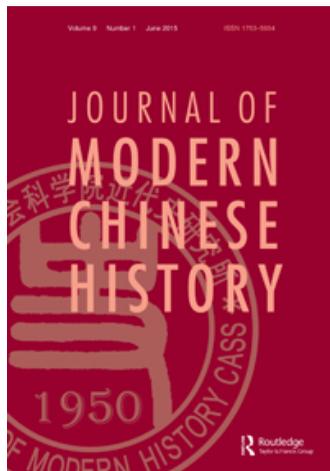


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## Journal of Modern Chinese History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmoh20>

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Published online: 16 Jun 2015.



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To cite this article: Lifeng Li (2015) Rural mobilization in the Chinese Communist Revolution: From the Anti-Japanese War to the Chinese Civil War, *Journal of Modern Chinese History*, 9:1, 95-116, DOI: [10.1080/17535654.2015.1032391](https://doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2015.1032391)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17535654.2015.1032391>

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## ARTICLE

# Rural mobilization in the Chinese Communist Revolution: From the Anti-Japanese War to the Chinese Civil War

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The key to the success of the Chinese Communist Revolution lies mainly in the Chinese Communist Party's ability to mobilize the people effectively. During the Anti-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War, the CCP adopted different mobilization strategies in different contexts. During the Anti-Japanese War, the main strategies included arousing nationalist emotions among the peasants with slogans of anti-Japanese patriotism; satisfying the demands of the peasants by reducing rents, interest, and other burdens; and promoting the peasants' political participation through the mass line. In the Civil War, mobilization was based on class categorization and identity formation, interest-oriented land reform, and emotion-oriented speaking-bitterness campaigns. Yet throughout the entire revolutionary era, the CCP approach reflected continuities that surpassed the differences visible during the successive stages in the Chinese Communist Revolution. In each war, CCP rural mobilization took the winning of the peasants' participatory, psychological–emotional, and material support as the main goal. To achieve this goal, the CCP usually used key mobilization approaches such as satisfying peasants' demands, reconstructing peasants' identities, and stimulating peasants' emotions.

**Keywords:** Chinese Communist Revolution; rural mobilization; Anti-Japanese War; Chinese Civil War

## Introduction

Western studies of the Chinese Communist Revolution all address two ultimate concerns: why the revolution occurred and how it succeeded. A wide spectrum of answers can be found in the exhaustive literature on the subject.<sup>1</sup> In the decade following the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Cold War led to the dominance of conspiracy theory in Western scholarship on China. Scholars were convinced that the occurrence and victory of the Chinese revolution was simply part of the Soviet-led conspiracy of world revolution, that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ruthlessly seized power with the assistance and guidance of the Soviet Union and the Comintern, and that the power seizure was followed by totalitarian rule. The Guomindang (GMD) regime was seriously weakened due to insufficient American aid, as well as its own diplomatic concessions to the USSR.<sup>2</sup> According to this theory, it was external factors rather than internal factors that determined the success of the CCP, and its relationship with the peasants was either excluded from the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Hartford and Goldstein, *Single Sparks*, 3–33; and Selden, *China in Revolution*, 222–258.

<sup>2</sup> Koen, *The China Lobby*.

scope of research or perceived as a one-dimensional relationship of coercion or acquiescence. Overall, there was a lack of in-depth inquiry into this relationship.

Since the 1960s, a series of important Western works on the Chinese Revolution have appeared, offering several influential interpretive frameworks. Chalmers Johnson proposed the theory of “peasant nationalism.” He argued that the Japanese invasion and oppression provoked nationalist sentiments among the Chinese peasants, which were used by the Chinese Communists to win popular support, and that therefore, the main driving forces in the Chinese Communist Revolution were the national liberation war and the Communist Party’s anti-Japanese stance.<sup>3</sup> The mass line model articulated by Mark Selden emphasized that the CCP’s flexible and effective socioeconomic policies and democratic-participatory practice awakened the peasants’ political awareness and released the peasants’ great revolutionary potential.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to Chalmers Johnson, Tetsuya Kataoka argued that natural common interests did not exist between the CCP and the peasants and that the key factor in the CCP’s victory was its strong and effective organizational control, which was sufficient to overcome the limits of the peasants’ narrow localism.<sup>5</sup>

The works of Chen Yung-fa and Theda Skocpol present another interesting contrast. In his account of the Communist movement in central and eastern China, Chen placed particular emphasis on the CCP’s mobilization strategy. The title of his book, *Making Revolution*, reveals the author’s view. It can be understood not only as the CCP “making revolution” through the peasants, but also as peasants “making revolution” via the CCP’s agitation.<sup>6</sup> Skocpol’s comparative study of the French, Russian, and Chinese revolutions emphasized that revolution was not “made,” but simply “happened.” More accurately, structural factors, such as the relationship between landlord and peasant, the relationship between the state and the ruling class, and the status of the state in the competitive international environment, were the fundamental reasons for a revolution’s occurrence.<sup>7</sup>

These interpretative frameworks seem very different from one another; however, a closer look shows that all the above-mentioned scholars, except for Theda Skocpol, accept a common presumption that the CCP’s success should be attributed to the support of the peasantry, which in turn was closely related to CCP mobilization. The scholars differ only on how the CCP mobilized the peasants and the kind of intermediate mechanism through which the peasants accepted mobilization. Even Skocpol, who adopts a structuralist perspective, agrees that the conditions of the Chinese Revolution were different from those of France and Russia in that China’s structural factors played a role through the revolutionary party and revolutionary elites.<sup>8</sup> Thus, she indirectly recognizes the significance of the CCP’s mass mobilization. In this context, we may safely replace the grand and essentialist historical inquiry into why the Chinese Communist Revolution succeeded with the more concrete and doable research question: how did the CCP mobilize the peasants?

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*.

<sup>4</sup> Selden, *The Yanan Way*.

<sup>5</sup> Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China*.

<sup>6</sup> Chen, *Making Revolution*. Chen questioned the search for a sweeping conclusion to explain the CCP’s victory, yet his own (over) emphasis on the CCP’s mobilizational strategy invited other scholars’ critiques of Chen’s own arbitrary shift from concrete delineation to abstract conclusion. See Keating, “Review of *Making Revolution*,” 142–145.

<sup>7</sup> Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 112–160.

As scholars have pointed out, the Chinese Communist Revolution was largely a “local revolution” with diverse characteristics.<sup>9</sup> Its final success was the outcome of adaptive strategies within a specific ideological framework. In the last 30 years, with the paradigmatic shift of research on the CCP from the center to the locality, scholars such as Kathleen Hartford, Stephen Averill, Pauline Keating, David Goodman, Odoric Y. K. Wou, and Edward Friedman have all provided impressive discussions of the interaction between the Party and peasants based on different time frames, localities, and perspectives.<sup>10</sup> These authors have also provided rich literature for further research into the issue of the CCP’s rural mobilization. Based on extant research, this article attempts to provide an in-depth inquiry into CCP rural mobilization during the periods of the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War. First, the article will outline the CCP’s rural mobilization strategies, collectively known in internal party documents as “mass work” (*qunzhong gongzuo*), and their trajectory of evolution against different backgrounds. Then, the article will focus on the goal and techniques of mobilization so as to analyze continuities in the CCP’s rural mobilization throughout the entire revolutionary era.

