet Districts.

Under the new statistics the number of landlords as well as the size of their holdings was reduced; the percentage of the poor peasants was also changed from 75 percent to 70 percent; and the land possessed by the poor peasants was increased from 6 percent to 15 percent. (See Table I.)

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25 Ibid., p. 55.
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<th>Middle Peasants</th>
<th>Landlords and Rich Farmers</th>
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<td>Tang's report</td>
<td>75 P (%)</td>
<td>6 L (%)</td>
<td>14 P (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11 P (%)</td>
<td>13 L (%)</td>
<td>81 L (%)</td>
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<td>Kiangsi's survey</td>
<td>70 P (%)</td>
<td>10-15 L (%)</td>
<td>10 P (%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20 P (%)</td>
<td>15 L (%)</td>
<td>70 L (%)</td>
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P = population.  L = land.
This modification reflects a major change of the Communist tactics in the peasant movement. The Chinese Communist party gradually developed a policy of organizing a united front between the poor and middle peasants. A large middle peasant would undoubtedly strengthen the Communist power in the countryside. The Kiangsi Figures were, therefore, officially adopted as the statistical basis of the Communist land policy.

A few statistics were made by the Warlord and the Nationalist Governments which favored different approaches to solving the peasant problem. These statistics emphasized the fact that a large part of the landowners engaged in land cultivation themselves. This clearly reflects the basic difference between the policies of the Communists and the Nationalists. The national government, especially after 1930, has tried to form a "land-to-the-tiller" policy. The first step of this policy was to mitigate the miserable condition of the tenants by reducing the land rent.

A large segment of the farmers, say the statistics of the Warlord Government, possessed their own land and engaged in cultivation themselves. The tenants, with only a few exceptions, were the smallest portion of the peasantry (about 20 percent of the rural population). These statistics also show that there were more tenants in the southern and central parts of China.

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The Nationalist survey reached similar conclusions. It indicated that the largest portion of the rural population were middle peasants (about 67 percent of the rural population). In contrast to the Communist assertion, the nationalists asserted that it was not the landlords but the middle peasants who owned the largest portion of the arable land. As the Warlord statistics showed, the middle peasants were identified with the tillers. Only one third of the rural population were tenants.28

No matter how extensive the divergencies are between the above findings, one thing that has been universally recognized is the miserable condition of tenants.

The tenancy system is as old as private land ownership in China. It is the result of land ownership concentration. The Economic History of the Han Dynasty (Shih Huo Chih) indicates:

The Chin Court adopted Shang Yang's system of free land purchase and abolished the ancient system of Chien-tien . . . .29 (Therefore) some farmers were forced to cultivate the land of the rich families. They gave five tenths of their product to the rich families as rent . . . . When the foot paths of the rich cut across every field and the benefits from the streams and mountains were monopolized by them, the poor had not enough ground on which to rest the end of an awl.30


29 "Chiang-tien" is the feudal land system in which the land was divided into nine portions. Among these portions, one was regarded as public land, and the other eight portions were allotted to eight households. The public land was farmed by the eight households, and its product belonged to the government.

Two points in the above quotation are worthy of careful notice. First, the tenancy system was the direct result of the policy of free land purchase. Secondly, the land rent, 50 percent of the product, was collected at the expense of the tenants' livelihood.

As we have pointed out before, the system of land allotment adopted by many dynasties was officially denounced in the Sung Dynasty. We can, therefore, say that the modern tenancy system can be traced back to the Sung period. A historian of the Sung Dynasty wrote:

After a long period of stability and prosperity, powerful officials and rich families were accustomed to expand their land by purchase or other illegal methods. Even governmental restrictions could not stop this development. 31

In that period, the rent was as high as that of the Han Dynasty. A farmer could cultivate about thirty mou of land, and get two teng of grain from each mou. Half of the produce went to the landlords. 32

The relationship between the landowners and the tenants involved more than the simple payment of rent, however. The tenancy system was actually a system of quasislavery. A writer of that time said, "(tenants) are whipped, driven and dominated as slaves." 33

32 Teng's the unit of grain.
34 Ibid., p. 29.
The phenomena of land ownership concentration did attract the attention of the intelligentsia. At least two systematic solutions were put forward. Wong An-Shih, a radical reformer in Chinese history, asserted that the rich families, both rural and urban, should be suppressed. He, however, favored neither the restoration of the allotment system nor the utopian Chien-tien system. He suggested that a wealthy tenancy class would check the expansion of the rich. The government should, therefore, financially help the tenants.\(^{35}\)

Another solution was offered by Chang Heng-Chu, a Confucian theorist. He attempted to adapt the utopian Chien-tien system to the social realities of his time. All the land should be divided in accordance with the Chien-tien principles. The existing authority of the landlord, since it could not be abolished, should be recognized by the government. At the first stage, landlords should be appointed as land officials to manage their own land. Then, after twenty or thirty years those land officials should be replaced by "some virtuous men."\(^{36}\)

To Chang, rule by virtuous men seemed to be the final step in land reform.

Obviously, Chang's proposal is imaginative enough. It was deeply affected by *The Rites of Chou*, a primitive utopian socialist


book. Chang himself seemed never to have realized the difficulty involved in transforming power from the landlords to virtuous men.

The land system under the Yuan, Ming, and Ching dynasties developed in such a way that the aristocracy became involved in the tenancy system. The government gave much arable land to aristocrats. The size of the land grants was very large. For example, in 1601 an Emperor of the Ming Dynasty attempted to give 40,000 Ching of arable land in Honan province to his third son. The offer was opposed by some of the high officials in the Court. They argued that a large amount of arable land in that province had already been given to the Emperor's other sons. The land already given plus the latest offer amounted to 50 percent of the total arable land of that province. 37

The combination of land ownership with political authority undoubtedly deepened the misery of the tenants. When the Manchu people occupied the whole of China in 1644, the land that had been given to the Ming aristocrats were taken over by the Manchu aristocrats. The Manchu people, in the early stages of the Ching Dynasty, were allowed by the Emperor to take any fertile private land with appropriate compensation. 38 In the nineteenth century, large estates still existed. According to the statistics made by the China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (England), in the 1880's in the Northern

38 Ibid., p. 1065.
part of Kiangsu province, there were "many large estates. One family, it is said, owns 400,000 mou, i.e. 66,666 acres; another 300,000 mou, and others still possess from 40,000 to 70,000 mou."  

As in other periods, the tenure structure changed with the political vicissitudes after 1911. In the Republic period, the large estates gradually disappeared. The old landlord class declined and a new one arose. The main members of the new landlord class were militarymen, officials and compardors.

From 1911 to 1928, the Pei-Yang military clique was the political authority of North China. At the same time, the Kwangsi military clique and the party troops of the Kuomintang began to dominate the Southern provinces of China. Military careers were looked upon with increasing favor, not because the military provided higher social position, but because it offered a new way to earn a living. General Liu Ju-ming frankly said at the beginning of his autobiography: "A biography writer may say that General Liu joined the army, because he was ambitious. He is entirely wrong, if he really thinks so. I joined the army simply because my family was so poor that I had to find a way to earn a living." 40

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40 Liu Ju-ming, "Reminiscences of a General Who Rose From the Ranks (1)," Biographical Literature, V (September 1964), 39.
In another chapter of the same autobiography, General Liu tells us why his family was so poor and how he and his family endeavored to save money for land purchase:

The poverty of my family was due to the system of succession (according to this system, when a person dies, each of his sons inherits a part of his property). Our property has been divided by every generation. When my great grandfather died, my grandfather only received five mou of land . . . . All the members of my family endeavored to save money in order to purchase land, and we did accumulate certain land. To purchase land in that way could hardly be regarded as exploitation, but the Communist said it was, when they were persecuting my family.41

The newly-arisen militarymen and officials with their fresh financial power became one of the largest customers of the declining landlords and poor farmers who could not maintain their land.

Some warlords, with their mighty military power, became the largest landlords in the 1920's. General Wu Chiun-shen, a warlord of Manchuria, possessed all the arable land of Tong-hua county. When his daughter became engaged to the son of a Mongolian prince, he accepted 600,000 ching42 of virgin land from that Mongolian prince as a personal gift.43

The most flagrant warlord-landlords came from Sauchuan province. The Sauchuan farmers were the most miserable segment of the rural

41 Ibid., p. 41.
42 Ching is a larger unit of land. It equals fifteen mou.
population. The warlord government of that province began to collect
the land tax of 1974 in 1934.44

The rising of the compradors, middlemen, was the result of the
Western impact. When the isolation policy of the Chinese Empire was
destroyed by the Western gunboats in the 1860's, international trade
stretched to every major coastal city of China. Under these circum-
stances an intermediary between the Western and the local merchants
was badly needed. A lot of merchants who could speak English became
"middlemen," and thus obtained wealth and reputation.45 Gradually they
became the richest segment of the Chinese people. They regarded land
purchase as the safest way of investment since the economic and politi-
cal situation in China was so unstable.

Those who had acquired wealth in trade and industry began to
join the landlord club. Statistics show that "by the 1920's in the
area around the commercial metropolis of Shanghai and Canton, already
ninety-five and eighty-five percent respectively of the farmers were
tenants."46

The two new ingredients of the landlord class shared a common
characteristic, i.e., both of them could not cultivate their own

44King Kuo-po, A Study on the Economic Problems of China,

45Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig, East Asia: The Modern

46Mehnert, Klaus, Peking and Moscow (Translated from the German
land. Under these circumstances, the tenancy system reached a new peak. The burden of the tenants was, in this period, one of the heaviest in Chinese history.

First, the tenants, as the tenants of other periods, had to pay a heavy land rent which usually equaled half or two thirds of the product. Statistics gathered in Kiangsi Province in 1927 show: (1) in twenty-two counties the land rent was 50 percent of the product, (2) in sixteen counties, the tenants had to pay 60 percent of the product to the landowners, (3) in twelve counties, the land rent was under 50 percent of the product, (4) in other areas, the rent rates ranged from 70 percent to 80 percent. The various rent rates were fixed according to the quality of the land.

In addition to the land rent, the tenants were also required by the government to pay a land tax, which, as compared with the land taxes of other countries, was extremely unreasonable. A German, W. Wagner, made a tax survey in Suntung Province, and discovered that the land tax the Suntung farmers had to pay was fifteen times the Prussian land tax (in 1866), 2.5 times the Japanese land tax and seven times the United States land tax.

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The land tax was by no means the only tax the farmers had to pay. There were many auxiliary taxes which were usually several times the land tax. A survey made in Chekiang Province in 1933 indicates that there were twenty auxiliary taxes in several counties of that province. None of the other counties, says the same survey, had less than eight.\footnote{Commission for the Agrarian Restoration, \textit{A Survey on the Villages of Chekiang Province}, Second Edition (Shanghai: Commercial Publishing Company, 1935), p. 8.}

The heaviest single tax levied on the peasantry was the tax for military purposes. In 1929 and 1930, the farmers of 823 counties (China had 1941 counties at that time) had to pay military taxes which approximately equaled 300 percent of the land tax.\footnote{King Kuo-po, \textit{A Study on the Chinese Economic Problems}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 212.}

The balance made for a tenant family may help to indicate the actual condition of the tenants' livelihood (see Table II).

