This groundbreaking study on the forging of Chinese communism in the furnace of the anti-Japanese war focuses on North China, where the Chinese Communist Party first took root and later expanded to conquer China. Whilst the explosive growth of the Chinese communist movement during the war years is a fact, the nature of this expansion remains disputed. Here the author examines a set of interrelated issues that have so far not received comprehensive treatment with regard to the main communist base areas in North China – regions where the CCP secured most of its recruits and where its policy programmes were most severely tested by Japanese military campaigns.

The analysis centres on how the CCP strove to combine two objectives that it perceived as crucial to building up a sustained mass resistance movement to the Japanese: socio-economic and political restructuring in favour of the poor and the forging of a grassroots rural united front including all social strata. The author also stresses the host of severe constraints that the party's policy ambitions ran up against, such as massive destruction of the local economy by the Japanese army, the economic burden of running the resistance, peasant ambivalence to revolutionary changes, and the shortage of trained cadres. Ultimately, the movement spread too rapidly and too widely for the party centre to exert more than a very weak or mediated vanguard function outside scattered enclaves. This in turn allowed localities an autonomous dynamic that often conflicted with higher party echelons. Nevertheless, the movement had a broad, if highly uneven, redistributive impact on power resources in the region, leading to a structural fluidity that lowered the barriers to a future revolution. History accelerated.

Professor Gatu works at Japan Women’s University in Tokyo, where he teaches politics and is researching the restructuring of village society in China during the Second World War.

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The Impact of Resistance to Japan, 1937–1945

Dagfinn Gatu
For Kashiko, Toyoko and Tojun
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Preface

My study covers extensive parts of those areas in war-affected North China that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sources describe as ‘border regions’ or, in a slightly more restrictive meaning, ‘anti-Japanese base areas’. These came into being with the spread of numerous bases of diverse sizes and kinds. In fact, a border region was only very loosely integrated and included areas where the CCP exerted extremely varying degrees of influence. There were three such regions in the part of China under consideration, comprising portions of several provinces: the Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan border region (abbreviated as JinJiLuYu in party sources;¹ the designation used hereafter), the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei border region (JinChaJi) and the Shanxi-Suiyuan border region (JinSui), in addition to the Shandong base area which never gained that status. The remaining border region in North China, including the provinces of Shaanxi, Gansu and Ningxia (commonly referred to as ShaanGanNing), was located in the far northwest beyond the reach of the Japanese army. It was this region’s ‘capital’, Yan’an, that housed all the central party, military and governmental organizations. My examination centres on the main CCP areas in JinJiLuYu, especially, and JinChaJi, with occasional excursions into JinSui and the Shandong base area.

The founding of base areas was initiated in early September 1937 when three divisions – the 115th under Lin Biao, the 120th commanded by He Long and Liu Bocheng’s 129th – set out from northern Shaanxi. These divisions moved into Shanxi’s northwestern (the 120th), northeastern (the 115th) and southeastern (the 129th) parts. The latter two established their headquarters in the mountains of Wutai and Taihang. During 1938 parts of the regular army, in North China named the Eighth Route Army, shifted further east to Hebei, Shandong and Henan. Being unimportant for the purposes of this study, the complex evolution of base area/border region administrative divisions will not be pursued. Yet as some geographical
names crop up frequently in the text, a brief note on the features of these geographical units is called for.

Beginning with the largest of the border regions, JinJiLuYu was at the simplest level divided into two parts to facilitate military operations: the JinJiYu mountain ranges of Taihang and Taiyue (southeast Shanxi, southwest Hebei and a small part of Henan to the north of the Yellow River) and JiLuYu (southern Hebei, western Shandong, northern Henan and a small part of Jiangsu to the north of the Longhai railway) which is part of the vast, fertile North China plain. Although the size of the two areas did not differ strikingly, the former had a population of seven million versus 18 million in the latter. Topographical features explain the difference: the mountainous areas were generally far less well off and could not support a dense population. On the other hand, the Taihang and Taiyue mountains had great strategic importance, deriving from the advantages they presented for extending control over the plains and launching attacks on the key railway lines in North China. Taihang’s significance is moreover underscored by the stationing in the area of the party and army organs immediately directing the resistance effort in North China and of JinJiLuYu’s leading organizations.

JinChaji, the earliest border region to be founded behind Japanese lines, eventually comprised parts of five provinces – Shanxi, Hebei, Chahar, Jehol and Liaoning – having a population of 20–25 million. This border region’s administrative division into three parts reflected the geographical variations within it. First, there was the predominantly mountainous and sparsely populated Beiyue area (about 4 million) situated within the rectangle of the railway lines of Beiping–Suiyuan in the north (between Beiping and Datong), Zhengtai in the south (Taiyuan–Shijiazhuang), Tongpu in the west (Datong–Taiyuan) and Pinghan in the east (Beiping–Shijiazhuang), thus centring on northeastern Shanxi and western Hebei. This was the core of JinChaji: here the border region was inaugurated, in the town of Fuping, and the military headquarters was located, in the Wutai mountains.

The other main area was central Hebei. It was also rectangularly marked off by railway lines, within the four corners of Beiping and Tianjin to the north, and Shijiazhuang and Dezhou to the south. The flat terrain favoured the mechanized Japanese forces. Their campaigns were frequent and highly destructive due to the area’s strategic location and relatively developed economy: in particular it produced an agricultural surplus. Consequently, the CCP’s presence here was less entrenched than in Beiyue. In the third area
Preface

of eastern Hebei, Jehol and Liaoning, the party’s activities gained much less strength.

JinSui was by far the smallest and poorest of the border regions. Its main base was set up in northwestern Shanxi, followed by the establishment of the Daqingshan base in Suiyuan. Party sources describe JinSui as the forward defence post of ShaanGanNing further to the west and as the link between it and the other border regions. Along this route documents were sent and cadres travelled in large numbers to attend conferences and study sessions. While JinSui’s predominantly mountainous terrain prevented the full deployment of the Japanese army’s heavy weapons, it expended rather less effort to destroying this border region.

Zhu Rui, who headed the party’s sub-bureau in Shandong, summed up the favourable conditions for building a base area there to a Western journalist:

Topographically, it consists of mountains and plains intermingled, it is rich agriculturally and minerally ... The population is huge – thirty-eight million [offered large numbers of potential recruits] ... [Shandong] itself had one taste of Japanese occupation in 1916-1920, and another in 1928. Great numbers of its people emigrated to Manchuria and many returned home, with experience of anti-Japanese guerrilla warfare after 1931 ... The same pressure of population on the land which made them go into the army or emigrate in millions to Manchuria led them to band together in secret societies of all kinds against the Manchu dynasty, the landlords and the tax collectors. It is estimated that there were about 300,000 rifles in the villages in the hands of the [Shandong] peasants when the war started so it was not too hard to organize resistance.²

However, the build-up of a resistance movement proved more hazardous than elsewhere, due to the exceptionally large Japanese and GMD military presence and to self-inflicted weaknesses that throughout lent the organizational basis fragility and fragmentation. Thus, the Japanese military offensives in the mid-years of the war reduced the base area by one-third and its population from 12 to 7.3 million. Subsequent recovery was slow.

Regarding social categories, our focus is on the poorer peasants, primarily, and the rural upper strata they related to. This is not to belittle the role of students and intellectuals in general, who often occupied leadership positions at the movement’s different echelons and thus exerted an influence well beyond their numbers, and of other non-peasant categories.
Certainly, persons belonging to various non-communist organizations also contributed to the resistance. The point is, however, that overall it was the poorer peasantry who eventually made up the overwhelming membership share of the CCP and its associated organs and it was to these strata and their problems that it had to address itself to achieve any measure of success in building up a real mass movement.

The term ‘poorer peasantry’ here roughly corresponds to the party documents’ categorization of poor and middle peasants and, of lesser significance, still lower strata. This raises the extremely thorny question of class determination. The CCP’s programmatic approach set out in October 1933, and employed thereafter without major revisions, was to identify the main rural classes as landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and farmhands/workers.² The first was ‘a person who owns land, does not engage in labour himself, or does so only to a very small extent, and lives by exploiting the peasants. The collection of land rent is his main form of exploitation; in addition, he may lend money, hire labour or engage in industry and commerce’. The rich peasant, while generally being in possession of land, had ‘rather more and better instruments of production and more liquid capital than the average and engages in labour himself, but always relies on exploitation [by hiring labour, mainly, or ‘he may let part of his land and practise exploitation through land rent, or may lend money or engage in industry and commerce’] for part or even major part of his income’. Often exploited, the middle peasant, typically, did not sell his labour power or engage in exploitation. Many owned the land they worked on, some a part of it and others rented the whole. The middle peasant possessed ‘a fair number of farm implements’ and got ‘his income wholly or mainly from his own labour’. The poor peasant was marked off from the middle peasant primarily because he had to sell his labour power. With ‘a few odd farm implements’ he had to rent at least a part of the land necessary for his livelihood and was ‘subjected to exploitation, having to pay the land rent and interest on loans and to hire [himself] out to some extent’. Last, the worker/farmhand ‘as a rule owns no land or farm implements’ and ‘make[s] [his] living wholly or mainly by selling [his] labour power’.

Two crucial sets of problems pertain to the document. One is definitional: the broad meaning given the upper strata targeted for subordination, the landlords and rich peasants. Not only was their exploitation spelled out in very diverse terms. More importantly, a landlord, the document declared, might in fact not be primarily, or even at all, involved in the economic
process: ‘Warlords, officials, local tyrants and even gentry are political representatives and exceptionally ruthless members of the landlord class’ (my emphasis). Second, actual application was enormously complicated by the sheer variability of local socio-economic structures, above all, and by war tensions and cadre unfamiliarity with class demarcations. The overall result was a considerable ambiguity – which meant a large political element came to influence class labelling – with arbitrary practices that could extend to the lower strata.

Yet problems related to criteria and consistency of class identification, serious as they certainly were, did not accumulate to the point of diverting the essential thrust of the CCP-promoted reforms: following the document’s spirit, to erode the position of exploiters, plus some non-exploited/exploiters, and oppressors. Hence the party’s call for the destruction of landlord rule in effect implied dismantling the entire edifice of the dominant classes/strata. As a general designation for them, ‘local powerholders’ and ‘elite’ will be used. In conclusion, rather than a technical tool for analysing economic structures, the document served as a rough statement for equalizing class conditions.

The agency charged with directing these processes was of course the party. While its formal organization will not be elaborated upon – the limitations of functional rules will be heavily stressed – the overall structural set-up needs mentioning.

Seen from above, the party organization below the central committee in Yan’an comprised seven levels: the regional bureau, the sub-bureau, the provincial and special district party committee, the area or local party committee, the county party committee, the district party committee, the party branch and party group. There were eventually six regional bureaus covering North, Central and Southeast China. Responsible for North China behind Japanese lines was the North China bureau. Among those who held top positions in it were Liu Shaoqi, Peng Zhen, Yang Shangkun and Bo Yibo. The sub-bureaus in North China came into existence later: JinChaJi in 1939 (headed by Nie Rongzhen), Shandong in 1940 (Zhu Rui, Luo Ronghuan), JinSui in 1941 (Guan Xiangying, Lin Feng) and JinJiLuYu in 1943 (Deng Xiaoping, etc.).

It will be documented at length that the party organization at the grassroots level, despite stern stipulations to the contrary, was not a tightly sealed-off unit from either the villagers at large or the other organs. This generally imparted a dissimilar, decidedly more volatile dynamic to the
lowest as compared to higher echelons. The line in the former case was further blurred by the fact that while leadership positions at all levels in the non-party organizations were as a rule occupied by party members, the vast majority of cadres at their lowest echelons were non-party members who nevertheless also played a key mobilizational role. Here the distinction between the two kinds of cadres was in practice not great; in fact, party sources usually do not specify the cadre category.

Finally, a word on the source material. Many original CCP documents are referred to in the footnotes simply as NU (Nankai University archives), in addition to the title. These documents were obtained during a stay at the university (in Tianjin) in 1994. The great value of this material, much of it lengthy investigations, is shown by their frequent citations. Very extensive use has also been made of the large collections of wartime material put out especially since the 1980s, the main ones including Wei Hongyun, (ed.) (1984), finance and economy, four volumes; Henan sheng caizhengting, (ed.) (1985), finance and economy, four volumes; JinChaji kangRi genjudi shiliao congshu weiyuanhu, (ed.) (1988–89), economy and politics, two volumes; Zhonggong JiLuYu bianqu dangshi gongzuo bangongshi, (ed.) (1988), politics, three volumes; Zhonggong Shandong sheng wei dangshi ziliao zhengji yanjiu weiyuanhui (ed.) (1989), politics and economy, one volume; Shanxi sheng danganguan, (ed.) (1989, 1994), party, four volumes; Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbian weihui, (ed.) (1987, 1989, 1990, 1995), finance and economy, party, government, armed forces, mass organizations, culture, communications, ten volumes.

The official party newspaper Jiefang Ribao [Liberation Daily] also deserves special mention. Published in Yan’an from 1941, it carried numerous informative reports from the areas examined in this study. This is a much underutilized source, possibly because of its open character. Yet this category of sources must not be lumped together and given the single label of ‘party propaganda’. What is in fact striking about some of these publications, and especially Jiefang Ribao, is their frankly stated message of the need for both all-class cooperation and unremitting class struggles of various forms to subordinate the elite. The notes in Chapters 2 and 3, above all, speak for themselves. This dualism was of course a reflection of the party’s consciously pursued policies, as manifested in the rural united front formula. At times, its cooperation and subordination components were expressed in sharply contradictory terms, the reason probably being the need to stress both policy elements in face of the resistance and incomprehension they occasionally
Preface

met with both inside the party ranks and among its supporters outside. Internal party sources also contained these dualistic tendencies, albeit with a relatively greater weight on and a more specific elaboration of the class struggle side.

With the exception of articles in Tōa [East Asia] and Mantetsu Chōsa Geppō [Mantetsu monthly investigation report] and the books by Kariya Hisataro and Kusano Fumio, Japanese material dating from the war was all classified. Some articles in Jōhō [Intelligence], Tsūshin [News dispatch], Tokushu Jōhō [Special intelligence] and Shisō Geppō [Monthly report on thought] were translated from Chinese sources, whereas those in Sōkyō Shishin [A guide to exterminating Communism] were all written by Japanese researchers. An often cited work is the voluminous Shinsatsuki henku ni okeru Chūgoku kyōsantō no nōgyō seisaku [The agrarian policy of the Chinese Communist Party in the JinChaJi border region] (1941) in which many relevant local CCP documents are translated and analysed. The two volumes Hokushi no chiansen [The North China pacification war], put out by the Japanese Defence Ministry in 1968 and 1971, include army investigation material.

As for books and articles written by Western observers visiting CCP areas, it must be remembered that travels in these regions were not the kind of tightly organized tours that became the practice for many years in the People’s Republic (PRC). Despite the activities, ranging from intelligence gathering to killings, of numerous Japanese and GMD agents, Western observers were able to move around virtually unhindered and remarkably free from surveillance and security precautions. The post-war investigation by Isabel and David Crook, Revolution in a Chinese Village: Ten Mile Inn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959) needs explanation. The material for the book, which covers the years 1937–47, was collected by the authors and their Chinese colleagues in the village from December 1947 to February 1948. While the book in broad outline is rather close to official party historiography, it does contain much useful data on individual issues.

NOTES

1. The abbreviation derives from the single classical characters denoting each province. Hence Jin stands for Shanxi, and so forth.


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Lastly, more than to anyone else I owe thanks to my family for sharing with me all the joys and travails that accompanied the completion of this project. To them I dedicate this book: my wife Kashiko, whose constant support over the years made the entire task feasible, and our children Toyoko and Tojun who for long eagerly awaited publication.

Needless to say, the text’s remaining deficiencies and errors are entirely my own responsibility.
Author’s Notes

Transliteration
The pinyin system has been used in transliterating Chinese characters into roman letters. Quotations from writings employing other systems have also been adapted to it, then placing geographical and personal names within square brackets. However, no changes have been made in titles that refer to the Shansi, Hopei and Shantung provinces instead of our Shanxi, Hebei and Shandong. It should also be noted that Beijing’s 1928–49 designation Beiping has been retained for historical accuracy.

Abbreviations
The following abbreviations are used in the notes. For full reference, please see the Abridged Bibliography (p. 433).

BZ  Balujun jun zheng zazhi
CS  Henan sheng caizhengting, ed.
DJ  Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbian weihui, ed., Dang de jianshe
DW  Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbian weihui, ed., Difang wuzhuang douzheng
GB  Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbian weihui, ed., Gongan baowei gongzuo
HX  JinChaji kangRi genjudi shiliao congshu weiyuanhui, ed., 1991
JF  Jiefang
JJ  Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbian weihui, ed., Caizheng jingji jianshe
JK  JinChaji kangRi genjudi shiliao congshu weiyuanhui, ed., 1988–89
JL  Zhonggong JiLuYu bianqu dangshi gongzuozu bangongshi, ed., 1990
JR  Jiefang Ribao (four-page newspaper; no page references made in notes)
KC  Wei Hongyun et al., eds, 1984
NH  Shi Jingtang et al., eds
Village China at War

NM Zhonggong Nei Menggu zizhiqu weiyuanhui dangshi ziliao zhengji yanjiuhui et al., eds
NU Nankai University archives
QY Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbIAN weihui, ed., Qunzhong yundong
QZ Qunzhong
SH Zhonggong Shandong shengwei dangshi ziliao zhengji yanjiu weiyuanhui, ed.
TD Shanxi sheng danganguan, ed.
TW Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbIAN weihui, ed., Tudi wenti
WS Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbIAN weihui, ed., Wenhua shiye
ZG Balujun jun zheng zazhi she, ed.
ZH Taihang geming genjudi shi zongbIAN weihui, ed., Zhengquan jianshe
ZJ Zhonggong JiLuYu bianqu dangshi gongzuozu bangongshi, ed., 1988
ZZ Yan’an shishi wenti yanjiuhui, ed., Kangzhan zhong de Zhongguo zhengzhi

Acronyms

The acronyms are abbreviated designations of communist administrative regions in North China (see map on opposite page).

JiLuYu the (southern) Hebei–(western) Shandong–(northern) Henan Region
JinChaJi the Shanxi–Chahar–Hebei Border Region
JinJiLuYu the Shanxi–Hebei–Shandong–Henan Border Region
JinJiYu the (southeast) Shanxi–(southwest) Hebei–(northern) Henen Region
JinSui the Shanxi–Suiyuan Border Region
JiReLiao the (eastern) Hebei–Jehol–Liaoning Region
ShaanGanNing the Shaanxi–Gansu–Ningxia Border Region

Measures and weights

1 dan: 150 kg
1 dou: 15 kg
1 jin: 0.5 kg
1 li: 0.5 km
1 mu: 0.06 hectare
1 sheng: 1.5 kg
Map 0.1. Communist border regions (base areas) in North China
Introduction

It is uncontested that the Sino–Japanese war of 1937–45 constituted a watershed in the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) tortuous road to power. These years saw an explosive increase of the party’s resources, culminating in the defeat of the ruling Nationalist Party (Guomindang, abbreviated GMD) in 1949. One Western historian has even asserted that ‘[n]ever before in history had a revolutionary movement grown so rapidly’.1 Not surprisingly, the enormous scale and concomitant complexity of the wartime CCP movement’s expansion have given rise to widely divergent interpretations.

The present study focuses on regions in North China that forcefully throw light on the inter-relationship of war, social change and organizational build-up. Here the CCP secured a stronger foothold and more recruits for its various bodies than elsewhere. Moreover, North China’s politically strategic position between Manchuria in the northeast and Central/South China, and this region’s valuable raw materials, made it the prime target of the Japanese army’s ‘pacification’ operations. War-affected North China, in other words, most severely tested the CCP’s innovative policy capacities and provides a rich reference material as to how the wartime experience shaped the movement’s characteristics. Below I shall first outline my own findings in four key points and then consider some other works in the field.

SALIENT FEATURES

Results and consequences

The more rapidly a movement expands, the greater appears its increased strength. Paradoxically a partial claim to the contrary can be made for the wartime CCP movement. In brief, its spectacular quantitative advance spelled definite qualitative drawbacks that placed the party in a highly vulnerable position by requiring it to respond to a range of problems for which it was ill-prepared. This widening gap between quantity and quality
meant that the former, taken at its face value, vastly exaggerated the actual power of the movement.

The broad pattern of CCP policy enforcement was for major, qualitative progress in transforming village society to be restricted to widely scattered enclaves or spots beyond which lay vast regions where instability predominated. This weakness related both to the CCP’s external and internal grassroots adversaries: militarily to Japan and politico-economically to the local powerholders.

Japanese intelligence reports on CCP activities typically focused on the enclaves. Compared to the surrounding big sea, these islands readily caught the eye of the Japanese army, in particular as the real threat to the occupation emanated from them. As a valuable testimony to the existence of a hard organizational CCP core, these reports will be quoted at some length. The enclaves highlight what party documents frequently described as ‘uneven development’, a conspicuous variability that touched upon virtually all aspects of the movement.

These trends had far-reaching implications for the party organization’s general character. Beyond the enclaves, it developed into a loose mass party ill-suited to exercise the firm kind of internal discipline and external leadership that the official Leninist vanguard model prescribed. The party overreached itself: the overall resistance movement was too large-scale, too diverse and too scattered over vast areas, and party cadres were too few and too inadequately trained to enable the party centre’s straight hegemony. Nonetheless, it is still valid to speak of a CCP-led resistance movement, but only in a rather tenuous and often mediated sense. In the absence of an effectively competing domestic rival, however, this weakness acquired a disproportionate significance.

**Transitional redistribution**

The enclave-like facets easily generate underestimation of the CCP’s policy impact. In fact, it signified a historically important elementary step in restructuring class-based power resources. Hence, the characteristically rather partial achievements were *relative* failures; party sources’ usually crude categorization of either success or failure is singularly misleading. As will be stressed, the social changes did not have to be of major proportions to serve a useful purpose and have significant effects. Under the circumstances even a seemingly smaller improvement was likely to make a big difference to an impoverished peasant. This was above all epitomized in the very extensive,
albeit fluctuating, degree of popular involvement in the movement’s diverse fields of activities. The outcome was an emergent potential for transforming village society; the barriers to a future revolution were lowered.

These tendencies, given their unresolved character, injected a pronounced fluidity to village structures and CCP control. As a consequence, conflicts were rife and multifarious. Perhaps the clearest example of the war years’ transitional essence was social mobility, whose class structural range was typically short, significantly medium and infrequently long.

This mobility issued primarily from organizational and economic changes. Let us briefly note their features in the light of the above discussion. The degrees and ways of organizational reliance on popular involvement were historically unprecedented by Chinese standards. Massive numbers of peasants participated in the governmental and mass organizations’ direct political management and in the armed forces’ activities to resist Japan and support the party’s social endeavours. That these processes broadly worked towards empowering the poorer peasantry is eloquently testified to by the local elite’s fears and subversion.

On the other hand, two sets of problems beset the organizations. First, their highly provisional character was manifested in the frequent rectifications of party organs and in the many ordinance revisions and diverse structural forms of the other bodies. Besides, functional differences between organs in various fields were blurred. Conflicts affected the organizations’ internal and external relationships, because of elite activities and a host of non-class issues. In short, the organizations operated in a largely ad hoc manner.

Second, given the organizational infancy, in addition to the changeable war conditions and the extremely poor communications links among the scattered resistance bases separated by enormous distances, there could be no systematic unification and effective co-ordination of overall structures. By force of circumstances, therefore, basic-level organs often had considerable autonomy from higher ones. The resultant localized dynamism had mixed consequences for the party: vitally needed flexibility in policy execution coupled with divisive influences of several kinds. Wartime organization gropingly commenced a break with the past while still containing pre-war elements. It strikingly mirrored a society in transition, including its manifold incompatibilities.

Redistribution was an expansive and diverse process in two transitional respects, fields and factors. The spread of a relative social levelling was the work of taxation, especially, and rent reduction. This stemmed from the
broad scope these encompassed: taxes referred to numerous kinds of levies collected, while rent reduction involved the entire tenancy relationship. The result was to force the upper strata to give up a sizeable amount of their wealth. Specific policy measures differed greatly. The number and rates of taxes fluctuated widely, as did rent levels. This variability was partly inscribed in regulations and partly issued from exigencies of the situation, both reflecting dissimilar area conditions; the former concerned socio-economic structures, the latter political dynamics.

**Constraints and difficulties**

Several objective and subjective factors put powerful brakes on the CCP’s policy strivings. The prime example of the former is obviously the Japanese invasion and its consequences. Directly, it devastated large areas, especially where resistance forces were active: villages were razed and looted; people were massacred or press-ganged into labour services; livestock were killed off or taken away. The result was a sharp drop in agricultural output as productivity fell and land under cultivation shrank. This damage to agriculture, and to the economy in general, acquired an even more catastrophic dimension in regions swept by natural disasters.

Moreover, the war imposed a crushing indirect burden on the movement: the military consumed a lion’s share of expenditure, which heavily taxed the people; army recruitment caused a serious labour shortage in many localities; and most village organizations had to assume a variety of resistance duties. All this took away precious needed resources, time and energy from other policy programmes and severely tested the CCP’s relationship to the mass of peasants.

The objective difficulties reinforced subjective complexities. If the peasants’ posture to the local elite prior to 1937 could range widely depending on circumstances, the war created a more volatile relationship by drastically narrowing the distance between the peasants’ deference to ruling strata and various degrees of radicalism. Besides, popular responses to CCP programmes acquired a heightened unpredictability; measures which could be expected to receive the peasants’ support might meet with their evasion and resistance, even making them join with the elite against the CCP.

Mobilization of popular energies into party-defined channels rested most immediately on basic-level cadres. They were caught in a very real dilemma which, in Franz Schurmann’s apt characterization, was ideally ‘to act as a combat leader, in intimate relationship with his followers, yet
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always responsive to higher policy’. As already observed, grassroots organs related to higher levels in ways that were often strongly autonomous, at times conflicting. Intricacies of harnessing cadre leadership that emanated from the intents of the party centre were compounded by an acute cadre deficiency, quantitatively and qualitatively. In conclusion, the work to be accomplished collided with the inadequacy of available resources.

Endeavours and objectives

The very sharpness of this contradiction flowed from the CCP’s extremely ambitious policy framework, namely to substantially improve the poorer peasants’ overall living conditions and forge a rural united front including all village strata. As the party reasoned, both were absolutely indispensable to a sustained mass resistance movement, one that accumulated strength on a long-term basis. Numerous quotations in Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate that these CCP concerns were fundamental and constant. How the CCP strove to combine these twin preoccupations is indeed the main theme of this study.

Actual experience demonstrated to the CCP that to develop stable and lasting power in the villages it was imperative to vigorously address the various aspects of the peasants’ hard daily life. The logical consequence – to redistribute power resources – was integral to the rural united front formula: these processes were viewed as essential to absorb the local elite into this framework, implying their subordination to the ‘supremacy’ (youshi) of the poorer peasant stata. But, the party stressed, to make this front a realistic prospect, the elite also had to be accorded certain minimum guarantees and rights, crucially reinforced by tangible incentives to actively develop their own resources for building the CCP’s base areas and their restructured power relationships. Thus, the variety of measures both pressuring/subordinating and enticing/utilizing the elite were to complement, indeed support, each other.

In reality, the front’s conflicting elements entailed a pervasive instability, with constant adjustments that raised vexed questions. How were the rich to be induced to assume a cooperative posture in an unfavourably reordered societal context? And, where mass mobilization made headway, how were the poor to be persuaded to take a long-term view forgoing greater gains immediately at hand? In the harsh and uncertain war conditions, swings in emphasis between the redistribution and utilization aspects stood out.
Structure of the book

The above arguments are integrated in the four parts of the present book. The first one presents an overall background, starting with war developments (Chapter 1) and then outlining party assertions and actual complexities concerning the principal field of inquiry, i.e. the restructuring (Chapter 2) and the rural united front (Chapter 3). The remaining parts examine these issues from organizational, economic and agricultural production perspectives. Specifically, Part 2 focuses on the party (Chapter 4), military (Chapter 5) and governmental (Chapter 6) organs at the local level; Part 3 on the tax (Chapter 7) and rent reduction (Chapter 8) policies’ impact on landholding and social mobility (Chapter 9); and Part 4 on how agricultural production related to war damage (Chapter 10), cooperative labour schemes (Chapter 11) and military demands (Chapter 12).

RESEARCH TRENDS

How do my conclusions and emphases differ from the other main works in the field? A useful starting point is to compare the level of analytical scale. Put simply, in pursuing the select themes broadly converging on the rural united front complex, I take an intermediate position between some initial attempts (1960s–70s) to expound a grand theory and the later tendency to concentrate on in-depth local studies to highlight area dissimilarities.

Methodologically speaking, however, these two analyses must not be put on equal footing: whereas the former contained an untenable mono-causal bias, the latter has cogently called attention to the diversity of conditions and outcomes and thereby sounded a valuable warning against over-generalization. The turn to local studies has therefore been indispensable to deepening our knowledge of the subject. At the same time, I believe that there is a parallel need to complement area-specific research by testing the possibility of detecting thematic tendencies of wider applicability. These might otherwise run the risk of being submerged in a rich, and however insightful, detail.

Certainly, area variability of several kinds is also stressed in this study. Yet I see it as frequently closing in on the themes of commonality already identified – there was, I argue, a conspicuous, and it would seem underestimated, dissimilarity within similarity. Obviously, these patterns were not omnipresent, but their prominence is amply borne out by the supportive evidence presented. These were, in my opinion, the essential features
of the wartime CCP movement; the kind of aims, tensions and conflicts it grappled with in a very specific historical conjuncture. In sum, a significant degree of generalization is possible without doing violence to diversity.

My larger regional coverage and primary concern with the problems that CCP policies encountered also makes me pay less attention to the issue of periodization than many local studies do. The former aspect of course renders a neat periodization extremely hazardous in view of the many area differences. The latter factor raises even greater complications: what degree of policy progress, for example, qualifies as inaugurating a new stage or phase? A difficulty with sharp demarcations is their consequent claim for a matter to have basically been resolved; our study rather underscores the persistence of similar problems even after a measure of implementational impact, although their severity certainly varied. Peasant and local cadre radicalism, ‘left excesses’ in party terminology, is a case in point. While the CCP tried hard to direct them into safer, more institutionalized rural united front channels, these phenomena were notable throughout the war. There were no doubt important policy shifts, and these will be traced in broad outline for the main individual policies. However, there will be no attempt to provide details on the issue or work out overall stages.

A closer look at interpretative issues raises more substantive differences. The examination of individual works below, however, is not intended as an overall evaluation of them; while noting their principal arguments, the focus is on what distinguishes them from my standpoint. Nor do I purport to cover the historiography exhaustively.³

The obvious starting point is Chalmers Johnson’s nationalism thesis (1962), which was applied to North and Central China.⁴ Not only was this the earliest and for many years sole attempt to analyse the wartime communist growth; most of the subsequent research has been conducted in the shadow of his argument. And despite much criticism of it, his book has retained considerable influence. Yet the reason for dwelling upon it is above all a negative one: its drawbacks bring to the fore some basic issues that have not received the emphasis they deserve.

In Johnson’s view, the flight of the rural elite and the chaotic situation that followed the Japanese invasion mobilized the peasants. In these conditions, the CCP successfully met the peasants’ demands for organizational leadership to restore the social order and resist the Japanese. The CCP’s guerrilla warfare made ‘the Japanese step up the reprisals ... and this in turn broadened the
rural mobilization’ (p. 49). In the process, the CCP obtained mass support. This rested on a ‘nationalistic upsurge’ resulting from ‘the hostile activity of easily identifiable foreign soldiers’ (p. 84). In thus ‘concentrating solely on national salvation’ (p. 4), the CCP set aside its revolutionary policies in favour of very ‘moderate’ ones ‘designed to create maximum unity’ (pp. 16–17).

Johnson vastly exaggerates the CCP’s mass strength. Supposedly, a uniformly solid bond was forged between the party and the peasants who harboured few inhibitions against joining its cause. This overestimation flows from his complete neglect to consider socio-economic issues and related policies – indeed, he categorically denies their relevance – which blinds him to the movement’s limitations and conflicts. His suggestion that the CCP’s penetration of North China merely involved filling a vacuum since the Japanese army ‘drove out the [GMD] and then, in effect, left the territory empty for the Communists to enter’ (p. 70) also ignores the multitude of difficulties the CCP confronted. For example, the ‘old order’ had by no means been ‘swept away’ (pp. 116–117) by the invasion.

Disregard of village actualities also connects with his misconception of the role played by Japanese army brutality. As we have seen, Johnson contends that this mobilized the peasants ‘who placed themselves at the disposal of the Communist Party to be used for nationalistic purposes’ (p. 11). In the debates on Johnson’s thesis, the issue of the effects that brutality produced has figured prominently. Yet the arguments have characteristically failed to distinguish between primary (long-term) and secondary (short-term) factors and have therefore, on this score, not conclusively disproved Johnson. It will be demonstrated in Chapter 2 that brutality did at times have an initial stimulus on the peasants’ resistance activity but could not serve as the basis for it.

The other, though less influential, study that sought to explain CCP growth in terms of a single factor is Tetsuya Kataoka’s focus on how the party’s organizational means secured control over passive and parochial peasants in Central China (1974). Specifically, as they resorted to traditional defence organizations to cope with the war conditions, the CCP moved in to impose its military structures transcending particularism. In this endeavour, the CCP employed various commandist tactics which in the end won out against local powerholders. Thus, he concludes, organizational capacity was decisive.

If Johnson relied almost exclusively on (Japanese) military sources, Kataoka leaned heavily toward organizational ones. He thereby tends to lose
sight of wider transformative processes and, as a consequence, inadequately
deals with a number of crucial questions. How and to what extent were
power structures remoulded? What was the shifting range of mobilizational
complexities that the party had to wrestle with? What was the nature of the
mass following achieved? Surely it was highly differentiated.

In what might schematically be called the first research stage on the
wartime CCP movement, the work of Mark Selden needs mentioning (1971).6
His stress on socio-economic issues in the CCP’s base area building was at
the time often taken as a counter-point to Johnson’s thesis. However, since
Selden examines a region that lay beyond the war zones – the ShaanGanNing
border region – his findings were not directly relevant to Johnson’s
problematics and the overall issue of CCP growth. Our essential concern
with the war’s formative impact on the CCP movement likewise justifies
excluding ShaanGanNing from consideration. Selden’s later protestations to
the contrary, scholars now regard it as a distinctly atypical region.7 This is of
course not to say that its study cannot yield significant insights into various
aspects of the CCP movement.8

The gradual shift to a second research stage of detailed local studies
unencumbered with overarching theoretical designs generated an im-
measurably richer and more complex picture of the CCP movement.
Increasingly it came to be seen as less monolithic, with peasant ties to the
party containing a large contingent element. In short, if debates in the
first stage had centred on why the CCP was successful, the huge scale of
which was taken for granted (whatever the specific differences of opinion),
subsequent research tended to question how successful the CCP had been.

The growing body of scholarship since then has seen two major
contributions in particular, by Yung-fa Chen on the Central China provinces
of Jiangsu, Anhui and Hubei,9 and by Odoric Wou on the Henan province in
North China.10 Both authors concentrate on grassroots developments

The title of Chen’s work, as well as several statements in it, point to
radical changes. However, he contends these only applied to the political
and military fields since war and the united front ‘limited the possible
redistribution of wealth through economic struggles...’(p. 214). Hence, ‘the
Party was unable at this stage to change the balance of economic power
between the landlord class and peasants as a whole’ (p. 503).

Thus disposing of economic matters is open to objections. First, he
overstates restrictions on redistributive measures. Their possibilities and
actualities exhibited numerous local variations depending on how a range
of factors interacted. Relatively, it is unlikely that Chen’s heavily stressed political class conflict could be so neatly confined as to have only a minor bearing on economic relationships, which should have concerned the peasants deeply. Our data certainly underscores mass mobilization’s broad impact and volatility. Second, and more fundamentally, the war related in contradictory ways to economic redistribution, demanding both its vigorous enforcement and careful handling; the former referring to improving the peasants’ living conditions to enable their sustained resistance activity, the latter to the united front’s absorbing and utilizing the local elite.

Chen’s focus on political changes is arguably the reason for his very detailed treatment of organizational developments. He concludes that the grassroots organizational power of the traditional elite ‘was so curtailed that they could not restore status quo’ (p. 12). The wealth of material presented leaves no doubt about the loosening up of their control over the village community and to the emergence of new social forces challenging them: the impact of struggles against local power holders and of recruitment into mass-based village bodies is exemplified at great length. But so are obstacles and complications. These sharply conflicting trends also inform our analysis. Unfortunately, however, there is a dearth of quantifiable data on the rough extent to which elite rule was eroded. In this light, and given the rather scanty examination of broad tendencies, it seems that his above formulation is much too definite to be applicable to more than some rather exceptional areas. From our perspective, structural fluidity was by far the greater characteristic – itself a major change.

Wou’s account diverges most notably from ours on the issue of how the CCP related to restructured power resources. As demonstrated in a case study devoted to it, Wou essentially denies the actuality of this restructuring, as well as its relevance. In the area, ‘a land of rural misery’ (p. 259), the party pursued ‘the two fundamental tasks’ of alleviating poverty and reconstructing the economy by ‘channeling the energy of as many people as possible into revitalizing the regional economy, reclaiming land, building irrigation facilities, and mobilizing the peasants to produce’ (p. 254). This meant the party aroused the peasants by tax schemes alleviating their economic burden and ‘acted as a mediator’ in ‘reintegrating and rebuilding the communities socially’ (ibid.). Wou’s emphasis is squarely on the party’s harmonizer function: ‘[T]he wartime social programs were ... mostly moderate and relatively nonconfrontational reforms’ (p. 282).
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Wou's contention suffers from a serious ambiguity. If taxation's content and problems of implementation are described in detail, the vital issue of how the class structure was affected is never really explained. Similarly, to what extent did the elite perceive their cooperation with the CCP as enforced by such circumstances as party policies, mass activism, banditry, war destruction, etc.? Overall, it seems that they cooperated only, as he puts it, 'passively and half heartedly'. In fact, 'most of the reclaimed land fell into the hands of the powerful gentry' (p. 275).