### I. Communist rural mobilization during the Anti-Japanese War

No matter what interpretation a scholar may provide, no one can deny that the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War was a key transitional point for the CCP. The war was also crucial to the substantial expansion of the Party. When the CCP headquarters reached northern Shaanxi after the Long March, there were only 40,000 party members and 30,000 troops left, and the Communist-controlled area was only part of the northern Shaanxi plateau. Yet when the Anti-Japanese War ended, the CCP had expanded into a political party that controlled 100 million people, 900,000 regular troops, and 1.2 million Party members. With vast base areas dominating the northern Chinese countryside, it was strong enough to compete with the GMD, and these base areas laid a solid foundation for the future Communist victory in the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> The CCP’s outstanding and effective rural mobilization enabled it to stand out in the brutal Anti-Japanese War. During this period, the CCP’s rural mobilization mainly revolved around resistance to Japan and salvation of China, reduction of land rent and loan interest, and the building of democratic government.

#### *Resist Japan and save China: mobilization based on nationalism*

The Japanese army’s invasion of China and the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War played a decisive role in Chinese domestic politics and dramatically changed the fate of the CCP. On the one hand, the GMD suspended its anti-Communist policy and thus created a less precarious environment for the CCP; on the other hand, the CCP also followed the trend of the times by abandoning its radical policies, embracing the United Front, and incorporating its rural mobilization into the framework of the national war.

In the Politburo meeting held at Wayaobao in December 1935, the CCP officially proposed the policy of the United Front, which advocated “uniting with all potential anti-Japanese forces” and establishing “the broadest Anti-Japanese National United Front.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Saich, “Introduction,” 1006.

<sup>10</sup> See Chen Yaohuang, “Cong zhongyang dao difang.”

<sup>11</sup> Chen Yung-fa, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishi nian*, vol. 1, 297.

<sup>12</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu muqian zhengzhi,” 604–605.

After the peaceful settlement of the Xi'an Incident, the CCP telegraphed the Third Central Plenum of the GMD in February 1937, promising to call off all armed riots against the Nationalist government as well as the confiscation of land from landlords. It also announced that it would implement a thorough electoral democracy within the sphere of its "special zone."<sup>13</sup> After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the Communist armed forces were reorganized into the National Revolutionary Army under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek and marched to the anti-Japanese battlefield. Before Taiyuan fell to the Japanese in November 1937, the Communist Eighth Route Army mainly backed up the Nationalist Army in battle. Thereafter, the Communist Army focused on expanding into the rear areas behind the Japanese occupation army and established anti-Japanese base areas. Its main goal was then to provide strategic cooperation with the GMD army.<sup>14</sup> After the Sino-Japanese War entered the period of stalemate, the CCP continued to emphasize the creation and expansion of base areas. It gradually expanded the scope of its base areas and at the same time consolidated them through socioeconomic reforms and government building.

Whether its focal point was national war or the growth of the Party itself, during the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP had no choice but to continue mobilizing the rural masses to gain popular support. The only difference was that now "nation" replaced "class" as the basic discursive tool of rural mobilization. The CCP mobilized the peasants in order to resist Japanese invasion and save China, while the peasants supported the CCP in order to protect the nation and their homes. This was what Chalmers Johnson called "peasant nationalism," which was without doubt a significant aspect of the CCP's wartime rural mobilization. Although the Nationalist army played the leading role in resisting the Japanese army on the front lines, particularly in terms of actual casualties inflicted by the enemy, the Nationalists also suffered many setbacks in a series of battles. The Japanese occupation of half of China's territory within the first two years of the war disappointed many Chinese people. The resounding defeat of the Nationalist army on the battlefields of Henan, Hunan, and Guangxi in the later phase of the war, as well as the capitulation of a large number of former local warlord troops to the Japanese greatly tarnished the image of the GMD and undermined its legitimacy as the leader of the national liberation war. In contrast, the Communist army, which avoided confronting the Japanese army due to the CCP's weaker military capability, won many piecemeal victories through guerrilla and mobile warfare, which aimed at harassing the invading army but in effect promoted the morale of the Chinese. The Pingxingguan Battle in the early stage of the war and the One-Hundred-Regiment Battle in the stalemate period satisfied the popular aspiration to victory and forged among people from all social strata an image of the CCP as not only determined but also resourceful enough to lead the people to final victory. One outcome was that "the CCP gradually became the epitome of Chinese nationalism not only on the home front but in the areas beyond it."<sup>15</sup> During the period of the Anti-Japanese War, Yan'an became a revolutionary holy land for progressive youth and intellectuals, while the anti-Japanese base areas behind the front lines expanded rapidly despite the complicated and brutal political and military conditions.

Nevertheless, as some critics have claimed, Chalmers Johnson overestimated the strength and breadth of peasant nationalism and thus fell victim to the reductionism of

<sup>13</sup> "Zhonggong zhongyang gei Zhongguo Guomindang," 157–158.

<sup>14</sup> Hu Sheng, *Zhongguo gongchandang de qishi nian*, 168–173.

<sup>15</sup> Chen Yung-fa, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishi nian*, vol. 1, 353.

historical interpretation.<sup>16</sup> To be sure, the invaders looted, raped, and killed, undermining the peace and stability of rural society and uprooting many people. Naturally, the Chinese people responded with hatred and rebellion. Yet as other scholars discovered, nationalist sentiments are more easily stimulated among the elites than among the masses. In the Shanxi–Chahar–Hebei Base Area, the first to resist the Japanese were not ordinary people but mainly college students, high school students, and other educated elites, as well as those who enjoyed higher social status and had more to lose from the Japanese invasion, such as landlords, small capitalists, and rich peasants.<sup>17</sup> In eastern Hebei Province, the enlightened gentry elites in the rural areas were the “elements that had the earliest awakening.”

They played the role that ordinary peasants were not able to play due to their unique political and economic status, social networks, rich experiences, and broad social interactions, as well as their own relatively high degree of name recognition and political clout.<sup>18</sup>

For many common peasants who simply panicked when the Japanese invaded, joining the rank and file of the Communist Eighth Route Army was no more than a strategy of protection seeking. Very few peasants truly answered the call for a national war. When the Communist New Fourth Army entered the east China region for the first time, local people mistook them for Japanese troops and welcomed them by waving Japanese flags and holding Japanese-issued “good-citizen cards”<sup>19</sup> It would be wishful thinking to imagine that Chinese peasants, completely cut off from national politics for centuries, overnight became nationalist fighters full of the spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice. As Chen Yung-fa points out, the CCP involved the peasants primarily by redistributing wealth and status<sup>20</sup>

***Rent and interest reduction and reasonable burden: mobilization based on the doctrine of people’s livelihood***

In comparison, the social and economic reforms pursued by the CCP in the base areas played a more prominent and stronger role. After the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP rapidly adjusted its land policy against the backdrop of the United Front. Radical land revolution was modified to become more moderate reductions of rent and interest. Yet, the role of even these modified policies in improving peasants’ economic status cannot be underestimated.