Table II reveals the following facts:

1. The income acquired by farmers was not sufficient to supply their families. Their dependents had to engaged in supplementary labor in order to make up the income shortage. If an accident happened in their families they were bound to fall into the whirlpool of a loan shark. Professor Edward T. Williams, formerly American Charge d' Affairs at Peking, has described what he was in China:

The sight of a traveler with his clothes tied up in a bundle and carried over his shoulder is not a rare one. But these country people as I learned to my surprise, were carrying
TABLE II
FINANCIAL BALANCE OF AN AVERAGE TENANT FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Income</th>
<th>Unit = Chinese Dollar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income of the farm</td>
<td>165.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family labor</td>
<td>18.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family supplementary labor</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>205.54</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2. Money for Productive Means                                             |                        |
| Facilities                                                                | 2.05                   |
| Cadastration                                                             | 14.62                  |
| Seed                                                                      | 9.88                   |
| Fertilizer material                                                      | 6.31                   |
|                                                                           | **32.82**              |

| 3. Money for Living                                                       |                        |
| Family                                                                    | 141.07                 |
| Employees                                                                 | 2.83                   |
|                                                                           | **143.90**             |

| 4. Taxes                                                                  |                        |
| Land tax                                                                  | 2.4                    |
| Eight auxiliary taxes                                                    | 11.0                   |
| Military tax                                                              | 7.2                    |
|                                                                           | **20.6**               |

Source: The first three items (income, the money for productive means and the money for living) were investigated by Chien Char-Chu, Heny Te-Chang, and Wu Pen-nung in Ju-lin county, Kwangsi province in 1933. See Chen Po-ta, op. cit., p. 1. The material of the fourth item was cited from King Kuo-po's work, A Study on the Chinese Economic Problems, op. cit., pp. 211-212. These three figures (2.4, 11.0, and 7.2) were the approximate averages of the various taxes in China. Although this table is exploratory rather than definitive in character, it discloses with reasonable accuracy, the actual living conditions of the tenants.
their clothes home from the pawn-shops, where they had been deposited earlier in the year to raise money for the purchase of seed for the spring planting. They had had a bad season the previous year, followed by a hard winter, and had exhausted their resources. This year they had better fortune and so were able to recover their winter garments before the cold weather set in. This custom of depositing clothes with the pawn-shops is not, however, an uncommon one, either in country or city. For the common people they (Pawn shops) serve as banks.

Poverty brought the tenants political and social inferiority. However, they were not accustomed to solving their problems by political or social revolution. Confucian teachings still dominated their minds. Only when they faced starvation, did they stand up and fight for their lives.

2. They had no surplus money for agricultural improvement. The technical backwardness of Chinese agriculture is mainly due to the poverty of the farmers.

The technical backwardness of agriculture, a part of the backwardness of science in China, can be attributed to the social structure and the value system. The traditional Chinese society was divided into four functional groups, namely the intelligentsia, the peasants, the artisans, and the merchants. The intelligentsia had a very high social position. They were, as the Confucianists asserted, the ruling class of the society. Farmers were given a position second only to the intelligentsia. However, their economic position was inconsistent with their social position. In other words,

they were socially near the top but materially poor near the bottom of
the society. They were governed, and scarcely became governing.

However, the social stratum was by no means rigid. The criterion
for social classification was literacy rather than origin or family
background. If a poor peasant could pass the Imperial Examination,
he was actually promoted to the intelligentsia. In other words, to pass
the examination meant to improve one's social position. Under such a
value system and social structure, people, including the literate
peasants, endeavored to master the Confucianist classics which were
useful in passing the examination, instead of reading other books.

In his autobiography, Chen Tu-Shiu, one of the founders of
the Chinese Communist Party, once vividly described how the people
of his native district encouraged their boys to pass the examination:

Imperial Examination was not only a sign of glory, but also
an implicit force which dominated the social life of the whole
people. Only those who passed the examination could become
officials; only officials could become rich; and only the rich
could become landlords. Although sons of the poor could hardly
pass the examination, the poor tenants still tried to do their
best to encourage their sons to learn. If their sons took, but
failed to pass the examination, they would be treated better by
the landlords.52

The Imperial Examination sapped not only the energy of the
intelligentsia but also that of the literate peasant and handicrafts-
men. The hand workers were separated from the head workers, and
scientific research was thus neglected. In Chinese history, we can

52 Chen Tu-Shiu, "Chapters of an Unfinished Autobiography,"
Biographical Literature, Taipei, V (September, 1964), 55.
find many peasants or handicraftsmen who rose from illiteracy to literacy, becoming intellectuals or officials. It is hard to find peasants who became literate and remained dedicated to the scientific development of their original careers. The story of Chi Pe-sheh, one of the greatest Chinese printers in the 20th century, may be utilized as an example.

Chi Pe-sheh was originally a poor carpenter. After working with a famous carpenter of Hunan Province, he mastered woodcarving and became famous in his native district. However, that was not what he wanted. He desired to master print-making and poetry, which were usually the careers of the intelligentsia. A careful study of his autobiography and other relevant materials shows how eagerly he and the people of his time wanted to join the intelligentsia. He left no contribution to woodworking but he did leave brilliant prints.53

The inferior social position of the merchant can be traced back to the Han Dynasty. Since commerce was regarded by the Confucianists as a necessary evil, the Han Dynasty adopted a policy of disparaging the merchant. In 136 B.C., after the Confucian triumph over the legalists, a period of Confucian ideological monopoly began. Confucian agrarianism was thus turned from a theory into a practical system with the following two principles as its base: (1) peasant affairs must be regarded as the center of statecraft; (2) merchants,

being regarded as an exploiting group, must be suppressed. This system has been adopted to various degrees by all the dynasties as the basis of their economic policies.

These policies localised and decentralized the commerce, including the purchase of surplus grain. Even in the 1940's most of the farmers in inland China still traded with each other through a system of periodic markets in which the local farmers met each other once or twice each month to purchase what they wanted and to sell surpluses. Agriculture has never been commercialized. The lack of a nation-wide market made the exchange of agricultural know-how difficult.

After the revolution of 1911 and after fifty years of modernization, the value system still remained the same. Merchants were disparaged, and the intelligentsia, adored. Even in 1964 the Chinese Communists had to criticize the disparaging of merchants, for many young Chinese did not like to work in commercial jobs.

As I have said before, the peasant problems in China worsened when land concentration combined with the problem of overpopulation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From the Tang Dynasty (621-880) to the early years of the Ching Dynasty, China had never suffered from over-population.  

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In the 18th century, China's population rapidly increased becoming approximately four times what it had been during the Ming period. The increase was partly due to the reform of the land tax. But the main factor contributing to the increase was obviously the stability and the prosperity of the social situation at that time.

Under the pressure of the rural overpopulation, the land that peasant farmed decreased from fourteen mou in the 17th century to 2.5 mou in the 19th century. In the 1949 land reform, only about 1.5 mou were allotted to each farmer. These facts clearly reflect the grave character of overpopulation in China.

Statistics gathered by the Statistics Bureau of the Nationalist Government in 1945 revealed that the average Chinese farm was smaller than the average farm in thirteen other leading countries (see Table III).

The Republic period (1911-1949) brought instability and misery to the rural population. Traditional ideas and ignorance still ruled the countryside but Western ideas began to push China toward fundamental reform. Peasant movements began to rise in wrath.

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### TABLE III

**LAND EACH PEASANT FARMED IN 14 COUNTRIES, 1945**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Land Each Peasant Farmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>19.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. S. A.</td>
<td>12.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>10.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. K.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. S. S. R.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 unit = 1 ching = 15 mou.

CHAPTER II

LAND REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE PERIOD OF THE REPUBLIC
(1911-1949)

Dr. Sun Yat-sen's first revolutionary organization was established in Honolulu in 1894 and named Shen-chung Hui (society for the Restoration of China). Most of its members were overseas Chinese.¹

In the 19th century, the Manchu Empire was declining on the one hand, and the cultural superiority of the Chinese people was challenged on the other. The overseas Chinese became the most unstable segment of the Chinese people. They lost the protection of the Chinese Government, and felt shameful when living in "barbarian" countries. They knew why and how the western countries became so strong. They wanted to reform their own country by means of western knowledge and experience. That is one of the reasons why the Chinese anti-Manchu revolution was stirred up, financially supported and implemented mainly by the overseas Chinese.

Most of the overseas Chinese came from the overpopulated coastal provinces of south China. They emigrated to foreign countries simply because they wanted to earn money to support their families or relatives who still lived in China. When they made enough money or became old, they usually returned to China. Most of them purchased land and became

¹The original members of Shen-chung Hui were twenty-three overseas Chinese. Most of them were middle class merchants in the United States. See Huang Fu-liang, Overseas Chinese and the Chinese Revolution (Hong Kong: Asia Publishing Company, 1955), p. 58.
middle-class peasants. It is significant that they came from the peasant class and wanted to retire as peasants.

Before the establishment of Shen-chung Hui, many secret societies existed among the overseas Chinese as well as the peasantry in China. These secret societies can be traced to the 17th century when the Manchu court seized the whole China mainland, and Cheng Chen-kung, one of the military leaders of the Ming Dynasty, seized Formosa and used it as a military base to overthrow the Manchu Dynasty. Realizing that the Ming court could not be restored merely by military activities, Cheng Chen-kung's staff general, Chen Yung-hua, secretly organized Tien-di Hui in south China. The simple platform of this secret society was "Fan-ching Fu-ming" (literally, fight against Manchu and restore the Ming Dynasty). In 1683, Formosa was occupied by the Manchu Empire. Members of Tien-Di Hui fled to and established themselves in Southeast Asia. In 1862, the potential strength of the secret societies substantially increased when the remnant of the Taiping rebels fled abroad to join them.²

In China proper, the character of the secret societies was changed. Religious doctrines and superstitions were incorporated into their platforms. Intellectuals were attracted by the Imperial Examination and no longer cared about any racist appeal. Only illiterate and poor peasants and workers, because of their miserable condition, were

²Ibid., p. 43.
still interested in secret societies. Anti-Manchu doctrine still existed but gradually lost its original flavor and became anti-foreignism.

After the establishment of Shen-chung Hui, Dr. Sun Yat-sen successfully organized a united front with certain secret societies. Undoubtedly, such an alliance benefited both the revolutionaries and the secret societies. The masses needed leadership, while the revolutionaries needed the masses. Under these circumstances, the revolutionary society had to adopt a land policy in order to satisfy the masses, especially the poor peasants.

In 1905, the revolutionary society was reorganized into Tung-mon Hui, and adopted "equalization of land rights" as one of the planks of its platform. The land policy designed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen was moderate in character. It was influenced by the western land reformers of the 1890's.

In the 1890's, the land reform movement in the West reached its zenith. Henry George put forward the idea of single tax in the United States. John Steart Mill advocated the theory that all unearned

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increments of land should go to the public. 6 Adolf Damaschke organized a land reform league in Germany. 7 As a western-educated person, Dr. Sun was undoubtedly influenced by this land reform movement. In the manifesto issued by Tung-mon Hui, Dr. Sun wrote:

The current value of land resulting from social improvement and progress after the revolution should go to the state to be enjoyed by all citizens in common. 8

If we compare the above statement with John S. Mill's theory, we can easily discover how deeply Dr. Sun was influenced by these western land reformers.

However, in the early years of the 20th century, traditional Chinese thought still dominated the intellectuals. Dr. Sun and his associates, although they had adopted the western land theory, still maintained the Confucianist attitude toward the peasantry. They had no intention of organizing peasants and workers into their own party. Revolution was still regarded as a pursuit for the intelligentsia. The revolutionaries decided to try to overpower the warlords and establish their own military forces. They focused their attention on the large cities rather than the countryside. In 1921, when G. Maring advised Dr. Sun Yat-sen to organize his party into a coalition of classes, particularly

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of workers and peasants, Dr. Sun told Maring that "the basis of (the Chinese) revolutionary movement is the unbroken heritage from Great Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, King Wen, King Wu, Duke of Chu, and Confucius to the present day." A man believing in Confucianism can hardly accept radical theories such as nationalization of land. In a speech delivered before the Kwangtung Provincial Assemblymen and newspaper reporters at Canton, Dr. Sun pointed out:

Many scholars in various parts of the world are in favor of land nationalization, which is reasonable and may be adopted by us. But, in my view, not all land should be owned by the state, but only those parts of the land which are needed for public purpose.  

Dr. Sun's land policy was not based upon detailed investigation. As a matter of fact, an investigation was impossible at that time. During the Canton period, the Kuomintang had never effectively controlled the Province of Kwangtung, not to mention the other provinces. The party lived at the mercy of the military man. Even after the establishment of the party force, the authority of the Kuomintang was still based upon a balance between the party troop and the Kwangsi military clique.