Some idea of class-structural change in the making is only conveyed in the accounts of the cooperatives' role in reviving the silk industry and of the rent reduction campaign. Regarding the latter, however, Wou says that it had 'limited success' (p. 314) due to the low tenancy in the investigated area. Yet his data shows that even in these areas the campaign could have socially levelling consequences by the imposition of fines and other struggles that accompanied it. Here Wou fails to discern the broad scope of the campaign. Furthermore, he does refer to localities where rent reduction caused significant social mobility (p. 313).

Two local studies on the Hebei province, North China, that also touch upon the resistance period as part of a long historical narrative bear some affinities to Wou's findings. Edward Friedman et al. depict the CCP's wartime policies as effectively serving both egalitarian purposes and cross-class village unity.11 ‘This stunning silent revolution’ was brought about by ‘gradual’ and ‘peaceful’ reforms that reduced elite holdings (p. 85) and ‘revived the economy, healed societal divisions’ (p. 44). The authors draw far-reaching conclusions: ‘[T]hroughout Raoyang [county] human bonds were reknit and unity was held. The countryside was pregnant with a new nation and a vigorous nationalism’ (p. 51). Ralph Thaxton has similarly noted that '[s]emicolonized, prosperous, close-knit Qian Foji, with its ties to the network of reopened local markets, was a place where the village people could move together with the political rhythms of CCP-led patriotic resistance’ (p. 273; italics in the original).12 Friedman et al. and Thaxton usefully indicate the possibility of highly variable patterns in as structurally diverse a region as North China; special cases and circumstances were manifold and hence important. But these might not have wide applicability. Our geographically extensive study rather demonstrates that the relationship of the social reforms to broad class cooperation, in the specific war conditions, was fraught with persistent trials, conflicts and tensions that precluded a clear-cut generalization of the ‘new nation’ kind.
A more recent book by David Goodman, dealing with three counties in the Shanxi province, North China, while occasionally making somewhat broader claims, unequivocally states that the ‘experience... was revolutionary in both intent and impact’ (p. 255). Other summary expressions speak a similar language: ‘fundamental revolution’, ‘new political institutions’, ‘overthrow of government’, ‘immense social upheaval’, etc. (pp. 255–256). He concludes that the ‘CCP ended the war as a complex administrative hierarchy characterized by its organizational unity and discipline’ (p. 261).

However, Goodman does not present a convincing analysis. Two overall weaknesses haunt his book. First, he has no clearly discernible framework to structure the content, which thereby tends to lack criteria of significance and thematic lucidity. The resultant indeterminacy extends to the degree of specificity accorded the three counties – which are intended to shed light on the CCP movement’s diversities – and to his relationship to the relevant scholarship, referred to in extreme brevity.

Second, failing to identify the strategic objective of the movement, he inadequately accounts for the constraints and dilemmas impinging on the CCP. Thus his treatment of the redistribution and united front issues is abstracted from their specific historical context. That is, how much redistribution was necessary and possible, and how did the united front’s intended mechanisms and actualities relate to it? There is in fact little sense of the huge gap separating the wartime tasks that the CCP had to confront and opted for and the means available to it. As a consequence, Goodman is unable to perceive the movement’s pervasive volatility. With the partial exception of the chapter ‘Licheng: Resistance and Rebellion’, only bits and pieces are offered, as in stating that social change was ‘uneven ... often chaotic, uncoordinated and violent’, while problems arose in the CCP’s internal and external relationships and ‘social tensions emerged within the peasantry’ (p. 153). Surely these are issues that deserve substantive analysis.

Some additional comments on three broad themes raised in the initial summary of my arguments will conclude the discussion of my distinctive approach.

A look at the trajectory of the historiography suggests, first, a propensity to either overestimate or underestimate the strength of the burgeoning CCP movement. The former viewpoint pays inadequate attention to the quantitative-qualitative contrast, i.e. to the combined constraint on the CCP’s

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policy impact by a multitude of factors. This tendency was very pronounced among the early writers, whatever explanatory factor they stressed. If subsequent works have developed a more critical analysis, Goodman’s marks a partial return to the original position in this respect.

Underestimation stems from slightening the class-structural consequences of the economic reforms. Johnson again takes an extreme standpoint: by entirely discounting socio-economic issues he forgets that the CCP’s essential objective was to effect a mass mobilization resting on a restructured social foundation. Wou’s, in contrast, socially infused moderation argument raises the question: moderation relative to what? In some measure, Chen also belongs to this category, while Friedman et al. play down the disruption of class relationships.

In our view, CCP strengths and weaknesses intermingled in complex ways defying a single formula, characteristics which in an overall perspective nonetheless initiated and accumulated far-reaching dysfunctional effects on structures of social subordination. Rather than an ahistorical revolution-or-moderation dichotomy of Johnson’s brand, the CCP’s policy practice contained a shifting mixture of processes encompassing their entire range, subjected to constraints of various kinds.

This volatility-informed perspective on the CCP movement derives, secondly, from our concern with the way the war environment shaped general configurations. In fact, party policies proceeded from, indeed were firmly fixed on, the kinds of adaptation that the resistance effort was thought to require, that is, the framework for availing oneself of the opportunities the war situation offered while avoiding its dangers. The war generated formidable pressures to this policy effect.

The import of the war was therefore virtually all-inclusive in scope. In this connection, it is necessary to bring up Wou’s analysis of the CCP providing the villagers with protection against Japanese attacks and harassment by GMD and other domestic forces – an issue where he comes close to repeating Johnson’s mistake of taking secondary factors for primary ones. Due to ‘constant fighting’ in the area, he writes in one case study, it was ‘war mobilization effort’ rather than economic policies ‘that pulled the movement together’ (p. 214).

His point is summarized in the section on guerrilla warfare: ‘It was the military and organizational assistance the party gave local citizens in helping them handle these problems [of insecurity caused by the above listed forces] that finally drew rural people to the Communist side’ (p. 233).
This assistance rested upon an elaborate collective defence system, which meant ‘the party had to work closely with existing community elites’ (p. 238). Such an arrangement, then, ‘enabled the party to build its political authority and to anchor it deeply in the countryside’ (p. 240). Similar expressions assigning an almost all-decisive weight to the security issue are repeated elsewhere.

Protecting lives and property – and the grain harvest, which he also mentions – was obviously important in obtaining popular support. But the more fundamental issue was rather the concrete programmes geared to the peasants’ lot: these were the ones that raised the area’s manpower and economic capacity to sustain the resistance in the long run – a particularly pressing task in the areas of frequent fighting since these were often, as in his case study, the scene of social breakdown and a devastated economy. In short, protecting the villagers’ security was an essential complement to socio-economic measures, not a substitute for them.

This does not mean that Wou ignores the CCP’s attempts to develop the economy. On the contrary, he presents a wealth of useful data on activities in various fields of production. However, these are not related to the overall demands on the resistance effort, other than defence arrangements against Japanese crop-seizing raids. Our examination will stress the multiple conflicts arising from the war’s relationship to production and economic redistribution.

Thirdly, if the war was ubiquitously felt, its decisive concrete policy impact on the CCP was of course the rural united front approach – an extremely complicated class politics swayed by frequently changing harder and softer policy measures towards the elite, a variety of more or less autonomous local dynamics and a perennial instability generated by opposing countercurrents to the front. From a different angle, not only did it require a most delicately controlled struggle for unity with and subordination of the village elite; at the same time, total mobilization for resistance necessitated a highly spontaneous mass activity. I believe that the rural united front processes have not received their due attention. The claim is certainly not that local politics has been neglected: Chen and Wou, in particular, devote considerable space to it. Let us clarify our differences.

Chen very interestingly describes how the CCP tried to ‘woo the old rural elite, the local [GMD] officials, and the leaders of all parochial interests’ (p. 16). He introduces valuable material on the higher and lower elite’s response to mass mobilization and struggle meetings (pp. 426–
and on how the CCP managed to ‘diffuse elite opposition’ following leftist radicalism threatening the united front (pp. 435–445). Yet however stimulating these and other case studies are, they do not systematize the conditions and patterns of the united front workings; their elements are not elaborated upon and integrated into an overall examination.

Wou’s account contains expressions suggesting affinity to our united front treatment. However, the substance of his analysis is very different: instead of seeing the party’s cooperation and compromise with the local elite as coexisting with continuous struggles to subordinate them, he one-sidedly stresses the former tendency – his theme of community integration. The party’s general posture is characterized as ‘a policy of patriotism, moderation, and consultation that ultimately won the support of the rural elite for the revolution’ (p. 270). As a corollary, he pays little attention to elite resistance to party policies and omits the vital question of how the elite’s readiness to cooperate with the CCP varied with changing circumstances.

On the other hand, Wou has an excellent discussion on the CCP’s coalition-building with local forces at the regional and grassroots levels, alliances which offered it a badly needed ‘chance to penetrate the countryside, infiltrate community defence networks, initiate structural changes, and seize political power’ (p. 211). Yet despite stressing the alliances’ temporary and tactical character, Wou seems to mix up the primary and secondary factors even here, claiming these arrangements were ‘crucial for the survival of the movement’ (ibid.). While certainly of great importance for the CCP’s initial expansion, these were no more than a prologue in a long drama of coordinating the restructuring and reconstruction with the politics of the rural united front.

NOTES


3. For an excellent overview of the relevant literature up to the 1980s, see Kathleen Hartford and Stephen M. Goldstein, 'Introduction: Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution', in Hartford and Goldstein (eds), Single Sparks: China's Rural Revolutions (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharp, 1989), pp. 3–33.


PART I

INTRICATE PATTERNS
CHAPTER ONE

Variable Growth

CONFRONTATION DEFERRED

Party proclamations at the outset of the war to resist the Japanese army did not envisage only a single offensive against it. Ten months after its invasion of North China, in May 1938, Mao Zedong predicted the war would run through three stages:

The first covers the period of the enemy’s offensive and our strategic defensive. The second stage will be the period of the enemy's strategic consolidation and our preparation for the counter-offensive. The third stage will be the period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy's strategic retreat.

The second stage was thought of as a ‘transitional’ and ‘most trying period’, destined to ‘last a comparatively long time’.¹

Later wartime and official historical party writing has upheld this three-stage theory, with 1940 and 1942 as defining years. According to these sources, the Japanese army concentrated first on defeating the GMD forces, basically leaving the CCP free to engage in organizing. By 1940 this activity had resulted in the growth of the Eighth Route Army in North China from 30,000 to 400,000 and of the countrywide party membership from 40,000 to 800,000. This rapid build-up was dealt a hard blow in the second stage, when the Japanese army turned on the CCP. Its troop strength in North China declined to 300,000 and its base areas shrank drastically, their population falling from 40 to 25 million. In the last stage, lessons drawn from the setbacks enhanced the CCP’s abilities to implement appropriate policies, bringing about a renewed expansion. By the end of the war, the Eighth Route Army was 600,000 strong, the village-based militia force boasted 2.2 million (mainly active in North China); total party membership stood at 1.2 million and the base areas were populated by 95.5 million.²
This brief account easily invites misconceptions. Above all, it tends to conflate the movement’s quantity with the crucial issue of its quality and to pass over area diversity\(^3\) and the closely interwoven socio-economic developments over time. On the other hand, the outline usefully indicates the profound impact of the Japanese occupation policies on the broad evolution of the resistance movement, as the tide-ebb-tide configuration of more detailed figures on regular army strength demonstrates.\(^4\) As background material to the present study, the initial two sections of this chapter will focus on these military trends, while the final one introduces some spatial issues bearing on the movement’s complexity.

While the full-scale invasion of North China by the Japanese army began in the summer of 1937, the preceding six years saw its constant encroachment upon China. In late 1931 Japan attacked Manchuria and turned it into a puppet state the following year. Anti-Japanese boycotts in Shanghai in January 1932 were followed by Japanese troop landings and aerial bombardment. In the roughly month-long fierce battle, the GMD army unit resisted tenaciously, contrary to orders from the government in Nanjing. The subsequent ‘Peace Agreement’ established a demilitarized zone of 25 kilometres around Shanghai. The following year Japan occupied the strategic Shanhaiguan area and the whole of Jehol, thereby controlling the two land routes to the North China plains. The truce concluded at Tanku set up another demilitarized zone from the Great Wall to Beiping-Tianjin. Two agreements in 1935 accorded Japan possession of large parts of the Chahar and Hebei provinces. In the same year two puppet regimes were set up in them, one under General Song Zheyuan who retained a certain autonomy and was provisionally recognized by Nanjing.\(^5\)

Utilizing the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, a rather minor clash between the forces of Song Zheyuan and a company of the Japanese army in the outskirts of Beiping on 7 July 1937, the latter swiftly advanced along two railways linking the ancient capital with Suiyuan to the west and Hankou to the southeast. Another route was the Tianjin–Pukou railway, leading towards Nanjing in the southeast. Zhu De, Commander-in-Chief of the Eighth Route Army, was indeed accurate in thus speaking to Western journalists two weeks before the incident:

Troop units and leaders in the north are none too good. Planning for joint action by the northern leaders with [Nanjing] has hardly begun. The northern troops under such men as General [Song Zheyuan] are both subject to Japanese pressure and influenced by our movement. The lower officers
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are very anti-Japanese, but their higher command has no plan of what to do. Once the war comes these units will be destroyed one after another.\(^6\)

Witness accounts by these journalists painted a miserable picture of the early Chinese defence, mainly by warlord forces:

Pulverized by a day’s bombardment, with no further direction from the army command, the Chinese had at last abandoned Nanyuan. Cars and military trucks loaded with troops, retreating blindly from the charnelhouse behind them, had been caught by the enfilading fire of machinegun nests on either side of the road; in one spot there were eight hundred Chinese bodies. No veteran of the World War could remember such a slaughter. For even in the War the worst military tactics of either command could not compare with what [Song] had done to his army.\(^7\)

In one terrible retreat through [Shanxi] I had seen the armies of [Jiang] almost completely collapse, soldiers throw away their weapons and officers grab all available transportation, abandon their troops and rush to the rear.\(^8\)

The Japanese units rolled down into [Hebei] and [Shanxi] with relentless speed [the average advance during the first five months was 12 kilometres a day, and sometimes it even stretched to 30 kilometres]... The Japanese offensive developed its momentum almost entirely behind airplane and artillery bombardment, and a vanguard of tanks.\(^9\)

According to other estimates, the Japanese army covered 15 kilometres a day until the occupation of Baoding, and 20 kilometres in the attack on Shijiazhuang.\(^10\) By December 1937 all the main cities, including all provincial capitals, in North China had fallen to the Japanese.

The occupation of China also proceeded from Shanghai. The immediate Japanese pretext was the Oyama incident in August 1937 in which two Japanese were killed. With the defeat of the stubborn defence of Shanghai in November 1937, the Japanese had broken the GMD resistance in central China and the subsequent advance was quick and casualties light. Nanjing fell in December and Wuhan, further east, in October 1938. The GMD settled in Chongqing which, by its remoteness, was safe from the pursuing Japanese armies but not from bombing which caused much destruction. In October 1938, the Japanese occupied Guangzhou and the Hainan Island. Their principal objective was to cut off the GMD’s then only supply route to the outside world.
Village China at War

Paradoxically, the more victorious the Japanese army was, the deeper it sank into the quagmire of an inconclusive war. A 1938 party report confidently declared: ‘The more the enemy advances, the vaster becomes the rear area, the weaker his troop strength ... the more favourable to our strategy of “turn the enemy’s rear into his front”, and the more advantageous to our “develop a large-scale guerrilla movement”’. With its limited troop strength Japan was only able to occupy the big cities, important communication lines and parts of some plains, the CCP repeatedly stressed.

The thinness of the Japanese presence was particularly apparent in the early war years. Some illustrative examples are worth mentioning. The Japanese Vice Chief-of-Staff, Mutō Akira, thus described the situation in North China in the spring of 1938: ‘[I]n our occupied areas the army made defence arrangements only along railways and the main roads ... the law and order was bad, [incidents of] railways being blown up were reported daily’. In the second year of the war the central Hebei party authorities still regarded Raoyang county on the province’s strategically important central plain as safe enough to station leading regional resistance organizations close to the county town. In fact, popular mobilization in Raoyang did not have to take note of the Japanese until 1939. Wang Yu-chuan, historian and participant in the resistance movement in southern Shandong, mentions a GMD regiment with over a thousand men and several hundred horses carrying ‘a large quantity of ammunition and two million dollars of cash from Loyang, [Henan], through North [Shandong] to South [Shandong]’ in the autumn of 1938. Marching ‘more than a thousand li [500 kilometres], the regiment did not encounter a single Japanese soldier’. When two Western journalists, making their way from Beiping to Yan’an, came into contact with party cadres in a place close to Beiping, allegedly controlled by the Japanese, they found a county magistrate and an elected administration. Two days before their arrival, a large army unit had stayed over there.

As an example of the geographical hindrances to the occupation, consider Ralph Thaxton’s description of the remote Qian Foji, a village in southern Hebei through which the Japanese army marched a number of times but other than through puppet forces never laid siege to for a prolonged period:

To reach Qian Foji from their base in Nanle town, the Japanese had to travel fifteen li [7.5 kilometres] on a semi-paved road to Yuancunji, then thirteen li [6.5 kilometres] on a rugged, broken-brick road to the Wei River, then ferry across the river, and then pass another three li [1.5 kilometres] along a narrow dirty trail.
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Referring to China’s vastness, a Japanese army doctor serving in southern Shanxi from 1942 has described the grisly consequences for medical treatment of soldiers:

When a man suffered from appendicitis, you could not bring him to a hospital. His appendix had to be removed right there at the front line. But there weren’t enough surgeons available. Even ophthalmologists or pediatricians had to be able to do it, and they didn’t know how, so they practised.\(^17\)

Add the growing resistance activity and it is obvious that for the Japanese army to extend its sustained control significantly beyond the so-called points and lines required immense efforts and resources – far, it eventually turned out, exceeding those available.

The initial three years of the war may, with regard to Japan’s rural occupation policies in North China, be conveniently divided by the fall of Wuhan in October 1938. During the first phase, when the Japanese directed their main efforts at crushing the GMD, their concern was to protect the railway lines. Related operations, which were defensive and not part of an overall plan, involved army units of 3–4,000 and lasted 3–4 days.\(^18\) Keeping the railways safe was an urgent priority by the spring of 1938, since, according to journalist George Taylor, from then on ‘hardly a day passed without the destruction by guerrilla units of some section of the North China railway system by the removal of telephone lines, destruction of bridges, attacks on garrisons, derailing of trains’.\(^19\)

The ‘protection’ villages date from about this time. They were organized along the railways to ensure uninterrupted traffic. Primary responsibility rested with a group of generally three to five men per village, who were on guard day and night in shifts. For other kinds of related security work the villagers were separated into two categories, ages 17–35 and 36–45, with the former receiving military training. Ultimately, responsibility was collective and failure to keep a section of the railway free from sabotage could in the worst cases result in the burning of villages. The Japanese also sought to obtain cooperation by offering incentives in the form of agricultural assistance, medical services, educational and recreational schemes. Blockhouses were built, deep ditches dug and crops higher than one and a half metres were prohibited within 500 metres of the railways.\(^20\)

From late 1938, the Japanese, having completed the military sweep against the GMD in central China, could devote more troops to the ‘pacification’
of the northern countryside. These were deployed in two ways: to launch mopping-up campaigns, which, a leading commander of the Eighth Route Army explained, were ‘not to take positions but to carry out quick, deep raids designed to annihilate our directing centres and separate detachments’; and to enforce the ‘cage’ policy to limit the resistance forces’ manoeuvrability by dividing areas into numerous sections through a network of roads, blockhouses and trenches.

The speedy Japanese advance also implied CCP inability to put up a significant early resistance. Indeed, its regular army was small and certainly not equipped to challenge the modernized Japanese army in a direct, large-scale confrontation. And localized guerrilla and militia forces had not yet gained appreciable strength. The CCP’s initial military concern was thus squarely focused on preparation and build-up – not on preventing the occupation of China. Propaganda apart, CCP sources were quite forthright on this score. Mao Zedong conceded in September 1937 that the communist forces ‘can at present only play a partial role’. Eighth Route Army commanders were even more blunt in conversations with Western journalists. Outnumbered, one said he would not fight the Japanese in that part of Shanxi. According to another, ‘[w]e found in our first experience of fighting the Japanese in positions that they would first use bombing, planes, the artillery; finally tanks and armoured cars. To resist such an attack with inferior technique is to invite heavy losses’. Japanese intelligence thus paid tribute to the guerrilla operations ‘skillfully avoiding the brunt of the Imperial Army’s attack’.

Yet communist and allied resistance units were not merely spectators. Two attacks (in September–October 1937) in which communist organizers played an important role were particularly noteworthy: at Pingxingguan and Xinkou in Shanxi the Japanese army’s advance was held up for one month and its deaths exceeded half the total suffered during the invasion of North China. Besides, as Japanese army sources acknowledge, CCP raids on the railway lines were frequent and destructive.

While undramatic, the CCP activities increasingly attracted the attention of the Japanese authorities. As early as October 1937 a foreign ministry report spoke of a ‘red force ... gradually expanding in North China’ and urged ‘utmost vigilance’. A year later the CCP was said to be directing a rapidly expanding anti-Japanese movement in several areas of Shanxi, Hebei and Shandong. An army report mainly on northern Shanxi then admitted the communists enjoyed mass support. The ‘pacification situation’
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in March 1939 was thus assessed: communist forces were spreading in Hebei and the party’s ‘thorough’ work made it ‘extremely difficult’ to obtain intelligence in southern Shanxi. In the same month the army warned that ‘the continuous stubborn activity of the CCP must not be treated lightly’ in the hinterland to the north and south of the railway linking Taiyuan and Shijiazhuang. ‘According to latest reports’, another army document of December 1939 stated, ‘the communist forces have permeated the whole of North China’. Their mass mobilization extended to the outskirts of Beiping and was ‘increasingly gaining strength’ in Shandong. An army estimate at the time professed: ‘Supported by the political forces and masses, resistance organizations are expanding the underground activities...Since hereafter the cancer to peace and order in North China will be the Chinese communist party and army, gathering intelligence on them must be top priority’. The deputy Chief-of-Staff noted in 1940 that ‘the communist army’s inroads into the areas occupied by us and its activities there are really remarkable and this will hereafter necessitate our greatest attention’.

These appraisals of a rapidly mounting CCP threat were no doubt exaggerated. Yet they do convey an awareness of a gathering storm in a near future. It is therefore difficult to believe that underestimation of the CCP and its potential, as is often assumed in historical writing, applied generally to leading Japanese occupation personnel. Nonetheless, the Japanese were unprepared for the kind of massive series of attacks that the CCP’s Hundred Regiments’ Offensive constituted. Launched in the last half of 1940, the offensive involved 400,000 men (115 regiments) and was primarily directed against Japanese communication lines.

While it was highly successful in cutting the main railway lines, the CCP’s armed forces sustained heavy casualties in the process: 17,590 killed and wounded (5,890 of whom perished in action) and another 21,182 injured from poison gas. The drastic reduction in troop strength proved hard to make up for and gave rise to criticism of the offensive by top army leaders like Luo Ruiqing, Deng Xiaoping and Peng Dehuai when a senior cadre conference met in Taihang in early 1943. Another, pivotal consequence of the offensive was its shifting the Japanese attention to the CCP; more concretely grasping its nature, they became absorbed in plans to eliminate it.
REGENERATIVE REPRESSSION

Japan’s pre-Offensive apprehension of CCP activities mainly rested on general reporting – hence its sweeping and impressionistic character and the subsequent realization that a more concrete understanding required intensified information gathering. Japanese concerns centred on the CCP’s mass mobilization activities, which were often portrayed in rather alarmist terms. The reports found practical expression in the Japanese army’s dramatically stepped-up warfare against the CCP forces. Its broad, all-out nature was suggested by the slogan ‘a total war of military, politics and economics’. To cut off the CCP bases from each other and make them uninhabitable, and consolidate the Japanese hold on other areas, five major ‘strengthen order and peace’ campaigns were launched from March 1941 through late 1942. The first (March–April) and second (July–September) campaigns were largely preparatory in nature: anti-communist propaganda was conducted and various popular ‘self-defence’ bodies were set up. The third campaign (November–December) was more offensive and directly aimed at the CCP bases. An economic blockade was instituted to prevent the flow of certain goods from the occupied zones to the bases and these were raided to seize the harvest. The last two campaigns (March–June and October–December 1942) continued the economic blockade and greatly escalated the grain raids. In the occupied zones cooperatives were set up to increase food and cotton production.

Japanese occupation policies varied in content depending on whether the area was designated ‘orderly’, ‘semi-orderly’ or ‘disorderly’ – the criterion thus being the degree of control exerted by the Japanese. The principal objective in the ‘orderly’ areas was to eradicate the resistance and strengthen the old Chinese baojia system of collective responsibility, in which ten households made up a jia and ten jia a bao. This system was designed to check the villagers’ movements and included issuing identity cards (following a census check), placing notices in front of houses with details on the occupants, requiring travel permits, setting up checkpoints and forming a militia. Party sources readily admitted this surveillance could limit its ability to penetrate villages as peasants feared Japanese reprisals. A Japanese investigation report described how the old elite rule was revived with the creation of baojia in a village of Anguo county, Hebei, following its seizure from the CCP in 1939. Puppet organizations were kept under close scrutiny and occasionally purged of the possibly disloyal or the too incompetent.
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In the ‘semi-orderly’ areas the Japanese forced their way step by step. First, agents gathered information on the CCP and engaged in secret organizing. Then smaller Japanese army units launched surprise attacks and strongholds were erected. Finally, the area was ‘pacified’ by repression and the formation of a puppet administration/armed force. To eliminate resistance, the Japanese divided these areas into small sectors surrounded by massive works of strongholds, blockhouses, stone walls and trenches. Railways and roads were repaired and built to facilitate quick troop deployment. Much of this activity was undertaken on the plains of central and southern Hebei. The former was cut into 2,700 tiny compartments; in the latter 1,103 blockhouses and strongholds were constructed, one for each 15 square kilometres. The distance between them was at most five kilometres, in places only one kilometre. Here the bigger resistance units found their manoeuvrability severely circumscribed.37

Towards the ‘disorderly’, largely mountainous areas, the Japanese sought to wreak such destruction as to undermine the conditions of the strong CCP influence and the people’s will to resist. The chief methods were mopping-up campaigns and the ‘three-all policy’ (sankō seisaku) of ‘kill all, burn all, destroy all’ in an area. The campaign pattern shifted from brief attacks to longer offensives, from small-unit operations to concentrating a vastly superior force, from direct attacks to gradual advance. The long-range raids could penetrate as far as the very core of the CCP bases. Yet these assaults also exposed the Japanese to weaknesses – fatigue and inability to use superior firepower – as well as dangers – severed supply lines and troops being trapped. In 1941–42, party sources say, the number of mopping-up operations (176) and the total troop strength (833,900) more than doubled compared to 1939–40.38

The Japanese military pressure on the three area categories was closely coordinated, like man-made waves surging out from the occupied zones and reaching, with lessened power, all the way to the heart of CCP control.

Japan’s strategic aim, as elucidated in the three-year plan drawn up by the army in July 1941, was to expand the ‘orderly’ areas and to reduce the other two area categories. The plan considered that 10 per cent of North China had at the time been ‘pacified’, with another 10 per cent being under strong communist influence and the remaining 80 per cent having a ‘complex’ character. In 60 per cent of the last area the Japanese army was thought to hold the upper hand. The envisaged percentage shifts of the different area categories were: the ‘orderly’ areas from 10 (July 1941) to 70 (end of 1943),
the ‘semi-orderly’ areas from 60 to 20 and the ‘disorderly’ areas from 30 to 10.\(^{39}\)

To the CCP, this plan reflected the Japanese realization that a quick victory was not possible. Japanese army leaders had at first indeed believed in the speedy subjugation of China. War Minister Sugiyama told the emperor that ‘the China Incident will be over in a month’.\(^{40}\) On another occasion he asserted: ‘We’ll send large forces, smash them in a hurry and get the whole thing over quickly’. As the army general staff admitted, ‘[w]e thought China would soon throw up its hands and quit’.\(^{41}\) An army ministry analysis of the CCP army in November 1936 dismissed it as ‘local bandits’ and ’forcibly recruited peasants’ and as being ‘little different from Chinese armies in general’.\(^{42}\)

The Japanese military offensives from 1941 certainly inflicted painful losses on the CCP. In December 1941 a *Jiefang Ribao* editorial declared that the guerrilla war had entered a new stage, ‘the present task’ being to consolidate, not expand, the CCP bases. A month later the same organ acknowledged that these had been badly damaged. General estimates of their contraction indicate the scale of the CCP’s setbacks. By the spring of 1942, the base areas in North China had been reduced by one-sixth and their population was down by one-third. Reports from the JiLuYu region in 1942 said it had shrunk by one-fifth within a year and its population had dropped from 3.5 to two million. Elsewhere in JinJiLuYu, the area in Taihang under party control was reduced by 20 per cent, while in Taiyue the party was for a period unable to retain control over a single whole county. The base area in JinSui contracted to the extent that its population declined from three to less than one million. In the Shandong base area, a PRC source states, ‘the basic area [jibenqu] shrunk, the enemy occupied numerous villages, strategic areas were divided into many sections, mass organizations were destroyed’. A military report on JinChaJi in September 1942 said that army contingents were forced to withdraw from the plains to the mountains. A month later it was conceded that ‘regular base construction cannot be carried out’ on the plains in North China.\(^{43}\)

The CCP forces on the plains were of course most vulnerable to the onslaughts. In southern Hebei, the CCP-held area shrunk by 60 per cent and only half of the regular army units, party members and party branches remained after a big mopping-up operation in 1942. In the central part of the province the situation became so critical that all leading party, govern-
ment and army organs were transferred to a safer location. In June 1942 losses for the main armed forces [zuli budui] and local armed forces reached 35 and 46.8 per cent respectively, and one-third of the cadres at district and higher levels were killed.44

The consequences of the Japanese campaigns were thus a generalized weakening of the resistance capacity. Further documentation will underscore this point. A 1943 report from the JiLuYu military district shows how the bases were deprived of essential personnel. To mention only the most prominent military data, in that year’s mopping-up operations involving a force between 500 and 10,000 Japanese and puppet soldiers, the resistance casualties amounted to: 1,317 soldiers and 364 cadres died and 3,149 soldiers and 645 cadres were wounded. In addition, 316 soldiers and 77 cadres were captured.45

The campaigns’ most immediate political damage to the CCP was their disintegration of many party branches, the key organization for mobilizing resources at the village level. In one JiLuYu county, the 104 branches and their thousand members were halved. About 40 branches collapsed in two other counties of this region. No less than 80 branches met the same fate in an area of Taihang. Where they held out, a serious weakening might ensue, as when ‘comrades in ... branches 5 kilometres from an enemy stronghold did not dare to live at home’, or when internal rifts surfaced and cadres ‘wavered’.46

The economic implications of shrinking base areas were likewise severe. Above all, tax revenue declined. According to a JinChaji source, the public grain revenue, the main financial income, having almost doubled in the years 1938–40, thereafter dropped so that by 1942 it was only 85.57 per cent of the 1938 figure.47 From JiLuYu it was reported that taxable land contracted drastically within a year from 1941, creating ‘great financial difficulties’.48 The other side of the coin was an extension of Japanese economic impositions. A Jiefang Ribao article in January 1942 said that the Japanese were able to collect land taxes and surtaxes and to draft labour within 2.5–5 kilometres of their points and lines.49 In places they could even reach 15 kilometres from their strongholds and make villagers secretly supply them. This applied, for example, to 47 per cent of the people in Fan county, western Shandong, described as ‘our core area’.50

Territorial losses also had strongly inflationary effects. During the first half of 1942, Japanese seizures of the more resource-rich areas in Beiyue were the main reason for the following sharp price rises: one decalitre of
rice from 8.7 to 29 yuan, one bolt of cloth from 9 to 26 yuan, half a kilogram of salt from 1.6 to 4 yuan. Similary, the market price for one decalitre of millet in central Hebei jumped from 15 yuan in June 1942 to 110 yuan in February 1943. A 30-per-cent price increase within merely two months in Taihang was attributed primarily to Japanese encroachments.

It has been observed that not even the strongest resistance areas were safe from Japanese attacks. In fact, party sources claimed some of them were specifically targeted. Hence serious losses were suffered also 'where the foundation of our work has been best', a JiLuYu document noted. According to another report summing up the work in the same region, in localities with a long party presence 'many party branches fell to pieces and the work came to a standstill'. Possibly reflecting this state of affairs, a sense of crisis permeated the Jiefang Ribao editorials in September 1942; as if fearing the resistance was on the verge of collapse, these frequently promised victory within a year, while simultaneously urging preparation for a long and difficult war.

If the scale and destructive impact of the Hundred Regiments' Offensive took the Japanese by surprise, their subsequent military campaigns arguably caught the CCP even more off guard; hence the magnitude of its losses. In November 1940, the area party committee of JinJiYu, discussing the Offensive, acknowledged that '[b]efore it, we did not reckon the enemy would come and “mop up” the base area hinterland so swiftly'. In the same month another party document said that enemy attacks extended to the 'rear of our base area', adding 'we thought these areas were quite secure but it is precisely these which experience the brunt of the enemy's mopping up operations'. The prediction that 'our work in the days to come' would be characterized by a 'very greatly increased fluidity' did indeed prove true.

As noted in the first section, however, these setbacks, large-scale and manifold though they were, did not prevent the vast expansion of the CCP movement in the final war years. Some additional, rough indicators of it will suffice.

The recollections of the senior staff officer of the Japanese army in North China, Samukawa Yoshimitsu, are extremely suggestive. In his evaluation, of the 400 counties occupied by the Japanese in the autumn of 1944 only seven (1.4 per cent) were at the time firmly controlled, while 139 counties (31.5 per cent) had been abandoned to the CCP. In the intermediate zone comprising 295 counties (66.9 per cent) the strength of both sides
‘fluctuated enormously’ and ‘the people tended to be sympathetic to the communists in many areas’. Compared to the Japanese army’s estimate of the two antagonists’ degree of influence in mid-1941, when the three-year plan for routing the resistance bases was devised, and to the CCP’s own assessment of the defeats in 1941–42/43, Samukawa’s figures do point to a very different situation. Interestingly, the existence of a large intermediate zone characterized by a high volatility is confirmed by party documents and will be stressed in various contexts in later chapters.

According to another Japanese war reminiscence, by the spring of 1944 the Japanese and the puppet forces only controlled the stations along the Beiping–Hankou railway in the strategically important plain of southern Hebei. The Eighth Route Army moved around freely in the areas in between the stations even in daytime, and the county towns off the railway lines had fallen into isolation. An American foreign-service officer in China, John Service, supplied further evidence of CCP spread, although his conclusion was no doubt exaggerated. Based on non-CCP sources, particularly ‘the large number of American airmen (now some 20) who have dropped to safety in those areas’, i.e. CCP base areas, he wrote in March 1945:

The Communists have rescued men [US aviators] near Shanghai, [Hankou,] Canton, [Nanjing] and Taiyuan – all important Japanese-held bases in China. Flyers have dropped safely within a mile of Japanese airfields and blockhouses.

Over a hundred American crossings of Japanese-held railways have been made safely... We must accept as substantially correct the Communist claims to control the countryside of North and Central China behind the line of Japanese penetration.

The CCP movement’s great leap forward during 1943–45 connected with the conduct of the three wartime politico-military forces: in addition to the CCP, the Japanese authorities (plus the puppet organizations) and the GMD and its associated armies. Paradoxically, the Japanese offensives of 1941–42 exposed their essential weaknesses, that is, the inability to consolidate gains of however destructive and extensive an anti-CCP warfare. The patently inadequate Japanese troop strength to garrison significant portions of the vast Chinese countryside and the low quality of the puppet forces was one factor. Another, more basic one, was the occupation policies’ alienating impact on the populace. Transfers of some better trained troops to the Pacific war theatre compounded Japanese vulnerability.
Not only were the Japanese successes of a very temporary kind: ultimately they reinvigorated the CCP movement by forcing it to deepen and elaborate upon its earlier socially transformative and related organizational efforts. The result was a critical qualitative injection into the movement, not wholesale but sufficient to lend it a certain increased efficiency in dealing with the war-generated opportunities, hazards and difficulties. Yet the extent to which related policy measures bore upon the CCP’s enlargement was also significantly influenced by the GMD’s posture. Let us take a closer look at the issue.

For many people, a basic reference point was then the relative difference in the wartime performance between the CCP and the GMD (including its allied forces). The severe test that both were subjected to by the war conditions provided excellent material for judgement. The outcome was that while the CCP movement exhibited a wide variety of qualities – ranging from outstanding to decidedly unfavourable ones – these projected an overall image clearly distinguishable from the overwhelmingly negative reputation the GMD earned. Presented with a choice of either, the CCP was to many people not only the preferable alternative; it also appeared in a light that, given the GMD’s dismal record, was arguably more positive than justified. Popular support for the CCP, therefore, was not solely self-generated. Unwittingly, its internal competitors for power and influence lent a helping hand.

To appreciate the GMD’s contribution to the CCP’s cause, as well as to put the latter’s own efforts in a proper, comparative perspective, the GMD’s wartime features deserve outlining, despite their being well known. In the first year or so of the war the GMD was more active. Yet driven from the coastal regions and all the way down to the inaccessible southwestern part of China by the end of 1938, its degeneration set in. John Service, writing in mid-1944, gave an appalling picture of GMD China: China is dying a lingering death by slow strangulation. China does not now constitute any threat to Japan... China faces economic collapse... Morale is low and discouragement widespread. There is a general feeling of hopelessness... The government and military structure is being permeated and demoralized from top to bottom by corruption, unprecedented in scale and openness... Unrest within the armies is increasing... It [the GMD] seems unable to revive itself with fresh blood, and its unchanging leadership shows a growing ossification and loss of a sense of reality.
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The army was also crumbling. Journalists T. White and A. Jacoby had seen much of the GMD armies and their assessment is corroborated by numerous other sources: ‘The years of stalemate [1938–44 when no major military initiative was taken along the Japanese–GMD fronts] had made the Chinese army a pulp, a tired, dispirited, unorganized mass, despised by the enemy, alien to its own people, neglected by its own government, ridiculed by its allies’. Recruitment methods and treatment of conscripts that were barbarous continuously melted away substantial parts of the army. This applied even to the better units. Hence death and desertion in the 18th division of the 18th Army resulted in a loss of 6,000 out of its 11,000 men in 1942, despite being stationed in a combat-free area. Add the inefficiency, incompetence, disunity and rampant corruption of the armies and it is easy to see why the Japanese had little to worry about on their southern front from late 1938.