In the Politburo meeting held in Luochuan, Shaanxi, in August 1937, reduction of rent and interest was included in the “Ten Platforms for Resisting Japan and Saving Our Nation” and became a basic principle of the wartime CCP land policy. Thereafter, the anti-Japanese base areas formulated their own regulations on rent and interest reductions, providing concrete stipulations to ensure these policies were implemented. A prevailing approach was usually called “twenty-five percent rent reduction,” (*erwu jianzu*) namely, a

<sup>16</sup> Gillin, “‘Peasant Nationalism,’” 269.

<sup>17</sup> Hartford, “Repression and Communist Success,” 92–127.

<sup>18</sup> Wei Hongyun, *Ershi shiji sansishi niandai*, 110–112. This book provides a detailed account of the “double-faced regime,” which best illustrates the complexity of the peasants’ involvement in the Anti-Japanese War and the limits of “peasant nationalism” as an analytical framework in interpreting the Chinese Communist Revolution. See Wei Hongyun, *Ershi shiji sansishi niandai*, 66–91.

<sup>19</sup> Chen, *Making Revolution*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

25 percent markdown in the original rent rate.<sup>21</sup> This was actually a GMD policy, adopted at its October 1926 joint conference in Guangzhou in order to mobilize peasants to support the Northern Expedition. During the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP also carried on the twenty-five percent rent reduction method to demonstrate its relationship with the Nationalist Revolution. The Shaanxi–Gansu–Ningxia, Shanxi–Chahar–Hebei, Taihang, Taiyue, and Southern Hebei Base Areas all put forward slogans such as “twenty-five percent rent reduction” and “one and half tenths interest reduction” (*fenban jianxi*), that is, the interest rate of a loan should not exceed 15 percent. The campaign of reductions did not go beyond the stage of publicity in the first two years of the Anti-Japanese war, while the base areas were still under construction. Only at the end of 1939 did the CCP Center explicitly require that reductions of rent and interest be put at the center of mass work in all localities, and after that, the campaign was thoroughly implemented.<sup>22</sup>

Reductions of rent and interest undoubtedly brought visible economic benefits to peasants, but the initial work of implementing these policies was far from easy. In the Mount Taihang Base Area, peasants were afraid that landlords might take land back after the rent was reduced, since there was no guaranteed right of permanent lease. In many areas where rent was discounted in the daytime, peasants were worried that their livelihood might be jeopardized, and so in the evening they secretly made full payment. To resist interest reduction, creditors refused to provide loans by burying their money, thus denying poor peasants loans when they were in urgent need.<sup>23</sup> In central China, peasants were reluctant to confront landlords because of the fear of retaliation, suspicion about the CCP’s military prospects, a passive mentality that attempted to avoid any confrontation, and fatalism, as well as lineage ties with landlords. The old rural elites took advantage of these mentalities to serve their own interests.<sup>24</sup> It was true that only through thorough mobilization and long-time observation were the peasants able to participate in the reduction campaign.

Meanwhile, under another measure adopted by the CCP in the base areas called “reasonable burden” in taxation, the base area governments followed the principle of progressive taxation and levied taxes based on taxpayer income. According to a survey conducted in three districts and six villages, after the progressive taxation system was implemented, landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, and poor peasants paid taxes at rates of 90.1 percent, 84.89 percent, 68.62 percent, and 36.71 percent, respectively.<sup>25</sup> The tax burden of the richest could be almost three times as high as that of the poorest. It is apparent that progressive taxation significantly minimized the income gap in rural society.

In contrast to the radical policy of “knocking down the local rich and dividing their land” (*datuhao, fentiandi*) during the period of Land Revolution, the CCP’s social and economic policies in the anti-Japanese base areas seemed at first glance much more moderate. But in terms of the effect of policy implementation, reduction of rent and interest as well as reasonable tax burden all drastically changed the socioeconomic structure of rural society. Land ownership and wealth slowly shifted and was dispersed from the rich to the poor, and the base areas achieved a fairly high degree of social equality. Friedman et al. found that the Central Hebei region achieved visible social equalization by 1941. By then, 36 percent of former hired laborers had become poor

<sup>21</sup> “Jianzu jianxi danxing tiaoli,” 1–2.

<sup>22</sup> “Zhongyang guanyu shenru qunzhong,” 189–193.

<sup>23</sup> Zhonggong Shanxi shengwei dangshi yanjiushi, *Qunzhong yundong*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> Chen, *Making Revolution*, 220.

<sup>25</sup> “Jizhong wunian lai caizheng,” 731.

peasants, and 20 percent of them had become middle peasants; 28 percent of former poor peasants had become middle peasants; and 35 percent of former rich peasants had become middle peasants, while 8 percent had become poor peasants. The political power and the economic dominance of traditional elites declined at the same time. Friedman et al. called this a “silent revolution.”<sup>26</sup> When combined with the outcry of nationalism, this “silent revolution” created surging dynamics in the base areas’ rural society and effectively involved the broad masses of poor peasants in the torrents of mass movements and the Anti-Japanese War.

### ***Building the government: mobilization based on democracy***

In the classic thesis proposed by Mark Selden in *The Yen-an Way in Revolutionary China*, the peasants’ support for the CCP was based not only on the satisfaction of their material needs, but also on the building of a democratic government in the base areas, as well as the peasants’ awareness of their own political participation.<sup>27</sup> Although this viewpoint has been challenged in past years, it still reminds us that we should not see the success of the CCP’s rural mobilization as merely the outcome of an exchange of interests between the Party and peasants (to be sure, an exchange of interests indeed played a crucial role.)

The occupation of a locality through a military victory was only the first step in the CCP’s successful founding of an anti-Japanese base area. Even more important was reliance on the United Front and mass mobilization, and the establishment of a complete, innovative political structure in the base area, particularly at the grassroots beneath the level of the county. Such a structure could be established from the top down, through exerting military control at the top level or through building the United Front by co-opting local elites, and then mobilizing the peasants at the lower level. This way the Party could consolidate its leading position in the United Front. Or, it could be built from the bottom up, through the Party secretly or semi-openly yet directly arousing the peasants and then seizing control of the upper level after the bottom was consolidated. The political structure created by the CCP in the base areas included four different command systems: administrative power, military command, mass groups, and Party organizations. The Party organizations at all levels, including the branch at the subcounty level and the village-level Party cells, steered the government, the military, and mass organization at the same level according to the principle of centralized leadership by the Party.<sup>28</sup> Only after this organizational system was established in all localities and at all levels was a base area considered “consolidated.”

It is notable that the CCP placed special emphasis on the pervasive and active involvement of peasants, whether the approach was bottom-up or top-down, and whether it involved political, military, or mass sectors. As soon as the Anti-Japanese War entered the period of stalemate, the CCP embarked on government building in the base areas. In January 1939, the Northern Bureau of the CCP laid down working principles for border governments at a Party regional congress: “[We should] further implement democratic politics, establish the system of democratic centralism, and tighten the connections between the government and the people.”<sup>29</sup> After 1940, the “three–three” system was adopted in the anti-Japanese base areas behind the enemy lines. Under this system, in the

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<sup>26</sup> Friedman et al., *Chinese Village, Socialist State*, chap. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Selden, *The Yen-an Way*, 119–120.

<sup>28</sup> Chen Yung-fa, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishi nian*, vol. 1, 354–355.