Dr. Sun asserted that the land problem of modern China was a corollary of the poverty of the whole country. China had no great landlords who dominated the livelihood of the common people. In the countryside the Confucian standard of morality should be maintained. In other words, the land problem in China should be regarded as economic in character; the social order should not be changed. This is perhaps the

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9Ibid., p. 12.
main difference between the land policies of the Nationalists and the Communi-

In his third lecture on the principle of People's livelihood, Dr. Sun says:

A large majority of the people in China are peasants, at least nine out of every ten, yet the food which they raise with such wearisome labor is mostly taken away by the landowners. . . . If we are to increase the production of food, we must make laws regarding the rights and interests of the farmers; we must give them encouragement and protection and allow them to keep more of the fruit of their land. . . . When the Principle of people's livelihood is fully realized and the problems of the farmer are all solved, each tiller of the soil will possess his own fields—that is to be the final goal of our efforts. . . . Although China does not have great landlords, yet nine out of ten farmers do not own their fields. Most of the farming land is in the possession of landlords who do not cultivate themselves. . . . Of the food production in the fields, sixty per cent goes to the landlords, while only forty percent goes to the farmers. . . . If the food raised in the fields all goes to the farmers, they will be more eager to farm and production will increase. 10

From the above citation, we can see that what Dr. Sun designed is a moderate and conservative "land-to-the-tiller" policy. He introduces no radical method of treating the landlords or of changing the social order of the peasant society. Such a policy was espoused by the Nationalists, but it has never been carried out on the Chinese mainland.

A senior Nationalist official who was an active politician during the Canton period, once vividly told how peasant affairs were neglected by the Kuomintang officials and how the Communists adopted an opposite attitude:

Before the central party organization moved northward, every district (county or city) established its own Bureau for Peasant and Worker Affairs. A party resolution was also adopted to set up training institutes for agricultural administration. I was appointed as the dean of that institute. . . . Instructors included noted Communist leaders such as Hui Tai-eing, Lu Yi-yan, Feng Chu-po, and many high Nationalist officials. The Nationalist officials were very indifferent and unenthusiastic about their teachings. . . . The Communist instructors adopted an opposite attitude. They worked very hard just like priests preaching the gospel. Later, the Communists were driven out of the Kuomintang, agricultural and labor affairs were again overlooked, and the institute was finally closed. 11

When the Kuomintang established itself in Kwangtung province, most of its leaders were intellectuals with traditional backgrounds. They scarcely knew the peasantry. The first national assembly of the Kuomintang was held in 1924 in Canton. Twenty-four revolutionary leaders were elected as members of the Central Committee, and five were elected as members of the Control Committee. An analysis of their backgrounds and their attitudes toward peasant problems might help us to illustrate the assertion that peasant problems were ignored by the traditional mandarin intellectuals.

The five members of the Control Committee were in the right-wing of the Kuomintang. All of them were traditional mandarin intellectuals. All of them came from rich urban or rural families. Among the members of the Central Committee, Wong Ching-wei and Liao Chung-kai came from rich families. Though they were the left-wing leaders, they put forward no positive ideas for the settlement of peasant problems. The majority of the Central Committee, as mandarin intellectuals, naturally opposed

any radical reforms. Tang Ping-shen, Li Ta-chou, and Yu Shu-teh were Communists who were elected as members of the Central Committee. Later developments indicated that they were also not in favor of radical land reform as the Communists were several years later. In the May Fourth Movement, Li Ta-chou, influenced by utopian socialism, advocated a new village system.\(^\text{12}\) Strictly speaking, he did not propose land reform. However, his suggestions gave Mao tse-tung a hint regarding the importance of the countryside.

A few military men were also elected as members of the Central Committee. Tang Yen-kai, who came from a notable mandarin family, was the military commander of the Hunan troops. Yang She-ming was a warlord of Yungnan Province. Li Lei-chun and Po Wen-wei were the military leaders of East China. Just like other military men of that time, their interests coincided with the interests of the landlords. As a matter of fact, most of the military men were themselves landlords or rich peasants.

In 1924, the Kuomintang decided to cooperate with the Communists. This decision was important both to the Kuomintang and the Communists. It was important to the Kuomintang because it marked the first time that the Kuomintang had obtained foreign aid. It was important to the communists because it gave the communists a chance to move into the main stream of the Chinese revolutionary movement.

Before the cooperation between the Kuomintang and the Communists, the high party leaders of the Kuomintang gradually developed an idea of establishing a party troop. They thought that the Kuomintang could do nothing, if it continued to live at the mercy of the warlords. In 1924, Chiang Kei-shek, after investigating the Russian military educational system, was ordered to set up a military academy at Wangpoa, Kwangtung. Four months later, the first Russian military aid reached Wangpoa.13

At the same time, the Communists apparently adopted a different method of developing their power. They decided to start a mass movement to increase their strength within the ranks of workers and peasants. A noted communist, Peng Pai, successfully organized a peasant movement in his native town, Hailufeng, Kwangtung, which was the forerunner of the Communist peasant movement. As the son of a rich Hailufeng farmer, Peng Pai knew the local peasantry very well. Hailufeng, like most of the Chinese rural areas, was backward, conservative and poor. It seemed to be extremely difficult to improve conditions there. In 1921, Peng Pai was appointed director of the Board of Education of Hailufeng. This gave him a chance to start his task. First, he organized students to celebrate Labor Day (May the first), but no laborers or peasants joined them. He published a periodical, Red Heart, as the voice of the masses, but

the masses did not back him. Workers and peasants did not even know what he was doing. 14

The failure in Hailufeng city forced him to go to the countryside to recruit support. In the villages he was treated like a tax collector; nobody talked with him. However, his old-fashioned gramophone helped him. Every time he reached a village, he played a record first. When the peasants were attracted and got together to watch his "magic box," he proceeded to put on a slight of hand performance. In this way, he recruited six cadres in the first months and organized the first peasants' association. However, most of the peasants did not understand the significance of the association and refused to join it. Only when the association showed its ability to protect its members did its membership begin to increase.

The Peasants' Association of Hailufeng consisted of nine departments: sanitary, education, arbitration, propaganda, agriculture, management, public relations, finance, and bookkeeping. The most active department was the Department of Arbitration which handled many cases concerning marriage, debt, and property. 15 The Peasants' Association showed its power in 1927 when a soviet government was organized in Canton. More than ten thousand Hailufeng peasants lost their lives for the cause of the association. 16

15 Ibid., p. 63.
16 Ibid., p. 64.
In 1925, another peasant movement was initiated by Mao Tse-tung himself in his native county, Shao Sen, Hunan. This movement was not as successful as Peng Pai's because Hunan Province was ruled by a conservative warlord. One of the contributions of this short-lived experiment was the merging of the peasant movement with Nationalism. At that time, Japanese invasion seemed to be imminent. Mao, first of all, tried to mix with the local farmers in order to understand their problems. Then, he organized Shui-chi Hui (Society for the Abolishment of the National Humiliation) to mix anti-Japanese appeal with the peasant movement. In addition, he recruited a number of cadres for the Communist Party. Undoubtedly, these two movements were experimental in character. Both Mao and Peng had not had any experience before.

In 1925, Mao, under pressure from the warlords, fled to Canton where he was appointed the Director of a training institute for peasant movements. Under the auspices of Mao, twenty-five courses were offered. Most of the instructors were Communists. Mao offered courses concerning Chinese peasant problems. Peng Pai dealt with the peasant movement in Tung-kiang and Hailufeng. Chou En-lai lectured on the military significance of the peasant movement.

One of Mao's noted essays, "An Analysis of the Various Classes of Chinese Society," was written and presented in the form of a lecture in

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1925. In this essay Mao divided the Chinese people into five classes: Landlord and camprador, middle class, petite bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat, and proletariat. After analyzing the characteristics of these five classes, he reached the following conclusion:

Campradors, landlords, and a part of the reactionary intellectuals are our enemies. The industrial proletariat is our leading revolutionary force. The semi-proletariat and petite bourgeoisie are our close friends. So far as the fluctuating middle class is concerned, its right wing might be our enemy; its left wing might be our friend. We must pay attention to them and be sure they will not disturb our front. 18

Peasants, according to Mao, belong to either petite bourgeoisie or semi-proletariat. Therefore, they are the close friends of the revolutionary workers. 19

In July, 1926, the Kuomintang launched a major military expedition. Their victory in Hunan and other provinces of the Southeast China gave Mao an opportunity to stir up a peasant uprising in his native province, Hunan. Peasants' associations were organized in thirty-five counties and had a total membership of 5,180,000 peasants in 1927. 20 A series of struggles against landlords were stimulated. The methods used by the Communists were ruthless. Many landlords were tortured or executed. The peasants' associations began to replace the gentry class of the

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19 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

countryside as the political authority. Landlords were forced to reduce rent and interest. Gambling and opium smoking were prohibited, and paternalism was challenged. The following are Mao's own words:

The power of the peasants' associations were paramount. Landlords were not allowed to debate. The prestige of the landlords was entirely swept away; we just punched them down to the floor and kicked them with our feet. The slogan was: "Those who have a lot of land are landlords; those who are gentry are depraved." In some places, people who had only fifty mou of land were regarded as landlords, and people who wore robes were treated as depraved gentry.21

In May, 1929, a national peasants' association was organized in Wuhan. Mao Tse-tung was elected as its chairman. This organization was dissolved when the Nationalist Government decided to separate from the Communists.

From January the fourth to February the fifth of 1927, Mao spent thirty-two days investigating the peasant movement in the south part of Hunan. Afterwards he wrote a report which has been deemed as one of the classic documents of the early Communist movement in China. In this report Mao listed fourteen programs which were carried out by the Hunan movement:

1. The peasants were organized within the framework of the peasants' associations.

2. The political authority of the gentry-landlord class was challenged.

3. The economic authority of the gentry-landlord class was challenged.

4. The fudal ruling system of the depraved gentry was overthrown.

5. The landlords were disarmed, and a peasant armed force was established.

6. The authority of the county magistrate and other lower officials was overthrown. The peasants' associations took over their judicial power.

7. Paternalism, theocracy, and male authority were challenged.

8. Propaganda against imperialism, aggression and unequal treaties was widely spread.

9. Bad customs and habits were prohibited.

10. Bandits were swept away.

11. High taxes were abolished.

12. Cultural improvements were initiated.

13. Several kinds of cooperatives were set up.

14. Construction was started.  

From the above fourteen points, we can see that social reform rather than land reform was emphasized. The Communists tried to overthrow the ruling gentry by arming the poor peasants. They intended to challenge the Confucianist standard of morality and value system by questioning paternalism. They attempted to wipe out bad customs by initiating cultural movement. They endeavored to stimulate the political consciousness of the peasantry by appealing to nationalism.

No matter how sacred and dedicated the aims were, the Hunan peasant movement was undisciplined and irrational. It was criticized

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ pp. 34-55.}\]
and opposed by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. A resolution was adopted on January 25, 1927, by the Central Committee condemning the immature actions of the poor peasants for causing the departure of the petite bourgeoisie from the Communist Party.²³

Such a radical movement naturally led the province into a state of terror. Military men took the initiative in suppressing the peasants. Finally, a bloody conflict occurred in Chang-sha. At that time, the Third International's order arrived at Wuhan, asking the communists to reorganize the Central Committee of the Kuomintang and its military forces and to carry out a radical land reform.²⁴ The order forced the Nationalists to alter their pro-Russian policy and separate themselves from the Communists.

The first Communist reaction to the Nationalist decision was an emergency conference held on August 7, 1927, at which the Central Committee was condemned and Chen Tu-shui, the secretary-general of the party, was dismissed. A series of rebellions in Southeast China were stirred up by the new Communist leadership. Under the leadership of Peng Pai, the Communists in Hailufeng and Tung-kiang established the first Soviet Government. A few months later, the Kwang Tung Soviet Government was established in Canton. A policy of nationalizing all the land was adopted. Every village and district was ordered to set up a soviet.²⁵


However, the nationalist army soon crushed the Soviets. More than ten thousand Hailufeng peasant militia men were slain. Mao Tse-tung and other communist leaders fled to the Chingkang Mountains. Thus, the first stage of the Communist-led peasant movement came to an end.