When in 1944 the Japanese resumed their southward advance, the operation Ichigō, GMD losses within seven months amounted to 700,000 troops, 146 towns, 200,000 square kilometres of territory, 36 airfields and over 60 million people. US intelligence sources frequently complained of GMD inactivity: the best armies, these said, were either used to blockade CCP areas or conserved, along with hoarded equipment, for the envisaged post-war liquidation of the CCP.

A de facto truce was in effect at the GMD–Japanese army fronts. ‘For hundreds of miles along the front’, US intelligence noted, ‘peaceful conditions prevailed for years until the outbreak of the Japanese offensive in 1944’. Besides, the same source pointed out, ‘[a] flourishing smuggling trade developed which was controlled by the military authorities on both sides of the front’, while GMD troops in Xian ‘occupied themselves chiefly with more close relations with the puppet forces’. During 1941–43, 69 generals and 500,000 troops defected to the Japanese. Although relatively few GMD troops were involved and most were provincial forces, they nevertheless served under Jiang Jieshi.

The army’s behaviour precluded solidarity with the people. An American embassy official’s report from ‘the anti-Communist blockade zone in [Shaanxi]’ states that ‘the imposition of onerous grain and fuel taxes, miscellaneous exactions and the ever-increasing corruption and graft on the part of officials’ created an ‘extremely unsatisfactory’ relationship with the peasants. The report said that this ‘is typical of conditions in many areas of [Shaanxi], [Henan], [Anhui], and other provinces’. One historian
writes, ‘[i]n almost every province in the [GMD] area, from [Fujian], and [Guangdong] to [Sichuan] and [Gansu], there were peasant uprisings, usually in protest against conscription and tax exactions’. Another historian tells of soldiers pillaging the people, causing ‘numerous incidents of friction’ – and he continues: ‘Probably the worst case occurred in [Henan] during the early phase of Operation Ichigo. When the Chinese troops retreated in defeat, more soldiers were killed by the indignant local population than by the Japanese’.

Of course the GMD, etc. forces’ negative demonstration effect must not be exaggerated; China’s vastness meant that many villages had little contact with these armies, and what in the final analysis gave the CCP movement a relative staying power derived from its policy endeavours at the grassroots. Nonetheless, the negative factor is easily underestimated: the CCP was hard pressed in several respects and even a minor ‘outside’ assistance was likely to have significant effects.

UNSETTLED CONDITIONS

The wartime North China landscape exhibited manifold variations. Two were basic to the resistance movement. At the most general level, areas were differentiated by the shifting degree of influence wielded by it and the Japanese (plus their puppet organizations). The second kind emanated in part from these military realities, but included in addition the whole range of local specificities and confronted the CCP with the thorny issue of how to account for these in policy implementation

Problematic control

Beginning with the former category, the CCP generally classified North China into anti-Japanese base areas, guerrilla zones and enemy-occupied areas. (These corresponded roughly in character to the Japanese-designated disorderly, semi-orderly and orderly areas.) While the CCP’s specification of occupied areas – big cities and towns, and regions crossed by important communication lines – is fairly sound, its sharp distinction between base areas and guerrilla zones is untenable. This was how Lin Biao described the base areas in a 1965 essay commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Japanese surrender:

In these base areas, we built the Party, ran the organs of state power, built the people’s armed forces and set up mass organizations; we engaged in
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industry and agriculture and operated cultural, educational and all other undertakings necessary for the independent existence of a separate region. Our base areas were in fact a state in miniature.\textsuperscript{74}

In the guerrilla zones, on the other hand, Mao declared in 1938 that ‘the enemy will not be able to set up stable puppet regimes, however much he tries to maintain control, while we, on our part, will not be able to achieve the aim of establishing anti-Japanese political power, however much we develop guerrilla warfare.’\textsuperscript{75}

In reality, patterns of CCP military control were of a more relative nature. As earlier cited CCP losses in the mid-years of the war indicate, almost no place was safe from Japanese attacks. More broadly, clearcut area demarcations conceal the complex impact of the party policies. It is a recurrent theme of this study that even so-called core areas of CCP control contained striking contrasts of strengths and weaknesses. The general description of ‘advanced’, ‘average’ and ‘backward’ areas, it was declared at a 1943 cadre conference on the mass movement in Taihang, was complicated by local differences within the base area and even within each county and district.\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, a 1941 document on the militia in JinjiYu drew attention to ‘blank space’ in the base areas.\textsuperscript{77} Nor must it be forgotten that identifiable battlelines were non-existent.

Nevertheless, when citing party documents, their terminology of base and guerrilla areas has sometimes been retained in the text. These then signify differences in the degree of CCP influence, the latter being of a highly insecure and fluctuating nature.

One very rough area division can, however, be made between mountainous and plain-located CCP bases, the former generally having far more developed and securely grounded structures and hence also superior strength. This geographical characteristic of primary CCP entrenchment in fact conformed to that of traditional peasant rebels. In Jean Chesneaux’s words:

The traditional seed-bed of peasant insurrection was not in the middle of a province, where the rice-growing plains were thickly populated and economically well developed, but along the wooded, mountainous border between provinces. Such areas were less accessible to the forces of repression. Since the government control over these inter-provincial frontiers were attenuated, they constituted a kind of administrative no-man’s-land.
Chesneaux describes the features of these regions in terms of economic backwardness, loose integration into the market economy, weak state/enemy influence and landlord rule, sparse population and advantages for defence. A Japanese intelligence report indeed noted that the mountainous setting, with its poorly developed communications, strongly favoured the CCP’s guerrilla warfare. The heavily equipped Japanese army was easily outmanoeuvred by the lightly armed Eighth Route Army which ‘always changed its movements at will’ and ‘no matter what efforts were made to capture and catch up with the Eighth Route Army, the results were insignificant’. No wonder a top party leader held that ‘[t]he best terrain has poor transportation and is hilly’.

But this environment also had definite drawbacks for the CCP: inconvenient communications raised obstacles to integrating broader areas of CCP control and to establishing liaison between higher and lower organs. ‘Communication difficulties’ was cited by a Chinese journalist as one reason (the other was the war environment) as to why the first JinChaji border region assembly was not convened until January 1943 although elections to it were held in 1940. Travelling in JinChaji about two years after the war, journalist Jack Belden described the communications as ‘so primitive that a journey of twenty miles by government mule took from sunrise to sunset, a telephone call of the same distance often required a week, a telegram might never be delivered and a letter posted to a destination a few miles away might take forty days’. Travel and transportation by motorized means were rare and traditional methods like wheelbarrows, carts, animals and on foot were still the norm.

The poverty and sparse population were even more serious constraints on building up mountain bases. It was therefore imperative that the CCP extend its influence to sizeable parts of the more fertile and populous plains to secure desperately needed supplies of agricultural products and recruits for the swelling armies. According to a 1941 Japanese newspaper report, about 60 per cent of the goods for a CCP-held area in western Hebei came from ‘outside’, and supplies were still inadequate.

As a consequence, the CCP strove hard to link the mountain bases with the plains. During the period from July 1940 to the spring of 1941, for example, the JinChaji border region government organized large-scale transportation of grain along four main routes from the central Hebei plain to the mountainous western part of the province. In the operations, several hundred carts were at first used, with the Eighth Route Army and
the militia providing armed cover. But as the Japanese reinforced attempts to stop the transportation by digging dykes, people had to carry the grain on their shoulders. The scale of the operations and the frequent fighting that accompanied them is suggested by the participation of a militia force amounting to 620,000, whose average work performance was four days per person. The effectiveness of these operations is alluded to in a Japanese army source of October 1940 that said whole villages were mobilized on a relay basis, making it 'hard to determine the direction of the transports by infiltrating spies'. The Japanese were of course aware of the significance of this strategy: 'So far as the integration of the guerrilla areas on the plains and the mountain bases is consolidated, the elimination of the communist bandits will become very difficult'.

The extremely adverse conditions for fighting on the plains – the flat terrain heavily favoured the deployment of Japan’s modern weapons – created an all the greater need for bases there as well. In these areas, the guerrillas typically had to operate swiftly and in small and dispersed units, keep the initiative, attack quickly and be adept at camouflage. Bases on the plains were part of a vast hierarchy of bases that branched out from the mountainous resistance strongholds. While highly diverse, these bases were small and vulnerable to Japanese penetration, necessitating their frequent shifts; so precarious was the CCP’s influence that its administrative organs often had to go underground. But as Japanese intelligence pointed out, although these bases were fluid and incapable of putting up strong resistance, their political impact, through propaganda and mass mobilization, was ‘very great’ – especially as they could be organized and dismantled almost everywhere.

Bases on the plains were critical to sustaining their characteristic tunnel warfare. Tunnels originated in areas close to Japanese fortresses in the form of caves for hiding and became increasingly elaborate and extensive, connecting first several families and then whole villages. One Western journalist witnessed an amazing system of tunnels linking hundreds of villages for miles and miles around... The tunnels are big enough to house the people together with their livestock and their provisions and are equipped with sufficient food and water for an extended siege... Tunnels were built zigzag, up and down; they connected, through emergency entrances, with wholly independent subsidiary tunnel systems at different levels going off in all directions.
Japanese and CCP sources alike justly stressed the importance of bases to the resistance. In these, the CCP armies and guerrillas could take refuge and rest, base their operations, make military preparations and accumulate strength by replenishment and training – though to quite varying degrees depending on the base's character. While most bases, whatever their size and location, thus contributed to keeping up an extensive harassment of the Japanese army, the build-up of strong, consolidated bases was essential to sustaining the resistance movement generally. Yet this was an extremely intricate task. Specifically, how was one to combine the socio-economic, political and military factors to create a measure of stability and security essential for further deepening popular mobilization and social transformation, processes which in turn were a precondition for a long-term resistance activity?

Experience taught the party there that was a very real danger of local cadres becoming so absorbed in pressing military commitments as to lose sight of the need to develop socio-economic and political base structures. A report at a 1942 JiLuYu conference of district level cadres concretely spelled out the likely consequences when ‘leading cadres’ had ‘for a rather long time failed to appreciate the importance of building a base’. As the work of devising, let alone implementing, novel administrative and economic systems had proceeded very tardily, ‘the base masses have not yet obtained the democratic and livelihood benefits they are entitled to’, leaving many village and district governments in the hands of landlords and bandits who manipulated taxation to their advantage. Reflecting the low level of popular activism, ‘cadres substituted themselves for the people's struggles’. Even more seriously, cadre practices ‘made enemies everywhere’, even leading to ‘indiscriminate attacks on traitors’ in which ‘many fellow travellers were wiped out’. Under these circumstances, ‘the united front work made little progress’. All this severely hampered the resistance effort: the organization of locally based armed bodies was neglected, causing breaches of discipline, desertions, corruption, arrogance towards the people, etc.; and in the absence of broad, coordinated efforts, the enemy was engaged in a random manner.

The tone of this report was no doubt influenced by the defeats then being inflicted upon the CCP movement. In large part, these stemmed from the as yet unsystematic endeavours to erect mutually supportive base structures. Hence the report’s apparent objective to warn cadres against a
narrow military perspective – and a resultant lack of a mass basis and sense of direction.

Adaptable limits

Processes of executing the various policy programmes revealed the sheer diversity of conditions and the trials these exposed the party to. Since this is an enormous subject, only some aspects immediately relevant to this study will be mentioned.

Unsurprisingly, military factors loomed large. Slogans of war mobilization are an illustrative case. Where CCP influence was stronger, these contained a straight activist message: ‘Good men go to the front!’ and ‘Protect the native place! Protect the border region!’ The stress in more fluid circumstances, however, had a defensive or pre-emptive character like ‘Chinese do not serve Japan as soldiers!’ and ‘Oppose the devils’ seizure of able-bodied men!’ An even greater caution was observed in the occupied areas where the recommended course of action was as follows:

Quietly immerse yourself in hard work; lie low for a long period; do not reveal [your identity]; build up [oppositional] forces gradually. Adopt several methods – feudal, semi-feudal, superstitious and even those practised by the enemy and the puppets – and gather all those who are not willing to become slaves of a foreign power.

The resistance tasks of the village-based militia shifted so that it concentrated on ‘traitor elimination’ work and training in the more secure areas, frequently engaged in combat where the Japanese army operated, and mainly sought to discourage ‘wavering elements’ from collaborating openly and to force those serving the Japanese to be more vigilant in the occupied areas.

The Japanese army’s impact on socio-economic policies varied. The greater its proximity, the more pervasive the military element in mass mobilization and in organizational forms and activities. The large-scale production campaigns launched in the second half of the war could hardly be conducted in a uniform manner. Where the CCP was weaker, protecting production – elaborate systems were devised for this purpose – was just as important as promoting production itself. Overall taxation was heavier in the core CCP areas since people in the more war-ravaged zones were less able to share in the expenses.
Since the issue of policy adjustments to non-military facets is touched upon in later chapters, a few brief remarks will suffice. The village’s level of economic development was another important criterion for determining tax rates. In calculating the amount of rent, several economic factors were taken into account, a prime example being land quality. The size of the mutual aid teams, higher party organs emphatically reminded cadres, had to accord with conditions in the individual villages. Local modification meant that schools differed in terms of time schedule, teaching material, physical setting and staffing – and so on.

While thus acutely aware of the necessity to accommodate policy measures to dissimilar realities, the CCP was also deeply concerned that the considerable local autonomy required for flexible implementation must not endanger the central organs’ broad control over the movement’s direction. The CCP’s stated formula for coming to grips with this intricacy was ‘centralized leadership and dispersed management’. This enjoined local cadres to ‘carry out the work independently and have the ability to work independently’ and to revise higher-level directives when these proved impracticable. There was to be no ‘blind obedience’ to them.

Such admonitions were frequent. A southern Hebei document emphasized that ‘party committees at various levels should conduct concrete and detailed discussions in conformity with the situation in the area’. A conference declaration of party cadres in JinJiYu called for ‘investigation and understanding of dissimilar conditions’ and added that to carry out the work accordingly was an ‘iron rule’. Mass mobilization practices had to proceed from the villagers’ locally specific living conditions and related demands: ‘one can definitely not adopt average work methods’. In carrying out the tax policy, ‘propaganda and mobilization work must not be generalized and simplified. One should convene several kinds of mobilization meetings and, depending on the object, present a different content’. Concrete examples were to be raised and connected with actualities. Since ‘the local situation develops unevenly’, a 1944 party investigation declared, ‘a highly flexible implementation of the [land] policy is necessary’. A similar point was made in regard to law, which ‘cannot be regarded as an unchangeable dead dogma’.

Practical steps to adapt policies cited earlier – and elaborated upon later – show that the CCP expended great labours on it. However, the magnitude of the task by far exceeded the party’s abilities to cope with it. Hence local party organizations were reprimanded for disregarding local specificities, at
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times resulting in policy instructions based on the consolidated resistance areas being applied to the guerrilla zones, or for lacking detailed knowledge of their area and issuing unrealistic orders.103

Basically, the inadequacies of the ‘dispersed management’ practice stemmed from the enormously rich local diversity. In southern Hebei this was said to apply to every county, district and village; each differed in regard to the extent and methods of Japanese army destruction, changes in class relationships, popular attitudes to the resistance and to the degree of party influence. It followed that ‘our leaders have to investigate the dissimilar situations and local characteristics in detail’, and on this basis work out policies, organizational forms and kinds of struggles appropriate to the area. Consequently, cadres were warned against ‘work plans and work directives that are stereotyped and are of the same old stuff’.104 Note here that the effects of the war on the social fabric and on the people’s perceptions added a greatly complicating element of fluidity and unpredictability to dissimilarities emanating from local social structural and cultural patterns.

Sometimes ‘dispersed management’ also ran into troubles with ‘centralized leadership’ whose top-down decision-making process applied sanctions of varying severity against those thought to be deviating from acceptable standards. The call for independence placed local cadres in a quandary: how much latitude did they have in taking initiatives on their own? Yet considering the geographically limited impact of a strongly exerted higher party leadership this aspect was not as pervasive.

Variable circumstances thus precluded any generally valid evolutionary policy scheme. The processes of mass mobilization proceeded along different paths. What work to begin with, the party’s JiLuYu regional sub-bureau instructed local party committees, depended on the concrete conditions at the time and in the locality, and on ‘the masses’ urgent demands’. This could mean that rent reduction took precedence in one place and struggles against corruption and ‘tyrants’ in another. Preferably, struggles related to livelihood issues were to be given priority since they facilitated forming a leadership nucleus, but there was to be no ‘rigid’ rule concerning policy sequence, the directive concluded.105

A PRC work illustrates the issue by reference to the Pu and Fan counties in the same region. Following the description, the two counties contrasted sharply. In the former, hardline anti-CCP (or ‘diehard’) forces dominated ‘from top to bottom’ as GMD troops had long been stationed there. The oppressive rule generated demands for democratization and livelihood
reforms. On the other hand, Fan county had ‘been under CCP control ever since the outbreak of the war.’ Yet inadequate popular mobilization enabled the hardliners to maintain their commanding position at the grassroots level; their feigning compliance to higher level authorities concealed realities. As a consequence, party policies designed to benefit the people did not take effect. For example, 60 per cent of the cultivated land remained unreported, despite the early launching of tax reforms.

These differences produced divergent policy approaches. In Pu county, anti-corruption and tax reforms assumed primacy, with rent and interest reduction and reform of the village administration being undertaken thereafter. Corruption here referred to hardliners extorting the people and tax evasion by powerholders. Within 25 days, it is asserted, tax reforms were carried out in 370 villages, i.e. in 88 per cent of the county. A different policy order was followed in Fan county: first rent and interest reduction and wage increases; thereafter anti-corruption struggles and investigation of unreported land; and finally reform of the village administration. The stated significance of the initial measures was their extending tangible gains to the farmhands, tenants and poor peasants who had not been activized and uniting them with the middle peasants against the landlords and other powerholders.106

Although this account may well contain inaccuracies and simplifications, it highlights the diversity of policy routes. Party documents did of course draw attention to this phenomenon. During the popular mobilization drives of 1939–40 in Taihang, for example, the principal focus in one village was on clearing up debts, in another village on struggles to obtain grain from the well-off and to equalize taxation.107

Given these complications, to what extent is it possible to generalize and discern major policy trends? In our view, the CCP’s diversity of policy methods and strivings focused essentially on an issue-complex largely shaped by the specific historical conjuncture of the Japanese invasion: the already identified interaction of a substantial social levelling with a broad class cooperation. In short, a conspicuous dissimilarity existed within a clearly definable framework.

The implication is of course not that policy variations moved straight and inexorably towards unity of purpose. On the contrary, it will be demonstrated that policy processes at the village level were rife with shifts, conflicts, tensions and incompatibilities. Moreover, and inevitably, the
mismatch between policy measures and the great variety of area-specific peasant needs and yearnings was frequent. These raised crucial problems for the CCP: unless the measures taken had a certain correspondence with local peculiarities, the people were unlikely to be activized. Thus a Taihang investigation report admonished cadres to keep firmly in mind the peasants’ ‘manifold’ demands, covering a broad variety of land problems, debt settlements, tax reforms, production campaigns, relief aid, etc.108

The theme of the present study is therefore how the CCP wrestled hard with the wartime issue-complex. The following two chapters will discuss its features in general terms, with a more concrete policy analysis undertaken in the subsequent parts.

NOTES

1. SW II, pp. 136–137, 139–140.


15. Claire and William Band, *Dragon Fangs: Two Years with the Chinese Guerrillas* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1947), p. 20. This was how Peng Zhen, a leading party figure in JinChali, characterized the initial occupation: ‘The enemy was in the stage of strategic offensive, advancing frenziedly. He still had no time to concern himself with what he had left behind, and he did not yet seem to realize the importance of turning back to take care of the problems in his rear.’ *Guanyu JinChali bianqu dang de gongzu he juti zhengce baogao* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1981), p. 133. First published in 1941. Hereafter cited as *Peng Zhen baogao*.
18. Li Menglin, 'Jizhong junqu de jianlüe jieshao', BZ, No.9, 1939, p. 111.
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40. Boyle, p. 53.


48. 'JiLuYu jingjian fangan', p. 250.

49. Di Hua and Xue Hui, 'Dikou'.


53. Rong Wusheng, 'Jiaqiang jingji zhanxian fazhan duidi de jingji douzheng', 28.4.1941, CS, vol. 1, p. 58. Rong Wusheng was sometimes the name used by Rong Zihe, a top party leader in JinJiLuYu.


55. 'JiLuYu jingjian fangan', p. 250.

56. 'JiLuYu bianqu gongzuo de chubu zongjie', p. 460. Five areas are mentioned.


56. 'JiLuYu bianqu gongzuo de chubu zongjie', p. 460. Five areas are mentioned.


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'Almost all the important Communist-held areas in North and Central China have now been visited by American army observers or rescued American air crews. All evidence verifies Communist claims of controlling substantially all the countryside of “occupied” China.' p. 244.

63. On the puppet organizations, see Boyle.
64. CCP sources acknowledge the early GMD resistance effort. See for example Zhu De's military report to the seventh party congress in April 1945. Zhu De, 'Lun jiefangqu zhanchang', JR, 9.5, 1945. The GMD's strictly military record was thus not uniformly negative; individual army units did put up a determined fight. See the relevant essays in James C. Hsiung and Steven Levine (eds), China's Bitter Victory: The War with Japan 1937–1945 (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1992). My concern here is only to note some broadly conspicuous GMD traits and their consequences, not to draw a comprehensive picture.
70. Eastman, p. 139.
75. SW II, p. 97.
77. ‘JinJiYuqu yinian lai qunzhong wuzhuang gongzuo baogao’, September 1941, DW, p. 188.
80. Lecture given by Liu Shaoqi on ‘Work experiences in the North China work zone’ at the Resistance University in Yan’an in March 1938. Translated by Henry G. Schwarz,
Village China at War


83. The newspaper was published in Beijing. Taken from Inoue, p. 185.
85. Tada butai sanbōbu, ‘Konji kyōsangun no shūgeki ni kansuru jōhō kimmu ni kansuru sankō narabini kyōkun jikō’, 24.10.1940, in Awaya and Chadani (eds), vol. 6, p. 549.
97. *Zhonggong Jinan qu dangwei guanyu duguo jindong mingchun jianku jumian*, p. 28, NU.
104. ‘Zhonggong Jinan qu dangwei’, p. 29.


Chapter Two

Social Pressures

CRITERIA OF RELEVANCE

Any examination of the resistance movement’s build-up must differentiate between primary and secondary factors. The former refers to policies laying the basis for a sustained, mass guerrilla war, i.e. those restructuring and reconstructing the villages socio-economically and politically. These measures were directed against injustices and oppressions of various kinds, as well as intended to develop the material conditions for alleviating abject poverty and securing supplies for the expanding resistance organizations. The secondary causes, however important they might be in the short term, only provided the initial impetus for people to join or ally with the CCP. Consequently, these could be highly diverse. The first section will focus on the latter and the next section on the former variety.

Party and various other sources affirm that Japanese terror played a role in persuading peasants to join or support the resistance. Early wartime examples are particularly numerous. Japanese burning and killing in southern Hebei in the spring of 1938 reportedly made peasants engage in combat. In a number of places Japanese atrocities were said to have had the effect of replenishing guerrilla units. Influenced by collaborators’ rumour mongering, the peasants in one locality at first chose submission to the Japanese, but their cruelty, it was asserted, caused the peasants to take up armed struggle. In western Shanxi, where the Japanese army had wreaked great destruction, the build-up of guerrilla units was swift. According to a leading party official, one argument in arming the people in Shanxi was to draw their attention to a recent massacre and to the necessity to defend themselves against the Japanese. This recruitment method was also used elsewhere. Peng Zhen stated that in the initial phase of the war ‘the brutal
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conduct of the Japanese invaders created an upsurge of popular feelings to resist Japan'. The list could be extended much further.2

Western journalists staying in China during the war learned the same thing. A local commander in Shanxi told J. Bertram that ‘in many cases, where the Japanese terror had been especially savage, the people themselves organized small bands of volunteers’.3 Taking revenge on the Japanese for killing 90 villagers along the Beiping–Hankou railway, the guerrillas were reinforced ‘because everybody saw that those who went out to fight killed Japanese, while those who stayed at home could only wait till the Japanese came to kill them’.4 Within 10 days of a Japanese attack in western Hebei killing 200 and rendering 20,000 homeless, 2,000 people offered their services to the guerrillas.5 In addition, Mao Zedong himself told American attaché Evans Carlson in 1939 that Japan's ‘greatest mistake has been the attitude of the army towards the Chinese people. By burning, raping and slaughtering, they have enraged the populace and cemented the will to resist.’6

The above references may well contain a certain propaganda element and thus overstate the extent of the peasants’ anti-Japanese response. Nonetheless, it is probable that Japanese brutality generated at least a measure of resistance efforts. After all, the Japanese army did admit that its ‘illegal actions against the people’ gave rise to widespread and ‘unexpectedly serious anti-Japanese sentiments’ and ‘agitation’.7

Yet resistance was only one possible consequence of cruelty perpetrated by the Japanese army. Evidence of a reverse outcome is plentiful. Peng Dehuai, deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Eighth Route Army, conceded that Japanese military campaigns in JinChaji during 1940–41 had scored ‘notable gains’ in controlling public opinion, spreading defeatist sentiments, buying over a part of the young intelligentsia and recruiting and utilizing traitors.8 A 1942 document summing up the work in JiLuYu painted a similarly gloomy picture: ‘Enemy destruction and traitor activity are conspicuous; the masses are low-spirited and the cadres rightist tendencies and desertions are also very serious; the situation in the border region is becoming increasingly tense for every day.’9

Massacres in JinSui during 1943 ‘caused fears and wavering’ among the people.10 The demoralizing impact on the populace of slaughters and burning down of houses was apparent in Taiyue during the winter of 1940 as well as in Pingshun county, Taihang, four years later.11 Having cited statistics on major losses (deaths, damage to agriculture, destroyed
houses, etc.) resulting from Japanese offensives in the Taihang and Taiyue areas, Yang Xiufeng, chairman of the JinJiLuYu border region government, acknowledged that these had ‘seriously affected the mood of the people’. They blamed the army and the government for the ensuing hardship, and there was for a time a ‘rather widespread’ resentment in Taihang of the CCP’s policy of shifting resources as the Japanese approached and of the militia’s combat activities. Similarly, two village investigations conducted by the JinJiYu area party committee in October 1941 revealed ‘the special political function’ of Japanese army atrocities and plundering was to ‘sow discord between our army and the people’ since they held the Eighth Route Army responsible for the misfortune. In fact, the people’s ‘indignation still weighs on our army.’

People’s fear of the Japanese army’s ravages could be so strong that they demanded the party’s withdrawal from the locality. In an area close to Baoding, people apparently resolved not to assist in the war effort after being terrorized by the Japanese, including the slaying of 200 people for helping the Eighth Route Army tear up the railway track.

Pessimism, dejection, passivity and loss of confidence in face of Japanese attacks was by no means confined to ordinary villagers. Such feelings were also harboured by local party cadres, who often had a certain political awareness and training. References of the kind, in addition to cadres defecting to the Japanese out of a sense of hopelessness, can be found in many documents. As a 1941 Taihang report said after noting the Japanese offensives tended to paralyse cadres, ‘the enemy’s perseverance is exceeding ours’.

The brutality of the Japanese army could therefore produce sharply divergent reactions: efforts at self-defence in one place and defeatism in another. Furthermore, and the crucial point at issue, Japanese killings, destruction, etc. could initiate, but not serve as the long-term basis for, resistance efforts.

Other secondary factors, such as defeating the Japanese in battle, also raised the people’s confidence in the feasibility of guerrilla warfare. This, Nie Rongzhen asserted, facilitated the rapid growth of armed units in JinChaji. It was also one reason given for the progress made in army recruitment in Shandong during the summer of 1943. A local commander in Shanxi said: ‘We show the people how our army is able to defeat the Japanese, always using a very small force against much larger enemy units. When they see for themselves that this is true, then many of the villagers are willing to form troops and begin independent action.’ In the words of Peng Dehuai, ‘[o]nly by constantly scoring victories can one excite the people, get their
enthusiastic support and make them willingly join the army’. One work report stated the issue in equally categorical terms: ‘To actively move about and strike at the enemy is the only way to gain prestige among the masses’ and ‘to consolidate and expand the armed forces’.

It was therefore often pointed out that demonstration of military strength was conducive to winning the people’s active support since this act tended to weaken their fears of Japanese attacks and the devastation they caused. The significance of a good combat performance was underscored in an investigation of 29 party branches in Taihang. Those branches, in for example the Liao and Wuxiang counties, which had done well in this respect earned considerable popular support and trust – despite their gangster-like tendencies and inadequate implementation of the land policy. In the eyes of many people, these branches had showed their worth by paying close attention to the fighting and by taking effective measures to protect the people, including shifting them, gathering intelligence and tackling their livelihood-related difficulties caused by the war. On the other hand, three party branches in Yushe county that were not alert to military exigencies, and consequently sustained heavy blows during three Japanese mopping-up operations in 1940, were so weakened that they became largely inactive. Since both party members and the people shunned resistance duties, a militia force could not be organized. Such tendencies were prominent in many other party branches.

Manifested combativity, however, had definite limitations, as a report to local party cadres in JinjiYu indicates: ‘A purely military victory is a victory that is not consolidated; a military victory must be followed by political work.’ Additional circumstances initially mobilizing the peasantry may be added. Even oath ceremonies to resist the Japanese might have a function in this regard. A martial tradition inspiring bravery was also usefully harnessed for resistance purposes.

**HARD-WON ESSENTIALS**

Party leaders often described the war against Japan as part, or the culmination, of the struggles waged by the Chinese people against foreign domination ever since the country’s sovereignty began to be encroached upon almost a hundred years earlier. The difference was that now China was determined to rid herself of all foreign subjugation. Kai Feng, director of the propaganda department, wrote that China had
long been subjected to imperialist bullying, exploitation and oppression but now raises the flag of resistance to Japan to defend the fatherland and win the independence and liberation of the Chinese nation... Precisely because in these wars [the Opium Wars of 1840 and 1856–60, the Sino–Japanese War of 1894–95, the suppression of the Boxers in 1900, the Japanese penetration of the Northeast from 1931 and attack on Shanghai in 1932], China's weakness and old corrupt practices were exposed, imperialism's contempt for, insult of and greed toward China increased even more. The present war to resist Japan is a ... national liberation war. The time when Chinese territory could be seized without resistance is passed.²⁷

Yet many statements also drew attention to the dual nature of the war, anti-imperialism and social transformation. Quite forthright on the party’s twin aims in the war, Mao told journalist T.A. Bisson in late June 1937:

Here [by resisting Japan] there is also a revolutionary movement, because the anti-Japanese struggle is accompanied by a struggle for democracy, better livelihood, and economic construction. Both go together in China... It is also true that along this road the Chinese revolution gains.²⁸

Making the point even more explicitly, Xu Teli, deputy director of the party’s propaganda department, characterized the war as one against imperialism, the feudal forces and the bureaucratic comprador system. He added: ‘Since the 7.7 incident China’s balance of class and national forces has undergone a change as never before in history... In the five years of the resistance war the concept of China should be given a new definition both internationally and domestically.’²⁹

National liberation in the abstract might have attracted many students and intellectuals in general to the resistance movement. But to the poorer peasantry, who made up the great majority in the large-scale basic-level organizations in the various fields, especially those carrying heavy military tasks, anti-imperialism made sense in the long term only if it was infused with and based on a social content, i.e. the primary factors.³⁰

This basic fact was stressed in the party’s policy directives and pronouncements, as well as in non-party sources, on the resistance movement. In citations of relevant examples below, three broad themes of necessity stand out: to improve the people’s livelihood, to give them a stake in the social order and to implement reforms. The essential message conveyed in these imperatives is that unless they are vigorously pursued it would be extremely difficult or impossible to achieve genuine mass mobilization, organizational
consolidation and a solid foundation for the resistance activities. In short, for the resistance effort to move beyond the sporadic and scattered stages, the substance of the peasants’ living conditions had to be addressed.

Before turning to the three themes, a brief look at two cases will be useful as a general illustration. The first concerns the demands that the resistance raised for the immediate reform gains to be deepened. A 1944 party investigation in Beiyue described this process in terms of a transition from ‘initial’ to ‘full mobilization’. The former instance had enabled a four-month-long armed struggle against the Japanese. However, since rent and interest reduction had ‘definitely not been thoroughly implemented’ it was concluded that ‘we must proceed with extensive and penetrating [policy implementation] and consolidation, otherwise these [armed struggle] achievements cannot be firmly retained’. To effect full mobilization three criteria were laid down: energetically carry out rent and interest reduction, with peasant participation; widely set up peasant associations (and thereafter other mass organizations) which the people can identify with; and raise class consciousness and resistance zeal. Put differently, these measures implied social reform, organizational build-up and consciousness transformation.31

The second case draws attention to the military importance of solidly implanting the village’s party branch. The survey of 29 branches in Taihang concluded their long-term stability and impact rested on the degree to which they managed to tackle the people’s livelihood difficulties. A successful example from Liao county showed that related policies were mainly of three kinds. First, wealth was redistributed, which meant reforming and abolishing old taxation practices, reducing rents and interests, clearing up debts and taking back landlord-controlled temple land and public land. Second, production was developed by organizing spring ploughing campaigns, repairing ditches, weeding seedlings, hoeing up young plants, etc. Third, peasant self-reliance was institutionalized in the form of cooperatives and storehouses. The failure of a party branch to gain a measure of strength – and there were many such cases – revealed itself in combat. Either it was incapable of gathering a militia force; or the militia fell to pieces in the first encounter; or the resistance could not be kept up for long or lacked the resilience to cope with a predicament, resulting in passivity, disbandment, flight and even the burying of rifles. Demoralization gripped peasants and party members alike. Again, the features of politico-economic restructuring, in addition to the vital production endeavours, are readily observable.32
Improve livelihood

‘A lasting resistance’, it was pointed out, ‘has to depend mainly on the efforts and persistence of the broad worker and peasant masses’. They were ‘the source of the resistance energy’ and had ‘shed blood and dripped with sweat’.33 Thus constituting the ‘basic strength’ on the war and production fronts, the peasants’ lot would have to be alleviated, or else they were not likely to actively involve themselves in these struggles.34 These were frequently enunciated arguments in wartime party sources. Policy statements by top party leaders strongly reflected this concern. In a 1941 report on the party’s work in JinChaji, Peng Zhen warned:

If our policy cannot substantially improve their [the basic masses] political and material life, they will not actively fight against Japan, nor will they give vigorous support to the resistance governments. ... the livelihood of the Chinese peasants is extremely miserable, and often they are half-starving. Without improving their political, cultural and, in particular, material life ... they will have no energy and willingness to participate in the resistance war.35

Liu Shaoqi was no less emphatic in his 1938 lecture given at the Resistance University in Yan’an:

It is not enough, if [we] merely mobilize the masses to participate in the war of resistance and neglect the livelihood of the masses. All these mass groups [self-defence corps and guerrilla teams] alike would collapse. Therefore, improving the people’s livelihood is also the duty of the mass groups. Only if the people’s livelihood can be improved can the greatest majority of the people be mobilized to participate in the war of resistance. This is a fixed principle.36

Lessons drawn from fighting Japanese mopping-up operations in the Taihang and Taiyue areas in the mid-years of the war corroborated these admonitions. Failure to ‘reasonably’ improve the people’s livelihood ‘seriously hindered arousing resistance activism and raising the production zeal’. The ‘central task hereafter’ was thus defined as vigorously implementing land laws and taxation policies so as to lessen the people’s hardship. In short, ‘[p]ersisting in the war and improving the people’s living conditions are inseparable’.37

The slogan ‘resistance above everything’ does not make sense, activists in a locality of northwestern Shanxi maintained. People would assume
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resistance duties only if these were co-ordinated with measures bettering their lot – they were unlikely to contribute when starving and shivering and having to sell their wives and children, the activists stressed. Hence, ‘during the initial period the peasants’ work in the locality mostly concerned such struggles as replacing village heads, reducing rents and interests and implementing the reasonable tax burden’.38

At times, claims regarding the peasants’ preoccupation with making a living appeared to take the extreme form of implying that no other issue would move them into action. An article on southeastern Shanxi in March 1940 said: ‘Only by proceeding from the masses’ demands for improved living conditions can one really mobilize them and gradually raise their interests and demands to the interests of the nation and the struggle for victory in the resistance war.’39 With the rent and interest reduction policy, government regulations relied on the principle of ‘improving the people’s living conditions and increasing the resistance strength’.40 Note, however, that these statements speak of activizing the peasants on a sustained basis. In the Shanxi article the long-range view is indicated by the words ‘really mobilize’ and ‘gradually raise’. The focus of the rent and interest regulations is on ‘increasing resistance strength’.

While in a general perspective endeavours to improve the people’s living conditions were basic and combativity demonstrated by armed bodies might have an initial or secondary mobilizational effect, activities in the two fields interacted in complex ways (see related comments in Chapter 1, and elaborations in Chapters 7, 8, 11 and 12). In fact, doing a good job in both respects was declared the ‘basis’ for accomplishing a variety of work tasks. Army recruitment campaigns in Taihang and Taiyue were held up as evidence; many localities claimed to have completed the quota ahead of schedule and some even to have exceeded it.41 Other sources similarly exemplified the importance of linking livelihood and resistance issues. What convinced the people in southern Shandong that the Fourth Brigade of the Eighth Route Army was ‘the army of the masses’ was its ‘fighting for the welfare of the people as well as struggling for the liberation of the country’.42 On the other hand, where the people’s living conditions were neglected, mobilization made little progress.43

A stake in the order

The CCP entertained no illusions of a nationalistic peasantry rising up to defend the country. One article ascribed their ‘extremely weak conception
of the nation-state’ to the failure of governments in the past to bring any practical benefits to the peasants or lighten their crushing economic burden.\textsuperscript{44} When in the summer of 1937 the peasants in Shanxi showed little inclination to fight, the province’s old warlord Yan Xishan had to admit that ‘[t]he people don’t care what happens to their government because their government has never cared what happens to them’.\textsuperscript{45} The rough behaviour of the GMD/provincial troops and their ruinous extortions further discouraged the peasants from joining the war effort. In one Henan village this was ‘the greatest obstacle’ in organizing them for resistance, since the Japanese could not make their plight worse and ‘might even be better’.\textsuperscript{46}

The peasants’ resentment of the societal order and unwillingness to fight for it was amply demonstrated in southern Shandong. Wang Yuchuan observed how the poorer peasantry’s initial reaction to the collapse of the establishment following the Japanese attack ‘was one of relief’ since ‘for them hunger, beating, flogging, blackmailing, and imprisonment were the order of the day’ under the provincial governor Han Fuqu’s regime. Although fearing the Japanese army’s brutality,

the people of south [Shandong] nevertheless felt that a big stone had suddenly been removed from their shoulders. They were particularly relieved when they realized that the downfall of Han meant no more collection of land tax and other taxes and no more forced labour.