<sup>29</sup> Xie Zhonghou, Ju Zhifen, and Li Tiehu, *Jinchaji kangri minzhu zhengquan*, 34.

assembly and government at various levels, “Communist Party members constituted one-third; non-Communist, leftist progressives made up one-third; and political neutrals the remaining one-third.”<sup>30</sup> These three types of people were regarded as the representatives of the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie, and the enlightened bourgeoisie/local gentry elites, respectively.

Following the three–three system, all the base areas carried out democratic elections, which became the foundation for well-established governments at the subcounty and villages levels, as well as political institutions that accommodated popular political participation. Taking the Shanxi–Chahar–Hebei Border region as an example, three general elections were held between June and September 1940. 80 percent of all eligible constituents voted in the elections below the county level, 86.3 percent participated in county elections, and 91.1 percent voted in the elections of the border region’s assembly. Even in some guerrilla areas under the close surveillance of the Japanese, more than 70 percent of qualified voters turned out to vote secretly.<sup>31</sup> A voting rate as high as this not only confirmed the effectiveness of the CCP’s early mass mobilization, but also served as a solid foundation for ensuing mobilization. Democratic elections not only greatly increased the political legitimacy of the base area governments and consolidated the actual control of the CCP, but also increased the percentage of non-Party, especially “central elements,” inside the government, and thus enhanced their sense of political belonging. Despite the fact that these people usually assumed insignificant positions, the CCP was regarded as “democratic and open,” in contrast to the GMD’s worsening dictatorship. From an alternative perspective, democratic elections and the three–three system also compensated the rural elites, whose interests were impacted in the campaigns of rent and interest reductions and rationalizing burdens. Consequently, the Party convinced rural elites to believe that “they still have political futures, and therefore nine out of ten of them won’t choose to resist.”<sup>32</sup>

During the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP met the needs of peasants by pursuing policies of reducing rent and interest and rationalizing burdens; the Party also carried the nationalist banner through anti-Japanese and national salvation propaganda and practice. The CCP also gave the peasants the feeling of being their own masters through building democratic governments, but at the same time, it pacified and compensated rural elites. These multilevel, comprehensive mobilization mechanisms enabled the CCP to freely act and grow in the unfavorable environment of the war. Its political rival, the GMD, could hardly match such a brilliant strategy. Small wonder that, despite the criticisms of it in the past 20 or so years, Mark Selden remained confident in his “Yan’an Way” concept, seeing it as the secret key to interpreting the CCP’s success.<sup>33</sup>

## II. CCP rural mobilization during the Civil War

China’s domestic and international political situations changed substantially after the end of the Anti-Japanese War in 1945, and the CCP’s rural mobilization also began to present a different face. The outbreak of the Civil War between the CCP and the GMD in 1946 facilitated a rapid transition from the previous integrative mobilization that emphasized national identity and social solidarity to an agitative mobilization that highlighted class

<sup>30</sup> Mao Zedong, “Kangri genjudi de zhengquan,” 742.

<sup>31</sup> Xie Zhonghou, Ju Zhifen, and Li Tiehu, *Jinchaji kangri minzhu zhengquan*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yung-fa, *Zhongguo gongchan geming qishi nian*, vol. 1, 363.

<sup>33</sup> Selden, epilogue to *China in Revolution*.

confrontation. “Class” once again became a main focus of the CCP’s rural mobilization. After breaking with the restrictions of the United Front, the CCP’s rural mobilization during this period became much simpler. It could now give a free hand to mass mobilization without worrying about undermining wartime national solidarity. Its mobilization techniques improved considerably due to the decreased constraints. According to most scholars, the CCP conducted rural mass mobilization during the Civil War largely through the land reform campaign. Yet a closer look reveals that the concrete process of mobilization contained at least three kinds of logic: first, land reform itself, which revolved around the redistribution of resources and was mainly interest-oriented; second, class categorization aiming at distinguishing the enemy from “us,” which was a mobilization based on identity politics; and third, the struggle of speaking bitterness (*suku*), which was a mobilization based on emotion.

### ***Land reform: interest-oriented mobilization***

During the period following the Anti-Japanese War, the CCP continued to carry out its policy of reducing rent and interest and also attempted to accumulate more land through the campaign to punish traitors and settle accounts. In an intraparty directive drafted at the end of 1945, Mao Zedong emphasized rent reduction and production as the two primary tasks in safeguarding the liberated areas. He demanded the launching of a large-scale campaign of rent reduction in the liberated areas in the winter of 1945 and the spring of 1946.<sup>34</sup> However, it is notable that by then, the reduction of rent and interest was no longer pursued alone. Instead, it went hand in hand with the gigantic campaign of “punishing traitors and settling accounts.” The Party no longer stressed protection of the land and property of landlords, but instead began to touch on the land issue. “Settling accounts” (*qingsuan*) meant resolving the economic disputes between landlords and peasants by thorough calculation; “punishing traitors” aimed at handling the many residual questions left over from wartime. During the settling accounts campaign, work teams succeeded in transferring property rights in the name of various policies. In Changzhi County of Shanxi Province, the ownership of 13 percent of the land changed hands during the late 1945 campaign of punishing traitors and settling accounts. Many villages actually realized the dream of “land to the tiller.”<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the campaign of punishing traitors and settling accounts also further mobilized the peasants in the liberated areas. By the end of April 1946, more than half of the total population in the newly liberated areas had been mobilized to join the struggle against landed elites. For instance, in the Jiangsu–Anhui region, more than two million peasants engaged in the struggle, and land was distributed to 300,000 of them. Only one out of seven villages in this region was left untouched.<sup>36</sup>

As the Civil War continued, the CCP recognized the importance of peasant mobilization by tackling the land issue. On May 4, 1946, the CCP Center issued the “Directive Concerning the Land Issue” (*Guanyu tudi wenti de zhishi*), usually known as the “May Fourth Directive,” to all liberated regions as an internal document. It clearly proposed the principle of “seizing land from the landlord and realizing [the vision of] land to the tiller.”<sup>37</sup> After this, all liberated areas embarked on the campaigns of land reform and its

<sup>34</sup> Mao Zedong, “Jianzu he shengchan,” 1172–1173.

<sup>35</sup> “Changzhi xian tudi gaige yundong zongjie” [Summary of Land Reform in Changzhi County] (April 1947). Taihang quwei dang’an. File no. 90–1–36–1.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao Xiaomin, *Zhongguo tudi gaige shi*, 313.

<sup>37</sup> “Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu tudi.”

review. As problems emerged in the process of land reform and the situation in the Civil War changed, the CCP Center Work Committee called a National Land Conference in Xibaipo Village, Hebei Province, from July to September 1947. The conference adopted the radical Outline of the Chinese Land Law (*Zhongguo tudifa dagang*), which stipulated that all (instead of the excessive part) of landlords' land and property should be confiscated, that land should be redistributed equally, and that rich peasants should be treated as landlords. The Land Law also abolished the exceptions previously given to middle peasants and to the families of martyrs and those in the Communist army.<sup>38</sup>

After the promulgation of the Land Law, an upsurge of dividing land and searching for hidden property, as well as an over-radicalization of the class struggle occurred in the liberated areas. As a result, the CCP was forced to adjust its land policy. It promulgated the "Directive on Land Reform and Party Rectification Work in the Old and Semi-old Liberated Areas" on February 22, 1948, signed by Zhou Enlai. This prohibited areas that had conducted "relatively thorough" and "semi-thorough" land reform from pursuing "absolute equalization," and instead required these areas to use the method of moderate adjustment.<sup>39</sup> From then on, the CCP continued to expand land reform throughout the liberated region, and its victories on the battlefield and in land reform in the newly occupied areas were intertwined until the end of the Civil War.