In 1929, the Communists established the Central Soviet Government in Kiangsi Province. The principles of peasant rebellion established by the August Seventh Conference were adopted as a basis for the policy of that period. A program of village survey was conducted by Mao himself. "The only way to understand the real condition of the various classes," Mao pointed out, "is to make a social survey. A universal survey is impossible and unnecessary. What we should do is deliberately choose several cities and villages as examples and investigate them from the Marxist point of view." 26

In this way, he investigated Changsha, Hsiang-tang, Hsiang-hsiang, Heng-sen, and Hsiang-ling in 1927; Ning-kong and Yung-shen in 1928; and the south part of Kiangsi Province during the Soviet period. From these surveys, Mao obtained much firsthand knowledge about the villages. For example, his survey in Shen-kuo provided reliable material regarding the rent under the tenancy system. He discovered that in the first, second, and fourth districts of Shen-kuo, tenants had to pay 50 per cent of the annual product to the landlords. In the third district a large part of tenants had to pay 60 per cent, while only a small part

of the tenants paid 50 per cent of the annual product to the landlords.
The first three districts frequently suffered from flood and drought.
These surveys were regarded by Chen Po-ta as a picture of the tenancy
system of the whole of China.  

From 1928 to 1931, at least six land laws were promulgated. This
fact indicated that the Communists were trying to work out a way to solve
the land problems. The first law was quite primitive. It chose the
village as the basic unit for land redistribution. Peasants were ordered
to write the quality and quantity of their land on bamboo planks which
were supposed to be posted on their land, and, at the same time, they were
required to report to the peasants' assembly. The village Soviet govern-
ments, in accordance with the data provided by the assembly, decided how
much land each person should be given and wrote the names of the peasants
on different bamboo planks. Then everyone went to the fields where the
Village Government arranged the division by simply exchanging the bamboo
planks.

The second and third land laws are mentioned in Mao's own work,
"Rural Surveys," in which Mao said,

... the (second) land law made in December, 1928, was the
embodiment of the experiences of the previous year. Before that
year, we had no experiences at all. ... These two land laws are

27 Mao Tse-tung, Rural Surveys (Peking: New China Press, 1949),
pp. 5-6.

28 Chen Po-ta, An Essay on the Lant Rent in the Modern China,

29 Wang Ssu-cheng, Mao Tse-tung and the Red Terror (Taipei: The
Central Committee of the Kuomintang, 1959), pp. 150-51.
mentioned (in Mao's book) simply because we can, from these two laws, see the development of our idea about land struggle.\textsuperscript{30}

As compared with the first land law, the second one was much more detailed and advanced. It adopted the Hsiang (district) as the single unit for land redistribution. All land was nationalized and allotted to peasants. After the redistribution, land purchase was absolutely prohibited. The land tax was fixed at 15 per cent of the annual product. Under special conditions, such as flood or drought, the tax could be reduced to 10 or 5 per cent. Men of the Red Army and the Red Guards also had as much right to obtain land as the common people. The Soviet Government hired workers to till for them, since they could not cultivate themselves.\textsuperscript{31}

This land law contained three principal defects which Mao pointed out: (1) it confiscated all the land, not just the land of landlords; (2) the land belonged to the government rather than the tillers themselves; and (3) land purchase was prohibited. These defects were all corrected later.\textsuperscript{32}

The third land law was made in Shen-kuo where Mao had made an intense survey. According to this law, only the land possessed by the landlords was supposed to be confiscated. The rest of this law was modeled on the first one.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{31}Article 9 of the 1928 Land Law. See Mao Tse-tung, \textit{Rural Survey}, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., pp. 94-95.
The other three land laws were officially promulgated by the central authority of the Communist Party. The fourth one was made by the Military Committee of the Communist Party in 1930. According to the fourth law, both the land of the landlords and gentry and the land of the rich farmers would be confiscated. The dependents of landlords, gentry, and rich farmers would be allotted land if they could not make a living by other means.  

The fifth law was enacted by the National Soviet Assembly in 1931. This law excluded rich farmers from among the persons whose land would be requisitioned. The Soviet Government only confiscated the rented part of the rich farmers' land. This law also had a very flexible provision concerning the method of land redistribution. The Soviet Government was authorized to decide whether it should redistribute all the land or just the confiscated land. 

The sixth was enacted by the First National Soviet Representative Conference in 1931. According to this law, the rich farmers again lost all of their land. For the first time people were allowed to rent out and purchase land. Not only the land of the landlords and the gentry, but also the land of the warlords and the Nationalist officials would be confiscated. This provision was inserted simply because the political

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situation required it. In September of that year, the Japanese aggressors had occupied Manchuria; while the Nationalists were conducting a wide-scaled military attack against the Communists.

In December, 1930, a meeting was held in Chi-ann. Many mistakes made in the land reform movement were reported by Chen Yi and others. The conspicuous mistakes were the following: 37

1. The ideas of the higher levels of the party did not reach the lower levels. Cadres of different organs could not harmoniously cooperate with each other. In some districts, there were power struggles.

2. Party members of landlord or rich farmer origin boycotted the reforms. For example, in Shan-yu, there were eighty party members, thirty of them were landlords and rich farmers. The reform plan was delayed for two months before it was put into practice.

3. In many places, land redistribution could not be successfully implemented.

4. Some social reforms were incidentally carried out in the land reform movement and were opposed by the conservative farmers. For example, women refused to join the movement. Rich farmers opposed freedom of marriage.

5. Farmers were afraid of the communists. They whispered to each other: "Don't criticize, otherwise you'll lose your head." 38

The land reform carried out in this period was so undisciplined and orderless that we could hardly say it was successful. But Mao said

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37 Mao Tse-tung recorded the reports and collected it in his book Rural Surveys, op. cit., pp. 79-82.
38 Ibid., p. 81.
it was. In 1934, Mao reported the success to the Second Soviet
Representative Conference.

The living standard of the peasant is greatly improved. For
Example, in 1932, in Fuchian and Kiangsi, production was increased
by 15 percent, as compared with that of the prerevolutionary period.
In 1933, production increased by 25 percent. The living standard
was twice higher than that of the Kuomintang period. 39

Was the reform as successful as Mao reported? Before judging
this, we must recall the general conditions of this period. From 1930
to 1933, there were five major battles between the Communists and the
Nationalists. More than a million persons were mobilized to join the
fighting. The battlefield was extended to every Soviet district.
Thousands were killed and thousands became homeless. Under these cir-
cumstances, normal agricultural cultivation was impossible. However,
several fundamental technical principles of land reform were established:
(1) the poor peasants and agrarian laborers must be the vanguards in the
reform movement; (2) the vanguards must organize a united front with the
middle peasants, in order to strengthen the farmer's position; (3) the
rich farmers must be neutralized or limited to make sure that they do
not side with the landlords; and (4) the landlords and gentry, as the
enemies of the people, should be abolished. 40

Ironically, when Mao reported the harvest to the Soviet Conference,
many communist cadres still did not know how to draw the class line. It

39 Ho Hua, A History of Chinese New Democratic Revolution (Peking:

40 Ibid., p. 121.
seemed to be extremely difficult to distinguish the landlords from the rich farmers.

In April, 1927, the National Conference of the Communist Party decided that peasants who possessed more than 500 mou of land should be regarded as landlords. This standard was accepted by the central authority of the party but opposed by the local Communist leaders, such as Mao Tse-tung and Chu Chiu-pa. "To adopt such a definition for the term 'landlord'", Mao angrily charged, "is incongruous. It would not help the development of class struggle in the countryside, since it is inconsistent with the actual condition." Mao was fully aware of the fact that only a few peasants possessed more than 500 mou of land.

From 1928 to 1933, three systems were adopted for drawing class lines: (1) Those who rented out a large part and cultivated a small part of their land would be classed as landlords. Those who rented out a small part and cultivated a larger part of their land would be regarded as rich farmers. This system was adopted in the Hupeh-Anhui-Hunan Soviet District. (2) Farmers would be classified as landlords if they were involved in three exploitative activities; that is, hiring agrarian laborers, renting out their land, and lending money. Those who practiced any two of the exploitative activities would be classified as rich farmers. This system was adopted by the ShanKuo Soviet Government. (3) Persons

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42 Ibid., p. 149.
who owned land, but did not engage in cultivation or only engaged in
supplementary labor and who made a living by means of exploitation,
were treated as landlords. Persons who owned land and cultivated it
themselves and who made their livings partially by exploitation, were
classified as rich farmers.43

The third system was officially adopted as a means of drawing
class lines in October, 1933. It was also employed in the land reform
program promulgated in 1950.44

In the 1930's, China entered a rather chaotic epoch. A Sino-
Japanese war seemed to be inevitable. At that time, China was unpre-
pared and isolated. The only way the Chinese people could save them-
selves was to unite and forget their political differences. On November
25, 1935, the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party adopted a
resolution "concerning the present situation and the current mission of
the party" in which the Chinese Communist Party proposed to establish an
anti-Japanese national front and officially denounced the original policy
of land confiscation.45

At the same time, it promulgated another land law. According to
this new law, the Chinese Communist Party only confiscated the land of

44 The Government Administration Council, The Agrarian Reform Law
of the People's Republic of China (Fourth edition; Peking: Foreign
45 Lee Tien-ming, The Chinese Communist Party and the Peasantry
the landlords or the rich farmers which was not cultivated by the land-
owners themselves, especially when the landlords or rich farmers did not live in the countryside. This new law indicated that the Communist Party was ready to accept reconciliation with its political enemies by temporarily sacrificing its own land policy and accepting the moderate one designed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen. \[46\]

In July, 1937, the Sino-Japanese war finally broke out. After a series of negotiations and under pressure from all the people, the second Communist-Nationalist united front was organized. As a matter of fact, it was a Communist surrender to the Nationalists, at least ostensibly. In September, 1937, the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a four-point declaration which stated that: (1) As Dr. Sun's Three Principles of the people answer the needs of China, the Chinese Communist Party will fight for their complete realization. (2) The Chinese Communist Party will abolish its policy of armed uprisings and its sovietization movements against the Kuomintang, and it will stop its program of dispossessing the landlords through violence. (3) The Chinese Communist Party will abandon its existing Soviet Government and hereafter practice democracy so as to unify the administrative power of the country. (4) The Chinese Communist Party will stop calling its armed forces the Red Army, abolish their existing military designations,

\[46\] Ibid., pp. 58-59.
integrate them into the National Revolutionary Forces, subject them to
the jurisdiction of the National Military Council of the National
Government and await orders to march to the front to fight the
Japanese. Their declaration was immediately accepted by the
Nationalists.

General Chiang Kai-shek stated:

The Chinese Communist Party's declaration is a proof that
national consciousness has triumphed over all other considera-
tions. . . . Since the Chinese Communists have given up their
preconceived ideas and recognized the importance of national
independence and national interests, we hope they will sincerely
fulfill their pledges.48

The good will and the national consciousness developed between
the Communists and the Nationalists that year was soon overshadowed by
the fierce power struggle in the guerilla areas of North China. With the
development of the war, the Communists occupied several "border dis-
tricts" in North China. The largest four were Shang-Kang-Nien, Ching-
Char-Chi, Chi-Lu-Ju, and Ching-Shang. The first district was the largest
and there the central organ of the Chinese Community Party was located.
The second and the fourth were located in Inner Mongolia, while the
third was at the mouth of the Yellow River. In the communist-controlled
districts a moderate rent-reduction program was carried out. According
to the report of the chairman of the first district government, the

47 Chiang Kai-shek, Soviet Russia in China (New York: Forrar,

48 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
policy of land confiscation was abolished in March, 1937. Two months later, the landlords regained their citizenship.\footnote{Lin Po-chu's report to the first plenary session of the Council of the Shang-Kang-Nien Border District in 1942. See Academia Sinica, the Third Department of History, \emph{Collected Documents of the Shang-Kong-Nien Border District} (Peking: Academia Sinica, 1958), p. 18.}

The same report disclosed three principles which were adopted to improve the relationship between the landlord class and the party. First, the land of the landlords which had not yet been confiscated would not be confiscated at the present time. The land still belonged to the landlords. Secondly, if the landlords whose land and houses had been confiscated before returned to the border district, the government would give them shares of land and houses and would restore their citizenship. Thirdly, the landlords would be allowed to rent out their land under the condition that the rent must not be too high.\footnote{\textit{Tbid.}, p. 20.}

Since the Communist Party, during this period, recognized the Nationalist Government as the national government of China, all of its land legislation was based upon the Land Law promulgated by the Nationalist Government on June 30, 1930. An analysis of this Nationalist Land Law might, therefore, be useful as a basis for understanding the land reform of this period.