The main reason for the peasants’ reluctance to resist was, Wang asserts, that ‘the invasion directly and immediately threatened the security of the landlords, which, to the peasants, was a matter of rejoicing’. Other factors also influenced them. Excluded from the political process, they were ‘quite devoid of national consciousness’. Possessing hardly any land, they felt that, except for getting killed, their situation could not become worse. Wang contended this gave rise to a feeling of ‘[n]o matter who comes, we have to pay taxes just the same’. Subsequently Japanese warfare taught the peasants the necessity to organize resistance – but then they fought as part of a process to change their own circumstances.\textsuperscript{47}

To make the peasants defend their locality they had to be given a powerful and concrete incentive. Lü Zhengcao, who commanded army units on the central Hebei plain, explained:
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Our new task ... was to give the villagers something to fight for. Almost all the farmers had personal reasons for hating the Japanese: houses had been burned, women raped, old people killed, cows and pigs carried off. There was no lack of ill feeling. But hatred is not a good battle cry. Farmers have always been bitter against the Chinese government but they seldom revolt. To make these peasants fight against the Japanese we had to give them something which they prized and let them defend it.

This implied a restructured village administration and economic reforms like reducing rents and interests, redistributing taxes and assisting the peasants who had lost their draught animals. By pursuing these policies, Lü claimed: ‘We have made each farmer feel that this is his war, not ours; he can keep his privileges only by supporting the guerrillas who protect his village.’

That a viable mass resistance could not rest on hatred of Japanese brutality was a point made also by Ren Bishi. While at first asserting that the ‘Japanese attack, and especially the cruelty of the Japanese army is the best material in our mobilization and organization of the masses’, he then listed predominantly economic factors as ‘the most important methods’ for accomplishing these endeavours: lighten the people’s economic burden, reduce taxes and rents, improve the people’s livelihood as much as possible and extend preferential treatment to soldiers’ families. Army recruitment had to be closely related to these measures. People joined the army for a variety of reasons, but what counted heavily in expanding armed strength were the concrete steps taken to help numerous families in dire need of food, land and labour, one report stressed.

Notwithstanding the frequent and stern reminders in party directives to this effect, failures to heed them were plentiful. In July 1942 the JiLuYu area party committee apparently sensed the crux of the matter and decided to undertake a campaign around the themes of democracy and people’s livelihood. The initiative was prompted by the precarious situation at the time: amidst a largely inactive peasantry, the Japanese pressed hard on the resistance forces. The actual launching of the campaign in September 1942 was probably influenced by Liu Shaoqi’s instruction to the Shandong sub-bureau of the JiLuYu region in that month: it said that providing visible material benefits was critical to winning a broad and long-term peasant support. Yet there were few signs of a turn for the better a month later when about 500 party, government and army cadres were sent to the Pu...
and Fan counties to conduct tests at selected spots. Not having obtained any material gains, the people were still unresponsive to the CCP.51

A report delivered at a cadre conference in the same region in December 1943 ascribed the people’s earlier ‘very cold’ posture towards the party to its inability to do anything concrete about their hardship. In contrast, the peasants subsequently, presumably after the neglect had been redressed, cooperated in fighting Japanese attacks by hiding party activists, instead of, as earlier, driving them away.52

**Implement reforms**

Improving the peasants’ living conditions and giving them a stake in the order implied fundamental reforms. A party directive in November 1939 stated a constantly inculcated theme to ‘carry out drastic economic and political reforms which are beneficial to the broad masses resisting Japan’.53 While these reforms were subject to many revisions and elaborations, their vital role was never doubted. Three months before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Peng Dehuai told journalist Nym Wales: ‘The heavy burden of taxation must be concretely removed to better living conditions or the people will not support the anti-Japanese movement enthusiastically.’54 Early in the war Mao Zedong spoke in similar terms to H. Hanson: ‘We believe that China cannot win this war unless it draws upon the manpower and food supply of the peasant masses. Their cooperation can be attained only by immediate political and economic reforms.’55 Peng Zhen’s conclusion after three years of war was unequivocal:

To generate a mass movement, the resistance to Japan must be linked to reducing rent and interest, carrying out the reasonable tax burden, increasing wages, reducing working hours, establishing mobilization committees and reforming the village administration. Otherwise it will not be possible to genuinely mobilize and organize the masses to resist Japan.56

Continued high rent rates had a strongly discouraging effect on peasant activism.57 In his report to the party’s North China bureau conference in September 1940, Peng Dehuai drew attention to the connection between enforcing rent and interest reduction and mass involvement:

If the peasants’ demands are not satisfied to a certain extent, it is impossible to arouse their activism to a high level. Therefore, apart from politically establishing a democratic government of class equality and destroying
landlord rule in villages, [we must] also implement a 25-per-cent rent reduction and appropriately reduce interests.\textsuperscript{58}

References in party sources to the Shandong base area and to the eastern Hebei/Jehol/Liaoning region (JiReLiao), where the CCP’s influence generally compared unfavourably to other base areas, are especially suggestive of how the CCP viewed its basic weaknesses and what had to be done about them. Rather than an outline of actual developments, the citations below are intended to illustrate the party’s overriding concern with the social primacy and its bearing on resistance performance.

Documents on Shandong in the years 1939–43 often lamented the slow progress in putting politico-economic reforms into practice. A CCP central committee directive in December 1939 said that ‘the mass struggle for democracy and people’s livelihood’ had not yet been launched. In July 1941, the same authority characterized the achievements in reducing rents and interests and in promoting the peasants’ political and social supremacy as extremely poor. Even in the spring of 1943, the political work remained quite underdeveloped, as evidenced by the fast swelling ranks of the puppet army.\textsuperscript{59} The outlying parts of the base area were particularly behind; ‘it is not until today’, the Shandong sub-bureau reported in August 1942, ‘that we have begun to pay attention to improving the masses’ livelihood’.\textsuperscript{60} Not surprisingly, the CCP setbacks during the intensified Japanese military campaigns of 1940–42 were more serious than elsewhere. Clashes with GMD army units also contributed to this outcome. A \textit{Jiefang Ribao} article in July 1944 explained the turn of events thereafter. Party members at various levels conducted ‘severe self-criticism’, and it was concluded that ‘[t]o change the situation mass work is crucially important.’ The concrete measures included rent and interest reduction and increased wages campaigns, for which about a thousand cadres were sent to assist peasant associations, and establishment of New Democratic relations of production to free the peasants from economic dependence on and subjection to the landlords.\textsuperscript{61}

The JiReLiao region is perhaps an even more telling example of how neglect to tackle the peasants’ livelihood problems seriously hampered the development of base area structures and combat capacity. As reported by the JinChaji sub-bureau in November 1944:

\begin{quote}
In the initial stages of building the JiReLiao base area the masses were mainly mobilized for the resistance struggle against the Japanese. This was an achievement. But in consolidating the base area one must fully
\end{quote}
and without scruples arouse the masses and make them resolutely free themselves. Only then will the base area rest on a firm foundation. In mobilizing the masses, the first step is to reduce rent and interest, and thereafter engage in economic organizing (the big production campaign). In this respect the JiReLiao party’s understanding has been inadequate. As a result, the rent and interest reduction policy has for quite some time not been our basic policy in consolidating the base area and in mobilizing the masses. The basic masses are the main force resisting Japan and they should bear the main burden in terms of manpower, material and financial resources... The question of the peasants continued capacity to carry the burden is a crucially important factor determining whether or not the base area will be able to keep up the resistance for a prolonged period.  

Accounts from various localities indicate economic reforms tended to invigorate resistance. Popular reactions to a radical redistribution programme in Shanxi are a case in point, although their claimed degree was perhaps exaggerated. At a two-day conference called by the Eighth Route Army and a local organization under strong CCP influence and attended by a hundred village representatives, the following decisions were taken: ‘[A]bolish all taxes and levies, carry out the reasonable tax burden; relief aid to refugees and poor people; reduce rents and discontinue debt and interest payments; overthrow the traitors and confiscate their property to cover resistance expenditure.’ The people were said to have responded instantaneously and asked for cadre assistance, which in turn strongly reinforced war mobilization. Other examples were less spectacular, but no doubt more representative. Peasants’ participation in struggles to eliminate corruption and implement tax and rent reduction policies in southern Hebei reportedly raised their determination to resist and increased mass organization strength. In the village of Ten Mile Inn, a campaign against heavy taxes boosted peasant morale and facilitated the establishment of the county government. Tax reductions in another locality had the effect of gradually lessening the villagers’ scepticism to the resistance authorities.

Both socio-economic and political reforms were thus vital to the resistance; indeed, they were closely interrelated. This linkage was set out in general terms by the party’s North China bureau in December 1942: ‘to thoroughly carry out democratic politics ... it is essential to broadly develop mass-based democracy and livelihood struggles ... to connect them and to gradually raise mass economic struggles to political struggles for democracy and for destroying the cruel feudal rule.’ The political measures would have to safeguard the poorer peasants’ rights and active participation in
village affairs or else there was no prospect of generating a mass resistance movement – speaking to Western journalists early in the war, top leaders like Mao Zedong, Zhu De and Peng Dehuai made no bones about this, in their view, cardinal principle. As the CCP tirelessly proclaimed, such reforms implied a ‘democratic politics’ depriving the elite of any real power and instituting the ‘supremacy’ of the poorer peasantry.

Restructured power relationships were seen as stimulating popular activism essential to executing a range of military tasks, like engaging in combat, gathering intelligence, providing the army and guerrillas with recruits and food, etc. A JinChaji directive of January 1939 lent negative confirmation. It drew attention to how ‘the village governments’ weaknesses’ had been exposed in the course of fighting and gave two reasons. One was the heavy work load of the village head. The other, which must be considered as the more basic, was the failure to put ‘democratic rights’ into practice. As a consequence,

![image]

It must be emphasized that the constancy of the three broad themes exemplified above referred to their perceived necessity and overall policy thrust, not to their specific content. Generally, with the passage of time, especially in the latter half of the war, policy measures became more elaborate and systematic and were implemented more extensively and with greater vigour. Of course, these measures never reached the stage of completion: this was precluded by their transitional character. Moreover, the impact of the primary policies was circumscribed by a number of conditions frustrating organizers’ determination (when that quality was present) to carry out these policies. How these hindrances affected the implementation process and the limits that they imposed on what was or could be achieved is indeed a central concern of this study and is analysed in Chapters 4–12. Below only some brief remarks of a general nature will be attempted.
Dimensions of unevenness

To begin with, Taihang statistics from 1942 provide a rough indication of the difficulties in mobilizing the villagers. The overall figure on involvement in primary policy struggles pointed to a fairly good record: 60 per cent of 1,925 villages in 15 counties. Yet this rate is heavily qualified by a popular participation of only one-fourth in seven counties, two-thirds of which were classified as ‘advanced’ (i.e. strong CCP influence), with a population of 458,600. These contrasting data denote an often stressed feature of the CCP movement: its extremely uneven spread. Thus in successful, but hardly representative, counties about 90 per cent of the villages were drawn into the struggles.

Unevenness was obvious in other important respects. First, popular attitudes to the struggles naturally varied. Conforming to the general pattern, the ‘activist posture’ was a distinct minority phenomenon. Those who spoke at struggle meetings in ‘advanced’ counties amounted to 10 per cent, in exceptional cases to one-third. Second, the intensity of the struggles tended to fluctuate sharply, with a brisk mass activity followed by a depressed state. Some political struggles against puppets and ‘local tyrants’ failed to develop into economic restructuring efforts. Third, given the insufficiently available resources to deal with the many exacting tasks, their co-ordination was hard to achieve. As a result, some activities were neglected or fell behind, particularly those in the laborious areas of organization and training. For example, people were registered for the peasant association without their knowledge.

Finally, unevenness of local conditions, political and/or economic, gave rise to a certain variability regarding those struggled against. When struggles were not exclusively aimed at ‘weakening the feudal element’ of landlord and rich peasant power, the basic policy line, but came to include a notable number of other categories as well, warnings of an ‘ambiguous’ policy direction were sounded. Thus, in one area the 308 struggle targets included the following percentages: rich peasants 33.6, landlords 28, middle peasants 26, and managerial landlords 6.3 per cent. The high proportion of middle peasants, supposedly the anti-feudal allies of the poor peasants, and the comment that some of the middle peasants were ‘corrupt’ elements and ‘tyrants’ indicates, among other things, disharmony between an economically derived class determination and a politically ascribed behaviour. As party organizers often discovered, there was no straight line from social being to
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consciousness. Strenuous mobilizational work also applied to the party’s natural constituency.\textsuperscript{70}

Resistant attitudes

Several factors contributed to the above outcome. The relative lack of, or only slowly forthcoming, activist spirit among the mass of poorer peasants, the intended beneficiaries of the party’s policies, was in large part due to mistrust of the CCP’s capacity to protect them from future retaliatory actions by the local elite or the anti-communist military forces. Consequently, one typical report said: ‘When launching the struggles the masses were invariably unwilling to hold up their heads and there was a strong tendency for cadres to take on what ought to be done by the people’.\textsuperscript{71} Another, though related, factor that tended to inhibit the peasants was sweepingly referred to as ‘tradition’. In the words of a directive on work methods: ‘Due to the oppression and shackles of feudal rule over thousands of years, the masses have not realized their own strength; they do not even believe in their own powers and dare not struggle against the village rulers.’\textsuperscript{72} The problem was compounded by a roughly 80-per-cent illiteracy rate and widespread superstition which meant that, a report in March 1945 declared, ‘old traditions and old thought are still definitely predominant in the villages’.\textsuperscript{73}

The local elite’s ability to hinder the CCP’s restructuring efforts was obvious when their interests were directly damaged or threatened.\textsuperscript{74} A prime example is landlord resistance to rent reduction. The specific tactics that they employed to subvert the transformative policies depended mainly on how consolidated the CCP’s rule was in the area. The weaker the mass mobilization, the more determined and open their obstruction. According to one report, they counter-attacked when peasant activism was at a low level and people shunned party cadres.\textsuperscript{75} In the core of the base areas, landlords sought to manipulate the village government by deceiving, feigning compliance, ‘seizing upon our weaknesses’ and placing agents in the administration.\textsuperscript{76}

If the mobilization of peasant men confronted the CCP with major obstacles, these were even higher in the case of women. An account from northwestern Shanxi gives a good illustration. Of the five problems listed, the initial two were mainly specific to organizing women, while the other three had a wider relevance. It was first of all noted that women were not easy to get in touch with. There were several reasons: women organizers
met with a huge cultural gap (they were even suspected of not being women!); the old women would not let them enter the house and talk with their daughters; and these young women were afraid of being called upon to perform combat duties. An important preliminary step to break down the great wall separating the two sides was to concretely convince the parents that the purpose of the organizers’ visit was to serve the ‘harmonious family’, not to stir discord. Only thereafter was it possible to gain access to the younger peasant women and get on with the main task. The second issue, concerning husbands allowing their wives to participate in outside activities, raised still greater difficulties. It often happened that women enrolling in literacy classes and training courses were ‘cruelly beaten’ or locked up at home without anything to eat. Third, the village elite tried to sabotage the work by spreading rumours, sawing dissension and hiring ‘local ruffians and hoodlums’ to humiliate women organizers in various ways. The fourth factor was typical of the mountainous base areas: a widely dispersed village population. In the relevant part of northwestern Shanxi, a village having no more than 30 households was considered big, while the usual village size was a mere 3-5 households. To reach a village with only two families, women organizers had to walk 5–10 kilometres in steeply mountainous terrain, which took one whole day. Finally, organizational efforts were severely hampered by the shortage of women cadres.

Military encumbrance

The war itself naturally weighed very heavily on policy options and feasibilities. Certainly, wartime developments were complex. To cite a 1943 party document that examined socio-economic changes in the Beiyue area since 1937: ‘The resistance war during the past six years has on the one hand signified progress, construction and prosperity; on the other hand, there has also been retrogression, destruction and decline.’ Put differently, impressive developmental policy achievements in various fields contrasted sharply with the devastation wreaked by natural disasters and especially the Japanese army.

The war affected the CCP movement in a still broader sense: by taxing enormous energies and resources for resisting Japan. Under the circumstances, how was one to harmonize the military-centred tasks with those of restructuring and reconstruction, closely interrelated though all these fields were? A conference report to local cadres in the JinJiYu area in September 1941 stated the CCP’s often repeated principle:
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[O]nly by solving the peasants’ immediate problems can their support be obtained and can they be mobilized to actively participate in the war... The basic issue in mobilizing the masses is to combine the interests of the resistance war with those of the masses.79

The two sentences refer to different levels of analysis. The first assertion is placed in the concrete, local context; the second takes an overall view. In reality, military and social/civilian demands constantly competed with each other. The existence of views reflecting this incompatibility was also frankly acknowledged, despite the frequent stress in party statements on the interdependence of the various spheres (see especially Chapter 1 on base area building). Some cadres were said to regard resistance tasks and mobilization work as conflicting and ‘only emphasized a certain aspect’.80 A directive on the work of the peasant association similarly recognized a ‘contradiction’ between ‘the peasants’ immediate interests and mobilization for resistance’. Discussing the issue generally, cadres were cautioned against ‘simply and narrowly’ considering the former or ‘only bothering about’ the latter. The point was to ‘grasp the unity’ of the two.81

As will be seen in Chapter 12, this injunction was a goal to be approached as far as possible, not a realizable option. The linkage problem was particularly acute in the early war years when organizational instruments were as yet quite underdeveloped. So far there had been no real attempt to connect democracy and improved livelihood to resistance, the JinJiYu area party committee declared in March 1939 and added that ‘mass mobilization for participation in war-related work, in the army and the guerrillas, and in traitor-elimination work has been very poor, despite the fact that the mass organizations have a very large membership’.

In fact, the same document went on to warn, there were local propensities to concentrate upon either of the two fields, thereby sacrificing the other. There was, in other words, no automatic or natural tendency for democracy and livelihood-related mass mobilization to develop into resistance channels. The people would have to be taught about the former’s connection with the war or else ‘[t]hey will then be indifferent to the resistance... This situation is rather widespread among the peasant associations in southeastern Shanxi’. Presumably, the Japanese invasion had not yet directly impinged on the peasants in the area. Yet for the CCP it was vital to marshal the resources also in these localities for the resistance effort, to join the particular to the general so as to increase total strength. On the other hand, resistance
activity required a social foundation. Consequently, ‘to mobilize the masses to join the army and to voluntarily participate in the war, political appeals alone do not have any great effect; one must solve the people’s livelihood-related difficulties’.82

Concern about lopsided mobilization was expressed elsewhere. When democracy and livelihood issues were stressed, it was reported at a meeting of party representatives of the Taiyue area in late 1939, the resistance aspect fell into oblivion: ‘The masses are poorly educated about the war; one is unable to link their immediate interests with the national ones and the war effort with democracy and livelihood-related struggles.’ On the other hand, where cadre energies focused primarily on military tasks, the villagers’ resistance activity was low as their living conditions then received inadequate attention.83

The military-centred approach sometimes derived from the predisposition of local party authorities. War pressures in the area might produce the same result, especially in the early years when cadres were apt to lean heavily towards resistance mobilization at the expense of other concerns. A voluminous investigation of the work of the peasant associations in the JinJiYu area noted the passivity, fragility and lack of staying power of the initial peasant movement and explained the reason:

In the work at the time, we were only busy with resistance mobilization and neglected to improve the peasants’ living conditions. We only wanted things from the masses and could not satisfy their demands. There were no limits to our mobilization of recruits, money, grain … we mobilized unceasingly and forcibly [and] did not choose the means… All work on improving the people’s livelihood became an empty shouting of slogans.84

In an overall perspective omitting area differences, the uneven degree to which military activities or primary policies were pursued had a certain inevitability. If each of the concerns imposed enormous strains on the CCP’s limited resources, the burden of all these endeavours, when put together, was simply crushing. In summary, there were definite constraints on what the CCP could achieve at one and the same time in a given area, while these nevertheless left room for significant diversity.

Restricted focus
To many contemporary Western observers, however, the vast social changes gradually set in motion during the war period appeared to meet with few
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impediments. Consequently, in these accounts, despite their many perceptive insights, the changes were given exaggerated proportions, sometimes to the point of implying a complete break with the past. Three quotations from different points of time will exemplify this tendency. Asked by a resistance force in the beginning of the war to tell the British about them and China when returning to England, James Bertram pondered:

What *did* they know about this war in England, I wondered again looking at these eager brown faces, the little mountain town with its peasant soldiers, the laughing [*xiao gui*] playing in the snow with local children? On the face of it everything seemed to be going so badly for China. [Beiping,] Shanghai, [Nanjing, Qingdao] ... was already in the hands of the invader.

But where was the real strength of the Chinese people? Not in the big coastal cities, not in the provincial capitals. Surely it was here, in the villages and district towns, here among the masses of the peasantry who at last, after so many years of ignorance and civil strife, were being united into an organic whole with one conscious and increasing purpose.

The social unit of China is still the village; and it was the village that could become the real centre of the war of resistance in the future. This much was already plain... Out of the storm and stress or the present crisis, a new China would emerge, and it would be a very different China.85

A 1945 US government intelligence study on the CCP thus described the import of its economic policies:

As sponsors of such an economic program [the taxation measures, the rent and interest reduction, the distribution of run-away landlords’ land and collaborators’ property to poor peasants] in a country where the overwhelming majority of the people were debt-ridden, impoverished by exorbitant taxes and rents, the Chinese Communists could not fail to gain a tremendous popular following. The Eighth Route Army in North China came soon to be considered the benefactor and saviour of the people not only against the Japanese, but also against the rule of the landlords and the former warlords who had held supreme sway over North China.86

Although the situation was rapidly changing by 1947 when Jack Belden revisited North China, his impressions chiefly refer to the impact of the war years:

[I]n wandering about Liberated Area rear lines, I was impressed first of all by the fact that I saw no soldiers of the 8th Route Army anywhere. No army guards hovered before *yamen* gates, protecting county governments as they
Village China at War

did in [Jiang Jieshi’s] areas... The second thing that impressed me was that the whole region, save for no-man’s land, was completely free from bandits and dissident armed farmers that one met so frequently in [GMD] areas. Travel was so absolutely safe as to be boring. If not an indication of popular government, such conditions pointed at least to a stable government.  

Other wartime sources strayed in a similar direction. In his account of an area in southern Shandong early in the war, Wang Yu-chuan certainly overstated the suddenness whereby the women sought to free themselves from the shackles of tradition:

Women's mass meetings are now held even in the most secluded villages of South [Shandong] and peasant women themselves take part in the speech-making. Farmers’ daughters give speeches on the same platform as high-ranking army officers, [county] magistrates, and other officials, and all the women feel that it is something to be proud of. This is a truly revolutionary change. Only a few months previously the women of South [Shandong] had still believed in the old idea that women should ‘never get out of the front door, or even the inner door’ or that ‘women without ability are virtuous’. But today they are speaking from the platform and learning to read. The Japanese invasion has driven the women of [Shandong] out of the kitchen and forced them to join the fight for the liberation of their sex and their country.

As generalizations, these quotations misrepresent a reality beset by conflicts. Unqualified breakthroughs, or nearly so, in arousing the peasants to supplant pre-war structures might have been achieved in some localities, but these were hardly typical. The more usual pattern was a fluid state of partial social transformation. The obstacles identified above could thus be more or less lowered but very rarely broken down. At the same time, however, highly significant gains were accomplished in remoulding village society, and these would have been unthinkable without a considerable degree of active mass involvement. And this was by no means solely due to CCP leadership: peasant activism occasionally had a strongly autonomous character, with important issue variations, despite the dead weight of tradition, etc. With its limited resources and tenuous hold over whole regions, the CCP was in no position to direct the peasants, by whatever means, on a scale that corresponded to the endeavours undertaken and to the results actually scored. To get a rough idea of these multifarious social tendencies at work and their interaction with the resistance effort, the next section will focus on the educational field in a broad sense.
The variety of educational programmes undertaken illustrates well the overriding twin preoccupations of the CCP movement: to effect social restructuring and development and to resist Japan. The class aspect of the former implied, in addition to providing an elementary schooling to children of the poorer peasant strata, equipping the peasants with the knowledge necessary to execute a range of tasks (draw up plans, organize the labour force and implement laws and directives in general) designed to establish their supremacy. As a corollary, education content was related to the immediate environment, with the object of rectifying the hitherto urban bias. This focus also characterized the developmental side. The schools were to 'combine learning with production' by teaching related methods and techniques both in the classroom and while engaging in practical activity, and by flexibly adapting teaching schedules to the agricultural cycle. This principle applied both to adults, who of course mostly engaged in production, and to children. In fact, teachers were told to attach equal importance to production and learning, and the performance in the former was credited toward school work.\(^8^9\)

The resistance feature was evident in the textbooks’ instructing the pupils in self-defence and in how to help wounded soldiers and catch collaborators. ‘The common theme in the textbooks’, a Japanese report noted, ‘is the resistance war against Japan, and care has been taken to imbue the children’s compositions, drawings, plays, etc. with an anti-Japanese awareness’.\(^9^0\) Against the background of killings and other losses at the hands of the Japanese army, a 1940 party document even urged educational programmes to ‘make “experiences and lessons from the anti-mopping up” the main content’.\(^9^1\) Adaptation to the social and military fields also meant children and teachers engaged directly in production campaigns, reform schemes and resistance duties (standing guard, checking travel permits, etc.).\(^9^2\)

Before examining the major educational undertakings, two background factors must be considered: the severe human and material constraints and the close connection of education with policy implementation. Most immediately, the constraints stemmed from the damage done by the Japanese invasion to large parts of the school system. Teachers fled south or joined the resistance forces, school buildings were destroyed and instruction was thrown into confusion. Rural Hebei was particularly hard hit: as shown in Table 2.1 below, two and a half years after the outbreak of the war the scale
of the education system had shrunk drastically compared to the pre-1937 level.

Table 2.1 Education in Hebei, pre-1937–December 1939

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<th>Primary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Post-secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>Pre-1937 29,030</td>
<td>Dec. 1939 7,307</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 1939 7,307</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers</td>
<td>Pre-1937 34,213</td>
<td>Dec. 1939 15,253</td>
<td>1,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 1939 15,253</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>Pre-1937 1,151,536</td>
<td>Dec. 1939 291,744</td>
<td>13,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec. 1939 291,744</td>
<td>6,737</td>
<td>4,430</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the occupied parts of Shandong the number of schools had by April 1940 declined from the pre-war 69 to 9 on the post-secondary level, from 65 to 26 (secondary) and from 35,076 to 7,674 (primary). By 1939 the educationally more developed areas in the pre-war days had either been occupied or were contested. Since they were not recovered until late in the war, educational work had to begin in the more secure mountain bases which were almost completely devoid of schools. Where such facilities had existed in the resistance bases they had often been destroyed. In an area of central Shandong all the primary schools were demolished during Japanese attacks in the winter of 1940, and by 1942 only half of the classes had resumed. One source says that a total of 47,567 primary schools were burned or knocked down in JinjiLuYu. The original shortage of teachers was drastically aggravated by the coming of the war. In the first year of war, 13 Baoding (Hebei) schools lost no less than 80–90 per cent of their personnel, with other areas recording a similar drop. The staggering insufficiency of teachers can be gathered from a 1943 investigation of 29 counties where the total number of primary school teachers was only 121 (higher level) and 2,278 (lower level). Besides, the teachers’ education was often of poor quality; not more than 42 per cent in nine examined counties met the requirements.

With ever larger numbers of people from the poorer strata with little or no schooling running village affairs, there was now an urgent necessity to provide them with basic knowledge. Lin Feng identified the demand for it, but exaggerated the scale of its spontaneous nature:

Tens of thousands of plain farmers elected to executive jobs in production groups, the militia or local government, feel keenly their own need for
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education and the lack of it handicaps their work. Previously our teachers and propagandists spent much time convincing the people that education was worthwhile. Now we are swamped with demands for teachers from thousands of scattered villages. Supplying them has become a serious problem because there is a limit to the number of qualified men.\textsuperscript{99}

Statistics on the cultural level of the village administrations’ personnel amply demonstrate the thinness of the pre-war education system in the countryside and the obstacles that this posed to organizing a strong mass movement. Of 852 popularly elected village heads and deputies (in an unspecified area), no fewer than 400 were illiterate.\textsuperscript{100} In Taian county, JiLuYu, two-fifths of the 475 village heads were illiterate and another two-fifths had too poor reading ability to grasp laws. As many as 228 of the 320 village heads in Yuncheng county, JiLuYu, were illiterate, with an additional 83 only having a very rudimentary knowledge of characters.\textsuperscript{101} The generally relatively smaller share of poor peasants at higher government levels was reflected in rising educational standards there. Thus, according to a 1940 survey of seven counties in Hebei, 37 per cent of the delegates to the village assemblies were illiterate, whereas in the district and county assemblies this category made up 17.4 and 5.6 per cent respectively.\textsuperscript{102}

High illiteracy rates also characterized the base of the party organization. This applied to 55.4 per cent of the party members in Taishi county, western Hebei.\textsuperscript{103} Figures from other areas give a roughly similar picture. Illiterates in local party organizations were 1,586 out of 2,432 in central Shanxi (three counties), 2,727 out of 6,160 in eastern Shanxi and 338 out of 524 in an area of southern Taihang. While described as ‘extremely serious’, these rates still understated the problem: those classified as literate did not necessarily have reasonable reading abilities. Thus, among the 1,478 party members in two Taihang counties, 926 knew 50–300 characters, 388 fewer than 51 and a mere 164 were able to recognize more than 300.\textsuperscript{104}

As with the government administration, however, educational levels rose at higher organs. A late 1943 survey in parts of the JiLuYu region said that illiterates numbered 1,338 (out of 2,347) in the village’s party branch committee and 60 (827) in the district bodies, while none was illiterate in the county organization.\textsuperscript{105}

The low educational level had serious implications for policy implementation. A test conducted among 18 village heads in one county of northwestern Shanxi – of whom three had attended school for three years, another seven for two years, seven were illiterate and one was an ‘intellectual’ – showed
that they were not very familiar with the laws and the way of putting them into practice. As for rent and interest reduction, they generally only knew ‘25 per cent rent reduction’ and were, with one exception, unable to grasp the meaning of the 37.5 per cent rent ceiling. On the question of the procedure for arresting a person, there were only three correct answers, while no one clearly understood the functional difference between a village mass meeting and a village representative conference. Yet on more directly class-related questions they did better. Twelve could identify the concept ‘citizen’ (gòngmin) correctly, and 10 knew exactly (and an additional five partly) the answers to ‘Who does the Northwest Shanxi government look after? What is its leading organ?’ One might infer that the village heads had a poor grasp of the more technical questions but were nevertheless conscious of the purpose of their work. The politicization of the village heads is also suggested by the fact that only one answered ‘incorrectly’ about whether and why the Soviet Union or Germany would emerge victorious in the war between them.106

Similar consequences for policy enforcement were also apparent at the district and county echelon, despite their relatively higher educational standards. Thus, the post-1942 political thought campaign revealed that most of the government cadres and party members were unable to grasp its documents.107 Under the heading ‘difficulties, experiences and lessons encountered’ in carrying out the unified progressive tax (see Chapter 7), it was noted that one of the main problems was the small number of cadres and their low educational level.108

As could be expected, the elite tried to exploit the peasants’ inability to comprehend documents and translate them into action. Referring to several surveys on the cultural level of the village government personnel, one report concluded that they had ‘no choice but to use’ the rich since ‘the absolute majority [of the village cadres] are by themselves incapable of understanding laws or keeping accounts’.109 In the course of the campaign to reduce rents and interest many tenants were cheated.110 An investigation into the results of this policy admitted that the landlords’ cultural supremacy enabled them to launch legal struggles ‘better than us’. They were ‘most adept at using the talks of comrade Mao Zedong and other leaders and responsible comrades of the party and at seizing upon government laws to strike at our work personnel’. Where legal-organizational means failed, peasant radicalism took over, which meant tying up and beating landlords.111
Formal school system

There were basically three kinds of educational programmes: the formal school system and the social and cadre education. The first had a two-stage primary school and a middle school. Whereas the lower primary stage was in principle compulsory, the higher one’s chief purpose was to train basic-level cadres and to provide education for those cadres who already had a fair amount of work experience. To raise educational standards as well as to play a promotional role, so-called core primary schools were established. These were allocated more material resources and the best teachers. Middle school education was at first exclusively directed toward training cadres and primary school teachers, and a general curriculum was resumed only in the last few years of the war.\textsuperscript{112}

After 1942 emphasis shifted in elementary education from teaching children to training those mainly in charge of the war and production tasks, the adult peasants. This was part of the ‘popular management and public aid’ concept, according to which the people themselves ran school administration and decided on the content of the curriculum, the teachers to be hired, the raising of funds, etc. The claimed result was to have better adjusted the education content and organization to the actual needs of the locality as perceived by the peasants. Popular management therefore introduced a much needed flexibility.\textsuperscript{113}

A vastly expanded primary schooling raised challenges to the rural elite’s monopoly on education. Whereas only 30 per cent of the children attended primary school in 26 counties of pre-war central Hebei – considered a culturally advanced region – the wartime rate in numerous, though restricted, areas more than doubled.\textsuperscript{114} Confirming also the early patchy progress, Western visitors to bases in Shanxi and Hebei were mightily impressed by local educational efforts.\textsuperscript{115}

The spread of elementary schooling was also significant for the equalized educational opportunities it offered girls. Traditionally peasants’ daughters were not considered worth the expenses for education since they left home upon marriage and cut the ties with the family while the economic sacrifices for sons were regarded as an investment for the future. A 1937 survey of four Hebei counties shows that far less than 20 per cent of the pupils were girls: Raoyang – 4.2; Anguo – 17.2; Shen – 8.8; Tang – 5.6. In many places the war years saw their percentage of pupils rise to almost half the total number. In 28 counties of central Hebei it was 43.4, while three counties in the Beiyue area recorded percentages of 43–50.\textsuperscript{116}
Adult educational programmes also benefited many women. For example, women’s training classes transmitted basic knowledge, holding out the prospect of women being promoted to cadres. The literacy campaigns (see below) were similarly instrumental in combating ignorance.\textsuperscript{117}

Conforming to the general trend, particularly adverse conditions modified specific policy methods. In the more contested areas, schools had no fixed location or basic structures, and were arranged to be shifted and hidden at any time.\textsuperscript{118} A group of Western journalists on a visit to northwestern Shanxi ‘saw primary schools close to the enemy, ready for evacuation as a body at moment’s notice under the leadership of the armed teacher’.\textsuperscript{119} Near Japanese strongholds and in the occupied zones classes had to be carried on in a disguised fashion of a puppet school officially using Japanese authorized textbooks and Chinese classics but in reality teaching resistance. Broadly speaking, there were two kinds of resistance primary schools in these areas: one had both a legal and illegal facet, while the other was entirely illegal. Frequent inspections necessitated quite elaborate measures to cover up the activities.\textsuperscript{120}

In remote and sparsely populated regions, where regular education was not practically possible, several approaches were tried. They included joint primary schools run by neighbouring villages, mobile primary schools using itinerant teachers, circuit schools where the pupils formed small groups of more than five with a literate person as head and instructors taught on a rotation basis, and various cultural groups in the most desolate villages.\textsuperscript{121}

**Social education**

The object of this adult-oriented programme was to conduct resistance propaganda, combat illiteracy and promote knowledge about agricultural production and health. The first task was assigned greater weight in the more fluid areas, whereas the other two were stressed in the consolidated bases. Yet policy directives were not readily adaptable to complex area differences; in October 1944, for example, the JinChaji border region government criticized past overemphasis on the propaganda side and gave precedence to developing the literacy movement.\textsuperscript{122}

The hallmark of social education was the winter study movement, which encompassed numerous kinds of literacy and lecture classes, study and newspaper-reading groups. Winter study, which had existed before the war on a small scale, implied using spare time during the slack season for educational activities. Where successfully carried out, the teaching was
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extended to the whole year and conducted on a permanent basis, and was then called ‘people’s school’. This was declared to have been achieved in some localities of JinChaji and Shandong in 1940 and 1943 respectively. At times winter study served a specific purpose, such as mobilizing people against a mopping-up campaign. It was less regularized than the formal school system in that the teaching material was not standardized but adapted to the peasants’ demands: ‘What [they] wish to study is taught’.123

In addition to technical training classes, which taught the peasants how to make mines and other weapons, there were principally two forms of winter study. First, the most basic and numerous were the literacy classes.124 Consonant with overall objectives, they were to serve both social transformation and the resistance. Hence these classes provided resistance training – instructions on how to fight the Japanese army and avoid unnecessary losses – and information on policies relating to rent and interest reduction, taxation and production. These classes also taught the people elementary reading knowledge, sorely needed on daily basis:

At the time many district and village level cadres could not write reports or read notices. They were unable to take notes at meetings or communicate instructions. When the militia stood guard and checked passers-by, they could not read travel permits. When collecting tax and participating in labour exchange, they were incapable of keeping accounts.125

For literacy classes to have the intended effects on work tasks, learning and political awareness, it was essential to connect the reading primer’s content to the people’s daily needs and undertakings.126 There were numerous methods for memorizing characters. Belden, for example, witnessed how ‘a farmer plowing in his field would put up one character on a big board at each end of the field. Thus, going back and forth all day, even his primitive mind could grasp the complex convolutions’.127

According to statistics from the Taihang counties of Liao, Wuxiang and Licheng, 45–60 per cent of the illiterates took part in the classes.128 Yet, substantially reducing the massive illiteracy was obviously a long-term undertaking. Despite two years’ efforts in southeastern Shanxi, where the classes involved 59 per cent of the population, 75 per cent of it still remained illiterate.129

The second form, lecture classes, met less often than the literacy classes – once to three times in a 10-day period. Characteristically these classes took up the main issue at the time and conducted propaganda and
education related to it. The teaching material had such titles as ‘Anti-fascist textbook’, ‘Rent and interest reduction textbook’, ‘Army recruitment and preferential treatment textbook’, ‘Production textbook’, etc. In areas of fierce fighting the textbooks usually carried themes like ‘Cut off supplies to the enemy’, ‘The grain war’ and ‘Eliminate traitors’. The participants were not only supposed to absorb the teaching by listening; they were also organized to tackle the problem. There is an interesting example from a village in Fuping county of western Hebei. In the course of reading the ‘Rent and interest reduction textbook’, the peasants became embroiled in an intense dispute with a landlord who had to consent to a rent reduction. With these tangible results, the other villagers perceived the advantages of the classes and responded positively. From an initially six to seven persons, attendance jumped to 70. With the low educational level, the material had to use simple illustrations and the language spoken by the peasants, while the short stories and descriptions expressed popular struggles.¹³⁰

**Cadre training**

Organizational build-up necessitated large numbers of trained cadres. Contrary to Zhu De’s claim in June 1937 that the CCP had ‘a big cadre reserve’ which could ‘be used to expand our forces quickly in wartime’¹³¹ there is massive evidence of an acute cadre inadequacy, quantitatively as well as qualitatively, throughout the war years.¹³² Initially, the problem was most strongly felt in the military field. Demands for cadres, Nie Rongzhen lamented, ‘could rarely be satisfied’ as the headquarters of the military district had no source of cadres to draw upon.¹³³ And since their replenishment from ShaanGanNing could not be counted on to any great extent and training required time, there was nothing else to do, he concluded, but to ‘get tempered in the struggle and advance courageously’. So pressing was the need for cadres that former guards, clerks, cooks, etc. had to be utilized as instructors or commanders of small military units.¹³⁴ The consequent detriment to quality inevitably persisted as the military forces burgeoned. In early 1941 a Taihang report on work in the military district was almost desperate in tone: ‘There is still an extreme lack of cadres who have experience of leading the militia, and cadres do not have the kind of elementary military knowledge and political qualities they should possess.’¹³⁵

In these conditions, enlargement of armed bodies hardly entailed a corresponding increase in combative strength. Due to cadres’ unfamiliarity
with military know-how and tactics, another Taihang document commented in late 1941 that ‘it is difficult to lead mass guerrilla warfare’. Indeed, the scarcity or military immaturity of cadres in different parts of the same region was declared to have rendered many local armed forces ineffectual. Organizationally loose and disunited, they were incapable of sustained activity. In one area the entire force melted away. A 1942 army source reported that military cadres’ poor grasp of commands in the midst of fighting made them ‘panic-stricken’ and caused ‘considerable losses’.