The essence of land reform was gaining peasants' support for the CCP by redistributing resources. The efficacy of rural mobilization was apparently proportional to the number of people who truly benefited from land reform. Thus it is not hard to understand why all steering offices repeatedly emphasized maximizing the number of beneficiaries by protecting the interests of hired laborers and poor peasants, co-opting middle peasants, and making sure that the interests of rich peasants were not encroached upon. The Party criticized the two deviant tendencies known as "too many targets" and "too few beneficiaries."<sup>40</sup> According to statistics on 981 villages in five counties in the Taihang region, those benefiting from land reform included 140,521 households or 82.4 percent of all households and 379,338 individuals or 74.2 percent of the overall population. In terms of social stratification, 100 percent of veterans, 99.8 percent of poor peasants, 97.5 percent of hired laborers, 93 percent of middle peasants, and 16 percent of rich peasants enjoyed substantial benefits from land reform.<sup>41</sup> According to statistics based on a survey conducted in 54 villages of the Hebei-Shanxi region, out of a total of 8,602 households, 6,569 households, or 76 percent, benefited from land reform. It is also notable that, among the 503 better-off households, 213 participated in the struggle, and 123 of these households benefited from it.<sup>42</sup> The fact that the process of large-scale redistribution of property ownership benefited such a large number of rural villagers suffices to explain the CCP's success in mobilization.

Viewing land reform at the grassroots level, it is obvious that direct material incentives were also an effective mobilizational instrument that assured the peasants of their gains and empowered them to participate in the struggle. A typical CCP method was "whoever struggles gains" (*shei dou shei fen*), namely, a peasant's performance in the mass

<sup>38</sup> *Zhongguo tudi fa dagang*.

<sup>39</sup> Hebei sheng dang'an guan, *Hebei tudi gaige dang'an*, 9–11.

<sup>40</sup> "Tugai fucha baogao chugao" [Draft Report about the Review of Land Reform] (June 1947). Zhonggong Bohai quwei dang'an. File no. G026-01-0240-001.

<sup>41</sup> "Taihang tudi gaige zhu wenti" [A Variety of Questions in Taihang Land Reform] (June 28, 1947). Taihang quwei dang'an. File no. 90-1-37-1.

<sup>42</sup> "Tugai tongji cailiao" [Statistical Materials on Land Reform] (January 1947). Jin Ji quwei dang'an. File no. 108-1-69-1.

movement was used as a fundamental criterion to determine that peasant's share of "the fruits of struggle." For instance, the CCP in the central Hebei region encouraged peasants to join the Peasant Association by emphasizing the relationship between membership and the number of "fruits": "those who have joined the organization get a bigger share, and those who have not joined get less." The local CCP leaders openly called this method "awarding based on merit." Daguozhuang Village of Wuji County adopted the method of credit recording, giving one credit to each villager who joined a mass organization and dividing land and property based on the credits. As a result, enrollment in mass organizations increased rapidly.<sup>43</sup> If the villagers were unhappy with the division of the "fruits", mass enthusiasm for "struggle" soon declined, and the villagers complained, "My field labor was delayed, but I didn't get anything. Struggle is not as good as doing short hired labor."<sup>44</sup>

Accounts like this are ubiquitous in CCP documents, and they support the conclusion of many scholars that land reform consolidated the peasants' support for the CCP, which eventually enabled the CCP to win the Chinese Civil War.<sup>45</sup> This phenomenon also confirmed Mao Zedong's earlier prediction: "If the land problem is solved in the liberated areas that have more than 100 million people, then these people will provide a long and inexhaustible backup to our struggle."<sup>46</sup>

### ***Class categorization: identity-oriented mobilization***

Reorganizing rural social relations through class categorization and labeling had proved an effective mobilization strategy during the period of National Revolution (1923–1927), and it was widely implemented in the Soviet areas during the period of Land Revolution (1927–1937). Class labeling remained a basic element of CCP mass work even during the "All-People's War against Japan," and it was only temporarily hindered by the discourse of the Anti-Japanese National United Front. When the Anti-Japanese War ended and the Civil War resumed, this powerful weapon was once again utilized by the CCP, and it played a far-reaching role in rural mobilization with the deepening of Land Reform.

As many scholars have noticed, although economic polarization and social conflicts did exist in the prerevolutionary Chinese countryside, they were not as severe and pervasive as was portrayed by CCP leaders and official historians expounding orthodox ideology.<sup>47</sup> In the north Chinese countryside in particular, due to the underdevelopment of tenancy relationships, the major exploitation came from taxation and surcharges rather than rent, and the main contradiction lay between the state and the peasantry rather than between landlord and peasant.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the new type of social relationship with class confrontation as its core was largely the result of the CCP's mobilization and political construction, rather than an inherent element in rural society. After the CCP entered rural

<sup>43</sup> "Dishi yi dui disan zu tudi gage zhengzu cailiao huiji" [Collection of Materials Concerning Land Reform in the Third Group of the Eleventh Brigade] (March 31, 1947). Jizhong quwei dang'an. File no. 3-1-102-3.

<sup>44</sup> "Laoqu xianjin cun shinian lai tudi gage chubu yanjiu" [A Preliminary Study of Land Reform in the Advanced Villages of the Old Liberated Area] (August 1, 1947). Taihang quwei dang'an. File no. 90-1-36-2.

<sup>45</sup> See Pepper, *Civil War in China*, chap. 7.

<sup>46</sup> "Mao Zedong Liu Shaoqi," 7.

<sup>47</sup> See Zhang Youyi, "Ben shiji ersanshi niandai"; and Perkins, *Agricultural Development in China*, chap. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Fairbank and Feuerwerker, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 13, *Republican China, Part 2*, chap. 5.

communities, its primary task was to replace old identities, interests, contradictions, and conflicts with class-based identities, interests, contradictions, and conflicts. It was committed to transforming the existing “soft” and multifaceted rural social structure into a “hard” structure of binary opposition, thus laying the foundation for further mass movements and war mobilization.

During the land reform period, the CCP Center promulgated multiple directives and documents about the issue of class categorization. The most detailed was “Regulation on the Classification and Treatment of All Social Classes during Land Reform (Draft).” Promulgated on February 25, 1948, the document consisted of 25 chapters and more than 40,000 Chinese characters. Perhaps due to its length and complexity and to the difficulty of implementing it, the draft was circulated only as reference material to the Central Work Committee, all central bureaus, and their branches, but not to the grassroots level. What really guided work were two older documents promulgated in 1933, “How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas” and the “Decision Concerning Some Issues in the Land Struggle.” The CCP Center circulated these two documents in December 1947 to the Party committees at all levels in the liberated area. On May 25, 1948, the two documents were reprinted as official guidelines after they were annotated by the CCP Center.