The Land Law of 1930, with a total of 247 articles, was deliberately made in accordance with Dr. Sun Yat-sen's doctrine. It can be characterized as follows:
1. It established private ownership as the basic system of land relations in China. Article 10 recognized that "any part of the land whereof the ownership is lawfully acquired by an individual Chinese shall be private land."\(^5\)

2. In view of the misery of the tenancy system in China, the law gave the tenants a right to ask the government to purchase the leased land for them at its statutory value, if the tenants had cultivated the leased land continuously for eight full years and if the owners of the said land did not intend to cultivate it themselves.\(^5\) (Article 33.)

3. This law recognized a system of perpetual lease in which the leasee can cultivate the leased land permanently unless the lesor takes back the land for his own cultivation (Articles 109 and 114).\(^5\)

4. According to Article 110 of this law, farm rent should not exceed 8 percent of the value of the land. If any contractual or customary rent exceeded 8 percent, it would be reduced to 8 percent; if it was less than 8 percent, it would remain unchanged.\(^5\)

5. In accordance with Dr. Sun Yat-sen's doctrine, this law set up a land value system. The value of land would be declared by its owner (Article 148), while the value of constructional improvements would


\(^{52}\)Ibid., p. 140.

\(^{53}\)Ibid., pp. 154-55.

\(^{54}\)Ibid., p. 154.
be assessed by the competent local land office (Article 161). Since the unearned increment would go to the public, the land owner was required to pay a land value increment tax in addition to the land value tax. The basic rate of the land value tax would be 1.5 percent (Article 169), while the land value increment tax would be levied on the basis of the net increment of the value of the land (Article 176).

6. The law gave the government a right to purchase private land on a compulsory basis in order to meet the requirements of public undertakings, such as installations for national defense or public utility enterprises (Article 208). Due compensation would be paid to the land owner whose land was purchased by the government (Article 236).

In the Communist-controlled areas, a series of land regulations were enacted in response to the above land law. Article 1 of the Shang-kang-nien Border District Land Regulations declared the regulations were made in accordance with the basic principles of the 1930 Land Law and the actual conditions of the border district. Article 3 of the regulations provided for private ownership, and Article 7 attempted to place some general limitations on the lease system.55

Perhaps the most detailed law was the Tenancy Act passed by the District Council in November, 1944, which defined four alternative kinds of tenancy relationship; namely, fixed leases, unfixed leases, mutual cultivation, and terms of employment.56


56 Ibid., p. 241.
1. Under the fixed lease system land rent was to be fixed in proportion to the size of the leased land. According to Article 7 of the Tenancy Act, the new rent should be less than 25 percent of the original rent.

2. Under the unfixed rent system, the leasor only provided arable land to the leasee, and the leasee had to have his own cultivating instruments. The grain produced on the leased land was to be divided proportionally between the leasor and the leasee. The rent, according to the Act, was to be reduced by 25 to 40 percent.

3. Under the system of mutual cultivation, the leasor provided both the land and the cultivating instruments to the leasee. The Act fixed the maximum rent at 40 percent of the annual product.

4. Under the terms of employment the land owner supplied farm workers with everything including houses, instruments, land, and food. Article 10 arranged a 10 to 20 percent rent-reduction for that kind of system. The share of the land owner, according to the Act, should not exceed 45 percent of the product.

Another report made by Lin Po-chu in 1946 indicated that the rent-reduction policy was universally carried out. As a result, agrarian production was increased and the living standard of the peasants was improved.\(^{57}\)

Because of the lack of reliable materials, we do not know exactly the actual condition of the peasant movement in the Communist-controlled

\(^{57}\)Ibid., p. 280.
areas. However, we can make a rudimentary analysis by employing documents and reports from various sources:

1. The war provided the peasant movement with an unstable situation in which thousands became homeless and thousands were killed by gunfire or famine. Under such conditions rent-reduction could hardly be carried out by peaceful means. Few landlords were executed after being convicted of exploitation, but many were killed as traitors. The authority of the Communist district in the middle of Hopei had persecuted 1,937 households as traitors. According to many available sources the anti-landlord campaign was not stopped until the end of the 1950 land reform in the border districts except the Shang-Kang-Nien Border District where the central organ of the Communist Party was located and which seemed to be deliberately decorated as a political sight-seeing area.

2. The peasant movement at that time seemed to be subordinate to military mobilization. One of the official newspapers said,

   Experience of the last five months illustrates that areas where land reform is successfully performed are areas where the masses are willing to engage in the war.

3. The rent-reduction policy itself was regarded as a temporary political maneuver. Instructions issued on May 28, 1946, by the Political Bureau of Central China said,

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59. Ibid., p. 85.
... the only way to earn the support of the peasants is to satisfy them. The land reform program, although it resembles rent-reduction, is substantially different from traditional rent-reduction. It is, an advanced type of rent-reduction. The land reform movement should not become stuck at the stage of traditional rent-reduction. It must be pushed forward until feudal exploitation is abolished. Only in this way can we fundamentally change land relations.\(^{60}\)

While the Communists were making their land experiments in the countryside, a Nationalist land reform program was also being developed. In 1932, some Nationalist land experts called a meeting on land problems in Nanking City. After a three-month discussion, certain principles were arrived at. Most of those principles were based on Dr. Sun Yat-sen's doctrines. In addition, they organized an association for the study of land problems. The next year, the first assembly of the association was held in Nanking City; only 26 persons were present. The association's membership, however, extended to 500 in 1937. During these years, it advocated a number of proposals.\(^{61}\) Unfortunately, its work stopped at the stage of intellectual discussion. Its proposals have scarcely been noticed.

In contrast to the Communist land policy, the Nationalist program, mainly designed by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, was much more moderate in character. It was centered around a rent-reduction system. The first rent-reduction was carried out in Chekiang Province. In the wake of the Chekiang

\(^{60}\)Ibid., p. 79.

reform, other provinces, such as Kwangtung, Kiangsu, Hunan, and Hupeh, also tried to reduce land rent. However, this movement was defeated by the landlords. In 1940 the Hupeh Provincial Government put a 20 percent rent-reduction into practice. This reform came to an end when the governor left his post.

More radical experiments were made in Lung-Yen of Fuchien and Peh-Pay of Ssuchuan, where the government on a compulsory basis purchased all the leased land and sold it to the ex-leasees. Generally speaking, the program was successful. But the Nationalist Government had no chance to extend the program to other areas. A 31 percent rent-reduction was also carried out in Southeast China in 1949. However, the results are not available since the Communists took over the whole Chinese mainland that year.

In 1949, the Nationalists reestablished themselves in Taiwan. The party structure was thoroughly reformed. They firmly believed that the Nationalist failure on the Chinese mainland was not the failure of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's doctrines themselves. The Kuomintang failed simply because Dr. Sun's doctrines had never been carried out on the mainland. A land reform plan was, therefore, deliberately designed and carried out under the auspices of Governor Chen Cheng and his associates. First of all, they put a 37.5 percent rent-reduction into practice. Then, in the next stages, they sold the public land to the farmers and on a compulsory basis purchased the leased land of landlords with appropriate compensation.

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62 Ibid., p. 124.
An arrangement was also made for turning landlords into industrial investors. 63

From 1911 to 1949, China witnessed many political vissicitudes. Many doctrines were introduced into China, from Dr. Sun's moderate democratic reform to Kong Yu-wei's constitutional monarchy, from Li Ta-chio's Marxism to Mao Tse-tung's country rebellion, from Tsien Sung-po's militarism to Ho Shih's liberalism. All of them had their own supporters in China. To China, this period was indeed experimental in character. To the Chinese peasantry, it was a period of fighting between traditional and imported doctrines, between science and superstition, between prosperity and poverty.

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CHAPTER III

LAND REFORM IN COMMUNIST CHINA (1949-1953)

After taking over the Chinese mainland, the Chinese Communists discovered that three principal problems had to be solved. First, they had to rebuild the political, social and economic apparatuses of the whole country. Rebuilding these apparatuses was not only an administrative problem, but also a problem of national solidarity. In such a huge territory, it would not be easy to give millions of people a single outlook, nor would it be easy to wipe out the potential influence of the Kuomintang from Chinese minds. Secondly, after the Sino-Japanese and the civil wars, the economy almost collapsed. Agricultural and industrial productions deteriorated to a critical point. The Communists had to get agriculture and industry back to normal. Third, they had to pave the way for future industrialization.

In 1949, the Communists decided to complete and reform within a period of three years. A series of laws, regulations, and decisions were thus promulgated in the summer of 1950. An analysis of these documents will help us to understand how the Communists tried to solve the three principal problems involved in agrarian reform.

Article 1 of the Agrarian Reform Law promulgated in 1950 declared that two general principles should be used to direct agrarian reform: (1) the land ownership system of feudal exploitation by the landlord class should be abolished; and (2) the system of peasant land ownership
should be introduced in order to set free rural productive forces, to
develop agricultural production and, thus, to pave the way for China's
industrialization.

The purpose of this stage of land reform seemed to be different
from that of previous stages. Economic considerations played a very
important role in the 1950 reform. This can be illustrated by a report
made by Nan Han-cheng, a high official of Communist China, in 1951.

In the last decade, we defeated the Japanese imperialisms and
U.S. supported Chiang Kai-shek simply because we had the support
of the peasants in the countryside. Our military forces consisted
mainly of armed farmers. . . . Now our nation has made the transi-
tion from a state of war to a state of peace. National construction
requires us, first of all, to restore and develop our agriculture
because a restored and developed agriculture will supply us with
raw materials and food, which are desperately needed in our indus-
trial development. . . . Industrialization is our basic aim. An
economic foundation built through industrialization is needed for
our transformation from a New Democratic Society into a Socialist
society. Only industrialization can help us to build a Socialist
agriculture which is based upon a system of collectivized farms.

The above report clearly shows us the formula to be employed for
national construction (in the 1950's). Most notable is the aim of the
1950 land reform: to pave the way for a socialist agriculture based
upon a system of collectivized farms.

As with other land reforms carried out in previous decades, the
land reform program of 1950 was based upon a rural class struggle. In

1 Government Administration Council, The Agrarian Reform Law
of the People's Republic of China and Other Relevant Documents (Peking:

2 Nan Han-cheng, "The Significance of the Financial Work in the
Countryside and the Way of our Endeavors," Collected Laws and Decrees
Concerning the Financial and Economic Affairs, III (Peking: The Govern-
ment Administration Council, 1952), 93.
August, 1950, the Government Administration Council announced certain standards which were supposed to be employed as criteria for drawing class lines in the countryside. The new standards contained standards established in the Kiangsi period with supplementary standards adopted by the Government Administration Council in 1950.

A landlord, according to these decisions, should be a person "who owns land, but does not engage in labor or only engages in supplementary labor, and who depends on exploitation for his means of livelihood." This definition was given in the Kiangsi period. In 1950, the Communist Government thought it was necessary to add those who rent land from landlords and sublet the land to others to the landlord category. The revolutionary army men, dependents of martyrs, peddlars and others, although renting out portions of their land, were exempt from being classified as landlords.

Since "exploitation" was one of the main criteria for classifying the landlords, it was necessary to give the term "exploitation" a precise definition. "Exploitation by the landlord," said the same decision,

... is chiefly in the form of land rent, plus money lending, hiring of labor, or the simultaneous carrying on of industrial or commercial enterprises. But the major form of exploitation of the peasants by the landlords is the exacting of land rent from the peasants.