The urgent demand for cadres thus easily generated a swing to quantity at the expense of quality. The resultant drawbacks were of course not confined to military-related activity. They were particularly troublesome to the agency vested with the decisive leadership function, the party organization. A 1941 summary of the work in JiLuYu contrasted the party’s rapid expansion to its ‘backward’ and ‘unstable’ characteristics, which ‘most importantly’ was ascribed to cadres deficient in theoretical grasp and practical experience. (These aspects are further examined in Chapter 4). Government work was hampered in various respects. Choosing almost any literate person as a cadre, whether suited or not, a 1942 Jiefang Ribao article complained, negatively affected cadres’ relationship to the people. In one case, government cadres demanding grain and money even made villagers think that the Japanese were preferable. Cadre failure to train additional cadres frustrated carrying out village elections in some areas, a Taihang source noted. Responsible cadres were accused of not comprehending this ‘first important step’. An investigation of several counties in JiLuYu in the summer of 1943 described the cadres’ anti-traitor work as wholly incompetent. Only by transferring cadres and raising new cadres was it deemed possible to deal with the situation. As will be documented in later chapters, economic programmes were heavily constrained by low cadre qualities. For example, cadres in charge of cooperatives had a flawed understanding of their technical operations.

Cadres’ quantitative and qualitative insufficiencies bore very heavily on two problems haunting the CCP movement generally. Regarding the quantitative factor, the consequence was often the inability to undertake, or to devote much energy to, even some of the more basic tasks in the area, thus necessitating hard priority decisions. Reviewing three years’ work in the Huxi area, southwestern Shandong, one report said that an extreme scarcity of cadres, despite running party schools, had resulted in ‘makeshift solutions’ of transferring cadres, which meant ‘attending to one thing and
losing sight of another'. Xu Zirong, head of the party's organization department of the JinJiYu area, described the dilemma facing the CCP in still starker terms in mid-1941: ‘There is a lack of cadres at all levels and in all fields. Statistically it is astonishing. Many works are severely hit by the cadre shortage.’

The qualitative case, highlighting the discrepancy between the abilities required and those available, was a critical circumstance in higher party levels finding faults (‘deviations’) with lower ones in policy implementation. Outlining recent developments in North China, Nie Rongzhen, in April 1938, referred to widespread ‘mistakes’ by ‘many new cadres not having received long-term training’. They had brought much political harm to the CCP by collecting grain and funds in ways that instilled fear among the rich households, an unspecified number of whom fled to Tianjin.

To meet the demand for trained cadres a great variety of institutions were set up, in addition to the cadre education given in the formal school system. These included cadre schools, a university, teacher training colleges, military and vocational schools, etc. There were also numerous kinds of training courses, which especially in the early years were conducted on a mobile basis. Yet, as already underscored, cadre requirements were always far ahead of what training programmes produced. An army report of December 1940 declared that ‘there is everywhere a need for cadres. The initial period’s crash course method is woefully insufficient’. Reflecting intense pressures for an increased supply of cadres, a central committee resolution of February 1942 proclaimed: ‘Under the present conditions, the task of cadre education should occupy first place in the general education programme, and in the task of cadre education, priority should be given to the education of cadres in service.’ This education had an all-round character, comprising the professional, political, cultural and theoretical fields. Quick results could not be expected: ‘The education of cadres is a long-range matter... When conditions in localities and departments permit, the rule of two short daily study periods should be observed.’ Recognizing the time-constraint on training basic-level military cadres, Nie Rongzhen suggested using the spare time, such as when the troops were on the move.

The impossibility of training large numbers of cadres for organizational work within a short time-period forced an initially very heavy reliance on students and other intellectuals. A report from southeastern Shanxi in April 1939 conceded: ‘Today the leaders of the mass work are mostly young
intellectuals, not cadres who have arisen from the ranks of workers and peasants.\textsuperscript{152} The critical contribution of these intellectuals to the mobilizational efforts has been noted by researchers on the CCP movement.\textsuperscript{153} But as the Shanxi report pointed out, these categories also gave the CCP much pain since many of them did not readily conform to the party’s ideological and disciplinary rigours, relatively muted though these were for practical and united front reasons.

If the intellectuals posed vexatious political challenges to the party’s policy line, these could be even greater with a category that constituted the very core of the local party organization, i.e. cadres from the pre-war days who were scattered in various areas of North China. Retraining them was urgent: their reasoning was guided by the CCP’s earlier class warfare against the GMD and the upper classes – a policy which differed markedly from the CCP’s new wartime strategy of delicately constrained class struggles so as to advance the party’s cause without wrecking the national and rural united fronts (see Chapter 3). These cadres’ readjustment to the new circumstances was an all the more agonizing process as some had just resumed contacts with the party after several years’ isolation in underground activities following defeats in the pre-war struggles in the 1930s. A document from the Hebei/Henan region thus summed up this aspect of the CCP’s cadre predicament in the beginning of the war:

\begin{quote}
[M]ost cadres have just come out from prison; indeed, they have emerged from the small circle of the white area underground party ... they cannot deal with the open, complex and confusing environment. In particular, they completely lack experience in grasping the work in its entirety, above all, that related to the armed forces and governmental power.\textsuperscript{154}
\end{quote}

Huang Jing, a leading party figure in central Hebei, bluntly told a JinChaJi conference of party representatives in April 1938 that the pre-war cadres did not comprehend the party’s new policy line.\textsuperscript{155}

The following chapter will demonstrate the stubborn persistence of the pre-war cadres’, and sometimes also later recruited cadres’, ‘leftism’ or ‘excesses’, as their radicalism was typically termed. Here the import of this phenomenon will only be briefly illustrated. Instructions issued by the provincial party authorities to comrades in Hebei and Henan in December 1937 drew attention to the consequences of local party cadres’ two-year isolation from the CCP leadership, a time-period when its ‘tactical policy line and China’s situation’ had undergone ‘an overall change’: ‘according
to reports you are still implementing the line of the past’, that is, beating
gentry, extracting contributions from and distributing and eating the grain
of the rich households, taking revenge by killing and looting.\textsuperscript{156}

When Wen Jianping, secretary of the Wuxiang county party committee,
Taihang, spoke to a conference of local activists in May 1940, he depicted
the pre-war cadres as singularly bent on moving straight to revolution.
Having pointed out their ‘leftist’ attacks on landlords and rich peasants,
he then turned to the cadres’ ‘muddled’ understanding of the party line
– ‘the basic problem’. Their insistence on immediately instituting a party
dictatorship and on retaliating against the local elite ran counter to the
party’s rural united front policy.\textsuperscript{157}

A report by the party’s JinJiYu area committee in August 1941 took
an outright condemnatory, even derogatory, stand toward unreformed
radicalism:

Most party members [in Ci county] are pre-war persons with an unsavoury
background and are politically backward members. They do not understand
and believe in the party’s united front policy. It is very difficult to deal
with their narrowly conceived idea of class revenge. They adopt an entirely
retaliatory and antagonistic attitude to landlords and rich peasants and
take actions that are very ‘left’.\textsuperscript{158}

The strong, at times virulent, official party reaction to cadre radicalism was
primarily due to its divisive impact on the rural united front, a formula as
difficult to implement as it was viewed by the CCP as absolutely critical to
the successful execution of the resistance movement. In part, the CCP’s
vitaly felt need to reform these cadres probably also stemmed from the
key role that they had to play in the organizational efforts, especially in the
early years.

Thus, as shown in later chapters, the perils inherent in clinging to
pre-war practices was relentlessly pressed home by higher party organs
in various contexts. Suffice it here to note the strident warnings in the
December 1937 instructions: such practices would assist Japanese and
puppet intrigues, alienate the upper strata from the masses and induce the
former’s collaboration with the enemy side and consign the CCP to the
‘grievous struggle of a lonely army’ destined to suffer ‘miserable defeat’.
Cadres were therefore strongly enjoined to stop the bloodletting and adhere
to united front imperatives. And as occasionally happened, the instructions
added an assuaging appeal declaring that ‘you cannot be blamed’ while
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urging responsible cadres to gather cadre and guerrilla forces and 'patiently explain' the party's policy change.\textsuperscript{159}

Pre-war cadres’ resistance to the CCP’s wartime policy shift bears some affinity to the rejectionist response of leading Bolshevik cadres in pre-1917 Russia to Lenin’s advocacy of relaxing the strict membership rules when lessened state repression enabled a broader and more open political activity.\textsuperscript{160} To instantaneously change deeply ingrained patterns of thought and behaviour, shaped by bitter experiences and great self-sacrifices, demanded large amounts of courage and a strong commitment to a flexible policy line. For top party leaders a major policy switch was arguably easier to arrive at than for party cadres at lower levels who were closer to the harsh realities at the grassroots. To the latter it seemed safer, both mentally and physically, to stick to the earlier ways of doing things. The present was preferable to an unknown territory fraught with uncertainties and dangers to previously hard-won gains and tenaciously defended positions. The altered circumstances inaugurated by the Japanese invasion certainly signalled novel potentialities, but these did not unequivocally point to a single concrete policy direction regarding how to relate to domestic enemies. If their standpoint towards the CCP and the resistance was characterized by ‘waverings’, it was not unreasonable for the pre-war cadres to take a similar attitude to unanticipated and largely unconverted allies.

Of course, the impression must not be given that all cadres with a pre-war record remained firmly attached to the traditions of revolutionary warfare. This was but one, albeit rather conspicuous, tendency. These cadres did manifest diverse frames of mind. Thus, for example, the head of the public security agency in western Hebei, Zhang Jin, ‘an old cadre from the civil war period’, chose to defect to the Japanese.\textsuperscript{161}

Having trained a cadre did not, however, guarantee his/her continued services. There were plenty of reasons for the depletion of cadre resources. Statistics on cadre losses in two regions provide an overall illustration. During the past year, the JinJiYu area party committee reported in August 1941, altogether 458 party, government and mass organization cadres at the county and lower levels were lost. As many as 139 were said to have become dispirited and returned home. Deaths amounted to 113: 57 in combat, 33 due to illness and 23 while in arrest. The remaining were referred to as run-away (93) corrupt (22) and others (19).\textsuperscript{162} Among the total toll of 171 administrative cadres in an area of Suiyuan–Chahar during 1940–42, the most numerous category was those seized by enemy forces. The subsequent
fate of these 92 cadres varied: 38 were missing, 19 were killed by the enemy, 10 returned home, 9 escaped, 8 were forced to work for the enemy, 5 were released and 3 defected to the Japanese. The second largest category was war deaths, which accounted for 25 cadres. The other cadres ran away (12), died from illness (9), were discharged (6) and were missing (4). \(^{163}\)

The high proportion of cadres who resolved to discontinue their duties is corroborated by other sources. Most of the about 600 cadre losses at district and higher echelons in central and eastern Shanxi and in western Hebei were attributed to ‘wavering’ and ‘dejection’. \(^{164}\) Further difficulties, it was often pointed out, were raised by cadres’ strong attachment to the family, which made them unwilling to accept promotion and duties elsewhere. \(^{165}\) The other major factor causing a drain on the availability of cadres was directly related to the fighting. The biggest losses were suffered during Japanese mopping-up operations. In Shandong, 57 per cent of those killed and wounded in 1943 were cadres. \(^{166}\)

Cadre quantity was therefore subject to fluctuations and a large element of uncertainty. While variations in time and space were significant, the seriousness and constancy of this problem were general, as were the qualitative weaknesses.

*Educational publications*

Another form of activity that usefully served a broad educational purpose was the issue of numerous kinds of newspapers. These were usually the primary, and quickest, means for informing villagers as well as cadres of national and international developments and of directives, decisions and work plans of party and government organs. Even the more developed central Hebei lacked radio communication facilities and telegramme and telephone services below the county level. \(^{167}\)

Apart from the CCP’s main organ, the Yan’an-based *Jiefang Ribao*, the principal party newspapers in war-affected North China were *Xinhua Ribao* (New China Daily; there was also a Chongqing edition) and *Kangdibao* (Resistance Daily) or *JinChaji Ribao* (JinChaji Daily) as it was renamed in 1940, and *Zhanyou* (Battle Companion) which appeared every third day. *Xinhua Ribao* was started in January 1939, about a year later than *Kangdibao*, and with a circulation of 30,000 it covered many bases. In 1942, following Japanese military campaigns, it settled in Taihang and the distribution was limited primarily to JinJiLuYu. In addition, there were a great number of localized wall newspapers and lithographic or mimeographed ‘small
papers’ (xiaobao), generally one for each county, which were posted on a noticeboard in the villages. The total number of newspapers published is not known. Yet by 1940 there were, if Peng Dehuai was accurate, 184 kinds in existence in North China.\(^{168}\) In 1939 Japanese investigators found that with the CCP’s penetration of southern Shanxi, 60 kinds of newspapers were ‘being issued in an area where there had hardly been any such activity before the war’.\(^{169}\)

Given the unstable military situation, the workers in charge of the main newspapers had to know both how to set type and fight, and also be prepared to move the plant at short notice. Journalist Edgar Snow was told of a plant, employing 600 printers and turning out 30,000 copies of a daily newspaper (presumably Xinhua Ribao), which was shifted in one night as the Japanese encroached upon the area, and still the following day’s newspaper appeared!\(^{170}\) As for the smaller local newspapers, seven to eight persons – usually unarmed, and equipped only with pens, ink and a printing machine carried on the back – were enough to do the work. The biggest local newspaper in central Hebei had a staff of 30–40 persons.\(^{171}\)

The organizational cuts and simplifications in the mid-years of the war also affected the newspapers, with the party centre instructing the JinChaJi Ribao in the autumn of 1942 to reduce its staff from 530 to 270.\(^{172}\)

With the shortage of staff writers, the long distances and military hazards, gathering articles involved great difficulties. The bigger newspapers had their own reporters: Kangdibao in every military district and some who moved with the army. But for the most part the newspapers relied on a widespread network of voluntary correspondents who in the case of Xinhua Ribao numbered 2,000 in the spring of 1945.\(^{173}\) In central Hebei delivery of manuscripts to the newspapers as well as of the printed product to the readers was accomplished in mainly two ways: by party-affiliated personnel who, to avoid the Japanese army, were said to march five kilometres per night; and by a popularly based network linking one village to the next adjacent one. The social advance of youth was notable also in newspaper work, even to the point of ‘most’ of them being around 20 in central Hebei; the editor-in-chief of Jizhong Daobao (Central Hebei Bulletin) was only 19 years old.\(^{174}\) Life as a staff member was risky and not a few perished in their work. In May 1942, 36 of the staff on the Xinhua Ribao, including the editor-in-chief, were killed in a Japanese attack in Taihang. During the entire period, 56 newspaper personnel in the area lost their lives.\(^{175}\)
The policy of making the newspapers serve the people, called ‘popularization’ (*tongshua*), was reinforced in 1943–44. Under the slogan ‘everybody read and run the newspaper’, the staff tried to report on the people’s concrete problems and a correspondence network was organized to involve the villagers in the latter activity. Zhou Erfu, who saw much of JinChaji in 1944–45, described the significance of popularization:

While in the past the newspapers were irrelevant to the peasants, now their living conditions have become important news. This is a tremendous change. There is a flesh-and-blood relationship between the people and the newspapers. Through the newspapers they learn about agriculture and exchange production experience with people throughout the border region ... reading the newspaper is already becoming part of their daily life.

Informing the peasants of agricultural issues (new methods, etc.) and government directives was an important educational function of the newspapers; inviting the people to air their views about government work sometimes brought inadequacies to attention.

Enjoying a measure of autonomy from higher level party organs, the smaller newspapers were particularly prone to reflect local sentiments, whether these emanated from party members or the people. This carried dangers to the united front policy of the party centre. Thus, from February through September 1940 several party newspapers (and other publications) in Taixi county, western Shandong, launched a campaign against landlords – on rents and ‘grain-borrowing’ – that exclusively stressed the conflict aspect. In fact, ‘one only talked about arousing class struggle and the issue of unity in resistance was put aside’. Many publications failed to print the characters *KangRi* (resistance to Japan) and to carry out united front education. Two of the newspapers, *Qianjinbao* (Advance Bulletin) and *Douzhengbao* (Struggle Bulletin), produced such slogans as ‘wipe out the diehards’ and ‘kill off’ the traitors, and lumped together the middle forces with the former.

Such class warfare tendencies emanated from a number of sources, probably the chief one being party organizers’ efforts to improve the poorer peasants’ living conditions. If the CCP was bent on pursuing related policies, it was equally determined to defend the political barrier that it had erected to their ‘excessive’ manifestations: the already identified rural united front. What was its theoretical justification and its envisaged and actual workings?
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13. ‘Xixi duidi douzheng de liangge cailiao’, October 1941, GB, p. 87.
17. Nie Rongzen, KangRi mofan genjudi, p. 11.
22. For example: Lü Zhengcao, ‘Chuancha zai gouxian zhong de youyi zhanzheng’, JR, 16.7.1943; Li Xinqing, ‘Minbing yingxiong yundong’, JR, 21.8.1944; Chen Kehan, Mofan kangRi genjudi: JinChaJi bianqu (Chongqing: Xinhua Ribao guan, 1939), p. 10. The same dynamics applied to the CCP fighting the GMD before 1937. A Shanxi peasant described the situation in 1935:

When they [the Red Army] came here ... they always said: ‘Divide up the land and fight against landlords and depots’. They talked a lot and held lots of meetings, and at the meetings we used to stand up and shout ‘Yes, yes!’, but we did not really believe in them or that they had any real power.

But in April 1935 the Red Army defeated an armed counter-revolutionary landowners’ corps ten li from here. After that they came more often. They also killed other counter-revolutionaries. Then the people saw that the Red Army did have power, and so we organized ourselves into guerrilla bands. Jan Myrdahl, Report from a Chinese Village (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 107.

29. Xu Teli, ‘Wunian kangzhan de lishi yiyi’, in Kangzhan wuzhou nian jiniance (Yan’an, 1942), pp. 73–76. The figures ‘7.7’ stand for 7 July which marked the beginning of Japan's all-out invasion of China.

30. The war effort’s intrinsic social nature has also been pointed out in the European context of the anti-fascist struggles: ‘As for the resistance movements in the countries defeated and occupied by the Axis, the inseparability of liberation and social
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34. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kangRi genjudi tudi zhengce de jueding’, JR, 6.2.1942.
35. Peng Zhen baogao, pp. 7, 87.
43. Huang Yuan, p. 11.
44. Youji zhanzheng (Hankou: Xinhua Ribao guan, 1938), p. 73.
46. Crook, p. 34.
47. Wang Yu-chuan, pp. 91–93.
48. Hanson, p. 257.
55. Hanson, (1939), p. 309.
56. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 137.
57. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kangRi genjudi tudi zhengce de jueding’.
63. Dai Fu, 'Tie de duiwu shi zenyang liancheng de', in Qiu Jiang and Lu Yi (eds), Xixian zhaji (Hankou: Da shidai shudian, 1938), pp. 50–51.
64. ‘Zhinan Yubei gongzuo baogao’, p. 460.
65. Crook, p. 34.
70. 'Li Dazhang jiang yijiusier nian qunzhong gongzuo de jiandian zongjie', January 1943, TW, pp. 224–225.
73. Rong Zihe, 'Taihangqu sannian lai de jianshe he fazhan', 8.3.1945, ZH, p. 313.
75. 'Huang Jing tongzhi zai diwei guanyu fadong qunzhong ji muqian zhongxin gongzuo wenti de fayan', 25.4.1944, ZJ, vol. 3, pp. 292–293.
79. 'Wang Xiaoci zai Zhonggong', p. 745.
80. 'Li Dazhang jiang guanzhong gongzuo de jiandian huigu', 1940, TW, p. 198.
81. 'Guanyu nonghui gongzuo de zhishi', January 1941, QY, pp. 158–159.
82. 'JinjiYu quwei qunzhong gongzuo zongjie baogao', 16.3.1939, QY, pp. 139–142.
85. Bertram, p. 422. Xiao gui, meaning little devils, were in the ages 12–16.
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98. ‘Xing xian cunzhang ceyan’, JR, 1.3.1942.

111. Wang Zongqi, p. 27.


113. JinChaji bianqu xingzheng weiyuanhui (ed.), (1945), p. 432; Mu Xin, JinSui jiefangqu niaokan, p. 114. Within this framework there were numerous variations. On three different kinds see ‘Zhang Panshi tongzhi zai Taihang wenjiao qun ying dahuishang de zongjie baogao’, April 1945, WS, pp. 155–156.


124. Unless otherwise indicated the below on literacy classes refers to Liu Songshou, ‘Huabei kangRi’, pp. 114–118.

125. For additional evidence of ‘numerous cadres’ being unable to read and write reports see Peng Zhen, ‘Gong nong ganbu yao xue wenhua’, JR, 16.1.1943.

126. D. Zagoria has noted: ‘The few available studies all indicate that literacy makes men more open to change and to new information, and greatly increases imaginativeness about alternatives to existing conditions of life. Thus, where the actual daily
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experiences of life have a potentially radicalizing effect, it is the awareness of the possibility of change that can trigger this effect.' 'Asian Tenancy Systems and Communist Mobilization of the Peasantry', in John W. Lewis (ed.), (1974), p. 43.

127. Belden, p. 117.
128. She Runsheng, 'Yinian lai Taibeiqu de jiaoyu gongzuo', WS, p. 357.
130. Liu Songshou, 'Huabei kangRi', pp. 118–120.
141. Ying Yong, 'Lielun Jin xibei siqu zhengquan gongzuow de quedian', JR, 2.7.1942.
144. 'Quyang hezuo shiye de kaizhan', p. 585.
145. 'Huxi kangRi zhanzheng shiliiao', p. 421.
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159. ‘Qu ba fan Ri youji zhanzheng’, p. 80.


165. For example, ‘JiLuYu gonggu dang cankao ziliao’, p. 184.


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171. Akiyoshi, p. 171.
174. She Jing, pp. 381, 388.
Chapter Three

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DYNAMIC FRAMEWORK

The literature on the resistance period has devoted much attention to the nationally concluded united front between the CCP and the GMD. In contrast, the rural united front on the village level (nongcun tongyi zhanxian) has been sadly neglected, despite its far greater substance. Yet, before examining the CCP’s theoretical elaboration and objectives in regard to the latter front as well as its inherent vicissitudes, some salient features of the CCP–GMD relationship will be briefly noted. This is justified by the general political setting it provided.

In the united front accord formalized by the two parties in September 1937, the CCP made four specific pledges: to strive for the realization of Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s Principles; to discontinue the policy aimed at overthrowing the GMD, Sovietization and forcible confiscation of landlord land; to abolish the rival communist government for the unification of national political power; and to change the name of the Red Army and reorganize it into the National Revolutionary Army under the control of the national government.

The only real concession by the CCP was abandoning the confiscation of landlord land. Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s Principles of nationalism, democracy and people’s livelihood were ambiguous and contradictory and widely divergent meanings could therefore be given to them. With the Japanese armies overrunning eastern China and the GMD retreating to the southwest, the CCP had no overriding interest in ‘overthrowing’ a fugitive government. Giving up Sovietization was not difficult; open, unrestrained class warfare would only play into the hands of the Japanese. There were other less violent means which could be used to weaken or erode the local elite’s dominant position in the villages. Finally, given the party’s unyielding
insistence on maintaining its independence, the points about unification of national political power and placing the regrouped Red Army under GMD control were bound to become dead letters. The party conceded nothing of substance.

Historical experience taught the CCP that an independent power base was essential to protecting its very existence. The earlier united front between the two parties – the one in 1924–27 to rid China of warlord rule and imperialist influence and unify the country – had ended with the GMD turning on the CCP which had suffered a disastrous defeat. There was another reason why the CCP clung to its independence: only thereby could it pursue its own policies since the GMD could not be expected to acquiesce in the social changes that these entailed. Although there were disputes among CCP leaders as to how independent the party should be towards the GMD, the actual practice of this principle is well indicated in a number of statements. Mao Zedong, speaking in November 1938, provided an unambiguous summary of it:

Since the policy of the [GMD] is to restrict our growth, there is no reason whatever for us to propose such a slogan, which simply binds us hand and foot. At present there are things for which we should secure prior consent from the [GMD]... There are other things which the [GMD] can be told of after they have become accomplished facts... There are also things ... which we shall do without reporting for the time being, knowing that the [GMD] will not agree. There are still other things which, for the time being, we shall neither do nor report, for they are likely to jeopardize the whole situation.⁴

Liu Shaoqi was no less unequivocal on this issue: ‘We must maintain our independence of work. We must actively carry out whatever work we consider must be done and could be done.’⁵ Such an ‘independence and initiative within the united front’, a central committee statement made clear, was not simply a negative policy to defend one’s positions since ‘our chief purpose is to extend the ground already won’.⁶

But this strategic-offensive objective of independence must not wreck the united front, the party repeatedly stressed. Strengthening the CCP’s forces and maintaining the united front were mutually supportive elements – that was the meaning of the CCP’s formula of struggle for unity. Hence, as clashes between CCP and GMD armed units escalated and there were ominous signs that the GMD’s anti-communism might even lead it to join hands with the Japanese, the CCP felt it necessary to intensify the struggle,
in every field. The duality of this struggle emerges clearly from a directive written by Mao in May 1940:

At a time when the anti-Communist die-hards in the [GMD] are obstinately persisting in their policy of containing, restricting and combating the Communist Party in preparation for capitulation to Japan, we must stress struggle and not unity... Therefore, whether in the theoretical, the political, or military sphere, we should as a matter of principle firmly resist all the verbal attacks, propaganda, orders and laws of the anti-Communist die-hards designed to contain, restrict and oppose the Communist Party, our attitude towards them should be one of firm struggle ... every concrete struggle is defensive, limited and temporary in nature.

Having listed a number of concrete examples of such struggles Mao went on:

The kind of strong attitude towards the die-hards and the policy of struggling against them on just grounds, to our advantage, and with restraint are the ways to make the die-hards somewhat afraid of restricting and combating the Communist Party, to force them to recognize our legal status and to make them think twice before causing a split. Therefore, struggle is by far the most important means of averting the danger of capitulation, of achieving a turn for the better in the situation and of strengthening [GMD] Communist cooperation.

The CCP emphatically insisted on keeping the united front alive as long as the war lasted so as to deprive the Japanese of a major Chinese ally. Hence, Mao maintained, ‘in no circumstances will the Party change its united front policy for the entire period of the War of Resistance against Japan’. Despite all the bloodletting and mutual recriminations, with the CCP charging the GMD of being indistinguishable from the Japanese and the puppets, Zhou Enlai thus praised the united front with the GMD on the fourth anniversary of the war:

After four years of resistance war our country is united as never before, our people is united and has a national awareness as never before and our army has a unified command and a concentrated will as never before. The leaders of the resistance war, the national government and generalissimo Jiang, have become the centre of the support of the whole Chinese people.

Two months before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, Mao Zedong asked why ‘the three closely related slogans of “consolidate peace”, “fight for
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democracy”, “carry out armed resistance” were advanced. He answered, ‘we desire to push the wheel of revolution forward and ...circumstances allow us to do so.’ The three slogans were closely related: unless resumption of the civil war with the GMD could be avoided, carrying out politico-economic changes and developing a broad popular resistance movement would be far more difficult.

If there was no easy solution to the question of class alliances, i.e. with what stratum/strata within the peasantry to ally and on what terms, against the GMD/landlord authority in the pre-war days, the issue was further complicated by the Japanese occupation. On the most general level, the party believed that the invasion had ‘led to a change in class relations in the country, and has thereby not only made it necessary to unite all classes of the nation against Japanese imperialism, but also created the possibility of doing so’. Even more concretely, ‘to subordinate the class struggle to the present national struggle against Japan – such is the fundamental principle of the united front’.\(^9\) In other words, ‘[o]f China’s two major contradictions, the national contradiction between China and Japan is still primary and the internal class contradiction in China is still subordinate. The fact that a national enemy has penetrated deep into our country is all-decisive.’\(^11\)

In principle, this implied an alliance comprising all strata in the villages. Consolidating this rural united front, forging closer unity between all classes and strata and establishing a government supported by all quarters of the community were frequently enunciated themes. The directly and indirectly elected administrative organs, which included all classes and were said to be adjusting their interests for the common good, were held up as a proof that the party’s talk of class unity was serious. Similarly, rent and interest reduction, like other reform measures, was presented as a policy which cared for the interests of all classes, involved mutual sacrifice and hence stabilized class relationships. The last point was also emphasized when according landlords who did not collaborate the same legal rights to own property, including land, and to participate in the political life as peasants and workers. At the same time, utmost efforts were urged to avoid friction between the classes.\(^12\)

Although the rural united front implied restructured class relationships, it was by no means wholly disadvantageous to the local elite. Indeed, these strata had to be given incentives, or otherwise their cooperation would hardly be forthcoming. Thus utilizing them constituted a positive
inducement. (These processes will be dealt with later.) A negative one was provided by the Japanese occupation forces: destruction, exploitation, maltreatment, etc. that in places spared nobody.

The exact extent to which the village elite suffered at the hands of the Japanese, as opposed to benefiting from their practices, is hard to estimate. While containing an element of united front propaganda, party sources occasionally emphasized that the elite was on the losing side. Descriptions of life in the occupied areas were then intended to show that the Japanese rule harmed everyone, to the point where even the economic base of the landlords was shaken: taxes had risen enormously, primarily affecting the rich, who were the ones able to pay, and land prices had declined sharply due to the insecure conditions. Even persons actively collaborating were not safe from extortion. According to a report from southern Hebei, the severe blow that Japanese controls dealt commerce made many landlords sympathetic to resistance and less suspicious of the Eighth Route Army. In the area, where land ownership was fairly dispersed, opposition to the Japanese became the rallying point for both landlords and peasants, although their ‘mutually felt deep hatred’ basically remained unchanged.

A 1941 document from Hebei/Henan pointed out that the ‘rural united front made considerable progress’ largely due to Japanese burning and killing, in addition to the Eighth Route Army’s elimination of banditry. War ravages did sometimes damage the interests of all classes. In some guerrilla areas of Taihang, for example, landlords experienced a decline in living standards as well as in social position. In a word, there could exist a certain objective basis for the elite to ally themselves with the CCP’s resistance movement.

For all the emphasis on and praise of class unity and conciliation, the CCP did not gloss over the objective class conflict: ‘[T]hey [contradictions between classes and between groupings] still exist and have by no means diminished or disappeared.’ It followed that ‘class struggle cannot be eliminated.’ Yet as the Japanese invasion had required an end to the civil war and the formation of a broad united front, a new approach to the politics of class struggle had to be worked out to advance the Chinese revolution. Rather than bury the class contradictions, the party let it be known that the task was to suitably ‘adjust’ and ‘regulate’ them.

The new frame of reference for adjusting the class conflict was the formula, announced in November 1937, of the Anti-Japanese National United Front made up of three components. First, there was the left wing which included...
‘the Communist-led masses’, i.e. the proletariat, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie. The task was ‘to do our utmost to extend and consolidate this wing’ since this was ‘the basic prerequisite for reforming the [GMD], the government and the army, for establishing a unified democratic republic, for turning partial resistance into total resistance and for overthrowing Japanese imperialism’. Second, there was ‘the intermediate section … composed of the national bourgeoisie and the upper stratum of the petty bourgeoisie’. Some were ‘tending towards the left’ while others vacillated. The aim here was ‘to help the intermediate section to move forward and change its stand’. Third, there was the right wing made up of the big landlords and the big bourgeoisie. Fearing ‘the destruction of their property in the war and the rise of the masses’, they were ‘the nerve centre of national capitalism’. Only a few could be counted on as reliably anti-Japanese.\textsuperscript{18}

Applied to the class forces in the countryside, party sources categorized the poor and middle peasants as the left wing, most of the rich peasants and the ‘enlightened’ or anti-Japanese landlords as the intermediate section and landlords collaborating with the Japanese, or in danger of doing so, as the right wing.\textsuperscript{19} As specified in March 1940, the party’s objective was ‘to develop the progressive forces, win over the middle forces and combat the diehard forces; these are all inseparable links and the means used to unite all the anti-Japanese forces is struggle’.\textsuperscript{20} To better appreciate this rough outline, it is necessary to take a closer look at the party’s basic view of the three forces and their interrelationship.

Developing the progressive forces of the poor and middle peasants was not limited to any one sector but was to take place everywhere since it meant

- boldly expanding the Eighth Route and the New Fourth Armies, establishing anti-Japanese democratic base areas on an extensive scale, building up Communist organizations throughout the country, developing national mass movements of workers, peasants, youth, women and children, winning over the intellectuals in all parts of the country, and spreading the movement for constitutional government among the masses as a struggle for democracy.\textsuperscript{21}

For the party, it was vital to gain paramount influence over the emerging structures and mass movements so as to bring them into line with its long-term objectives.

It was declared that ‘the winning over of the middle forces is an extremely important task for us in the period of the anti-Japanese united front’. Given
their function in the rural economy it was imperative to absorb and gain the cooperation of a fair number of the intermediate group. Although apprehensive of an agrarian revolution, it was nonetheless possible for these forces to ‘join us in the common fight against Japan and also in the setting up of an anti-Japanese democratic political power’.\textsuperscript{22} Basically antagonistic to the demands of the poor peasants and at the same time more ‘enlightened’ than the diehards, the middle forces were inherently unstable, and, depending on the circumstances, might go to either side. While objectively belonging to the ruling block, their attitude towards the Japanese differed significantly enough to make it possible to win them over as allies, or rather as subordinated allies; that is, provided they were not attacked and were offered tangible incentives to join a united front. Other means were to be employed to subordinate them. Nevertheless, the danger of them linking up with the diehards was very real and to attract them to the poor- and middle-peasant camp three conditions had to be fulfilled:

- (1) that we have ample strength;
- (2) that we respect their interests; and
- (3) that we are resolute in our struggle against the diehards and steadily win victories.\textsuperscript{23}

The most important factor was the first one: as these forces usually tried to resist or subvert redistributive reforms, an effective policy implementation was as a rule not possible until the strength of the peasant masses had been mobilized. Consequently, a precondition for gaining the cooperation of the middle forces was their subordination. They had to be made aware that continued attempts at blocking reforms were futile and that they had better come to terms with the new power structure and, by lending their services to it, try to protect their interests as best they could.

If the first condition was wholly negative in character, the second one was positive and played an indispensable complementary role in providing a motive for joining the united front. The incentives seemed more attractive to the middle forces than they actually were. Yet the party did extend certain guarantees and gave them a role to play, particularly in the fields of commerce and trade, on the condition they agreed to the plans of the border region governments. This of course placed limits on redistributive radicalism: ‘improving the peasants’ livelihood must not give rise to sharp class confrontations and obstruct the basic principles of a united front and of unity in resistance’.\textsuperscript{24} In short, the middle forces’ interests were to be respected.
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to a minimum, which was just about enough to enable their absorption and prevent the landlords as a whole from collaborating. In winning them over great care was urged: ‘The middle forces carry considerable weight in China and may often be the decisive factor in our struggle against the diehards; we must therefore be prudent in dealing with them.’

Three principles governed the party’s posture towards the diehards: self-defence (‘we must never attack others without provocation, but once attacked we must never fail to return the blow’); victory (‘we must not fight unless we are sure of victory’); and truce (‘after repulsing one diehard attack, we should know when to stop and bring that particular fight to a close before another attack is made on us’). Thus by isolating them ‘we can also make the diehards think twice before attacking us, compromising with the enemy or starting large-scale civil war’. In forming a united front with the rich peasants and landlords the struggle was to be ‘peaceful’ and ‘bloodless’. Although only ideological, political and organizational forms were mentioned in this context, economic struggles were also included and came in fact to constitute the main battleground in the subordination process. Deng Fa optimistically explained, in 1944, why the landlords did not have to be dealt with violently:

Our armies’ victories have given political authority to the people. Therefore we can readjust class relations by conference and negotiation without the normal class battles. When the peasant is no longer powerless he does not have to hit the landlord over the head to get justice; he can call him over for a talk.