These documents set forth both qualitative and quantitative criteria for classification of socioeconomic classes. The former were used to describe the basic features of the classes, and the latter were used to establish the boundaries among the classes. In “How to Differentiate the Classes in the Rural Areas,” Mao Zedong defined the main classes in rural society, such as landlord, rich peasant, middle peasant, poor peasant, and hired laborer, based mainly on their ownership of productive materials and the exploitative relations among them. It is notable that Mao’s language was often vague, perhaps out of concern about the complexity of reality. For instance, Mao used terms such as “general ownership of land,” “part ownership of land,” “appropriate tools,” and “incomplete tools,” and he differentiated landlord from rich peasant based on which method of exploitation was “primary.” When defining a middle peasant, the key was whether his exploitation was “slight” or “often and major,” and so on.<sup>49</sup> A definition like this could only assign essential theoretical meanings to various assumed class identities, but it would be hard to apply in real life. To remedy this, the CCP central government promulgated the “Decision Concerning Some Issues in the Land Struggle,” which established quantitative criteria for distinct classes. For instance, the difference between landlords and rich peasants was that rich peasants worked by themselves, while landlords did not do physical labor or did only auxiliary work. This second document provided clear definitions for terms such as “labor,” “auxiliary labor,” “primary labor,” and “non-primary labor.” The boundary between wealthy middle peasant and rich peasant was defined in terms of the amount of exploitation (whether it exceeded 15 percent of total yearly output), and the length of time laborers were exploited (whether it exceeded three years).<sup>50</sup>

As with land reform itself, many deviations in the classification of rural classes occurred in practice. Not only did the criteria for labeling depart from the reality of rural society, but often policy implementation also deviated from the announced policy.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the importance of the categorization of classes to the CCP’s rural

<sup>49</sup> Mao Zedong, “Zenyang fenxi nongcun jieji.”

<sup>50</sup> “Guanyu tudi douzheng.”

<sup>51</sup> See Huang, “Rural Class Struggle in the Chinese Revolution,” 105–143.

mobilization can never be overestimated. As a local leader said, “(Classification) fixes their fate. This is the most important work in the whole movement. He who leads the classification holds the knife in his hand.”<sup>52</sup> The political identity of peasants was assigned by the Party based on criteria stipulated by the Party. Under these circumstances, class labeling served as a powerful instrument for the Party both to mobilize the peasants and to control them. Undoubtedly, class categorization became a significant step in and precondition of the transformation of individual peasants into subjects of the state.

By naming and labeling the members of a rural community, classification helped the CCP to establish a new, unquestionable ruling order based on mass mobilization. Some peasants said, “Since some people do not know what kind of peasants they will be classified as, they worry about the review all day long. Thus they are not in the mood for work, staying up late and refusing to work at night,” and “This time we should measure classes with the ruler of Chairman Mao. People should first be assigned the class label that they deserve, and then they will work with their mind at ease.”<sup>53</sup> These remarks demonstrate that the rural masses had been studying and adapting to the CCP’s class identity-based approach to governance. Villagers also began to cite class labels as the basis to reposition themselves as well as to decide what to do next. William Hinton vividly describes various responses in Zhangzhuang Village, when reclassified class identities were announced on the bulletin board: “Certain families...were overjoyed when they saw how far down on the list they stood.” When one terrified merchant discovered that he was labeled as a middle peasant, “He strode up and down the main street, chest out, eyes shining.” A female Party member whose in-laws were labeled as rich peasants was put into the category of middle peasant herself. She “walked in full length with her head up.” Some poor families who were classified as middle peasants “complained bitterly.” Some people threw notes into the opinion box to express their resentment of the labeling of others as poor peasants.<sup>54</sup> That the peasants took class labels seriously enough to engage in disputes shows how deeply class discourse had penetrated people’s minds in rural society, when they were driven by both economic interests and political status related to this discourse. This once again confirms the effectiveness of the CCP’s rural mobilization.

### ***Struggle through “speaking bitterness”: emotion-oriented mobilization***

In reviewing CCP documents on land reform, one fact is very noticeable: in almost every village, land reform included a unique step called “speaking bitterness.” “Articulating one’s history of being oppressed and exploited by class enemies and thus stimulating others’ class hatred while consolidating one’s own class standpoint. This is what we call ‘speaking bitterness’.”<sup>55</sup> Incorporated into the discourse of class struggle, speaking bitterness effectively aroused hatred of the GMD and love for the CCP among the peasants, who thereby unconsciously accepted the CCP’s mobilization and internalized its ideology.

As was previously mentioned, land concentration and economic polarization in prerevolutionary China were actually quite limited. Moreover, the influence of

<sup>52</sup> Hinton, *Fanshen*, 411.

<sup>53</sup> “Changsha qu gecun tugai fucha qingkuang de diaocha” [An Investigation of the Review of Land Reform in the Villages of Changsha District] (October 19, 1949). Zhonggong Jiaodong quwei dang’an. File no. G024-01-0145-012.

<sup>54</sup> Hinton, *Fanshen*, 439.

<sup>55</sup> Chen Beidou, *Renmin xuexi cidian*, 331.

traditional moral values and lineage bonds in the village hindered the CCP's attempt to mobilize the peasants within the framework of class struggle. The leaders of land reform often found it was very difficult for peasants to confront landlords. Yet in terms of the ultimate goal of the Party, the most important work was not simply to guide the peasants to *fanshen* (turn over the body) but also to *fanxin* (turn over the mind). The best way to achieve this goal was to “mobilize the masses to speak bitterness and to pour bitter water.”

The more bitterness the masses speak, the easier it is to organize their struggle, and the more likely it is that they will turn over their minds. Otherwise, the masses will never change their ideology, even if they change their social status.<sup>56</sup>

With this in mind, land reform leaders at various levels all attached great importance to speaking bitterness. Land reform without speaking bitterness was sufficient to accomplish the task of land redistribution, yet without it, the peasants' class consciousness and class stance could not be reshaped. Thus, this type of land redistribution was usually called “picking an unripe melon.”<sup>57</sup> In many localities, the land reform work teams made it clear that “speaking bitterness and struggle sessions still need to be organized” even “after land was divided” or in places where “struggle has been completed.”<sup>58</sup>

To arouse the peasants' feelings of anger and hatred, it was insufficient simply to speak out about past suffering. The “bitter sense” had to be nurtured, and the “bitter taste” had to ferment. As one document suggested, “One must ponder the bitter taste of the past. Don't just listen to other people's sufferings, think of your own sufferings. This will make the meeting solemn and sorrowful.”<sup>59</sup> In order to stimulate the emotion of both speakers and listeners, the choice of *kuzhu* (main bitterness speakers) became crucial. Many places emphasized that old people or women should be chosen as *kuzhu*, for the rich life experience of old people and the low status of women were conducive to a “sense of bitterness.”<sup>60</sup> Organizers usually had to teach *kuzhu* how to speak well by coaching them on how to “summarize several of the most abominable sins (of the landlords), which will arouse an intense hatred in the masses, so that they will then be willing to join the struggle due to the hatred.”<sup>61</sup> The organizers also needed to train *kuzhu* to wear “sad facial expressions”; *kuzhu* had to “show the attitude of anger when speaking of how the landlord oppressed the peasant, and be able to move other peasants as if they were actors and actresses who could touch the audience.” Speaking-

<sup>56</sup> “Dishiyi dui disan zu tudi gaige zhengzu cailiao huiji” [Collection of Materials Concerning Land Reform in the Third Group of the Eleventh Brigade] (March 31, 1947). Jizhong quwei dang'an. File no. 3-1-102-3.