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3 The Government Administration Council, The Agrarian Reform Law and Other Relevant Documents, pp. 18-19.


5 Ibid., p. 18.
Another criterion adopted to classify the landlord concerned whether he engaged in labor or not and if he did, how long every year. According to the *Decision Concerning Some Problems Arising from Agrarian Reform*, "a family is considered as being engaged in labor, if one member of the family is engaged in essential labor for one-third of a year."\(^6\)

The basic principle for differentiating the landlord from the rich peasant was that the former did not engage in labor, while the latter did.\(^7\) The rich peasant was exempt from land confiscation in the land reform of 1950, because the Communists thought the rich peasant should be preserved as a means of increasing agricultural production.

In June, 1950, Leiu Shao-chi made a report to the second session of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference elucidating the policy of preserving the rich peasant. In it, he said,

Why now do we advocate the preservation of the rich peasant economy in the coming agrarian reform? It is mainly because the present political and military situation is basically different. In the past to strive for victory in the war was in the greatest interest of the Chinese people and everything had to be subordinated to this need. . . . We allowed the peasants to requisition the surplus land and property of the rich peasants . . . so as to satisfy to a greater extent the demands of the impoverished peasants. The present situation is already essentially different from that of the past. The present basic task for the people throughout the country is to undertake economic construction on a nation-wide scale.\(^8\)

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\(^6\)Ibid., p. 24.

\(^7\)Ibid., pp. 20-21.

The peasants' associations were set up to replace the landlord-gentry class as the ruling apparatus in the countryside. A peasants' association was a five-level organ. The organization of the association was based on the Hsiang association. The other four levels were chu, county, special administrative region, and province.\(^9\)

Poor and middle class peasants were encouraged to join the association. The revolutionary intellectuals who had been regarded by Lenin as the teachers of peasant class consciousness, could also become members. Their membership was subject to the consent of the committee of the local peasants' association.\(^10\) To rich farmers, the associations did not close their doors. Rich farmers could become members only after the land reform, and, just like the revolutionary functionaries, their membership was subject to the "approval of a Hsiang peasant mass meeting or a Hsiang peasant congress."\(^11\)

The nationwide land reform started in July 1950. The process of land reform can be roughly divided into three stages. First, the working teams for land reform were organized. These teams were made up of intellectuals who were sent to develop the class struggle in the countryside. Their work included local survey, development of Communist cells, debate with landlords and organization of anti-landlord mass meetings. They were not necessarily Communists. Some of them were teachers and students.

\(^10\) Ibid., p. 52.
\(^11\) Ibid.
When the teams arrived at the villages, they chose one district for experiment. The experiences obtained in the experiment were adopted as the guiding principles for land reform in that area. At the same time, they tried to stir up hatred between classes by disclosing the misbehavior of the landlord-gentry class. When the atmosphere of hatred was created, they launched an anti-landlord movement in which the poor peasants were encouraged to ask for rent-reduction and a purge of the landlord class.

In the anti-landlord movement, active poor and middle-class peasants were selected to organize the peasants' associations through which the local political apparatus was basically altered. The last work of the first stage was land survey which would provide the necessary informations for the next stage--land redistribution.

The principal work of the second stage was the differentiation of class status. Because of the difficulty of this work, the communists adopted a quite complex procedure. First, they set up commissions of land reform which consisted of both the working teams and the peasants' associations. The function of the commissions was to classify the peasantry. The result of the classification was subject to the consent of the peasant assembly. If the assembly agreed with the result of the classification, it made the first declaration of social status. The government, after the first declaration, legalized the classification by making a second declaration. The landlords, although they had no right to do anything during the procedure, were allowed to appeal to the courts if they thought the classification was unfair.
In order to mitigate resistance in the countryside, the decision makers of the Communist Party ordered their followers to attack only 3 to 4 percent of the rural population. An investigation in Shangsi Province shows that at least 10 percent of the peasantry was attacked. This was regarded as a major error by the Communist Party.

The end of the classification marked the beginning of land redistribution. The peasants' associations played a very active role in this period. All the population was mobilized to measure, and mark the land. The intellectuals from cities served as advisors to the poor peasants when they were struggling with landlords. The members of the peasants' associations were armed in order to coerce the landlords. A land reform agent, a professor of Peking University, said:

Our director wanted us to stand guard around the peasant mass meeting. Our work was to help the poor peasants to debate with tough landlords... Our department had three rifles which were used to coerce the landlords to join the mass meeting and to guard the meeting. When the day came to confiscate the landlords' agricultural instruments, the armed communist agents went to the landlords' houses, taking away all of their agricultural instruments. Since resistance of the landlords was impossible, the rifles only served as a symbol rather than an instrument of violence. The fact that the Communist Party armed the farmers was a basic element of the Chinese Revolution.

During this stage the landlords lost all their land, draught animals, farm implements, and surplus grain, and extra houses in the

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12 Wan Ah-kong, Three Years under the Rule of the Communist Party (Hong Kong: Ta-Tao Press, 1954), p. 82.
13 Ibid., p. 85.
countryside.\textsuperscript{14} However, their industrial and commercial enterprises were exempt from confiscation.\textsuperscript{15}

In China a large proportion of the rural land belonged to ancestral shrines, temples, monasteries, churches, and schools, because the contributors regarded land offerings as the best way of supporting those organizations. This kind of land, the Agrarian Reform Law declared, would be requisitioned with appropriate compensation, if the local government thought it was necessary to replace lost income.\textsuperscript{16}

Under the policy aimed at preserving the rich peasant economy, land belonging to rich farmers was protected from confiscation on the condition that the portion of land rented out by them did not exceed in size the land tilled by themselves and by their hired labor.\textsuperscript{17}

The land reform was supposed to be finished within three years. In the first year, it concentrated on the important agricultural areas, mainly in the coastal provinces and the southern part of China. About 128 million rural Chinese were involved in this reform.\textsuperscript{18} In the second year, the northern and western parts of China were dealt with. By July, 1952, only a few portions of Sinkiang, Kangsu, and Chinghai Provinces had not yet implemented the reform. According to a report made by a


\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 1-2.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Chin-po Daily News} (Tientsin), June 29, 1951.
high Communist official, by the middle of the year 1952, the land reform was generally finished. Only an area with 30 million rural inhabitants was left.\textsuperscript{19} The total rural population involved in land reform had increased to 290 millions.\textsuperscript{20} Before the spring cultivation of 1953, land reform had been implemented throughout the whole country, except in some areas where minority peoples lived such as Sinkiang and Tibet. About 700 million mou of rural land were redistributed; 300 million peasants obtained their shares of land.\textsuperscript{21} The land reform was finished almost one year earlier than originally planned. It was obviously the Korean War that caused the rush.

Because of the different rates of land concentration in various areas, the farms peasants obtained varied in size. For example, a peasant living in the northern basin of the Wei River could obtain four mou of land, while a person living in the southern basin of the same river was allotted only 1.5--2 mou of land.\textsuperscript{22} Farmers living in the suburbs of large cities such as Nanking only obtained 0.7 mou for each person.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Jen-Min Jih-Pao (People's Daily News), July 4, 1952.
\item \textsuperscript{21} The People's Daily News, March 14, 1951.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Chin Po Daily News, June 29, 1951.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Wan Ah-kong, Three Years Under the Rule of the Communist Party, op. cit., p. 88.
\end{itemize}
When the land redistribution was completed, the whole countryside was pushed into the third stage, a stage of education and solidarity. Education and solidarity were necessary because:

1. The Communist cadres illegally got more and better land.
2. The peasantry, after the reform, turned from militancy to moderation.
3. Land redistribution divided the rural land into numerous small units. Such a division deeply harmed agricultural production.
4. The peasantry ignored agricultural collectivization.

The land reform of this period was derogated by human weaknesses like selfishness and ignorance. Since a lot of Communist cadres illegally obtained more and better land, some Communist radicals advocated a new movement to purge the newly-arisen "landlords." Po Yi-po, a Communist official in charge of economic affairs once told his followers how to handle these kinds of cases. First, he recognized the fact that there were some local cadres who occupied better and more agricultural land. Such an usurpation, he indicated, deeply influenced the livelihood of the poor peasants. However, Po Yi-po went on to say that those cadres served as a link between the party and the mass. Without them the party could not govern the mass. Their misbehavior was inevitable since traditional thought and the family burdens still dominated their minds. The party, therefore, had to fact this fact and solve the problem by some appropriate

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Ibid., pp. 89-89.
method. The appropriate method, Po concluded, was not a purge of the newly-arisen landlords. It was ideological education by which the deviation could be corrected.

The farmers, as Professor Hugh Seton-Watson pointed out, are more individualistic and more conscious of traditions than the worker. After accepting their shares of rural land, the Chinese peasants rapidly turned from militancy moderation. They ignored future agricultural collectivization on the one hand, and fell in love with meaningless title deeds on the other. They wanted to rest and to live peacefully in their villages. Such an attitude was obviously inconsistent with the Communist blueprint. Socialist construction, according to the Communist, demanded an active peasantry to supply what the country needed for industrialization.

As early as September, 1951, the Communists discovered that it was extremely necessary to fight against the weaknesses of the peasantry. For the purpose of education, every area began to select individuals who could be transformed into symbols of wrong doing. For example, Honan Province chose Lay Yu and launched a movement against Lay Yu's thought.

Lay Yu was a poor peasant and had been a tenant for twenty years before 1949. During the land reform, he was elected as the chairman of the village peasants' association and joined the Communist Party in

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June, 1951. He was allotted five mou of land and a house. After the allotment, he gradually altered his attitude toward the Communist cause and desired to resign from his post. 26

Kiangsi Province chose Wang Shui-sheng, who was a poor peasant and had fought for the Communist cause before 1949. Land reform brought him twenty mou of land and a buffalo. He was appointed a communist cadre, director of his village, model laborer, and secretary of a unit of the Communist Youth League. In 1950, he married a widow. From that time on, he gradually changed his attitude toward Communism. When he was kicked out of the Party and the Youth League, he proudly declared, "I can earn 45 chin (unit of weight) of rice every day by pushing a wagon. Working for three days, I can earn more money than the director of the village can earn in a whole month." 27

The symbol selected in Hunan Province represents another attitude of the peasantry. Li Ssu-si was originally a rural laborer. He was recruited as a Communist cadre in the land reform of 1950 and worked hard during the reform. When land redistribution was implemented, he thought the revolution was over and desired to run away from political work. A convention held in that province showed that 120 out of 126 Communist cadres favored the ideas of Li Ssu-si. 28

27 Ibid., p. 98.
Those who failed to be loyal Communists should be criticized, those who constantly worked hard for the Communist cause should be admired. This seems to be the universal formula for mass education in Communist China. In 1951, many model laborers were selected both for their hard work and their skill in handling the problems arising from the system of the small land unit which not only harmed the production but also wasted manpower. Wang Chen-tang, director of a small village, was selected as model laborer by a province of Manchuria. From 1948 to 1950, the production of the village directed by Wang increased from 470 to 510 teng (unit of grain). The most admirable part of Wang's work was his organization of the households into teamwork groups according to the principle of division of labor.  

Han Ann, another director of a village, was selected by Hopei Province for his brilliant skill in organizing work teams. The development of the cultivating team was slow because of the lack of incentive. Under the original system, no distinction was made between strong and weak, between old and young, or between male and female. Han instituted a score system under which those who worked harder and better got higher scores, while the lazy and weak got lower scores.

The peasant cultivating team marked a new system of agricultural collectivization, too revolutionary to be understood by the Chinese

29 Hsin Hua News Series, Interview with Model Laborers (Hankao: People's Press, 1951), pp. 63-64.

30 Ibid., p. 58.
farmers. As I have said before, one of the basic purposes of land reform was to pave the way for agricultural collectivization which was a prerequisite of large-scale industrialization. All of this seemed to be beyond the understanding of the peasantry. Thus, education was of primary importance.