In the case of the diehards, being ‘opposed to the growth of the progressive forces’ the struggle against them had to be ‘resolute’ and ‘ruthless’, or otherwise ‘we shall be unable to resist their pressure or dispel doubts of the middle section’. As noted above, the party’s attitude to the diehards was essentially defensive and designed to avoid large-scale fighting. Thus a 1943 Beiyue document, discussing how to deal with landlords ‘engaging in rather widespread counter-attacks’ on ‘the peasants’ rights and vested interests’, stressed: ‘It must be remembered that our struggle is waged for the purpose of achieving unity and preventing an unprincipled enlargement of the struggles’. The same message was contained in the instructions by party-army leaders in October 1940 on ‘keeping up the war effort in Daqingshan on a long-term basis’.
The united front policy must be earnestly put into practice. During the past high-tide of frictions directed against the communist party and the Eighth Route Army, there were tendencies to neglect the united front (left deviation tendencies in the policy towards landlords)... But it must be firmly understood that the united front is our party’s strategic policy line during the present resistance war.\

In a report to a senior-level cadre conference in April 1940 on the experience of united front work during the past three years, Yang Shangkun, secretary of the CCP North China bureau, similarly stated:

The struggle is for achieving unity ... for consolidating the united front... On the one hand, it is for protecting the progressive forces so that they do not suffer losses and continue to expand. On the other hand, the struggle is for safeguarding unity and cooperation, for prolonging the time the diehards stay inside the anti-Japanese front and for avoiding large-scale civil war.

The CCP’s grand wartime design was thus to set huge social forces in motion by restructuring class relationships, while at the same time develop them into cooperative channels. The following two sections of the present chapter will focus on the basic processes characterizing this attempted pursuit and on responses complicating or conflicting with them.

RELUCTANT ALLIES

The CCP’s policy approach to the rural elite can be summed up in the formula of absorption, subordination and utilization. These aspects are well captured in a report on economic work in Taihang: in confronting the landlords one was to ‘see to it that their living conditions have a certain level, strive for their joint resistance and for their gradually taking an active part in the production effort’. In other words, the elite was to be subordinated to a reformed order curtailing their exploitation while not eliminating them as a class; they were to be absorbed into the movement and prevented from collaborating; and their resources were to be utilized. As will be observed, these three mechanisms were closely intertwined.

The subordination aspect received a heavy emphasis in numerous party sources. While the principle for improving the people’s livelihood meant ‘legal and peaceful struggles on the basis of adjusting the interests of the various classes’, this did not imply a ‘middle-of-the-road standpoint’; thus ‘we do by no means call off the struggle (nor can we call off the struggle).”
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Power sharing of different classes in the united front administration, Peng Zhen declared in 1941,

certainly does not mean that the actual strength of the various classes in the government organizations must be kept in a state of balance or be evenly matched. In reality that is impossible. If we are to consolidate the united front, the basic masses must occupy a dominant position in it.\(^{35}\)

A directive on the work in central Hebei pointed out that ‘the supremacy of the basic masses’ was to be institutionalized in the mass organizations, armed bodies and in the party exercising ‘absolute leadership at all government levels’. This was a prerequisite for ‘consolidating and expanding the united front’.\(^{36}\)

Elite attempts to maintain status quo did of course run counter to the subordination principle and was not to be tolerated. A party resolution said:

All those, in particular the landlord class, obstructing the development of the mass movement [i.e. landlords who refused to be subordinated] must, on the basis of the support of the masses, be gradually excluded from all levels of the government administration and a policy of isolating them must be adopted... Special attention must be paid to regulating the district, township and village government administration since it is easy for landlords and bad elements to hide inside these while pretending to be anti-Japanese.\(^{37}\)

In Liu Shaoqi’s words, ‘of course, there are also deadly stubborn landlords who disregard any kind of explanation; then we must take to armed struggle’.\(^{38}\) To repeat, this did not mean the break-up of the united front. The above resolution stated:

Yet this certainly does not prevent us from promoting, to a certain extent, a united front with all fair-minded gentry and with those landlords and merchants who can still help in fighting Japan; for example, encourage them to contribute money, grain and weapons ... and maintain necessary connections with them.\(^{39}\)

The necessity to absorb or forge a united front with the local elite was often expressed in urgent terms. Peng Zhen declared that the landlords were ‘the resistance allies who at present [we] cannot do without and cannot lose’. Without their cooperation, he continued, ‘[t]here is no way of
Persisting in the war'. Preventing a militarily adverse elite collaboration with the Japanese was one background factor to this insistence. But an even greater reason for it was the party's strongly felt need to utilize the elite's skills and resources for the build-up of the base areas. Lin Feng explained how the landlords could render important services to the administration and the economy:

We cannot deny that many landlords have experience and knowledge that is of value to the people, that some have been honest, upright and patriotic. These are given scope for the investment of their capital in industry, for the use of their education in teaching, government, accounting and other specialized jobs. No less than that of Communists, their position depends, in the last analysis on how the people who live with them regard them as individuals.

Deng Fa spoke of a hundred landlord families who, after leaving for Tianjin and Beiping when the war broke out, had returned to their district in northwestern Shanxi, with their money. He continued:

After a couple of years you could see many landlords actively helping in the technical work of the government. We have proved that we could keep the hated enemy away and that, although they could never again expect supremacy, we could give them a square deal.

Thus, if the landlords adapted to the altered conditions they were invited to make a contribution within the framework set by the CCP. Peng Dehuai said that they were often called to informal discussions and asked for their opinions. On the other hand, inclusion in the government was subject to the two vague but binding conditions of approving of resistance and democracy. Peng's formulation of the problem of landlord power shows the party's intention of extending conditional and formal guarantees of equality while at the same time excluding them from any real influence. Lin Feng could tell Epstein that '[a]lthough we have deprived them of their monopoly of political power, we have not in any way infringed on their equality of rights as citizens'. Or as Peng Zhen put it, '[a]s for resisting the Japanese, the landlord class can under certain conditions become our allies, but on the issue of democracy they are still the concrete object of our struggle'.

Pressed by Epstein as to why the landlords were not expropriated and eliminated as a class, Deng Fa pointed to the negative consequences of
simply discarding rather than using them. Deng Fa first noted that the peasants had been ‘far to the left of us’ and that the party had had to apply brakes on peasant radicalism. The peasants had made 23 demands, which included a retroactive reduction and refund of rent and interest since 1911. They argued: ‘We’ve always been told the revolution dates from 1911 when we got rid of the Emperor.’ The landlords and money-lenders could not pay the claims even if they had given up everything they had. Deng clarified why the party could not agree:

In places where this occurred the merchants took their stocks and moved secretly to the Japanese-occupied cities. The landlords, who were now themselves frightened, tried to sell their land. Small manufacturers who depended on them for credit closed down their workshops. In peacetime you can adjust these things. In war you can’t fight on two fronts... We explained (to the peasants) that an all-out class struggle would force every landlord and merchant into the arms of the enemy, who was already stronger then we materially... A new form of society and economy is not built in one day, and meanwhile production and the circulation of commodities would decrease precisely when we need them most.

Cadres persuaded the peasants that the closing of shops and capital flight to the occupied areas only ‘increase our own troubles and aid the enemy’. In a similar vein, a Hebei report noted that where landlords had fled as a result of too radical policies ‘great damage was done to the mobilization of financial and material resources’.

Given their serious consequences, leading party figures issued stern warnings to exercise restraint. Cheng Zihua pointed out that a ‘confrontational policy’ towards landlords, capitalists and merchants would only cause ‘dispersal of internal strength’ and a debilitating ‘economic struggle on two fronts’, i.e. against both internal and external enemies. ‘Considering the needs of the resistance war and the anti-Japanese base areas as a whole’, Peng Zhen stressed, the peasants had to pay rent to the landlords following the stipulated reduction or else their cooperation would not be forthcoming – then ‘there is no way of persevering in the war’, he continued.

Subordination and utilization interacted in complex ways in the absorption process, with marked local variations as to how each related to the other. While the former epitomized a hard version and the latter a soft version, both contained various means of a more-or-less nature.
One Hebei-Henan report lists four work methods employed *vis-à-vis* ‘landlords, rich peasants, distinguished personages and gentry’ in the second year of the war. First, the army and the mass organizations held meetings and discussions at which the principles of the resistance were explained and the elite’s contribution was ‘encouraged’. Second, many were given ‘prestigious but powerless positions’ in the mass organizations and some in the armed forces. Third, communist forces ‘eliminated’ bandits and puppet units and attacked the Japanese, a resolve that ‘excited’ rich peasants and landlords. Fourth, vigorous mass mobilization directed against diehard landlords made ‘neutral and wavering landlords’ take a cooperative attitude to the resistance. Such was the claimed success of these measures that in some places a majority of the landlords and gentry joined the resistance movement and ‘voluntarily’ contributed money and grain.\(^5^0\)

The emphasis in this account is clearly on the strong side of the absorption process. Generally speaking, elite provision of grain and money had a compulsory tendency, with differences in the degree to which actual force was applied. Mass mobilization, although the targets here only included a certain category of landlords, was also a kind of pressure to conform. The show of military strength against bandits, puppets and the Japanese could be both fairly strong in character (power demonstration) and a soft form of enticement (provision of security against harassment, destruction, etc.). Letting the elite fill powerless positions is obviously a soft example.

David Paulson mentions a fairly similar version of the rural united front formula practised in a Shandong village. In ‘hitting’ and ‘pulling’ the landlords, party cadres split the landlords by treating them differently at struggle meetings, helped solve their economic difficulties by minor compromises, carried out political propaganda to allay their fears and made them contribute their material and intellectual resources to society.\(^5^1\)

As was indicated in the outline of the rural united front, and will be documented in later chapters, the hard version was predominant. In some more strongly CCP-controlled areas, however, the passage of time saw a relative shift in the sort of methods used. Initially, these had a noticeably confrontational tendency but later on, when significant progress was made in erecting basic structures and implementing the main policies, a more institutionalized subordination of the elite was effected.

This trend was roughly suggested by Peng Tao, director of the CCP’s propaganda department, in a speech (February 1943) at the Taihang sub-bureau on the development of the mass movement. Until now, he said,
there had been three ‘attacking stages’ in trying to eliminate corruption and reduce economic inequalities. The fourth, ‘pulling stage’ about to begin constituted a ‘new form of struggle having a constructive character [jianshexing]’. Landlord counter-attacks were still likely to foment political struggles, but, Peng predicted, class relationships in this ‘constructive’ period would settle down to a pattern whereby poor peasants and farmhands formed the mainstay, middle peasants became their close allies, unity with rich peasants and joint resistance with landlords were consolidated and government representation comprised a broad class coalition. Peng Tao sketched what might be called a model case, that is, what the CCP strove to achieve and did approach in very favourable circumstances.

Whatever the specific means employed, popular activism was usually crucial to the absorption process. In southern Hebei, for example, landlords consented to rent reduction only after the peasants had manifested their collective strength, with some even refusing to pay any rent and interest at all. Subsequently ‘the landlords changed their wavering attitude to the resistance’. The report concluded that here it must also be made clear that unless the peasant masses are aroused to struggle to a certain extent one cannot reduce rents and interests and realize democracy. Nor can we gain the landlords’ firm commitment to resistance. Certain comrades in southern Hebei do not pay serious attention to … correctly grasping the struggles within the united front.

In another reported case, mobilizing the villagers against diehards ‘gradually’ altered ‘the hostile attitude of the rich and the gentry to the mass organizations’. As was often concluded, ‘only working through the upper strata is insufficient’. They had to be subjected to mass pressure.

But as indicated in the expression ‘struggle to a certain extent’, this typically hard variety was to be pursued with prudence. Peng Dehuai said that the ‘arduous struggles’ which arose in implementing rent reduction and other transformative policies – the landlord class is ‘generally unhappy about them’ – had to be ‘appropriate’. If these developed beyond this criterion, ‘the national enemy and the class enemy will join together’. Hence, struggles to put policies into practice were ‘definitely not intended to deal a serious blow to the despotic gentry and landlords’ – the aim was rather to ‘strengthen unity’.

In other words, the use of brute force would as a rule be self-defeating. The party’s rural united front strategy prescribed an interplay of subordination
and utilization measures, each containing a range of harder and softer means. This was the formula meant both to avoid large-scale, disruptive internal strife and to restructure power resources.

The party was under no illusion that the absorption process would be easily accomplished. Writing in May 1938, Peng Zhen approvingly quoted a decision by a provincial party committee to the effect that ‘persuading the landlords, rich peasants and capitalists to resist Japan jointly with us requires protracted, painstaking and patient efforts’. Three years later, at a time when landlord collaboration had caused serious misgivings among local party cadres as to the feasibility of the rural united front, Peng was compelled to issue a similar appeal, now more strongly worded:

Fearing and detesting the landlords’ double-dealings in the anti-Japanese war should not lead us to abandon the hard work of winning them over to the resistance, so that friends who can resist Japan (even if temporarily) are abandoned to the Japanese robbers and become planted agents in Japan’s aggression against China.

Elite opposition to party policies meant the rural united front was only precariously held together. ‘To struggle with the landlords is certainly not easy’, a central Hebei document declared. It then explained ‘the general law’ of landlord posture in terms of three dissimilar tactics depending on the state of mass mobilization. While in its initial stage, landlords resorted to repression. In a heightened but not yet consolidated mass activism, they used bribery and ‘win the peasants over by soft tactics and small favours’. Finally, placed in a context of having ‘no alternative but outwardly accept the situation, they use lies to cheat the masses and pretend to make concessions’ and bide their time to take revenge.

Landlord obstruction to policy implementation was bound to render the key issue of how much ground to yield to the rural upper class all the more intricate. For as a party directive on the land policy stated, ‘certain rights of the landlord class must be guaranteed or else we will not be in a position to ally with them. Today our task is to weaken the feudal forces, not to eliminate them. Struggle is to be followed by appropriate concessions.’

Such was the complexity of actually absorbing the elite into the rural united front and its mechanisms that the problem of their collaborating with the Japanese, inevitably, proved hard to deal with. According to a 1945 party document summing up the experience in the JiLuYu region during the
past eight years, a split developed among the big landlords as the war went on. Some served and depended on the Japanese directly, and continued to exploit and suppress the peasants harshly. Other big landlords had one foot in both camps. While not abandoning the resistance movement they were unenthusiastic about a prolonged war and maintained ‘certain links with the enemy, the puppet army and the higher echelons of the puppet organizations’. Generally, the big landlords were said to have two homes between which they moved, one in the base area and one in the Japanese controlled zone. Regarding the medium and small landlords, their lesser inclination to collaborate was explained in terms of their economic inability to maintain a retreat in the occupied zones. With no escape route, the possibility of switching sides was not as easy for them. Nor did these landlords have as close relations with personnel in the puppet organizations.60

Generalizing from this description, the danger of landlords throwing their lot with the Japanese lurked constantly and at times became an actuality. Statements by party leaders often painted a similar picture.61 However, a host of circumstances – especially regional differences in regard to war destruction and the nature of class relationships – meant that the potential for collaboration was rather unevenly distributed. Two background factors to landlord collaboration illustrate the certain diversity in outlook among them. One was radical measures alienating them. The other was a low level of mass activism. The former suggests that they were pushed, more or less against their will, into the enemy camp. The latter points to a rather natural impulse of some landlords to collaborate. As radicalism will be brought up later, the focus is here on the second aspect.

The medium and small landlords, who initially assumed resistance leadership, were particularly sensitive to the ‘strength manifested by the masses’, the above JiLuYu document noted. Only ‘very few’ of them surrendered when the peasants fought tenaciously. On the other hand, ‘as combat ran into difficulties and the situation became tense [these landlords] often hesitated, ran away or gave themselves up to the Japanese’.62

The extent of landlord collusion with the Japanese was therefore often inversely related to the degree of CCP influence in the area. In the core parts of the base areas, there were few opportunities for collaboration. There they were subject to rather strict party and peasant supervision. Where policy implementation was effective and the party and ‘the basic masses’ had achieved supremacy, ‘almost all’ the landlords were said to support or sympathize with the resistance. Rather than a change of heart, this posture
probably represented a realistic adaptation to altered conditions: in the early, chaotic war years of building up the bases, Peng Zhen explained, ‘the great majority’ of the landlords ‘wavered’.63

In the militarily more contested areas landlord collaboration loomed large throughout the war. It often happened, as in JinSui in the autumn of 1942, that the approach of Japanese troops stimulated landlord thoughts to get in touch with them.64 With a mopping-up operation drawing near the village of Ten Mile Inn in northern Henan, a landlord secretly negotiated with the Japanese for the restoration of the old local government.65 Journalist Zhou Libo described how the Japanese occupation of Dingxiang made the landlords in the vicinity vacillate. One big, influential landlord summoned other landlords to his house for a secret meeting where he spoke against fighting the Japanese since they could not be defeated anyway. The Eighth Route Army refrained from punishing him because ‘his connections were very complicated’ and it might harm the united front. With the recovery of Dingxiang shortly after the landlords’ meeting the issue resolved itself.66 Recollecting experiences from central Hebei, Lü Zhengcao relates how Japanese attacks in nearby localities induced ‘the more stubborn’ landlords and rich peasants to engage in covert ‘surrender activities’.67

Japanese intelligence conveys the impression that the landlords might not be as afraid of the invading army as the peasants. According to one report, ‘after the Japanese army has attacked and occupied a village the first persons to return are the landlords’.68 Examples from Shanxi and Shandong suggest that they were primarily concerned with their property.69 In the latter case, the landlords looked to the Japanese army for protection, fearing that ‘the resistance would threaten their property and lives’; ‘the majority of the gentry’ believed that the Japanese ‘would want social order and food supplies, and that, for this reason, it would help to protect their property. They also hoped that the Japanese might treat them at least more gently.’

Feeling uneasy, even panicking, at the sight of the havoc brought by the Japanese army, landlords occasionally sought to curry its favour by supplying it with necessities taken from the peasants, the above JiLuYu document (1945) explained.70 Belden has vividly described how the peasants in the anti-traitor movement during the subsequent civil war period took revenge on collaborating landlords who had killed and looted. As for the looting, ‘[n]ot only their [i.e. peasants’] grain had been uncovered by the landlords and turned over to the Japanese, but even their seed. Pots, pans, even metal farm tools had been taken to meet the Japanese levies, but half
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the levy had gone into the landlords’ storerooms’. So deeply felt was the bitterness of the cruelties committed by the landlords in serving their own and the occupation authorities’ interests that landlords were killed before the holding or in the process of a trial. For example, three landlord brothers in Shanxi who had murdered 18 peasants ‘were hauled before a Speak Bitterness Meeting, during which the passions of the crowd mounted to such heights that cadres who had come to watch the meeting were brushed aside and the landlords strung up in the trees.’

At the same time, landlords availed themselves of Japanese assistance to recover whatever economic and political power they had lost as a result of CCP policies. In some guerrilla bases in Beiyue and central Hebei, Japanese encroachments led to ‘widespread’ cancellations of previous rent reductions and evictions of tenants from their rented land. In central Hebei, landlords and Japanese forces co-ordinated efforts to destroy village organizations during 1942–44.

BEYOND LIMITS

Resistance to the formation of a rural united front was not only externally generated, the disposition of the local elite. There was also an internal counter-current to the front, which manifested itself in what the party referred to as ‘left excesses’. These radical practices violating the standards of this front included a wide range of attacks on the elite: direct and random confiscation of land, redemption of land at very low or no payment, heavy fines and other penalties, involuntary contributions of grain and money, arbitrary taxation measures, rent and interest payments less than the law stipulated or refusal to pay at all, cancellation of old debts, beating and killing, etc. Three aspects of this radicalism will be considered.

Cadres and Peasants

A major reason for such occurrences was attributed to basic-level cadres harbouring few inhibitions about ‘frictions’ with landlords and rich peasants, overemphasizing the issue of the peasants’ living conditions and instilling fear in landlords causing them to flee. Obviously, official party perceptions of what policies were called for under the wartime conditions diverged significantly from those held by parts of its local organization. Statements highlighting this gap have already been cited in Chapter 2 on pre-war cadres. The issue warrants further attention.
Dispatched to investigate southern Taihang in September 1938, the mission of the JinJiYu area party committee was alarmed to find how political practice in the area conflicted with party priorities. Not only was there a widespread disbelief in the actuality of landlords and rich peasants joining the resistance; these strata were frequently also forced to shoulder an ‘extreme’ tax burden. In fact, struggles against them ‘dragged out for more than a year’ since ‘one is unwilling to settle for a small victory’. And echoing sentiments so often found in party documents, the mission was deeply apprehensive of the possible snowball effect of radicalism.  

Another, even more forceful illustration of such policy divisions was contained in a report by Yang Shangkun to a senior cadre conference in Taihang in October 1940. To demonstrate how the party’s basic stand was being ‘violated’ and ‘distorted’, Yang quoted extensively from documents issued by local party authorities. Of particular interest is the one by a county party committee in southern Taihang entitled ‘Experiences and lessons from work during the past two months’. As a clear-cut and trenchant challenge to the CCP’s view of developing the rural united front, the county committee’s argument is worth quoting at length:

The rural united front has a definite developmental pattern. At a time when the basic masses have still not been organized and united into an independent political force, and when the rule of the despotic gentry and landlords has not yet been dealt a fatal blow, it does not make sense to talk about a rural united front. The main issue at present is to develop mass struggles to strike at them. Only after they have been defeated and the basic masses have become dominant can one talk about a united front. Many comrades make irresponsible remarks about ‘guaranteeing human rights’, ‘winning over the middle forces’, etc. The result is to strengthen landlord confidence in dominating the peasants. According to our experience, the rural united front has relevance only in progressive areas. Since its target is the feudal remnant one must first strike at it and thereafter unite with it. This is the essential conclusion drawn from our rural united front work during the past two months. An attack on the diehard forces is basically also an attack on the rule of the landlords, despotic gentry and rich peasants.

The message is categorical: only after class relationships have been overthrown can the work on building a rural united front be embarked upon. In contrast to this two-stage strategy, the official party line implied a single stage of simultaneously proceeding with the absorption/subordination/utilization aspects. The former perspective insisted on the peasant masses’
supremacy within the front from the beginning; the latter viewed the front as a gradual process for achieving this class restructuring. While the final objective was roughly similar, the focus of immediate concern differed. The former was adamant in demanding guarantees of poor peasant supremacy, fearing, not unreasonably, the prospect of the elite utilizing the front to defend its interests. The latter was anxious to make the upper strata desist from collaboration and contribute their resources to base area building.

The county party committee’s deep scepticism of the CCP’s rural united front strategy revealed the basic posture of radicalism: immediate and major gains in the concrete local setting. The official party, on the other hand, took a theoretically informed long-term, overall view. As will be seen, these conflicting approaches were sharply expressed in the main policy fields. Yet radicalism was not the sole manifestation of this contradiction; it could also generate an anti-CCP rural united front against economic impositions (see Chapter 7). In view of the gravity of the county committee’s bluntly stated position, Yang Shangkun’s reply was extraordinarily feeble: two sentences rejecting the committee’s ‘misunderstanding’ of the revolutionary course.\textsuperscript{77}

Of course, radicalism was not a homogenous phenomenon. For example, the guiding formula in a Shandong village fell somewhere in between the standpoints of the party line and the county committee: ‘Both hit them and pull them over. First hit, and later pull. When hitting also pull. When pulling, also hit.’\textsuperscript{78} As apparent from the concrete methods listed, ‘pull’ here refers to the utilization aspect.

In official party eyes, radicalism proceeded from two erroneous perceptions, both enunciated in the county committee document. Underlying much of the practices of radicalism, these were frequently targeted for criticism in party sources. First, and most fundamentally, radical cadres were described as distinctly critical of the 1940 programme according equal political and socio-economic rights to all those supporting the resistance, irrespective of class origin. This declaration was intended to curb radical occurrences which at the time were prominent in places. In 1941 Liu Lantao reported at a cadre conference in Beiyue, JinChaji, that district-level cadres ‘generally’ had ‘an extremely inadequate understanding’ of the programme. They ‘intentionally’ took a ‘negative attitude’ to it and refused to put it into practice, causing the party ‘immense harm’. Not surprisingly, ‘some party members think the party’s line has become increasingly rightist’.\textsuperscript{79} (Liu’s report is considered further at the end of this chapter.)
Village China at War

Similar observations are available from JinJiLuYu. A Taihang investigation drew attention to how local-level cadres resisted the programme ‘as best they could’. There were ‘numerous cadres in party branches’ who thought of ‘reviving the simple [class war] formulas of the past in implementing land policy and arousing mass struggles’. This reaction certainly owed much to the arrogance of higher party authorities. These had failed to consult lower echelons and investigate a number of key issues relating to the programme, such as having a larger part of the population pay taxes and standardizing fines. Lower-level cadres were further antagonized by the rough ‘anti-leftist’ treatment to which they were earlier subjected. At a meeting of the Wuxiang county party committee, Peng Tao acknowledged that the programme’s clauses safeguarding human rights had ‘aroused fierce opposition among cadres’.

Second, given the very intricacy of making the fine but crucially important distinctions between dissimilar political outlooks among the elite strata and dealing with them in the diverse ways prescribed by the rural united front logic, local cadres were often found guilty of an undifferentiated approach. Yang Shangkun’s 1940 report cited such tendencies by party committees in southern Taihang and Hebei, which lumped together and treated as one the entire block of rich peasants, landlords and diehards. In Wuxiang county the same practice produced a generalized diehard labelling blurring the identity of this category. In this ‘nervous’, ‘dizzy’ and ‘disorderly’ situation, ‘straight repressive methods’ prevailed, leading to attacks on landlords and rich peasants, who, the document lamented, should have been won over by political means.

As the party recognized that political attitudes varied both between and within the upper strata, cadres were admonished to judge the individual on his/her merits. Yet this was hard to accept for many cadres. A landlord exploiting tenants remained suspect and reprehensible. Cadres had to amend their uniform view of landlords, Peng Zhen demanded:

There is no understanding of different kinds of strata within the landlord class and of different interests and political tendencies. Hence, whenever an anti-communist high tide develops and the big landlords waver in their resistance, it is mistakenly believed that the whole landlord class will turn traitor and surrender to the enemy, that ‘the united front will hereafter be simplified’ and that the landlord class should be excluded and the policy towards them changed.
Cadres distrusting the landlords’ resistance credentials was in fact widely reported.\textsuperscript{85}

The CCP had arguably even greater difficulties in making cadres discern political variations among diehards. As Yang Shangkun observed, many cadres simply regarded them as traitors \textit{en masse}. He retorted that collaboration only involved some of them, adding it was the ‘party centre’s policy’ to try and unite with the others. Examples of cadres’ incomprehension of this policy indicate that their hostility towards diehards ran high. They were commonly humiliated while forced to parade in the streets. Other manifestations included: requiring self-defence corps to try to seek out one diehard element every week and putting up posters with the instruction ‘do not punish the diehards but kill them immediately’ (some counties in JinChaji); beating diehards in a ‘planned and organized’ way at mass meetings (southeastern Shanxi); holding discussions to bury diehards alive (southern Hebei).\textsuperscript{86}

A danger of decidedly greater proportions to the resistance movement was, as earlier touched upon, the tendency for struggles against the diehards to expand to other categories due to the wartime social tensions. Under the circumstances, the diehard designation easily assumed a nebulous and manipulative character. In Yang Shangkun’s words, ‘there is no clear understanding of what is meant by the diehard faction’.\textsuperscript{87} As will be seen, the road to abuse lay wide open with disastrous consequences.

Cadre resistance to the rural united front had a material basis, a fact that ensured the strong persistence of this propensity. There was an intra-front as well as an external dimension to the issue. The former concerned feelings of revenge that local party members harboured after years of bitter struggles against the dominant strata.\textsuperscript{88} Deng Fa explained how cadres’ radicalism related to their class experience:

\begin{quote}
[M]any communists have gone overboard in this tide [of ‘ultra-leftist actions’]. After all, they were peasants themselves and there were cases when, after being called to arbitrate between landlords and peasants, they received the landlords with a pistol and said: ‘What do you mean, you bloated parasites, standing in the way of the people!’\textsuperscript{89}.
\end{quote}

Cadres’ hatred of the elite was mixed with fears of their superior cultural abilities swaying the rural united front’s content. These fears were well-founded: several examples of how disadvantaged party cadres were in this respect and how the elite did attempt to utilize it are given elsewhere in the
text. The same uneasiness among local party members has been noted in Joseph Esherick’s research on Mizhi county in the Shaanxi province. Being afraid the landlords/gentry were ‘too capable’, the party members were not disposed to join forces with earlier enemies: ‘This regime that we have built with our own blood... Now we are going to let the landlords and gentry rush back in! Can you guarantee that we won’t get tricked?’ The dilemma which the CCP faced in regard to the elite’s cultural capital has been shared by other major revolutionary movements: how to employ the elite for party purposes while preventing its subversive influence?

In places cadres’ rancour towards the elite was reinforced by external circumstances. Clashes with GMD forces tended to have this effect. In some cases during 1939–40 local party cadres considered that the united front had finally collapsed. They believed ‘that we no longer need the united front policy of the period of the War of Resistance but need a policy of agrarian revolution as during the ten years’ civil war’. According to a report in April 1940, ‘certain leading comrades are dizzy with success in the anti-friction [struggles against GMD forces]’. Another external factor has already been mentioned in this chapter: the Japanese army and landlords working together to undo reforms when the opportunity appeared.

Peasant radicalism might be purely spontaneous in nature. But more often it arose when the party launched a mass mobilization drive. Peasant initiatives then occasionally transcended the limits set by the party and were not ‘rectified’ until some time had elapsed. Liu Lantao thus reported on mass work in JinChaJi in January 1945: ‘After the masses have been aroused, excessively left actions occur. This is a regular pattern.’ Significantly, Liu added that these occurrences took place when the peasants had military and governmental backing. Without this protective shield against acts of revenge by the elite, radicalism was less likely to come to the fore. Consider some additional examples of the potential volatility of mass mobilization.

In Pingshan, it developed into a ‘widespread movement for equalizing land use’ when the party sought to help impoverished peasants by means of a ‘voluntary’ redistribution of landlord holdings. The party lost control of events and an ‘extremely serious’ situation unfolded. It was concluded that ‘in the process of arousing the masses to struggle it is very difficult to avoid leftist actions’. In another locality, mobilization produced peasant wrath with landlord exploitation and oppression and a rejection to pay rent and interest. The peasants were also disgruntled with the party’s policy of guaranteeing the landlords’ land ownership rights. Experience from various places in the
Taiyue area said that movements to settle accounts with landlords ‘inevitably’ gave rise to ‘excessively left thinking’ among the masses who retaliated by liquidating, beating and thoroughly discrediting them.\textsuperscript{97}

A post-war PRC source tells of struggles waged by poor peasants to settle accounts with ‘illegal’ landlords – i.e. exploiters and oppressors of a particularly rapacious kind – in the JiLuYu region in 1944. Struggle sessions, lasting a day and a half, in 22 villages were attended by about 15,000 people. Peasant demands for the landlords to pay their blood debt were sanctioned by the county government and they were executed on the spot. However, the county party committee looked askance at this measure and laid down that the sentences of those landlords willing to ‘hang their head and admit their guilt’ should be limited to fines.\textsuperscript{98} Landlord provocations, like refusal to renew tenancy contracts, might also swing peasants to the left of the party line.\textsuperscript{99} Such was the uncertainty and fluidity that Huang Jing, in reference to the radicalizing impact of mass mobilization in Hua county, was led to conclude in April 1945 that ‘to follow a prescribed order, like our step-by-step formula, is impossible’.\textsuperscript{100}

As David Paulson has compellingly and vividly demonstrated, radicalism was also conspicuous in many localities of the Shandong base area. Party cadres and peasant masses resorted to several variously violent methods to disgrace the landlords and rich peasants and forced them to give up ruinous, or nearly so, amounts of land, grain and cash through refunds at the inflated war prices, thorough compensation for past unpaid labour and ‘settling old accounts’ in other ‘excessively’ redistributive ways.\textsuperscript{101}

\textbf{Ominous consequences}

There were very weighty reasons for the CCP’s apprehension of radicalism: it had a multi-layered disruptive impact on the resistance movement, the result of which could vary from seriously setting back the party’s work in one locality to causing an irreparable damage in another. The most obvious casualty of radicalism was of course the rural united front. To distinguish this tendency from others given below let us term it ‘unofficial radicalism’, thereby also underscoring its difference from the certain radicalism inherent in the front’s objectives.

Examples of the divisive consequences of this radicalism are numerous. ‘Many of those who originally would not have opposed us’, a report from northwestern Shanxi said, ‘have fled as a result of our excessively left errors’, which created ‘fears’ and ‘violated the united front’.\textsuperscript{102} Beating, extraction
of loans and other ‘left excesses’ in parts of JiLuYu antagonized landlords and rich and middle peasants to the point of their organizing opposition to the CCP. Attacks by the Japanese, puppet and diehard forces seriously weakened the mass organizations – some even collapsed – and caused cadres to run away. The overall extent to which the elite fled radical measures is uncertain. Scattered figures from JinJiLuYu indicate that radical measures could cause the elite to flee on a considerable scale in some areas: about half of all landlords in Binghe county and around 600 landlords in the Kunwu and Shouzhang counties.

A second disruptive influence was a so-to-speak derailed radicalism that targeted not only the elite but virtually all strata, a phenomenon already observed in connection with struggles against diehards. The repercussions were likely to be deeply injurious to the party and give its leading personnel a profound sense of crisis. Struggles related to leasing land and borrowing grain in some areas of western Shandong ‘caused social disorder, destroyed the social united front and made most people dissatisfied with us’. The party’s work became ‘depressed’ or ‘collapsed’. Beating, imposing fines, arresting and killing in December 1939 caused widespread alienation with the party in Pingshan county, Taihang. Not only did many landlords and gentry flee; those classified as middle forces and basic masses also turned their backs on or became hostile to the party. It was to take some time before the party was able to break out of the resultant isolation from the people.

Multi-class flights from derailed radicalism were also reported from southern Shandong. In five counties these included 101 landlords, 92 rich peasants, 65 middle peasants, 35 poor peasants and 166 classified as others. A narrower class range was recorded in the Huxi area: 473 landlords, 371 rich peasants and 176 middle peasants.

From these examples it is clear that radicalism did not only undermine the prospects for absorbing the rural upper classes, but at times had wider, still graver consequences. An especially sensitive issue was actions infringing upon the interests of middle peasants.

Struggles against them, above all those of a radical character, contradicted official party policy. A December 1944 ‘Directive by the JiLuYu sub-bureau on the policy towards middle peasants’ strongly defended their position. (At the time, they were subjected to heavy fines in Hua county of this region.) Being ‘an oppressed and exploited class’ and themselves engaging in labour, they belonged to ‘the basic masses’. It followed that the middle peasants’ interests were ‘under no circumstances to be harmed’. Yet this stratum, the
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directive pointed out, also exhibited certain weaknesses which must not be overlooked, that is, its anti-landlord stand, particularly on livelihood-related matters, was not as firm as that of the poor peasants and farmhands. Having attributed this posture to the middle peasants’ material basis (their ability to make a living on their own), a less reductionist reason was then added: when the transformative work was still in the initial stage and the poor peasants and farmhands had as yet gained organizational strength, the middle peasants had little confidence in these strata and adopted a wait-and-see attitude to the struggles against landlords.

Middle peasants were especially vulnerable to attacks in villages uninhabited by landlords and rich peasants, i.e. where the middle peasants were the only ‘good households’. Bankrupting and weakening them caused a ‘rift inside the basic masses’. Yet the problem had a broader dimension. Being loosely defined and delicately placed in between the poorest and the highest strata, with a fairly strong tendency to an upward social mobility in places, the middle peasants were quite liable to find themselves struggled against, ‘leading to’, a not very exceptional assessment said, ‘a loss of many middle forces... giving the enemy an opportunity to enlarge his strength’. The ambiguities surrounding the middle peasants’ politico-economic actualities were greater than those of the other main strata, which most severely complicated the rural united front’s class restructuring mechanisms.

The derailed version of radicalism was also a cause of intra-organizational strife. Its effect on the party was of particularly grave concern to its leading personnel as their control over the mass movement and the local party organization, and hence over the direction of the resistance movement, was thereby threatened. Another notable example in this context is the peasant association.

Organizational disarray did of course impair resistance strength. With numerous variations, organizations were emasculated, became incapable of co-ordinated efforts, suffered depletions and defections, and were estranged from the people whose resentment and demoralization engendered passivity and indifference, or might even stir up widespread anti-CCP activity. Let us consider a concrete case.

The Red May Movement, directed by the local party committee in Taixi, western Shandong in 1940, illustrates how radicalism became derailed and alienated both the upper strata and a part of the peasantry. ‘The Red May’ was
so called because of the many days commemorating the labouring people in that month.

One general feature of the movement was the way it repelled some who had supported/joined the CCP-led resistance. This stemmed from ‘erroneous practices’ in the course of struggles against diehards, spies and collaborators. For example, there was a noted gentry personage about whom unfair rumours and slogans were spread. Having been criticized at a mass meeting attended by 10,000 people in the fourth district of Feicheng county, he was paraded in the streets. Other ‘democratic personages’ sympathetic to the CCP were similarly humiliated. The Japanese eagerly seized upon the dissatisfaction, also felt at the popular level, with these methods and had some success in fomenting dissension inside the resistance ranks.

A particularly serious case in this regard was the ‘rebellion’ of the Hongqiang Society in Dafengshan, directed by its well-known leader in the area, nicknamed Zhu Xiaobian. When the local party organization set up armed bodies in Zhangqing county in October 1938 it tried to form a joint resistance with the Society. These efforts came to nothing as the party rejected Zhu’s ‘unreasonable demands’, including a claim to be appointed regimental commander. With the build-up of party, government and military organizations in Dafengshan, which became one of Taixi’s most important bases in 1939, Zhu found his manoeuvrability circumscribed. In CCP parlance, he was left with fewer opportunities to act as ‘the king of the bushes’, a euphemism for bandit chief.

Thus placed in a quandry, Zhu saw a chance to stage a counter-offensive by playing upon popular discontent with the ‘excesses’ committed by the Red May Movement. Zhu’s attempt to whip up popular sentiments against the CCP met with a fair amount of success: ‘For a time he managed to confuse a section of the masses’, and, with Japanese and puppet assistance, established a force of 6,000 men, commanded by himself and operating in three counties. Zhu’s forces also took part in Japanese military campaigns against the resistance strongholds.