<sup>57</sup> “Leling suku yundong de jieshao (tongbao)” [An Introduction to the Speaking Bitterness Campaign in Leling] (January 15, 1947). Zhonggong Bohai quwei dang'an. File no. G-026-01-0228-001.

<sup>58</sup> “Xinqu tugai chubu zongjie” [Preliminary Summary of Land Reform in the Newly Liberated Areas] (March 7, 1949). Ji Cha diwei dang'an. File no. 758-3-96-1.

<sup>59</sup> “Tugai fuchao baogao chugao” [Draft Report on the Review of Land Reform] (June 1947). Zhonggong Bohai quwei dang'an. File no. G026-01-0240-001.

<sup>60</sup> “Zenyang lingdao nongmin suku” [How to Lead Peasants' Speaking Bitterness] (September 12, 1947). Ji'nan jiu diwei dang'an. File no. 14-1-114-1.

<sup>61</sup> “Yongzhi xian fanjian suku yundong zhong jidian chubu jingyan jieshao” [Introducing Several Preliminary Experiences in the Campaign of Opposing Traitors and Speaking Bitterness in Yongzhi County] (August 16, 1946). Ji'nan yi diwei dang'an. File no. 28-1-39-3.

bitterness meetings were also carefully staged to elicit the best possible effects of this political ritual:

It is suggested that small-group meetings be held in poor peasants' shabby homes, even better if in the dim light of evening. Large mass meetings are to be held in remote, deserted places; if the meetings are staged in dramatic settings, then people will be even more touched.<sup>62</sup>

The “emotional work” sophisticatedly orchestrated by the speaking-bitterness agitators seemed to turn on an emotional switch in peasants, and the outcome was just as one peasant observed: “The [Communist] Eighth Route Army is really strange. If they want the poor people to laugh, the poor people will laugh; if they want the poor people to cry, the poor people will cry.”<sup>63</sup> According to statistics from four districts in Huanghua County, a total of 5,184 people spoke bitterness during land reform, and 4,551 “cried bitterly and shed tears,” 12 “cried and then fainted,” and 195 “got sick after crying.”<sup>64</sup> The accuracy of these statistics is open to question, yet they convey the prominence accorded by the CCP to emotional work.

After “digging the bitter roots,” the next task was to direct the aroused emotions toward the CCP’s political and military opponent, the GMD. “Speaking bitterness will lose its meaning if it stops at speaking out about grievances without tracing the roots of the suffering.”<sup>65</sup> Through logical deduction and moral accusation, the CCP succeeded in making the speakers and listeners “realize that these sufferings were inflicted on them by Chiang Kai-shek. If Chang Kai-shek’s government was not replaced, there would be no end to the poor people’s suffering. The poor people’s *fanshen* meant overthrowing the Chiang Kai-shek regime.”<sup>66</sup> Once the root cause of suffering was dug out, the poor people began to understand that their suffering, that is, their bitterness, was inflicted by Chiang Kai-shek and the GMD, and thus this bitterness found a target when it turned to “anger” and “hatred.” By then, peasants were naturally transformed from speaking bitterness to seeking revenge and from talking to fighting. At this time, the emotion previously repressed by the peasants, which was stronger than rational calculation, erupted and gained great revolutionary momentum. This was how the CCP was able to accomplish its goal of rural mobilization within a short period.

### III. Variation and continuity in the CCP’s rural mobilization

It is well known that the Chinese Communist Revolution went through four stages: the Great Revolution (1921–1927), the Land Revolution (1927–1937), the Anti-Japanese War (1937–1945), and the Liberation War (1945–1949). This periodization and the names given to each period in official Communist historiography reveal the stage-specific features of the Chinese Communist Revolution. The status and power, as well as the

<sup>62</sup> “Lingdao suku de jidian jingyan” [Several Experiences in Guiding Speaking Bitterness] (1948). Ji Re Liao xingshu dang’an. File no. 520–1–931–5.

<sup>63</sup> “Tugai fuchao baogao chugao” [Draft Report on the Review of Land Reform] (June 1947). Zhonggong Bohai quwei dangwei dang’an. File no. G026–01–0240–001.

<sup>64</sup> “Zhonggong Bohai qu yi diwei,” 162.

<sup>65</sup> “Zenyang kaizhan suku yundong” [How to Carry out the Speaking-Bitterness Campaign] (January, 1947). Ji Cha Re Liao junqu dang’an. File no. 583–1–29–2.

<sup>66</sup> “Leling suku yundong de jieshao (tongbao)” [An Introduction to the Speaking-Bitterness Campaign in Leling] (January 15, 1947). Zhonggong Bohai quwei dang’an. File no. G–026–01–0228–001.

domestic and international situations of the CCP varied from stage to stage, and its rural mobilization strategy also adapted to the changing circumstances and varied over time.

During the period of the Great Revolution, the CCP had legitimate status only in the southern provinces controlled by the GMD, but not in the overall Chinese political arena. At that time, CCP members could join the GMD as individuals, and the CCP could openly engage in politics and also maintain its own autonomy. Its role was that of a participatory political party. However, the CCP did not have its own sphere of influence, nor did it control a regional government. This was quite different from the situation after 1927. The consequence was that the CCP had insufficient resources to exchange with peasants to induce them to take part in mass organizations and mass movements, and the only thing the CCP could count on was the sense of political superiority peasants acquired by joining peasant associations. This was what one historian called a “peasant revolution that only struck down local tyrants but failed to take their land.”<sup>67</sup>

During the period of the Land Revolution, the CCP, which sustained serious damage from the GMD’s purge campaign, was forced to take the revolutionary path of encircling the cities from the rural areas. The CCP at this time was a weak yet ambitious political party whose aim was to take power by armed force. The CCP gradually established base areas in localities where the GMD’s hold was weak and even founded the Chinese Soviet regime, becoming a ruling party in regional areas, although the scope and degree of its rule were both limited. Against the backdrop of its radical confrontation with the GMD, the CCP implemented the concepts of class confrontation and class struggle. Striking down the local rich and dividing their land became a basic tool to spur the rural mass movement, and the conflict and animosity between peasant and landlord was pushed to an extreme. The circumstances of the CCP were so precarious that it could not help but go overboard, exhausting local human resources and resorting to coercion. The CCP and its army even went as far as to burn down peasants’ homes purposely to transform them into a “proletariat” who had no choice but to join the revolutionary rank and file.<sup>68</sup>

After 1935, as the Japanese invaders accelerated their aggression against China, there was an upsurge in public opinion calling for resistance to Japan and the salvation of China. In December 1936, the Xi’an Incident occurred when Zhang Xueliang kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek and forced him to collaborate with the CCP and actively resist the Japanese invasion. This incident and its peaceful settlement provided a good opportunity to forge a new political situation characterized by the cessation of the civil war and joint resistance to the Japanese. By the time the Sino–Japanese War formally broke out, the CCP had achieved legitimate status within the framework of the Anti-Japanese National United Front and survived the crisis caused by its tremendous losses in the military defeats before and during the arduous Long March. During this period, the CCP temporarily abandoned its political goal of overthrowing the government by force, and its revolutionary ardor largely cooled. Since GMD–CCP collaboration at this time took the form of a coalition rather than dual membership, the CCP appeared to be a legitimate opposition party with national scale and influence. In its own anti-Japanese base areas, however, the CCP was the *de facto* ruling party. Under these specific political circumstances, the CCP placed its ultimate goal of class struggle below the demand for a national war. Although it still took class identification as the basis of its mass mobilization, it placed more emphasis on the need for national solidarity and resistance to Japan. The theme of land revolution yielded to rent and interest reductions and rationalization of

<sup>67</sup> Wang Qisheng, “Geming de diceng dongyuan,” 66, 94.