Land reform of this period (1950-1953) was by no means a isolated phenomena. It was one of the reforms carried out in the early years of Communist China. Those reforms were interconnected. Their main purpose was to solidify the Communist regime.

After the 1949 revolution, the first law promulgated by the Communist Government was the New Marriage Law which was made for the purpose of releasing Chinese women from traditional ethical and social bondages. Parents could no longer arrange their children's marriages. The system of concubines and prostitution was abolished. Divorce was no longer dependent upon a complex legal procedure.

On May 1, 1950, when the New Marriage Law came into effect, the Communists launched a marriage reform movement and encouraged all of the Chinese people to treat this movement as "a part of the revolutionary mission." This movement was undoubtedly a severe challenge to the basic elements of traditional Chinese Society. In the past, the family had been regarded as the most important social unit. According to the Confucianists, a perfect nation must be based upon perfect families. Statesmen were encouraged to order their families first before ordering the country. People were urged to respect paternalism. As a result, the family became the basic social unit which, in the eyes of traditional
Chinese People, was an important as the nation. In the family, women were the slaves of their husbands and their parents-in-law. This family system was undoubtedly inconsistent with Communism.

The mixture of marriage reform with land reform in the countryside marked a radical change of social ethics in the most stubborn portion of the nation. By studying this movement, one can see how difficult it is to alter standards of morality in the countryside. A report made by Chou En-lai disclosed the cruel fact that many women committed suicide. The movement met strong resistance and could not be fulfilled completely.\(^31\)

However, most of the Chinese women liked the marriage reform. The new marriage system seemed to increase their prestige. Statistics formulated by the judicial organs of Communist China show that 70 percent of the divorce cases were initiated by females. The divorce cases increased from 93,000 in 1950 to 204,000 in 1951. In the first six months of 1952, the courts handled 198,000 divorce cases.\(^32\)

Another movement involving the whole country was the suppression of anti-revolutionaries. It is obvious that the aim of this movement was to eradicate Nationalists influence. On February 21, 1951, the Communist Government promulgated an anti-anti-revolutionary law. All persons opposed to Communist policy were subjected to this law. It is difficult


\(^{32}\) \(\text{Ibid.}\), pp. 436-37.
to say how many anti-revolutionaries were killed. According to a report made by a Communist cadre who fled from Communist China to Taiwan, more than 10 million persons were slain in three days (May 15, 16, and 17, 1951). 33 On May 22, 1951, 505 persons were tried in Peking. Two hundred and twenty-one of them were sentenced to death. 34 In July of the same year, one of the largest mass executions in Peking was reported by the People's Daily. Two hundred and seventy-seven were killed. 35 A report made by the New China News Agency disclosed that the Communists of Shanglai arrested 220,000 anti-revolutionaries in the first four months of 1951. In the first week of May, 1951, another 24,000 were arrested in the same city. 36 The Free Trade Union Committee of the American Federation of Labor estimated in October, 1952, that the Communist regime had been responsible for the deaths of more than 14,000,000 people over the previous five years. Among those executed, 5,000,000 were killed in rural areas. 37

It is obvious that the mass executions were rushed by the Korean War. Peng Chen, former Peking mayor, made the following statement in order to justify the mass executions.

At that time, the counterrevolutionary remnant led by U.S. supported Chiang Kai-shek took advantage of that critical time and began to attack the people. They thought that a third World War had already begun and that it was time to restore their rule. They destroyed railroads, factories and bridges, and killed Communist cadres. In the newly-liberated areas, the landlords began to threaten the poor peasants, to violate the land reform program, and to prepare for Chiang's return. Even in the old liberated areas where land reform was already completed, some landlords attacked the peasants. Communist cadres and their families were killed in many places... For example, in Kwangsi Province, more than three thousand Communist cadres were slain.38

The Korean War not only lead to an increase in terror throughout the whole country, but also provided political impetus for the various reforms. Once again the Communists merged their reform movement with Nationalism. A nationwide propaganda machine was established, with three million persons employed to run it. Millions of people were encouraged or forced to sign a patriotic compact, to contribute to the war, and to work hard on their posts. Chou En-lai, in a report to the Political Consultative Conference, indicated:

These achievements were secured in the process of the Resist America-Aid Korea Campaign. This great campaign served as a political impetus for the reform and restoration of this nation.39

It is beyond doubt that land reform carried out in this period (1950-1953) was successful on its own terms. The political and social

38 Wan Ah-kong, Three Years Under the Rule of the Communist Party, _cit_. , pp. 401-02.

39 Ibid., pp. 62-63.
powers of the landlord-gentry class were abolished; the Communist Party and its peasants' associations began to control the whole countryside; the Kuomintang elements were eradicated; and tradition was attacked. However, the Communists were fully aware that hatred could stir up a movement but could not bring it to a successful conclusion. They had to reconcile dissident elements of various classes so as to produce national solidarity. Violence was, thus, reduced in 1953.

The last step of land reform was to issue title deeds which symbolized the right of all the landowners to manage, buy, sell or rent out land freely. This step seems to have had no real significance, since agricultural collectivization was to be carried out in the following years. The end of land reform brought the farmers worry rather than cheer. With fear the Chinese farmers greeted a new epoch in which they would lose what they had gained.

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CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Land reforms in China were complex at best. They involved not only land distribution but also reforms of the socio-political system which had endured in China for thousands of years until 1949, when the Communists put forward a series of reforms. These reforms undoubtedly brought about many profound effects. First, in the early years of the 1950's, we saw the collapse of the landlord-gentry class, and the establishment of the peasants' associations. It was not the first time that the Chinese peasants tried to seize power, but it was the first time that the farmers legally administered their own affairs.

Second, as I have pointed out in the previous chapters, land reform programs were in conflict with the traditional values and beliefs of rural China. For example, the strict and drastic measures taken in the class struggle against the landlords were regarded by many farmers as inconsistent with the Confucian ethical norm of moderation and the golden mean. However, the collapse of the landlord-gentry class did undermine the prestige of the Confucian doctrine.

Third, the abolition of the mediatory rent-receivers produced the most profound effect. The peasants no longer lived at the mercy of the landlords. They could control their own destiny.

Although, after almost two decades, the effects of land reform were recognized as satisfactory, there are certain questions which
still remain as the topics of debate. Among those questions, the most important are the following.

First, the necessity of land reform is a question that has been doubted by the Nationalists. The Nationalists based their argument on their rural surveys which indicated that the concentration of land ownership was not so serious in China.

Second, the Communists asserted that China was dominated by a feudalistic landlord-gentry class. Therefore, the socio-political system should be completely changed. This assertion was rejected by the nationalists.

Third, the nationalists stated that the communist reform movement was not made for the welfare of the peasantry, but for the benefit of the Communist party. This assertion was naturally denied by the Communists.

Fourth, there are different opinion on the reasons why the peasantry supported the Communists rather than the Nationalists. This question is particularly worthy of study, when many areas of the world are threatened by national liberation wars.

In the basis of the observations in the previous chapters, the author intends to evaluate the above questions, and tries to find out certain characteristics of the Chinese land reform, which might be helpful to the assessment of the land reforms, as well as the Communist movements, in other underdeveloped countries.

Liu Shao-chi, in explaining why land reform was necessary in China, said:
The essential content of agrarian reform is the confiscation of the land of the landlord class for distribution to the land-less or land-poor peasants. Thus the landlords as a class in society are abolished and the land ownership system of feudal exploitation is transformed into a system of peasant land ownership. This is indeed the greatest the most thorough reform in thousands of years of Chinese history.

Why should such a reform be made? In a nutshell, it is because the original land ownership system in China is extremely irrational. In general, the land situation in old China is roughly as follows: Landlords and rich peasants, who constitute less than 10 percent of the rural population, possess approximately from 70-80 percent of the land and brutally exploit the peasants by means of their land. Poor peasants, farm labourers, middle peasants and others, however, who make up 90 percent of the rural population, possess in all only 20 to 30 percent of the land.¹

According to Richard L. Walker, the typical Communist analysis quoted above contains three basic distortions. First, Mr. Walker contends that "There has been no feudalism, by Communist or other definition, in China since the formation of the first Empire some two centuries before the birth of Christ."² This assertion may be a distortion itself. Before we discuss the feudal characteristics of Chinese society, it is necessary to know what feudalism is.

Feudalism, according to S. Andreski,

... denotes a socio-political system based upon a rural economy, characterized by dispersal of power in a variety of semi-independent domains; the domains being styled in fiefs held on condition of performance of service.³


On the basis of this definition we might say that feudalism possessed three characteristics: (1) politically, it was decentralized; (2) economically, it was an institution based on land and mutual service, and (3) socially, it was characterized by a fixed social status.

It is true that in 221 B.C., when China was unified by Chin and free purchase of land became legal, feudalism was abolished. However, Mr. Walker neglects to point out the fact that a new aristocratic class arose when a new dynasty was established. Aristocrats have had their own fiefs within which they have been privileged just like the lords of the medieval Europe. This system was called Chuang-yuan. Chou King-shen, in his work *The Economic History of China*, made the following statement:

> Derived from a feudal economy, the Chuang-yuan system could be traced back to the Tang Dynasty. . . . Under that system, princes, princesses, relatives of the emperors, high officials, eunuchs, and monasteries were allotted large estates of land. Within their estates, the owners appointed officials, exploited the tillers, and even expanded their estates by annexing the land belonging to the common folk. . . . The aristocratic owners of the estates collected land rent within their estates. They had no obligation to pay the government. In other words, they were independent from the taxation system of the nation.4

This kind of estate, according to the same writer, occupied a large portion of the rural land. Statistics show that in the 15th century there were 46,000 ching of rural land belonging to Chuang-yuan (large estates) in the suburbs of the capital.5 In the 17th century, half of

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the rural land in Honan Province belonged to large estates. 6 With the fall of the Ming Dynasty, those estates were taken by the newly arisen Manchu aristocrats. 7 From the above citations, we can see that the Chuang-yuan system was feudal in character. It existed along with a system of free land purchase. People who cultivated the land of the great estates were subject to feudal exploitation.

Because of the existence of the feudal Chuang-yuan system, we can hardly agree with Mr. Walker's assertion that there has been no feudalism since the establishment of the first Chinese Empire. Now the question that remains to be settled is whether or not feudalism continued to exist in China after the revolution of 1911.

During the Republic Period (1911-1949), China was politically decentralized, and economically localized. Although the Chuang-yuan system was legally denounced, some feudal characteristics still remained in Chinese Society, especially in the countryside. The system was called by Mao Tze-tung "semi-feudal." 8

Chinese society, in the Republic Period, was said by the Chinese writers to preserve five feudal characteristics: (1) Land ownership marked a kind of social privilege. The size of one's holdings served as a measure of social power. (2) In addition to land rent, labor services and tributes were paid to the landlords. (3) Landlords and officials

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6 Ibid., p. 885. 7 Ibid., p. 1065.
were immune from obligations of citizenship or other kinds of tribute to the nation. (4) Landless or poor peasants alone were obliged to perform military and labor services for the nation. (5) Rascals, as the teeth and paws of the landlords, made their livings by suppressing the poor peasants. Villages, therefore, were in a state of instability. These characteristics were the remains of the abolished imperial institutions and were employed by the Communists to justify the class struggle in the countryside. But such a justification should not be regarded as a projection of the Marxist "feudal stage of society" onto the Chinese scene, as Mr. Walker charged. It has its factual basis.

The second basic distortion in Liu's statement concerned, according to Mr. Walker, the class divisions in rural China. He cited a few writers to demonstrate that the class conflict theory was inapplicable to China. One writer, S. T. Tung, even arbitrarily declared: "China has no landlord class."

The meaning of the term "landlord" is itself obscure. The term has been given a dozen definitions. As I have pointed out in previous chapters, even the Communists themselves could not agree upon unified definition in the early years of the Communist land reform movement. The term also possesses different meanings in different countries. For

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10 Richard Walker, op. cit., p. 130.
11 Ibid.
example, in Bolivia, eight landlords owned, in 1939, an area equal to one-tenth of the total national territory. ¹²

"Landlord," according to the Chinese Communists, should have a different meaning in countries with a high population density. Landlords should not be identified on the basis of the amount of land, but rather by the criteria of exploitation and labor engagement. So, we can safely say that the rural population was classified into various categories on the basis of Communists' own terms.