It is an indication of the strength of the popular reaction against the derailed radicalism of the local party organization that putting down the rebellion proved a protracted undertaking. Only after repeated attacks by CCP units during the latter half of 1940, including an elite battalion, did Zhu’s forces ‘gradually fall into isolation’. But in the spring of 1941 Zhu was still capable of counter-attacking, in the third and seventh district of Zhangqing county. What finally spelled the end for the Hongqiang Society
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was Zhu’s death in fighting. This paved the way for the CCP’s recovery of ‘various basic-level governments’. It is uncertain to what extent the CCP’s regaining hegemony in the area was influenced by two previous developments: ‘humble’ self-criticism to the masses by the party committee of Zhangging county; and propaganda activities, including exposure of Zhu’s ‘traitorous crimes’, by district and township cadres, who also investigated the errors on the spot.

As often happened, despite the menacing problems that derailed radicalism gave rise to, intervention from higher echelons, rather than reflection and reconsideration by those responsible, was required to terminate this phenomenon – a fact showing its tenacity. Hence, told by Xu Xiangqian, commander of the first column of the Eighth Route Army, to correct the mistakes, party and government cadres in Taixi finally called off the Red May Movement in the autumn of 1940. Xu, who learned of the cadre practices and the rebellion when passing through the area en route to Yan’an, impressed upon the local authorities the imperative of a broad resistance. In his opinion, as summarized by the author of the article, ‘otherwise one drives the fish into deep waters and the sparrows into the thickets and the forces to be united with and won over would be pushed into the enemy camp’.  

That one could ill afford to assist the Japanese army by supplying it with key strata in the rural economy was indeed the CCP’s constantly inculcated message to local party authorities. A March 1943 document from the Daqingshan base in Suiyuan, to give just another example, thus rebuked cadres’ inability to understand the resistance limitations of the core CCP forces. Violations of the landlords’ human/basic rights had intensified the conflict with the ‘friendly’ (i.e. GMD) and puppet forces since these had close relations with the landlords. This situation raised great difficulties to expanding and consolidating the resistance forces, which, the document underscored, required the splitting of forces hostile and unfavourably disposed to the CCP. Put differently, the CCP had to reach out to the ruling strata, including those serving the enemy, as they were strategically placed in relation to the contest for control over the countryside. Social structural area differences certainly varied the elite’s relative weight, but its overall significance is not in doubt, as evinced by the CCP’s earlier documented intense concern with the issue.

Furthermore, unofficial radicalism’s hard concentration on battling the elite carried the danger of unduly diverting attention and energies from
the resistance activity. This was precisely the import of Yang Shangkun’s criticism of a propaganda publication by the area party committee in southern Hebei entitled ‘A reader on farmhands’ struggles’. Yang quoted the reader to the effect that it only called for struggles against landlords and rich peasants; the issue of mobilization against Japanese imperialism was not to be found. What mattered to local cadres was making revolution, Yang claimed. Whether an exaggeration or not, Yang pointed to a central theme of this study that has been raised in previous chapters: heavy demands of various kinds, clustering around the two issues of war and social transformation, vied with each other for attention and available resources, with resulting conflicts and imbalances.

Policy swings

The dangers associated with radicalism, including the official variety which easily developed into unofficial channels, meant that the CCP could hardly afford to ignore the issue. Yet taking ‘corrective’ measures was an undertaking fraught with hazards. Consider first some relevant points raised by Bo Yibo, Wang Zongqi and Zhao Ziyang in reports on mass work in different localities of JinJiLuYu.

Bo Yibo’s expressed concern was how to deal with the ‘widespread’ beating of landlords in Taiyue during 1942. He listed three background factors to the occurrences: mobilization bringing forth the peasants’ ‘class hatred’; landlord resistance to reforms unleashing the peasants’ ‘pent-up fury’; and the use of force in extracting things from landlords. The first and second factors were not to be feared, but one should put an end to the beating and ‘straighten out’ the peasants’ thinking. In overcoming landlord resistance, ‘a struggle by argument and reasoning’ was preferred. On means implying force, Bo’s rejectionist stand was clearcut.

Wang Zongqi brought up the issue of humiliating landlords, a frequent happening during mass struggles in Pingshun county in 1944. Many had to wear tall hats on which were written ‘son of a bitch’ and other derogatory expressions. This was wrong. Instead, one ought to expose the facts of landlord exploitation as tenants elsewhere had done. The stress was squarely on ‘reasoning things out’. Such struggles had been waged in Xiuyuan, where a landlord, subjected to mass pressure, had no choice but to reduce rents and interests. The need to beat or arrest him did therefore not arise.

For Zhao Ziyang ‘leftist actions’ did not constitute a major worry. They ‘cannot be avoided’ or were ‘inevitable’ when the peasants were aroused.
Consequently, ‘[w]e should not be afraid of [such actions]’. In the same vein, he declared it was important to ‘take one’s time’ in dissuading the peasants from pursuing them. Although asserting that turning a blind eye to peasant radicalism would be as dangerous as confronting it with compulsion and orders, he viewed the latter as the main problem. Such measures were bound to ‘dampen the masses’ enthusiasm’. Besides, demands of higher party authorities ‘to stop these leftist kinds of actions’ were ‘not easily accomplished’ given the already mobilized state of the masses. Scared and not knowing what to do, basic-level work personnel submitting to these orders did in fact use force against the peasants, thus causing antagonism between the two. Zhao’s recommendations for tackling peasant radicalism were of a general nature: sum up the work, hold discussions with everybody involved and raise the peasants’ awareness so as to provide them with a correct guide to action.\(^\text{116}\)

These statements by Bo, Wang and Zhao reveal both points in common and shades of differences. All regard vigorous mass activism as an essential source of strength in dealing with landlords, but their opinions on peasant spontaneity developing a dynamics of its own are not identical. Here lurked a crucial dilemma: how much mass pressure could be applied against the landlords within the framework of the rural united front? Generally speaking, these discrepancies could reflect policy divergencies or be due to environmental contrasts that forced them to place greater emphasis on some aspects rather than others. For example, the party usually took a more determined stand against those local powerholders thought to be particularly ‘intransigent’ or ‘vicious’.

Other leading party figures, such as Liu Lantao, paid attention to the problems of peasant radicalism on a more general level. His earlier cited report on mass work was prepared to accept a degree of peasant autonomy that did not clash with the confines of ultimate party control. On the one hand, ‘left deviations cannot be avoided’. Give the peasants a free hand in the beginning so that they can learn from personal experience, he advised. However, Liu’s qualification was a major one:

\[
\text{A truly revolutionary movement is not a band of roving rebels. This point is not easily accepted by the peasants. After they have stood up, illegalities and breaches of discipline frequently happen. Hence our party must emphasize the organizational and disciplinary character.}^{117}\]
A particularly sensitive issue was how to curb the ‘excesses’ of radicalism without dissipating its energies. Difficulties were compounded when local cadres resisted intervention from above to put an end to radicalized popular spontaneity. Such was the case in parts JinJiYu in 1942 when peasants reportedly became ‘too aroused’ and resorted to ‘reckless’ methods in the campaigns to refund rents and to combat corruption and ‘local tyrants’. As on many other similar occasions, cadres justified their recalcitrance by fears of ‘pouring cold water on the masses’, thereby stifling their activism.118

The ways and means of coping with radical phenomena thus involved major dangers to the vitally needed mobilization of the villagers. ‘Excesses’ must not be dealt with excessively, since ‘otherwise it might make the masses suspicious [of the party] and invite counter-attacks from landlords’.119 Yet, not only is this precisely what happened in many localities, ‘rectifying’ radicalism also tended to bring about a shift in work methods much further to the right than was originally intended. As one Taihang report put it early in the war, the ‘excessive “left” tendency among activists has generally been corrected. But this has led to another extreme, i.e. the relative decline of mass work’. The result was its ‘fragmentation’.120

A more concrete account of the implications of a ‘right deviation’ is available from Pingshun county, where it was dominant from June 1940 through February 1941. Like elsewhere, the background was a ‘rectification’ of previous radicalism that ‘went too far’. Severe criticism by higher party organs of local cadres and of the way the mass organizations had been run dealt a depressive blow to the hitherto mass activism. As the overriding objective of these party organs was to develop a broad class unity, the lot of the peasants was slighted. In consequence, ‘[w]hen disputes arose between the landlord class and the masses, the government used laws guaranteeing human rights to side with the former. Then followed a great upsurge of the landlord class counter-attacking the masses.’ Reflecting the de-emphasis on mass mobilization, the peasant associations, the principal agency for sustaining the peasants’ activism, were only assigned purely technical organizational tasks. The work in the villages proceeded in a marked top-down manner. Meetings took the form of reading out long reports and policies were implemented simply by issuing administrative orders. The people were not consulted.

The outcome was an emasculation of the mass organizations, of which the peasant association was the main one. Deprived of the capacity to take independent initiatives and reduced to merely auxiliatory bodies of the party
and the government, the peasants lost interest in the mass organizations. This was amply demonstrated during Japanese attacks, which brought ‘much burning and killing’. The effect was to lower ‘the masses’ spirit even more and some people, blaming the government, the army and the mass organizations alike, immediately withdrew from the mass organizations’. In this period, mass work was therefore characterized as ‘rightist no matter from what angle one considers it’.

During the following year and a half, some progress was made in dealing with the ‘serious crisis’ by focusing on redistributive measures to alleviate the peasants’ living conditions and generally stimulate their activism. However, cadre suspicion of autonomous peasant activity lingered on: ‘[F]earing the destruction of the rural united front, they neglected to raise the peasants’ class consciousness and did not dare to educate the masses in the communist spirit’.121

Other party sources painted a similar picture of the ‘rightist’ turn. Cadre preoccupation with winning over the elite strata led to fewer mass struggles against them that in turn emboldened their violation of CCP-instituted laws. Mobilizing the peasants for politico-economic objectives was ‘relaxed’ or ‘abandoned’.122

The gist of the Pingshun, etc., documents was thus: a failure to safeguard peasant interests and to press the elite into submitting to them; a top-down policy process demobilizing and demoralizing peasants and cadres alike. Yet to dispose of these issues by simply attaching a ‘rightist’ label is unenlightening and unconvincing. As with radicalism, these actions were influenced by concrete circumstances. The Pingshun document contains hints of their complexity. Cadre fears in this particular case seem to relate more to superior party organs than to the mass movement: the rural united front was party policy and failure to enforce it brought sanctions of varying severity from above. The many ‘rectification’ campaigns were a powerful reminder to this effect (see Chapter 4).

Such fears were probably also a strong reason for cadre obsession with retaining their commanding position vis-à-vis the peasant masses, as referred to in another document. Cadres were said to have fixed ideas to which the peasants had to adapt. While this behaviour was termed ‘rightist’, it might in a different context have been derailed ‘leftist’. The result was the same; top-down compulsion and popular inactivity.123

There were other circumstances liable to bring charges of ‘deviation’. Variations in overall local conditions and their changes over time often
defied a reliable criterion for judging concrete policy measures. Moreover, complicated problems, sometimes in the form of an emergency, demanded quick decisions by local cadres, many of whom were quite inexperienced in organizational matters. The general guide to action implied flexibility: ‘[D]uring a certain period or in a certain area one should emphasize either struggle or unity depending on the situation’\(^\text{124}\) This abstract formula proved too difficult to handle for a good many cadres.

All these intra-party and environmental factors combined with the movement’s large-scale expansion and concomitant unevenness to render inevitable a large measure of policy oscillation. Its recurrent characterization in party sources as a right or left ‘deviation’ was a convenient polemic, not an explanatory device. To repeat, deciding whether the concrete application of broad policy objectives in a locality did amount to a departure from official party standards involved a great deal of arbitrariness. And where identifiable, these departures were not simply of two categories, but encompassed a wide range of action patterns. Shifting trends were therefore usually not of the sharp, abrupt and wholesale kind typically depicted in party accounts. In fact, the claimed efficacy of the party’s ‘corrective’ measures, said to have ushered in a completely new stage, is negated by the very frequency with which such measures were necessitated. Any turns of events inaugurating clear breaks were rather the exception. At the same time, the generalized instability did pervade policy implementation to bring about a shifting dynamics of social conflict. As illustration, consider the following two examples, while bearing in mind the qualifications to the CCP’s crude categorization of right-left ‘deviations’.

Reporting on JinChaJi in 1941, Peng Zhen divided the emphasis of the party committees’ work into two periods. Initially, ‘the main danger in some areas’ was a preoccupation with obtaining landlord support for the resistance that virtually excluded efforts to subordinate them. Peng claimed that the committees did ‘not dare to engage in the required struggles and to strike at local tyrants’. The result was to ‘tie the hands and feet of the party members and the masses’. This had a dampening effect on the mass movement, especially in northeastern Shanxi. The second period saw the growth of the early ‘very few leftist deviations’ into becoming ‘the greatest danger’ as the committees switched attention to mobilize the peasants. Despite the assertion that ‘leftism’ had been already ‘rectified’ in April 1938, it was now declared ‘sufficient to jeopardize’ both the united front and the existence of the base areas.\(^\text{125}\)
Another document from 1941, mainly on central Hebei, distinguished three policy zigzags. Also here struggles with the landlords were at first played down for the sake of joint resistance, leaving power relationships in the villages intact. In the following period, from the autumn of 1939 to July 1940, a radicalization took place. Local party organizations reacted to landlords collaborating during Japanese army campaigns by stressing ‘the basic masses’ supremacy’. Yet in official party eyes, the pendulum subsequently swung too far towards struggles: implementation of rent and interest reduction policy was accompanied by peasants refusing to make any payments; local governments excluded the upper strata; these were forced to shoulder ‘too heavy’ a financial burden. The third period beat a retreat from the anti-elite offensives to enable a united front with it. Party authorities told peasants to pay rents and interests following the legislated reduction, reserved a place for the elite in the government administration, obliged most people to pay taxes and extended civil liberties to all those resisting Japan.¹²⁶

These two examples, despite their very sketchy nature, raise some points of general relevance. First, a relative de-emphasis on struggles against the elite was most likely at the beginning of the war when the protective military shield was as yet very weakly constituted and the party’s propaganda effort (as distinct from intra-party directives and resolutions) hammered out the theme of national unity to a foreign aggressor with particular zeal, reflecting the general climate among politically aware social groups and the CCP’s eagerness to win them over. The latter point was no doubt given added impetus by China’s initially miserable war performance. In this vein, an April 1939 report on mass work in southeastern Shanxi concluded: ‘With the coming of the war, the right deviation is most probable to arise due to the blows causing deaths and bloodshed; the enemy’s propaganda and threats have a disintegrating impact on some mass organizations’.¹²⁷

Second, no clear-cut periodization of policy oscillations can be made other than for very limited areas. As was noted in Peng Zhen’s report, the strong early theme of class unity by no means excluded simultaneous radical occurrences. In fact, he provided instances of landlords then being so heavily taxed that they fled to Japanese-occupied areas.¹²⁸ Regarding central Hebei, a party directive of August 1939 denied that there had been a generally one-sided stress on a broad class alliance during the initial two years of the war. Since the issue of class struggle within the united front had not been properly understood, the directive declared, ‘deviations’ developed both to the right and the left.¹²⁹ In short, a complex mixture of
contradictory trends coexisted throughout the war. Hence the inaccuracy of the frequent claim in party sources that radicalism ‘basically’ came to an end with the promulgation in 1940 of laws guaranteeing equal rights to all people supporting the resistance. Radical phenomena causing ‘disorder’ were thereafter supposedly marginalized. The earlier account of cadre and popular radicalism as well as evidence presented in later chapters effectively invalidate this assertion. If anything, radicalism gained in strength after 1941, especially through the reinvigorated campaign to reduce rents (see Chapter 8).

Third, a marked swing in one direction might strengthen the likelihood and manifestation of a counter-current as problems accumulated and sharpened. The fervent radicalism in central Hebei during 1940–41 is corroborated in other sources. A land redistribution was carried out in several places, at times ‘with exceptional rapidity and fierceness’. The imposition of heavy fines and involuntary contributions was widespread. The multiple influences created a chronic instability.

Building up a viable rural united front in accordance with the party’s strategic thinking thus ran into a host of problems. A vivid summary of their manifold nature is contained in Liu Lantao’s 1941 report at a cadre conference in the Beiyue area discussing the 1940 equal rights programme.

His first point was that it had met with a big success, even inaugurating ‘a new period’ in the development of the united front. The main part of the report is, however, about people from various strata/classes expressing distinctly negative sentiments about the programme. For all the mentioning of landlords who strongly appreciated it, there was plenty of scepticism among them. Equal rights for all, they maintained, was nothing but ‘idle theorizing’. Being ‘a trick by the Communist Party’, these rights would not be implemented properly or at all. They worried about what the party meant by carrying out policies ‘flexibly’ and ‘suitably’, depending on local circumstances. In any case, landlords were highly distrustful of local organs’ ability and willingness to put higher-level directives into practice. Another landlord reaction to the programme was to use its clauses, particularly the one pledging to safeguard ‘the wishes of both sides’, to repossess rented-out land and thwart the rent reduction policy generally.

The employers also found the programme a useful weapon to bolster their interests. Pointing to ‘the freedom of contract’ clause, employers told hired labourers that they had ‘no priority rights’ and resorted to widespread
dismissals. In the resultant unemployment, those accepting the lowest wages were hired, thereby causing labourers to compete among themselves.

As the party’s equal rights initiative was a move to placate the upper strata, Liu, not surprisingly found that ‘the basic masses in some areas are not very enthusiastic about supporting the programme’. Specifically, peasants lacking permanent tenancy rights felt that it offered no help in getting access to land. Nor could labourers see any concrete advantages in the programme.

At another level, the programme’s commitment to the free will of each anti-Japanese individual raised problems for the party also in relation to the popular masses. If everything was voluntary, surely this also applied to joining the village-based self-defence corps, some reasoned. Others, referred to as ‘bad elements’, refused to participate, confident that party organizers ‘do not dare but to guarantee human rights’. In fact, these organizers were confronted with questions to which the programme had no answer: ‘What does persuasion mean? What happens if you tell me one thing and I do not submit to it?’

As with other policies, landlords were able to seize upon certain wordings to spread rumours causing apprehensions among the people. The programme’s opposition to early marriage was thus construed as an outright prohibition on marriage. The result was a flurry of marriages, some, involving persons who had not yet reached marriageable age, held secretly in the middle of the night. In one locality there were about a hundred marriages on a single day.

Those who assumed leadership functions at the local level and were ultimately responsible for implementing the programme were also unhappy with it. Party members ‘violating’ and criticizing the ‘rightest’ character of the programme have already been cited. In their view, the programme amounted to ‘a betrayal’ by higher levels, ‘an unprincipled concession to the landlords’ and to a violation of the constantly reiterated communist pledge to redistribute the grain of ‘the big households’. Some party members argued that ‘what is said is completely suited to the taste of the landlords and the moneybags’. Others protested: ‘Well! We just have to wait and serve others as despicable slaves!’ Were the clauses in the programme to be fully implemented, ‘some comrades’ concluded, ‘landlords and moneybags will certainly gain ground and our work will necessarily collapse’.

Sub-county cadres were likewise concerned about the restraints the programme imposed on measures taken against landlords and other local powerholders. No longer was it allowed to freely beat, scold and extract...
fines. Feeling powerless in dealing with landlord intransigencies, etc., these local organizers grew pessimistic and dispirited, and some asked for leave to go home.

Liu concluded his report by rebutting his initial optimism of a breakthrough in the united front work; in fact, it was still seriously impaired by compulsion, bullying and cadres arrogating all powers to themselves. While his report might contain inaccuracies, its essence highlights a crucial feature of the rural united front, one that is corroborated in this study: the front posed the party with almost constant struggles of varying intensity, involving most strata and a wide range of issues. Consequently, the front was never securely grounded or achieved – it did indeed represent a struggle for unity.

The front implied a strategy for possible and necessary class structural changes under specific historical conditions. The crux of this theoretical construct was its dependence on a strongly exercised leadership by the CCP as the envisaged social transformation was to be delicately fitted together with joint efforts including virtually all village strata. The CCP’s relative inability to effectively control events at the grassroots imparted a highly volatile functioning to the front, in addition to the influence exerted by its intended mechanisms. The clearest example of this weakness was unofficial and derailed radicalism, which ran counter to the CCP’s essential policy approach. In raising extraordinary difficulties, the front could not but glaringly expose the limitations of the CCP’s vanguard ambition. How these were manifested in the local context is the basic theme of the next chapter.

NOTES

1. A less frequent designation was the ‘social united front’. While focusing strictly on the national dimension is perfectly legitimate, such an approach cannot illuminate the essential dynamics of the CCP as a mass movement unless extended to a concrete analysis of the grassroots united front workings in the various policy fields. Thus, Shum Kui-kwong’s detailed study of the CCP top leadership’s debates on the national united front does not warrant his conclusion that it served ‘as the overall factor in facilitating the growth and expansion of the Chinese Communist power from 1935–45’ (p. 231). His basic severance of these debates to policy implementation’s actualities (the programmatic content is in any case treated quite schematically) gives references to ‘the masses’ and ‘the class forces’ a very abstract connotation. *The Chinese Communists’ Road to Power: The Anti-Japanese National United Front, 1935–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

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4. SW II, p. 216.

5. ‘Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938’, p. 34.


9. SW I, p. 286.

10. SW II, pp. 41, 215.

11. Ibid., p. 456. This was constantly repeated by the party. Peng Zhen restates this paragraph in his 1941 JinChaJi report (p. 17), but makes the crucial qualification that ‘the external contradiction and the internal contradiction are intricately intertwined’ due to ‘the complex land relationship’. (p. 88) *Peng Zhen baogao*, (1941/1981).


18. This formula was restated, with minor variations, in for example Yang Shangkun, ‘Muqian zhengzhi xingshi yu tongyi zhanxian zhong de celüe wenti’, 16.4.1940, ZJ, vol. 1, pp. 215, 218.


20. SW II, p. 422.


29. SW II, p. 423.
35. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 53. See also p. 196.
38. ‘Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938’, p. 56. The brackets are the translator’s.
39. ‘Zhongyang guanyu shenru qunzhong gongzuo de jueding’, p. 112.
42. Ibid., p. 257.
43. Peng Dehuai, Sannian kangzhan yu Balujun (Balujun jun zheng zazhi she, 1940), p. 13.
44. Epstein, p. 285.
45. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 19.
46. Epstein, pp. 254–256.
49. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 95.
52. Peng Tao, ‘Quanzhong yundong de fazhan yu jieji guanxi de bianhua’, pp. 1–4, NU.
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57. *Peng Zhen baogao*, p. 100.
58. Wang Zongqi, ‘Pingshun sisi nian dong jiancha jianzu yundong zongjie’, p. 28, NU.
61. For example: *Peng Zhen baogao*, p. 7; ‘Peng Zhen tongzhi lun JinChaji bianqu de tudi zhengce’, p. 54.
63. *Peng Zhen baogao*, pp. 7–8.
68. Misaki Yoshio, *Hokushi ni okeru saikin no Chûkyô katsudô jôkyô*, (1941), p. 44.
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77. ‘Yang Shangkun zai Zhonggong zhongyang beifangju jiu gaogan huiyishang baogao de zhailu’, 3.10.1940, TD, vol. 3, pp. 673–676. At the time Yang was secretary of the bureau.


84. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 100.


87. Ibid., p. 678.


91. SW II, p. 466. See also ibid., pp. 444, 460–461, 466–467.


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106. Wang Zongqi, p. 3.
119. ‘Huxi kangRi zhanzheng ziliao’, p. 422.
120. ‘Xin xingshi xia shengwei gongzuo de xin renwu’, June 1938, DJ, p. 97.
123. ‘Huang Jing tongzhi dui Tai yun gongzuo de fayan’, pp. 470–471.
128. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 118.
PART II

INCIPIENT REORGANIZATION
Contested Party

UNMANAGEABLE EXPANSION

The best way of searching for prospective members of a village’s party branch was, according to a party document captured by the Japanese, to observe the peasants’ conduct in the struggles to reform the village – such as in the movement against a corrupt village head or in a difficult tenancy dispute – and in fighting against the Japanese, including anti-collaboration activities.\(^1\) Within a period of eight years the search had resulted in a dramatic membership rise from about 40,000 to just over a million. While the conditions for entry into the party were in principle severe and the attached work duties heavy, members’ actual performance was extremely varied, whether in changing village society or in resisting the Japanese army. In short, the general pattern of quantitative–qualitative contrasts was perhaps most clearly epitomized in the party organization’s evolution.

The CCP’s very thin spread in the vast North China region at the outset of the war is well known. Yet there is a dearth of precise indicators as to the scale of the party’s organizational resources, despite the amount of research that has been done on the CCP’s pre-war movement there\(^2\) – that is, how much of the party survived the repression it was subjected to in the 1930s and what was the nature of its remaining activities?

Some rough estimates point to the party’s very limited presence. Regarding JinChaji, ‘not even the areas of highest pre-war “success” in Hebei could boast a rural Party organization which offered immediate potential for control of the villages’.\(^3\) Pre-war party activities in Shandong, another researcher notes, did not leave ‘much of an impression’ on the peasantry; in fact, ‘even in uprisings the party identity of the participants was not always revealed’.\(^4\) According to one party source, the Henan CCP had a mere 96 members on the eve of the war.\(^5\) A document on northern Henan/southern Hebei says that the membership at the time amounted to
about 300, with ‘only a few counties’ having organized activity.\textsuperscript{6} The western Shandong counties of Po, Fan, Yanggu and Guan reportedly had no more than 20–30 party members each in the beginning of 1938.\textsuperscript{7} There were, of course, variations. Paradoxically, overall membership in Shandong, where the party’s influence remained comparatively weak, included about 1,000 in July 1937.\textsuperscript{8}

But this does not mean that party organizing had to start almost from scratch. Kathleen Hartford writes of ‘a small but not negligible potential cadre of leaders’ in Hebei who had been ‘steeped in and tested in, the commitment to … the party’s goals’, and of a regional/local-level ‘core of leaders familiar with the local environment’.\textsuperscript{9}

\textit{Hazardous build-up}

In expanding a local party organization, its village-based branch assumed special significance as the basic-level agency directly linking the party hierarchy to the people. It was thus the responsibility of the party branch to immediately promote and lead the rural structural changes. A document on how to ‘penetrate the masses’ specified the crushing work load placed on the village branches:

\begin{quote}
The party branch must make mass work the basis of its activity, and each branch must become the nucleus of the masses in every village or town and also become the propagandist, organizer and leader of all mass movements and struggles.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

Given the critical role assigned to the branch, the present chapter will primarily focus on this party echelon, thereby indicating the general nature of the CCP’s difficulties in policy implementation.

Initial efforts to establish the party in the villages followed several patterns. In northern Henan these included reinvigorating traditional party strongholds or using party recruits from the local elites, peasants or students.\textsuperscript{11} Experience from JinChaji, Peng Zhen explained, was that ‘an outside force’, like the Eighth Route Army’s local work teams or student activists, ‘is often required to give prior support’ as ‘the peasants’ dependence is very great before they have stood up’. The first organizational initiative of such force upon entering a village would often be to contact the village head and, irrespective of his political leanings, have him convene a mass meeting and declare the setting up of a mass organization. Thereafter the party cadres took over. This strongly top-down formula was advocated
in order to achieve quick results and, relatedly, break the obstruction of local powerholders.\textsuperscript{12}

As an initial measure, working exclusively from above therefore offered definite advantages. However, drawbacks became apparent when proceeding to the subsequent task of genuinely activizing the peasant masses – which necessitated painstaking educational and organizational endeavours. Inevitably, the forced pace had to slow down. In parts of Taihang this entailed a shift to working ‘little by little’ from below through investigation and methods based on experiments and demonstration of models.\textsuperscript{13} Yet, as will be elaborated upon later on in this chapter, there was resistance to changing the top-down approach, which thus tended to linger on. Summing up the work in 1940, Lai Ruoyu, head of the organization department in Taihang, was forced to conclude: ‘There is no mass movement from below. The mobilization still proceeds only from top down. Consequently, the mass movement is not penetrating. The masses do not get moving by themselves. They are passive.’\textsuperscript{14} Such complaints were frequent in party sources.

Japanese intelligence drew attention to a more gradual and cautious practice that was likely to produce considerable results in the long term, that is, the mobilization of primary school teachers in the CCP’s penetration of central and southern Hebei. Having been exposed to the CCP’s thinking at regional gatherings, the teachers were sent back to the villages to set up party branches. This source offered two good reasons for the party targeting primary school teachers: possessing a certain level of knowledge, they were fairly receptive to the party’s arguments; and their leading position in the villages held out the prospect of party policies gaining a ready audience, even among children.\textsuperscript{15}

At first, many party directives stressed stringent standards for recruitment.\textsuperscript{16} Arguably, this vigilance derived from the communist vanguard theory according to which the party must restrict its membership to the advanced section of the labouring people, who, armed with the Marxist theoretical tool, was to have the ultimate responsibility in directing the course of events. Intellectuals and even workers (!) were shut out, one document lamented.\textsuperscript{17} This trend was reinforced by cadres who had been active in the pre-war days in North China when repression had forced them to operate underground and to expand the party in a highly cautious manner.\textsuperscript{18} These cadres’ scepticism was therefore not only directed against the rural united front (see Chapters 2 and 3), but also against moves to dilute the classical revolutionary type of vanguard party.
Only with the central committee directive in March 1938 did a greatly accelerated recruitment become a pronounced feature. Noting that ‘in many important areas a party organization does not yet exist or is very small’, the directive demanded a massive expansion of the party.\textsuperscript{19} The same urgent message to vastly increase the party’s presence was found in a central committee report by Mao Zedong in October of the same year: ‘[T]he Communist Party must … become a great mass party... Here no tendency towards closed-doorism should be tolerated… We must not close our door for fear of enemy agents, our set policy being boldly to expand our Party.’\textsuperscript{20} The heavy stress on ‘a great mass party’ was probably intended as a criticism of those pre-war cadres who harboured a decidedly narrower concept.

To be sure, swift membership increases were observable already in the initial phase of the war. In Pingshan county, for example, the 20–30 members of the summer of 1937 could not compete with the 2,984 in March 1938.\textsuperscript{21} But it was in the second and third year when recruitment really assumed the proportions that the directive called for. Party conferences in the Taihang area reported a membership growth from about a thousand in February 1938 to 10,000 half a year later and to 30,150 in September 1939.\textsuperscript{22} As for individual counties in the same area, enrolment in Zanhuang rose from 100 to 1,300 during April–May 1938, in Heshun from 402 to 1,724 in the period February–July 1938 and in Wuxiang from 200 to 2,500 during the first year of the war.\textsuperscript{23}

These quantitative gains were bought at a huge, deformational qualitative price. Its manifestations were manifold and amply exemplified in numerous party sources from different areas. Frequently, procedures for entering the party were ignored by the village’s party branch. There were many cases of collective affiliation. Membership conditions were reduced to willingness to resist Japan. Some people were ‘pressed’ into the party, others were attracted by slogans appealing to self-interest, such as membership absolving one from serving in the army or paying taxes. Just as recruits sometimes had no knowledge of their membership, so many branches kept no statistics on it. Class status was overlooked, giving rise to conflicts between branches dominated by poor or rich peasants. The party was not developed in a planned way, with regular meetings. The failure to keep some work tasks secret and separate these from the open activities was conspicuous. Instead of a tight, disciplined organ exerting strong leadership, the party turned into a loose and fragmentary mass organization lacking a sense of direction.\textsuperscript{24}
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Having listed many of the above phenomena, including beating the gong when founding the party branch, a work report by the JiLuYu area party committee thus characterized the initial efforts: ‘Only expansion and no consolidation, no training, no check-up, no combing out [of undesireables], no leadership.’\(^{25}\) Japanese investigators found that the party’s ‘remarkable’ expansion in western and central Hebei was accompanied by the inclusion of inferior party members.\(^{26}\) In frenziedly pursuing figures, the local party organization was in large part a vanguard in name only.

Generally, three circumstances were fundamental to the troubles afflicting local party organization, all of which have already received attention and were of broad and largely continuous applicability. First, given the stark military emergencies, matters bearing on armed build-up tended to take precedence, leading to a neglect of party-related tasks. Thus when many party members were mobilized to join the army in western Shandong, one ‘did not even care about the work of the local party organization’.\(^{27}\) This conflict of priorities found its sharpest expression in the early war years.

Second, training programmes could not keep pace with the recruitment of new party members – which had a detrimental effect on the party organization’s viability. In Peng Zhen’s description, with a supply of cadres from the party centre in Yan’an ‘that was extremely inadequate to satisfy demands, the work lagged far behind the situation as it developed’.\(^{28}\) It will be observed that many cadres deserted and were found guilty of various breaches of discipline.

Third, as the upper party organs early in the war took a generally inattentive attitude to the elite and failed to instruct lower levels to struggle against these strata, many of them came to occupy leading positions at these echelons. This was one important source of dissention inside the party as well as between it and the people.\(^{29}\) Peng Zhen pointed out how the elite employed their cultural capital to ‘conceal themselves in the party for a long time’ in parts of JinChalji: they were men of ability and good at writing and speaking, they acted with great care and ‘kept doing a few good things to cover up their intrigues’, etc. He added that the elite’s success in this endeavour was facilitated by the party’s then de-emphasis on popular activism and cadres’ highly mobile work duties and inexperience in organizational matters\(^{30}\) – thereby summing up the three circumstances and drawing attention to their interrelationship. Yet, following the uneven pattern, the work was conducted entirely from below in some areas, a situation which excluded the elite.\(^{31}\)
Retrenchment in troubles (1939–40)

By the summer of 1939, the host of problems besetting local party organizations forced the CCP to rethink. The result was to discontinue the policy of rapidly expanding membership and instead institute a general tightening. A central committee directive in August 1939 concluded that ‘ideologically, politically and organizationally consolidating the party has today become our extremely urgent task’. Accordingly, at the first party representative conference of the JinJiLuYu border region in September 1939, it was resolved to stop enlarging the party and instead strengthen the existing organizations. Only where the party had made little headway was the expansionary policy to be continued, although more prudently. Limits on the number of party members were stipulated depending on the size of the village population: they were to number 5 per cent in a big village (defined as 100–300 households), 3 per cent in an average village (25–100 households) and 1 per cent in a small village. In the same border region a rectification campaign was launched in 1940 to expel those judged to be undesirable and to examine the reliability of cadres at all levels.32

In JinChaji, the retrenchment got under way after a party conference in October 1939. Over the next 10–12 months, 2–3 per cent of the party members in the Beiyue area and central Hebei were expelled. In the former area, 449 purgees out of a total of 759 were classified as follows: extremely backward elements – 38 per cent; opportunists – 26.3 per cent; class alien elements – 25.2 per cent.; enemy agents – 10.5 per cent. In central Hebei most of the 2,730 purgees were categorized as class alien elements, bandits and local ruffians; 406 had run away; and 138 had turned traitors. In some cases enemy agents effectively controlled the party branch.33

The general import of the campaigns was not that the party had become too big and unwieldy. After all, numerous reports complained that the party had failed to activize a mass movement, such as in several counties of southeastern Shanxi and northern Henan where the party in the latter half of 1938 had still not recruited two per cent of the population, despite the claimed work progress in the former areas.34 The point was rather that the party’s quality had reached crisis proportions.

This first large-scale attempt to establish the party on a footing better conforming to its principles and objectives achieved little. Judging from a JiLuYu document of September 1941, local party organizations failed to discuss the August 1939 directive concretely and widely among leading members. Retrenchment was understood as an absolute demand to be
applied whatever the circumstances, a method that fitted ill with the uneven spread of the membership; in fact, the document described half of the region as ‘blank space’. Only in 1941 were discussions initiated on how to consolidate the party and on revising stipulations relating to entry and re-entry into the party. The examination of cadres was not really undertaken until this year, and even then it ‘lacked vigour’.35

A feature of the campaigns that left a very serious after-effect on the party organization was their random and shock-like treatment. Standards for ‘cleansing’, when referred to at all, were arbitrarily applied, for example, to ‘those who do not perform any function’ or ‘those who do not hold meetings or pay the party membership dues’. Methods used in effecting expulsions were various, such as marking a list of names with circles and calling on members to withdraw voluntarily.36 The cuts could be staggering. In the case of 22 party branches in Taihang, the average membership was more than halved, with an extreme at 83 per cent.37 Of the 1,800 party members in one county of JinChaji, only 506 remained after the retrenchment measures, prompting higher party authorities to undertake further investigations resulting in raising the figure to 900. Such expulsions produced uneasiness and fear among party members.38 Belonging to a ‘good’ class category offered no guarantees. At times, ‘loyal peasants’ were ousted, while hoodlums were unaffected.39 In one branch led by a rich peasant, 26 out of 30 members were expelled, many of the purgees being farmhands and poor peasants who were accused of ‘not playing any role’ or of being ‘class-alien elements’.40 With the expulsions, the party strength became still more unevenly distributed.41

Documents describe the local party organization following the 1939–40 campaigns as in a state of disarray. A Taihang survey of party branches thus spelled out their general consequences: party members were bought over by the elite; cadres took little notice of the masses; policy implementation reached an impasse; new activists could not be raised.42 Moreover, cadre corruption, or their inheriting of old customs, as the elaboration went, was ‘very widespread and cases of betrayal and defection occur continuously’.43 The bitter experiences of the 1939–40 campaigns prompted one party official in December 1940 to demand that the ‘adjustment’ of the party’s composition be accomplished in a planned and step-by-step way. Hitherto practices had been singularly injurious:

In the past, there were many counties which regulated the organization by large-scale cleansing of party members, by arbitrarily playing with party members’ political life and by creating terror inside the party. For example,
in ‘X’ county there were in the past about 1,000 party members, but after the adjustment only about 100 remained. Clearly, measures of a different proportion and, above all, _kind_ were urgently needed to come to grips with the multiple problems that had accumulated both inside the party organization and in its relationship with the people at large.

_An over-ambitious design_

In 1942 the CCP launched what is commonly referred to as the Big Rectification Campaign, an initiative that was far more large scale and elaborate than previous efforts. Although the campaign also involved the army and the government, its greatest impact was on the party. The campaign first unfolded in the ShaanGanNing border region, especially through the speeches of Mao Zedong, and was thereafter undertaken in the other base areas. By studying a collection of documents and holding group discussions, at which self-reflection and criticism of others were conducted, and by participating in mass ideological struggles, cadres were to rid themselves of work methods and of thinking contravening party prescripts. The selection of documents, it is generally agreed, reflected the strong influence wielded by Mao Zedong.