<sup>68</sup> See Zeng Zhi, *Yige geming de xingcunzhe*, vol. 1, 52–54.

burdens, and the CCP also tried to respond to the feelings of both landed elites and peasants by advocating the three–three system in government building. Rural mobilization during this period seemed to be more oriented towards integration and compromise than in any of the other three stages of the Chinese Communist Revolution.

During the period of the Liberation War, peace negotiations between the CCP and the GMD broke down, leading to civil war. Under the banner of “liberating the whole country,” the CCP reclaimed the old yet fundamental slogan of “taking power by force” and returned to the true nature of its revolution. The previous anti-Japanese base areas behind the enemy lines were now renamed the “liberated areas,” and the CCP maintained its status as the de facto ruling party in these domains, which rapidly expanded in area and population. Compared with the period of the Anti-Japanese War, the pivot of the CCP’s political activism and mobilization shifted from “nation” back to “class.” By this time, the CCP’s influence in an absolute sense and its revolutionary experience had changed tremendously. In order to win the support of the peasantry, the CCP unhesitatingly turned to class struggle as an instrument in the remobilization of its “old areas” and “semi-old areas,” and in the initial mobilization of “new areas.” Naturally, the once-suspended policy of land revolution was resumed, and mobilization oriented toward grievances and confrontation, downplayed under the banner of the United Front, once again assumed a key role. The only difference was that during this period, the CCP was much more confident and skillful in maneuvering the sharp weapon of the mass movement, benefiting from the Party’s repeated expansion and accumulated experience during the Anti-Japanese War.

A closer look at the actual process of the CCP’s rural mobilization reveals continuity that persisted throughout and transcended the differences in the four periods of the Chinese Communist Revolution. This continuity was evident in terms of both goal and techniques. Turning first to the goal of mobilization, when the CCP was founded, it declared, “Our Party identifies with the Soviet system of management, which organizes workers, peasants, and soldiers.”<sup>69</sup> The CCP defined itself as “a political party that is organized by the most-revolutionized masses among the proletariat, a party aimed at striving for the interests of the proletariat.” It required Party members to “go to the masses” and make the Party a large “mass party.”<sup>70</sup> By the time of the first United Front between the CCP and the GMD, the Communist Party had confirmed that its backbone and the object of mobilization were the “masses”. It had also confirmed that the mass movement was its basic strategy and focal point. The Party’s aim was to extract energy from the masses and the mass movement to facilitate the realization of the CCP’s grand goals. This so-called mobilization was nothing more than a process in which the ruling elites acquired resources, human resources in particular, to serve the purpose of political authorities.<sup>71</sup> In its long revolutionary history, the CCP always gave preeminence to mobilizing the masses and winning mass support, whether it used the slogan of nation or class.

Generally speaking, the popular support the CCP tried to gain had three main aspects: participatory support, including engaging in mass movements and joining mass organizations and the Party; support through identification with the Party, including obedience in behavior, psychological acceptance, and emotional gratitude; and material support, mainly in the form of paying the land tax and the tax grain and in the form of human resources,

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<sup>69</sup> “Zhongguo gongchandang diyige gangling,” 3.

<sup>70</sup> “Guanyu gongchandang de zuzhi,” 90.

<sup>71</sup> Townsend and Womarek, *Politics in China*, 86.

including enlisting in the Communist army or providing logistic support to the front. These aspects of rural mobilization persisted in all of the stages of the Chinese Communist Revolution except the first stage. During the Great Revolution, due to the restrictions imposed by the lack of an independent domain and the form of cross-party collaboration, the CCP's reliance on support through identification with the Party and material support was not strong. The effect of its mobilization was reflected mainly in participatory support, that is, in the scale of popular participation in mass movements and mass organizations.

The descriptions of the CCP's rural mobilization in different historical periods might suggest multiple and incoherent techniques. Yet beneath the surface, there was continuity. I would argue that interests, identity, and emotional orientations suffice to cover the basic techniques of the CCP's rural mobilization and that these just assumed different forms in different stages.

First, the policy of striking down the local rich and dividing up their land in the period of Land Revolution, the reductions of interest and rent and rationalization of burdens during the Anti-Japanese War, and the land reform in the Liberation War can be all considered interest-oriented mobilizations. They followed the logic of reciprocity, that is, the CCP let the peasants enjoy economic rewards by redistributing resources while peasants gave the CCP all kinds of support to return the favor.

Second, despite the constant changes in handling landlord-peasant relations from the Great Revolution through the Liberation War, the CCP never changed the class labels themselves, nor did it modify the basic assumption about class conflicts and confrontations. This can be called identity-oriented mobilization in that different class identities implied different political treatment and distinct status in the process of redistributing resources.

Third, the CCP stressed class conflict mainly during the Land Revolution and the Liberation War, and the mobilizations during these two wars mainly targeted rural elites and their political proxies. In contrast, during the Anti-Japanese War, class solidarity was emphasized, and mobilization targeted the Japanese invaders and their Chinese agents in the puppet regime, who were the common enemy of all Chinese social classes. However, whether the target was national or class based, arousing the people's emotions to stir up their hatred of the enemy and to promote their love for CCP was an enduring instrument of mobilization. It was as important as, or even more significant than the redistribution of interests.

It is safe to say that during the entire era of revolutionary war, the CCP's rural mobilization had consistent basic goals and techniques, as well as amazing flexibility in the application of concrete strategy and discursive tools. Through flexibility and variation, the CCP adapted to changing situations by taking advantage of all favorable conditions to overcome difficulties. But through the continuity in its goals and techniques, the CCP transcended spatial and temporal limitations, continuously and effectively mobilized the masses to join the revolution, and won final revolutionary victory by drawing multifaceted support from rural society.

(translated by WU Guo)

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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### Glossary

Chahar 察哈尔  
 Changzhi 长治  
 Chen Yung-fa 陈永发  
 Daguozhuang 大郭庄  
 datuhao, fentiandi 打土豪，分田地  
 erwu jianzu 二五减租  
 fanshen 翻身  
 fanxin 翻心  
 fenban jianxi 分半减息  
 Guanyu tudi wenti de zhishi 关于土地问题的指示  
 Huanghua 黄骅  
 kuzhu 苦主  
 Luochuan 洛川  
 Pingxingguan 平型关  
 qingsuan 清算  
 qunzhong gongzuo 群众工作  
 shei dou shei fen 谁斗谁分  
 suku 诉苦  
 Taihang 太行  
 Taiyuan 太原  
 Taiyue 太岳  
 Wayaobao 瓦窑堡  
 Wuji 无极  
 Xibaipo 西柏坡  
 Yan'an 延安  
 Zhangzhuang 张庄  
 Zhongguo tudifa dagang 《中国土地法大纲》

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