The third distortion, Walker pointed out, concerned the data about land distribution provided by Liu in his statement. In order to prove the inaccuracy of Liu's data, Walker provides us with two other sets of statistics. One of them was formulated by the Nationalist Land Commission before the second World War. The other was produced by an individual scholar, J. L. Buck, who has taught in Kingling University, Nanking. ¹³

So far as land distribution is concerned, we can find a half-dozen different sets of statistics, each of them based upon a local survey. A comparative study of those statistics may help us to gain a concrete impression of the problem of land distribution in China.

First, we discover that various Nationalist surveys are different from each other. The earliest Nationalist survey was made in 1934 by

¹²W. S. Stokes, "National Revolution and the MNR in Bolivia," Inter-American Economic Affairs, XII (Spring, 1959), 34.
¹³Walker, op. cit., p. 131.
the Nationalist Commission for Agricultural Restoration in four provinces. The survey-maker recognized the existence of high land concentration. However, the rates of concentration were quite different in various places. In some counties of Chekiang Province, they discovered that 7 percent of the rural population possessed 72 percent of the land, while 56 percent of the rural population only possessed 6 percent of the land. These percentages are similar to those of the Communist survey in the Kiangsi period.

According to the China Handbook published in 1950 in New York, 67 percent of the rural population was classified as middle or rich farmers who owned land and cultivated it themselves. This figure was adopted from the official report of the Nationalist Government. The Nationalist statistics provided by Walker's book shows that

... nearly 80 percent of the land was shown to be in the hands of owners of less than 100 mou. Almost 99 percent of the families were such small owners, while 1.34 percent of the families owned 100 mou or more, and only 18.32 percent of the land belonged to such owners. Buck's report maintained that 54 percent of the rural population were self-tillers who owned 71 percent of land.

One might be justifiably confused by these divergent sets of figures, each of them claiming to be reliable. Perhaps the safest way

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15 Walker, op. cit., p. 131.
16 Ibid.
to select one set from them is to compare them with the figures contained in the survey made after the 1949 revolution. On September 6, 1949, the People's Daily (Jen-min Jih-pao) disclosed that a survey made in twenty-one villages of Hupeh Province showed that 8 percent of the rural population were landlords, while 92 percent were middle and poor peasants and agrarian laborers. The former possessed 30 percent of the land, while the latter possessed 60 percent. On September 9, 1949, another Communist newspaper, the Changkiang Daily News, declared that in Kuoyang Hsiang of Kiangsi Province, middle and poor peasants owned 73.6 percent of land. The results of these two surveys are similar to the Nationalist rather than the Communist figures. Therefore, we may agree with Mr. Walker's assertion that "the Communist figures were doctored to support the application of Marxist dogma to China."  

Perhaps the best attitude toward this question is proposed by a correspondent of the Economist: "Whatever evidence is accepted, the misdistribution is evident."  

In the eyes of Marx and Engels, the peasantry was the conservative and reactionary element of the population. Although the peasants played an important role in the Russian Revolution, some Russian revolutionaries still doubted the possibility of organizing "united will" between the proletariat and the peasantry.

17 Ibid., p. 132.
Lenin, in his article "Two Tactics of Social Democracy," asserted that such a united will is possible, simply because

... will may be united in one respect and not united in another. The absence of unity on the question of socialism and the struggle for socialism does not prevent unity of will on questions of democracy and the struggle for a republic.21

In answering the questions put forward by a Moscow comrade, Lenin discussed the theoretical attitude that should be adopted toward the peasant movement. First of all, he asserted that the Communist Party should "support the peasant movement insofar as it is revolutionary and democratic. They (the Communists) are making ready to fight it insofar as it becomes reactionary and anti-proletarian."22 It is certain that there will always be some reactionaries in the peasant movement. Lenin encouraged his comrades to declare war on these reactionaries in advance. Since class antagonism between the rural proletariat and the peasant bourgeoisie is inevitable, Lenin urged the Communists to fight "on a new field and with other allies."23 In other words, the proletariat must organize a united front with the peasantry on the one hand, and fight against the peasants' reactionary characteristics on the other.

Lenin's assertion about the "united will" between the proletariat and the peasantry was, according to Arthur A. Cohen, transferred to

21 Ibid., p. 99.
23 Ibid., p. 145.
China through the channel of Comintern. However, the Russian ideological influence was denied by the Chinese Communist theoreticians, who insisted on stressing the independence of Mao's thought in the early years of the Chinese land reform movement. It is beyond doubt that the Comintern's directives sometimes dominated the policy-making of the Chinese Communist Party. But in the early years of the land reform movement, it is the traditional Chinese idea of peasant uprising rather than Lenin's or Stalin's ideas that dominated Chinese Communist minds. This can be illustrated by the early works of Mao Tze-tung. In the Human Report, which I discussed in Chapter II, Mao "gives the poor peasants the exclusive credit for the revolution."

In Chinese history, over a thousand peasant revolts can be counted. A dozen of them could be described as nation-wide ones which overthrew or weakened the ruling dynasties. Perhaps the peasant revolts that remained most vivid in the memory of the Chinese people of the 1920's were the Taiping and Nien rebellions which taught the Chinese Communists much in terms of revolutionary tactics. For example, these rebellions gave Mao and his associates hints about rural base areas and guerrilla warfare.


In the Kiangsi period, the Chinese Communists gradually accepted Russian ideological influence and theoretically recognized sole leadership of the workers in the revolution. However, the gap between theory and practice did disturb the Chinese Communist historians, who

... wished to stress the revolutionary qualities of the Chinese peasantry, but were constrained by Marxist theory from giving the pre-modern peasantry the characteristics of the modern proletariat.28

The Chinese Communists have never given up their original idea concerning the importance of the part played by peasantry in the revolution, although the national structure is theoretically based upon a worker-peasant alliance, an alliance solely commanded by workers. Such an implicit contradiction between Marxism-Leninism and Chinese Communism seems to be inevitable. Perhaps Professor Schram gave us the best interpretation on this matter. He believed that the traditions and historical situations in the mind of Mao produced his ideas. In other words, the tradition-bound side of Mao's personality produced certain ideas which existed side by side with Leninism.29

Although the Chinese Communists emphasized the importance of the peasantry in the revolution, their peasant policies were subordinated to the development of their own party. As many Communist leaders indicated in the last decades, they launched the peasant movement in the

28 Ning Ko, "The Question of Spontaneity and Consciousness in the Chinese Peasant Wars," extracts from China Mainland Magazine (Hong Kong: U. S. Consulate-General), No. 311, p. 43.

29 Schram, op. cit., pp. 3 and 169.
countryside only for the purpose of gaining the support of the peasants for the Communist cause. Land reform, in the eyes of the Communists, was transitory in character. Private land ownership was regarded as a temporary system. In the long run, the land should belong to the nation rather than the peasants themselves. This marks the basic difference between the Communist and non-Communist land reforms.

During the first Nationalist-Communist united front, the Communist Party was in its first stage of development. It wanted to organize the poor peasants and those who were excluded from society into a mass movement. Its actions were radical and ruthless. Its purpose was to build a mass basis. The militancy of land reform in this stage can be illustrated by the early works of Mao.

In the Kiangsi period, the purpose of land reform was to eradicate the traditional gentry class and build Communist apparatuses in the Soviet Districts. In order to resist the military invasion of the Kuomintang, they had to mobilize and arm the peasants. By looking at the various land reform laws promulgated in this period, we can discover that the Communist theory of land reform was gradually altered to support military mobilization.

In 1937, in order to build an anti-Japanese united front, the Chinese Communists even gave up all of their ideals about land reform and accepted the Kuomintang's rent-reduction policy. This basic change fully illustrated what Professor Seton-Watson once pointed out, that the
Chinese peasant movement was a movement by the peasant, not for the peasant.  

After 1949, the Chinese Communist Party was secure. The Communists, at that time, made it very clear that land would not belong to the peasants. Land Reform only marked the first step in a process of institutional change. The final aim was to nationalize all the rural land and make the peasants rural laborers rather than land owners. The peasants' welfare would be sacrificed for industrialization, just as it was sacrificed for the Party's development and survival before. Perhaps we can use Lenin's own words to elucidate this realistic attitude toward the peasant problems: "Concrete political tasks must be presented in concrete circumstances. All things are relative, all things flow and are subject to change."  

Although the welfare of the peasantry has been constantly sacrificed to various goals, the Chinese Communists have successfully built support for themselves in the countryside. The interesting question is why did the farmers support the Communist Party at the expense of their own welfare? Their support can be attributed to three factors. First, the Communist Party served as the only voice of the peasantry. The miserable farmers had no choice, since the Kuomintang neglected them; the Kuomintant was proved to be the sounding board of the big cities and nonrural population.


Second, the Chinese Communists have frequently tried to merge the slogan of land reform with nationalism. They successfully took advantage of the antiwarlord movement, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Korean War to rush their reforms. It is, ironically, the Nationalists who first stirred up a nation-wide feeling of nationalism by spending three decades teaching the Chinese people what nationalism is, and reminding them of the hundred year national humiliation; but it is the Communists who really enjoyed the fruit of the three-decade indoctrination.

Third, the skillfulness of the classification of the rural population has helped gain the peasants' support. Only a small portion of the rural population was attacked. Most of the farmers were organized into an antilandlord united front. The middle farmers, as rebels without a cause, were strong supporters of the land reform movement, which was supposed to be initiated and carried on mainly by the poor peasants under the direction of the intelligentsia. From 1927 to 1953, the middle peasants were never the target of Communist attack. On the contrary, they were regarded as allies of the proletariat. They were given an equal opportunity to join the peasants' associations. Their properties were protected from confiscation. In case of necessity, the Communists even treated rich farmers as associates of the rural proletariat, as they did in the early years of the 1950's, so as to isolate the landlords. Such tactics gave most of the peasants a feeling of safety and indirectly helped the Communists gain peasant support.
As a movement involved various classes of the society, the Chinese land reform possessed the following characteristics: First, although the peasants' support was very important in the land reform movement, land reform was launched, directed, and carried out by the intelligentsia. Peng Pai's experience in Hailufeng shows the inability of the peasants to take the initiative in land reform. The intelligentsia had to go to the villages to encourage them, to help them, and sometimes to do the works for them. In the early years of the 1950's, thousands of land reform teams consisting of the intelligentsia were sent to the countryside to implement land reform. This fact once again illustrates the importance of the intelligentsia in land reform. So, the peasant's support might be identified as passive nonresistance rather than positive participation.

Second, the Chinese land reform shows that, when the landlord class coincided with the ruling class, land reform could hardly be carried out. It seems to be impossible for the landlords to give up what they own, if they still hold the political power. This can be illustrated by the failure of the rent-reduction policy put forward by the nationalists in the period of the Republic. In the early years of the 1950's, the Communists had to promulgate the Anti-revolutionary Law in order to provide the legal weapon by which the landlords were forced to give up their land. The land reform carried out in Taiwan gave another evidence. Taiwan was ruled by Japan for almost a half century. In 1945, when China regained Taiwan, there had been no association between the Taiwanese landlords and the ruling class from the mainland.
So the reform program which failed in the mainland was successfully carried out in Taiwan.

Third, the armed peasants played an important role in land reform. They provided the necessary protection and security through which the peasants, with the support of the intellectuals, were able to complete the reform program without fearing the organized resistance of the landlords. This can be proved by the fact that the armament of the farmers was one of the important works of the working teams which were sent to the countryside to implement land reform.

The land reform program was completed in 1953. From 1953 to the present time, Communist China has made a great progress in its national construction. Undoubtedly, the successful land reform has been the basis of all its achievements, for, in a country like China which is still mainly agrarian, agriculture must be the basis for all economic development. Although the Chinese people can hardly forget the terrible and bloody days of land reform, they have already seen the growing trees they planted twelve years ago.