Three conspicuous themes were enunciated in the campaign.

First, one must combat views counter to the party as a tightly organized vanguard, such as ‘individualism’, ‘anti-centralism’ and ‘liberalism’, the last defined as rejecting ideological struggle. Second, and closely related, there was an emphasis on the need to shape a unified ideological frame of reference to ensure that cadres spread over distant parts of China grasped the content and import of party directives and really carried them out. The difficulties of liaison between the many big and small bases and strongholds due to poor communications and being surrounded by stronger enemy forces produced the so-called mountain-stronghold mentality. There was a tendency to give priority to local interests over the whole. Third, the study had to be linked directly to the concrete conditions under which the cadres worked, both the comprehension of these conditions and the ways to change them.

These themes restate a basic tension in the CCP-movement: one between a firmly centralized decision-making and the recognized need for flexible policy implementation at the grassroots; and another between the campaign’s truly challenging objectives and the CCP’s limited organizational resources. As a measure of the formidable obstacles that the campaign confronted
let us note just how much at odds with the party line cadre attitudes and perceptions could be, itself partly a reflection of the party’s heterogenous membership.

An August 1944 report on the rectification in Taihang concluded that ‘our cadres’ thoughts are extremely complex’. They demanded privileges and were guilty of corruption, waste and hedonism. The last charge applied more or less to all 122 cadres. Most of the 44 cadres who had become a ‘serious liability’ in this respect were well-off persons or bandits.

Some cadres distrusted the CCP policy of limiting its membership presence in the government administration to one-third of the seats, and thought that ‘we make up too large a proportion’. And why, they wondered, was this system not instituted in the army and the public security bureau? Their understanding of the GMD was, in party eyes, exceedingly deficient. Not only did they fail to ‘correctly’ diagnose the reasons for the discordant CCP–GMD relations; more seriously, they held the GMD in curiously high regard: its government and military forces were powerful and enjoyed solid popular support; the GMD’s ‘surrender to the enemy’ was ‘for the purpose of preparing for a counter-attack, and in future the GMD will take over the cities’; Jiang Jieshi, as a great man who worked for the country, was therefore correct in preparing for resistance; corruption in the GMD areas of southwestern China ‘is our propaganda’. On the other hand, there were also cadres who voiced radicalism. In their view, the anti-spy measures included killing GMD personnel, while the aim of the land policy was to eliminate the landlords.49

Compared to the results of a test conducted among party members and cadres from the county level downwards in western Shandong in early 1941, some of the above examples would appear rather extreme. Nevertheless, the following data does, again, demonstrate the enormous effort required to achieve an adequate ‘rectification’. The test was preceded by educational discussions on the party’s united front policy, with the primary aim of coming to grips with previous radicalism. Evidently, a large number of the respondents had a poor grasp of the party’s official standpoint:

Broadly speaking, what is the task of a CCP member? 67 respondents:
24 ‘correct’ answers.

What are the various work duties of a party member? 66:3
(22 were fairly close to a correct answer).

Why pay the party membership fee? 66:37.

What is the difference between the CCP and the GMD? 41:39.
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On the party branch’s organization and tasks. 44:13.
Why become a party member? 70:38.
Why form a united front? 20:5.
What causes frictions between the CCP and the GMD? 20:13
What is leftist closed-doorism and how can it be solved? 20:6
On the character of the Chinese revolution. 60:12.
On the meaning of bourgeoisie and proletariat. 41:26.
On the meaning of middle-of-the-road forces. 58:26.
On the meaning of progressive forces 56:49.50

Many party directives and instructions refer to the launching and progress of the campaign in the base areas behind Japanese lines in North China.51 Yet, the paucity of comprehensive material makes it difficult to assess the specific impact of the campaign. It is nevertheless clear that the military and social instability in these areas, and the training problems mentioned earlier, meant that the campaign in a narrow sense was of far lesser importance than in the ShaanGanNing border region. (The expression ‘narrow sense’ refers to the study and other activities immediately bound up with the campaign documents and does not include the social reform processes which were part of the campaign in a wide meaning – a distinction which will be made a number of times.)

Army cadres in particular were dispersed and preoccupied with guerrilla operations. Unlike in Yan’an, a Beiyue report pointed out in February 1943, ‘war conditions preclude following the prescribed order in studying the documents’.52 At a conference in March 1943 it was declared that the campaign must not interfere with combat operations or directly related activities.53 Another severe time constraint on the campaign activities were the demands of a major production campaign simultaneously in progress (see Chapter 11); only in between the busy seasons could the former campaign really be engaged in.54 These conditions obviously hampered the kind of concentrated study efforts that the campaign called for. Hence a directive of January 1944 said cadres in JinChaJi thought it interfered with more pressing tasks and were unwilling to spend much time and energy on it.55 Many reports do indeed point to the neglect to work out concrete plans and to supervise and examine the activities.56

As a consequence, the thought-remoulding endeavours of the campaign generally lacked vigour. References to this effect are plentiful. In fact, ‘very
few comrades can detect what is at issue... and there are still not many in the [JiLuYu] border region who are ideologically capable of systematic analysis and historical investigation'.\(^57\) An investigation of five local party committees in Taihang lent statistical confirmation to the sluggish progress of the campaign. Following one year's campaign activity, 1,034 of the 4,659 cadres had completed their courses, 2,622 had as yet not been exposed to it, 120 (20 of whom were not party members) were still undergoing training and 873 newly recruited cadres were classified as 'not having to be rectified'.\(^58\)

Yet, it is also noteworthy that some limited gains could have long-term implications. Cadres' 'attitude to study has ... begun to change', a JiLuYu directive proclaimed in September 1944. While earlier they had avoided the campaign and were 'even more unwilling to enter the party school', the cadres' greater interest in investigation and practical activity was a significant beginning.\(^59\) Such smaller, hesitant steps forward were indeed a hallmark of the war years.

It has been demonstrated that building up a local party organization involved contending processes preventing it from exercising the kind of decisive leadership function that the CCP aspired to. To substantiate this conclusion requires closer examination of the content and activities of this party level. In the following two sections the party's internal and external relationships are considered separately.

**INTERNAL FISSURES**

In contrast to the vanguard ideal of a strictly select membership from the class conscious core of the working class (however that is defined), the CCP's class composition was unstable and complex. While much of the evidence below dates from the first half of the war when recruitment patterns were particularly disorderly, this characterization of the local party membership remains essentially valid in general wartime perspective; fluidity of CCP control over vast areas and periods of rapid organizational expansion inevitably imparted to it a large measure of volatility.

**Class: Distributional varieties**

In the convulsive conditions at the time, the pattern of the party members' social background tended to fluctuate. Reflecting regional diversity, such changes did not necessarily follow a uniform pattern. A survey of eight party branches in 'consolidated' areas of Beiyue, JinChaJi, showed a marked contraction of the poor peasant and farmhand components from December
1937 to July 1941. The former shrank from 62.75 to 46.96 per cent and the latter from 11.43 to 1.21 per cent. The middle peasant percentage, replenished from below, rose from 23.89 to 49, while that of the rich peasants increased from 2.02 to 2.83.\textsuperscript{60} If middle peasants and higher strata made up no less than 70 per cent of the membership in Taixi county of western Shandong in 1938, a different situation prevailed in the summer of 1940. The 17,408 recruits were then made up of (in percentage): middle peasants – 30; poor peasants – 22.6; farmhands – 8; workers – 6.5; rich peasants – 1.1; and others – 0.5.\textsuperscript{61}

As already described, changes in composition were often a result of expulsions and other steps taken by the party to ‘improve’ or ‘adjust’ the class status of its members. A report at a 1943 cadre conference in JiLuYu even claimed the middle peasant percentage of 50–60 had been ‘corrected’ so that poor peasants and farmhands came to make up 80–90 per cent.\textsuperscript{62} There were cases of a clear-cut and dramatic transformation of the branch’s social basis (see previous section), but usually the changes were more drawn-out and partial. For example, the overall ‘adjustment’ of branch members from 700 to 650 in the Yushe and Wudong counties of JiLuYu thus affected the main categories: poor peasants from 513 to 358, middle peasants from 74 to 165, farmhands from 35 to 59, handicraft workers from 22 to 27, rich peasants from 17 to 10, intellectuals 6 to 25. The notable shifts for poor and middle peasants are probably explained by an upward social mobility.\textsuperscript{63}

References have earlier been made to expulsions affecting all strata. That ‘right’ (i.e. poorer) categories were also ousted was not simply a matter of the previously noted ‘errors’ in implementing the organizational retrenchment: neither were they immune from violating party standards. Considering their generally large proportion of the membership, it should come as no surprise that out of the 141 purgees in an area of Taihang during 1937–42 poor and middle peasants numbered 56 and 64 respectively, while the others included 10 rich peasants, three landlords, three upper middle peasants, etc.\textsuperscript{64}

In the early war years, the distribution of party members’ class background was primarily altered by organizational means. Thereafter the mechanism shifted gradually to social reform policies and their concomitant broadening of popular activism. It has been noted in regard to Taihang, for example, that the rent and interest reduction policy was instrumental in raising the proportion of poor peasants and farmhands from 1942.\textsuperscript{65}

Yet, spots of strong CCP influence did emerge in the first half of the war, and these reform policies also impacted on the party’s class composition. Data in an August 1941 report by the JinJiYu area party committee
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indicated how the membership of the branches had changed since the beginning of the war as a result of economic development. The trend showed a substantial rise of poor peasants to middle peasant status as their relative living conditions improved. In five localities of Zanhuang county, the number of middle peasants increased from 254 to 443 and that of poor peasants decreased from 383 to 279. Party membership in other counties had a similar middle-peasantization tendency.66

Features relating to the distribution of the social composition of the branch membership can be summed up in five points. First, area differences of several kinds produced variable patterns, also within a single region. Consider JiLuYu. In 10 branches rich and middle peasants constituted 21 and 49 per cent respectively, while poor peasants were 30 per ent.67 In two other (late 1943) surveys covering a membership of 18,890 and 16,981, the poor peasant component was definitely larger, 58.3 and 85.5 per cent respectively.68 Contrasting configurations also applied to western/southern Shandong. In two localities the rich peasant/merchant share was no less than 70–80 per cent in 1940. On the other hand, one district with 8,670 members recorded the following percentages in 1941: poor peasants – 50.5, middle peasants – 29, rich peasants/landlords/merchants – 12, workers – 7.5, etc.69

Second, the social origins of branch members were particularly heterogenous in the tumultous early years of war. Data from three Taihang counties provide an illustration.70

Licheng county
- 94 members of 4 party branches: 52 middle peasants, 33 poor peasants, 5 rich peasants, 4 workers
- 17 members of 1 party branch: all middle peasants
- 16 members of 1 party branch: 14 middle peasants, 2 rich peasants

Liao county
- 60 members of 3 party branches: 18 middle peasants, 15 farmhands, 12 poor peasants, 4 vagrants, 4 workers, 3 merchants, 2 rich peasants, 1 landlord, 1 clerk
- 23 member of 1 party branch: 14 middle peasants, 5 poor peasants, 2 rich peasants, 2 workers
- 1 party branch: controlled by gangsters

Pingshun county
- 48 members of 2 party branches: 23 poor peasants, 21 middle peasants, 2 workers, 1 rich peasant, 1 gangster
- 1 party branch: 4 out 6 were gamblers

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Third, ‘adjustments’ and social reforms, in combination with social structural factors, served over time to bring about a broad trend of poor and middle-peasant predominance among party members, with particular stress on the former category. To relevant figures already cited may be added data reported by the JinJiYu area party committee in August 1940 and October 1941. The latter source says that poor and middle peasants were 48.6 and 34.3 per cent respectively of the 24,512 party members in 1,267 branches, shares that roughly corresponded to those given in the earlier report. In a part of western Hebei middle peasants were in the lead with 48.1 compared to the poor peasants’ 36 per cent.\(^71\) Japanese investigations of two branches in the same province indicated poor peasant majorities.\(^72\)

Fourth, and obvious in a Taihang survey, the stronger the CCP influence in the area, the greater the likelihood of a higher proportion of poor peasants. Differentiating areas into consolidated, general and weak, the poor peasants numbered 81 (out of a total membership of 190), 93 (256) and 35 (67), in that order. Their combined share was 41 per cent of the 513 party members. Another characteristic was the generally large presence of middle peasants who were 56, 109 and 23 in the three areas, or 37 per cent of the total. These trends were also apparent at leadership levels. Middle peasant strength was partly due to the upward mobility of the poorest peasants that resulted from economic policies.\(^73\)

Fifth, while the intellectuals’, mainly students, share of overall membership was negligible, in places their number could be quite conspicuous. Compared to their 2.4 per cent of 24,512 members in a 1941 JinJiYu survey, intellectuals made up 30 and 20 per cent in two Taiyue counties in 1939.\(^74\) Among the 6,485 party members in (mostly) Henan in mid-1938, they reportedly were 40 per cent.\(^75\) Their contribution to the CCP is even better expressed in leadership terms, a quality that the party badly needed (see Chapter 2). According to the JinJiYu survey of August 1940, they numbered 52 of 362 sub-county cadres. As elsewhere, intellectuals carried still greater weight in the county organization, where they were as many as 80 of 111 party cadres. Slightly more than half of the intellectuals came from rich peasant (38) and landlord (10) homes.\(^76\)

The data presented so far in this section might generally be given a dual interpretation: party members belonged to diverse social categories, yet the great majority covered a rather narrow sociological spectrum. Theoretically, this left much room for both conflict and cooperation. As for the small membership proportion of the village elite, their options and preferences
were mostly determined by the nature of class relationships and party branches in the area and by the proximity of enemy forces. Against this background, the internal relationships of the local party organization were not expected to assume a uniform pattern.

The rest of this section will introduce and briefly comment upon data specifically addressing the issue of how class connected with the running of a party branch; consider factors of a non-class character; show how all these factors combined to seriously weaken the party and sometimes even provoke disastrous set-backs; and finally present the case studies illustrating the party branches’ variable dynamics.

**Class: Behavioural varieties**

In examining how different social strata acted in a party branch, the findings of several Taihang investigations provide a starting point. True, these go very far in a crude class-reductionist direction and cannot, as such, sufficiently account for a much more complex reality. Nevertheless, the investigations, apart from pointing to class-based tendencies having a certain validity, do give some idea of the party’s difficulty in arousing and maintaining the activism of its natural constituency (the poorer strata). They reveal the diversity, inconsistencies and volatility of a given class’s behaviour, the multiple conflicts within the rural united front and the forcible and subversive routes into the party.

Poor peasants initially tended to be inactive and their membership was sometimes a result of their being pressed into the party. Hence they were not prominent in running the branch. Still exploited and oppressed, one explanation goes, they had little time and energy to involve themselves socially and politically. Their consequent ‘backward’ appearance received the middle peasants’ contempt. The latter were inclined to ignore the former at meetings, a situation not designed to improve the poor peasants’ low confidence in themselves. Their passivity was also ascribed to the party’s failure to launch struggles around livelihood-related issues like rent and interest reduction and workers’ wages. In conclusion, ‘they generally join the party late and at first they have a low position and play only a minor role. However, having risen up, they become the backbone supporting the party’s work’. Social reforms were therefore a key to sustained poor peasant activism. But the very reforms also carried the danger of demobilizing them as they became primarily devoted to enlarged family property – especially newly
acquired land – and lost interest in meetings. Consciousness transformation in the course of improving material circumstances was crucial.\textsuperscript{77}

The middle peasants were often characterized as having no scruples about pursuing their own interests at the expense of others, a motive easily producing swings both to the left and right, depending on circumstances. They deceived higher party organs: when they stood to gain they spoke frankly, otherwise they kept silent – and oppressed subordinates. Middle peasants tried to reduce their taxes by shifting them on to higher as well as lower strata. Depending on the extent to which the issue concerned them, middle peasants could be rather active in clearing up debts in some areas, while in other localities they remained inattentive to rent reduction. With improved economic conditions and the prospect of managing production, middle peasants came to view party work and meetings as an undue interference, prompting some to contemplate withdrawing from the party. Their leadership in the initial struggles against corruption and discriminatory tax practices (and here again, they sought to make others foot the bill, especially the better off) contrasted with their poor combat record and disinterest in army recruitment drives.

However, this middle peasant posture was not invariably the case. For one thing, it might be restrained in branches dominated by poor peasants and farmhands. Conversely, a middle peasant majority often blocked reform initiatives – other than those beneficial to themselves – since they were unable to perceive the hard toil of the lower strata, whom they despised and were unwilling to join forces with. The stagnating work in the area was then liable to incur the poor peasants’ anger and demand for the middle peasants’ expulsion from the branch. In some places they were ousted from the peasant associations, ‘a dangerous tendency requiring further dispassionate research’.

Another modifying factor was the middle peasants’ heterogeneity, a trait which perhaps characterized them more than other strata. A politically important distinction was drawn between relatively conservative-inclined, old middle peasants from the pre-war days and generally more progressive new middle peasants who had risen from lower strata since 1937 as a result of the party’s reform policies. Hence the references to middle peasants’ contribution to reforming village structures and mobilizing for resistance. As indispensable allies, the old/new middle peasant division was a source of much agony to the party. Thus, ‘at present, the problem most debated in the party is that of the middle peasants’ class status’. Both made up a large
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percentage of party members in 20 investigated branches in four counties, 30.4 old middle peasants and 25.9 new middle peasants. Yet on the branch committees the latter were far more numerous: 27.5 compared to the 1.8 of the former. Possibly, this circumstance was a product of the greater activist element among the new middle peasants. To complicate matters further, there were the upper-middle peasants, who were rather similar to rich peasants in living conditions and outlook.  

Landlords and rich peasants became branch members under essentially three circumstances. The first involved inter-factional feuding. They approached the party pretending to be progressive and sought to utilize it for the purpose of attacking a rival faction. True, some youth displayed an activist stand, but this did not change the factions’ ‘feudalistic’ and ‘sectarian’ character. Popular struggles were sometimes dragged into such antagonisms. A second motive for entering the party was to obstruct or dilute redistributive policies. In a third instance branches more or less forced these strata into the party, only to expel them in due course. Generally, the second factor counted most. ‘Landlords and rich peasants’, one document stated, ‘have seized the party branch, suppressed comrades and used the struggles to make everybody their servile adherents.’ Specifically, they had expelled poor peasants and farmhands from the branch and threatened comrades by saying that one had to endure hardship for the resistance.  

Not all rich peasant members were family heads. In 13 branches they numbered 17 out of 28, the others being youth, women and intellectuals. But it was the husbands who occupied the leadership positions – in this case half of them – and used the branch to enrich themselves. The six of the 17 family heads who managed to escape subsequent expulsions thus took advantage of party authority to continue to engage in speculative business, block implementation of laws, borrow public funds, reduce their taxes and oppress workers.  

One account says ‘vagrants’ entered the party for opportunistic reasons: ‘they realized [that] the Eighth Route Army was powerful and thought of using our strength to get rich in the chaotic situation’. Mass struggles and political training sometimes influenced their consciousness; otherwise they were likely to stir up conflicts in the branch. According to another source, many played a prominent role in the radical struggles to the left of the party line in the initial years. With higher party organs imposing restraints upon such ‘excesses’ from 1940, those surviving the expulsions swung to the ‘right’. Such behavioural shifts did of course also apply to other strata (see Chapter 3).
If party documents often raised the possibility of reforming members classified as ‘hoodlums’, data from eight branches is indicative of the protracted trials that this was likely to involve. During 1937–38, 17 hoodlums entered the party, and in six of the branches they became leading cadres. By mid-1942 seven hoodlums had been expelled on charges of corruption (four), surrender to wealthy households and to the GMD (two) and defection to the enemy (one). The ten who then remained party members were on the whole not strikingly different from the purgees, despite the passage of time. Only one of them had a positive record, proven ability and promotion to county-level cadre, while the fate of the others included ‘fall from power’ (five), corruption and collusion with landlords (two), reckless actions (one), participation in secret society rebellion (one) and a ‘very bad’ performance upon returning to his native place as cadre (one).82

Party investigators drew the seemingly reasonable general conclusion that a branch’s combativeness and quality largely hinged upon the nature of its class composition and members’ consciousness; the more ‘complex’ a branch was in these respects, the more laborious the work on consolidating it. However, despite the apparent warnings in the above account that peasant strata’s behaviour had a large volatile element, consciousness was here treated as a mechanical outgrowth of social structural location. Two examples were raised by way of illustration.

The first case referred to 22 branches which were riven by disunity. The class distribution of their 256 members was: middle peasants – 109; poor peasants – 93; hired workers – 20; rich peasants – 11; upper-middle peasants – 10; handicraft workers – 7; merchants – 3; landlords – 2; vagrants – 1. With middle peasants and higher strata constituting an overall majority of members – among cadres their share was even close to three-fourths – these branches paid little attention to the poor peasants’ and farmhands’ living conditions. Numerous examples were furnished to demonstrate how rich and upper middle peasants, with whom the vagrants ‘ganged up’, looked down upon these strata and opposed redistributive and other party policies.

On the other hand, a distinctly better performance in mass struggles and political education was claimed for seven other branches where the 81 poor peasants and 18 hired workers were a slight majority. Middle and rich peasants numbered 56 and 16 respectively. Among the 39 cadres, there were 22 poor peasants, nine middle peasants, five vagrants, etc.83

A close connection between a party branch’s character and its class composition was noted in several other documents. A high proportion of the
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‘petty bourgeoisie’ (34.3 per cent) among party members in an area of JiLuYu was given as the basic reason for the sharp decrease from 22,284 to 10,505 in the course of nine months of struggle in 1940 against the Japanese, puppets, diehards and secret societies. Subjected to attacks, pessimism and loss of confidence spread among party members and many simply fled or defected, including the head of the public security bureau in Naihuang county, who returned home and offered his services to the Japanese. By contrast, the ‘model function’ of a 31-member party branch in Wuxiang county was squarely attributed to the large presence of poor peasants.

That the issue of class composition had a bearing on how the party branch operated is beyond doubt. After all, CCP policies were generally biased in favour of the poorer peasantry. They were likely to take a more positive attitude to these policies than the upper strata. Nonetheless, two major qualifications to the above linkage of branch disposition to membership composition are necessary.

Most importantly, branches were not simply of two kinds, ‘good’ and ‘bad’. The inadequacy of this so conspicuous dichotomy in party sources has been noted in other contexts. Fortunately, we have material which more accurately indicates the relativity of CCP influence over the branches – a source that interestingly confirms the configurations of CCP achievements in other fields, that is, salient progress over smaller areas (the spots), a fairly significant element of foundering, and a broad space of fluidity in between these extremes.

This material was contained in a 1943 report by Zhang Linzhi, secretary general of the JiLuYu CCP committee. Zhang divided branches into ‘good’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘bad’, with each category dominated by different strata: the first by poor peasants and farmhands, the second by middle peasants, and the third by landlords, rich peasants and hoodlums. The criteria for judging the branches were their relationship to the people and the degree to which work tasks had been institutionalized. It is a measure of how big obstacles the party faced in rooting itself in the villages that the ‘good’ branches – the only ones to obtain a pass – made up no more than a distinct minority in a region supposedly under strong CCP influence: 37 per cent in Fan county and 28 per cent in Juanbei county. The most widespread were ‘ordinary’ branches (per cent): Juanbei county – 54; Shouzhang county – 53; Fan county – 48; Yunbei county – 33. Considering the characterization of the ‘bad’ branches it is indeed noteworthy that these occupied as relatively large
a percentage share as 29 in Yunbei county, 25 in Shouzhang county, 18 in Juanbei county and 15 in Fan county. No wonder the report complained of insufficient cleansing of party branches.\textsuperscript{86}

Again the difficulty which upper party organs had in ‘rectifying’ branches is strikingly suggested. The CCP was for the most part in no position to effect a straight policy imposition, even with the supposed vanguard organization.

The second qualification has occasionally been indicated and will receive further attention (in case studies below and in later chapters on policy implementation): subjective, non-class-specific influences often said to impair branch-functioning. These referred to members’ ‘old consciousness’, variously defined as ‘lack of discipline’, ‘selfishness’, ‘degeneration’, ‘corruption’, etc. The result could be a branch’s factional infighting, loss of direction or failure to take concerted action.\textsuperscript{87} More concretely, in one branch of Liao county, eight out of 14 male members just idled about and were unwilling to work. Another branch, in Liaocheng county, had an even more dishonourable record: of the 31 members, 18 visited prostitutes, nine gambled and four were drug addicts.\textsuperscript{88} The often called for need to raise the political awareness of the CCP’s essential support base was acute, as were the (cadre) resource problems in accomplishing this objective. Heterogeneous class composition is therefore far from a complete explanation of the troubles inside the party branch.

\textit{Oppression without class}

There was another, strongly negative non-class influence on intra-branch life: the party’s organizational principle of democratic centralism, according to which higher bodies were to rule lower ones. This implied a top-down power flow with no room for an effective intra-party counter-current from below to serve as check function. In this pyramidal structure, overall power was exclusively concentrated to the party’s top-most organ, the politburo, or an even smaller circle within it, that was accountable to nobody. Oppressive intra-party practices were thus institutionalized, with, however, important variations in the degree to which they manifested themselves.

Several statements by leading party personnel frankly acknowledged the anti-democratic features of internal party relationships, but failed to identify the root cause of the problem – the party’s structural mechanism. Zhang Linzhi, for example, reported to a senior cadre conference in December 1943 that the democratic work style and self-criticism in the party were extremely inadequate and feared that their absence ‘will bring forth the dark
sides of our party’. He then restated a theme to which so many communist leaders, in China and elsewhere, have paid lip-service:

Without the masses’ supervision, the leading organs will definitely not perform well. On the contrary, only in so far as these are subject to the masses’ supervision can there be progress. The whole of our party must be subject to mass supervision...  

A 1945 speech by Li Xuefeng, secretary of a provincial party committee, on ‘The democracy movement in the rectification campaign’ pointed to abuses of the democratic centralism formula without reflecting why these could occur so frequently. In the part entitled ‘The biggest defect of intra-party life in the past’ he stated unreservedly that centralism had been used to ‘stifle other persons’ democracy’ and ‘to oppose criticism’. Having noted higher authorities suppressing ‘lower level democracy’, he continued, ‘in many places the comrades’ right to speak was in actual fact denied and they could not and were not willing to speak’. Self-criticism was demanded of lower levels, but ‘the leadership’ refused to reciprocate as they were afraid it ‘will damage their prestige’. Mistakes had not been criticized at the 1943 senior cadre conference, Li reminded the audience at the party school, and then sounded a strong warning: ‘Unless we develop democratic [practices] examining the leadership from higher to lower levels, and absorb and fully use lower authorities correct opinions, the problem will never be properly solved.’ The issue of course turns on the word ‘correct’, which was ultimately defined by the top party leadership and consequently set limits on the extent to which intra-party discussions could be conducted on problems of substance.  

Many other party sources similarly refer to lower levels being subjected to suppressive rule from above. ‘Higher levels often lack real democracy in dealing with lower levels and cannot reflect their demands’, a decision by the JinJiYu area party committee declared in June 1939. Symptomatically, the explanation given for such practices, which also applied to areas where the work had been done ‘rather well’, did not touch on the allocation of decision-making powers but on circumstances intensifying its inherent authoritarianism, specifically time pressures in carrying out the work tasks and cadres’ inexperience.  

Party members at grassroots reacted variously. Upper levels’ ‘excessive attacks’ and harsh criticism of past mistakes, one document says, aroused the anger of lower bodies. Feeling that nothing could satisfy their superiors,
members of one party branch in Wuxiang county concluded that one just had to ignore them. Another example from Xingtai county suggests fear of higher authorities. Following anti-spy struggles a landlord falsely accused a village head – a party member – of corruption and called upon the county head to settle accounts. Yet before his arrival, the village head hanged himself. The act sent shock waves among party members in the county, who, being suspicious of the county head, expressed wariness about doing one’s work too actively under his nose.92

An earlier cited 1940 Wuxiang report by Wen Jianping (Chapters 2 and 3) described how lower levels were demanded ‘absolute obedience’. Failure to accept work assignments brought abusive criticism and punishment. Democratic centralism was a convenient tool: ‘One uses the party position and the party’s resolutions to suppress other people and conceal oneself.’ Apprehensive of attacks, lower levels refrained from expressing their views and making self-criticism.93 Another, 1941 Wuxiang source, lamenting the absence of educational efforts, spoke of ‘straight purges’ that ‘turned into terror’.94 Occurrences of the kind were occasionally cited95

To be sure, the overall weakness of the vanguard function meant that democratic centralism as a continuous mechanism was usually confined to enclaves of strong CCP influence. The geographical extension of this straight top-down imposition of the rectification campaigns was more transient. Yet in severe cases this extension could have a lasting divisive impact on relations inside the party branches. Thus, where ‘deep-seated scars’ had resulted from the haphazard way of instituting the purges of 1939–40, branch cadres were in 1942 again charged with ‘random holding of meetings and struggles’ and with resorting to ‘arbitrary expulsions, abuses of discipline, erroneous thought struggles’, etc. At the same time, higher party organs violated procedural rules in dealing with branches.96 An assessment of the North China bureau in May 1941 drew attention to the gravity of the situation: ‘[T]he party’s lower organizational echelons are still quite disorderly, the party branch has yet not been really adjusted ... the organizational work is very bad.’97

A rather extreme case of an extended oppression, both in space and intensity, was the ‘rescue campaign’ in the latter half of 1943.98 Launched by the party centre, with Kang Sheng (then head of the department of social affairs) primarily in charge, the campaign was to examine local cadres’ reliability. At a time when the CCP’s relations with the GMD had taken a sharp turn for the worse, with signs of the GMD intending to employ its
military forces close to the ShaanGanNing border region for an attack on it, the campaign generated a frantic search for secret agents and ‘traitorous’ activity and thought in general. The outcome was trumped-up charges, forced confessions and torture. While reflecting the coercion inherent in the rectification campaigns generally, these methods went so far as to force the CCP centre to call them off and apologize for the wrongdoings. The PRC historian Qi Wu blames them wholly on Kang Sheng, who is said to have used some ‘incorrect’ wordings in a party decision to expand the anti-spy struggles.99 However, other top leaders did support to the investigation drive, although they may not have consented to its extremes.100

Organizational consequences

When combined and intensified, problems treated in this chapter could have fatal repercussions on the local party organization, whether this vulnerability was exposed in an assault from outside or in the inability to cope with internal conflicts. A number of such incidents occurred, especially during the first half of the war.

Writing in February 1940, Yang Shangkun accused diehard and anti-communist forces of killing 70–80 cadres and imprisoning 200 others in attacks on the resistance army and patriotic organizations in December 1939. In addition, several tens of cadres were missing in the chaotic situation that resulted. The ‘gradual’ spread of these actions from a restricted area to ‘the scope of several counties’, Yang maintained, was due to the failure of local party organizations to take resolute counter-measures. Obviously, the incident deeply concerned Yang. He appealed to ‘comrades everywhere’ to study its ‘many experiences and lessons’ since these were highly relevant to the party in North China generally. Yang’s critical evaluation proceeded from a vanguard image: the party was only too deficient in such vital qualities as organizational tightness, firm leadership and political and ideological cohesion. Hence ‘the failure to take decisions without delay, to make them penetrate lower levels and to strictly investigate their application’.101

Party members’ commitment to the resistance was tested by Japanese attacks on the base areas. Their devastation in the mid-years of the war points to weaknesses in this regard. Only in August–September 1941, 80 party branches in the Shanxi part of Taihang collapsed in face of Japanese army offensives.102 There are indeed numerous examples of party members failing to weather the storm and surrendering to the Japanese and their puppet forces. This also applied to members serving in responsible
positions, like, for example, the secretaries of the party committees in three western Shandong counties in 1941. A party reminiscence laments that the secretaries ‘led the enemy in arresting hundreds of party members, cadres and activists, dealing enormous damage to the resistance forces’.103

An internally generated setback that spelled disaster occurred in August 1939 in the Huxi area of southwestern Shandong. In summary, ‘bad elements’ in the party unleashed an indiscriminate terror killing about 300 members and cadres on the pretext of ‘eliminating the Trotskyist faction’. The result was a virtual organizational collapse. A look at the four specific reasons given for the incident reveals just as many dimensions of intra-organizational conflict.

1. **Conformity versus democracy.** The leadership of the local party and army organizations perceived an exaggerated threat from the Chinese Trotskyists and those who for a variety of reasons did not live up to party standards were labelled likewise. In this atmosphere, people like Wang Xuren, the ‘main ringleader’, seized the opportunity to gain control by listing people supposedly belonging to the ‘Trotskyist faction’, extorting confessions by torture and, finally, instituting the liquidations. The blame for the mass killings can, of course, not be confined to a few locally-based individuals: anti-Trotskyist vilification proceeded from the party centre and thus involved also people loyal to it at all echelons.

2. **Tight versus loose party.** In rapidly expanding the local party, including ‘press-gang recruitment’, the principle of a tight organization was ignored. Thereby people with shady motives got themselves into leading positions, notably Wang Xuren, who became head of the Huxi special committee’s organization department.

3. **Party versus army.** These people dexterously exploited the schism that arose between local army and party leaders. The former, not trusting the party, transcended their jurisdiction and took over its security work.

4. **Lower versus higher levels.** Following the outbreak of the incident, concerned organs of both the party (the district committee) and the army (the fourth regiment) failed to report to higher authorities, i.e. the Shandong sub-bureau and the 115th division. The tardiness to take counter-measures, moreover, contributed to the mounting losses.104
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What enabled the terror, therefore, was not simply a matter of the party’s class composition. Nor does adding, as party sources generally do, the immaturity and inexperience of leading cadres adequately resolve the issue. Rather, it is necessary to take a broader view of the CCP movement’s characteristics and interrelationships.

Party branches in struggles

It has been observed that the 1942–44 campaign intensified divisions emanating from the party’s organizational principles. Another, contrasting intra-party aspect of the campaign was the way outside pressure in the form of popular activity proved a basic condition for lessening branch dissension and immobilism. This activity could be class-based – peasant struggles against exploitation and oppression forcing a branch to seriously address itself to mass mobilization – or it involved peasants in various ways against cadres’ corruption, factionalism, etc. Two investigation reports on how the campaign affected party branches in the Taihang area during 1944–45 exemplify well these tendencies, in addition to concretely indicating the manifold strains under which the branches laboured, thus summarizing the problems discussed in this section. Although the material contains a number of unfortunate ambiguities, such as the nature of the achievements scored and the specific role of higher party authorities, and occasionally makes doubtful claims, it is highly suggestive of the internal–external dialectics which also was part of the campaign. In fact, its intra-party activities of studying and discussing documents, engaging in self-reflection, criticizing leadership practices and stimulating class consciousness more or less embodied both these dimensions. Having outlined the content of the case studies given in the reports, the external relationship will be pursued in the last section of this chapter.105

One report related how the rectification campaign unfolded in three party branches in the winter of 1944, each treated separately.106 In the case of the Wangqu village in Pingshun county, factional strife immobilizing the party branch was the dominant concern. While minor misunderstandings, especially gossip, were said to be the immediate cause, basically the rivalry boiled down to hegemonic ambitions of two faction leaders, both named Wang. As the animosity escalated, both factions sought to use the mass activism unleashed in the rent reduction work to strike at the other.
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The conflict unfolded through three phases. First, popular pressure provided in the end the occasion for abating factional prejudices. Initially, however, mass meetings supposedly convened for rent reduction purposes turned into scenes of the people attacking cadres and bringing up old scores again. For example, one of the Wang leaders was accused of having raped a woman. This apparently moved the cadres to divert the peasants’ attention into different channels. The cadres argued: ‘Just consider what changes have taken place in the village during the resistance years. How many landlords have been overthrown? How many poor peasants have perished? How have the benefits been obtained?’ Given the peasants’ then expressed support for the branch’s policy of improving their livelihood, its members felt obliged to take appropriate measures. It resolved to launch mass struggles for rent reduction and to remove the two Wangs from their positions as chairman of the peasant association and village head.

Second, raising the branch members’ class consciousness also softened their mutual distrust. They recalled past hardship – eight of the ten members belonged to strata below the middle peasants – and how life had taken a turn for the better in recent years. The thought of having failed to unite and to reduce rents filled them with shame. But ‘historical prejudice’ was too deeply rooted to dissolve in the subsequent discussions, and it was not until all members had been mobilized by higher party authorities to ‘bring out one matter after another’ that a breakthrough was achieved. Some controversies were clarified by ascertaining who had complaints against whom. Yet the more intractable problems proved extremely time-consuming.

Third, responding to the call to further examine past records, members admitted having helped a landlord to seize land and having beaten, arrested and scolded people. Progress was also claimed in improving cadre–peasant relations by holding mass meetings.

For the party branch in the Huanghua village of Pingshan county, the issue was how to deal with peasant hostility incurred by cadres allocating to themselves an unfairly large proportion of public resources, especially grain, in secrecy and by means of trickery, engaging in ‘corrupt’ activities and even raping women. The peasants, having been activized in earlier rent reduction work, demanded firm action to be taken against, as they saw it, the new feudal (party) rulers inheriting the oppressive practices of the overthrown old forces. When the peasants rejected the district level cadres
as troubleshooters and insisted that only higher party authorities were qualified to execute this role, ‘an extremely antagonistic situation ensued’.

To deal with the predicament, three courses of action were pursued. Discussions held by 32 activists of the peasant association were designed to persuade its members that today’s cadres were after all different from the old rulers. Cadres reflected on how they had ‘stood up’ and on the imperative of mass support, and thereafter submitted to plans for ‘improvement’. Finally, cadres offered self-criticism at mass meetings and the peasants stated their opinions. The resultant conciliatory mood was reinforced when cadres put forward concrete steps to return illegally acquired grain and funds.

The third case centred on methods to overcome the party branch’s unwillingness to arouse the peasants. In the Lubao village branch of Licheng county there were two factions: the five powerholders, including the village head and the branch secretary, some of whom were controlled by the enemy agents of the village; and the out-of-power faction which had the ‘better’ class composition of poor peasants and farmhands. The latter was made up of purgees and party members who had served as cadres. Most party members resented the powerholders, but did not commit themselves to any faction.

The early war years had seen considerable mass activity in setting up a guerrilla force and in attacking ‘scoundrel rulers’. But after 1942 the branch cadres turned a deaf ear to mobilizing the peasants for reducing rents. To break out of the impasse, the higher party authorities in charge of the rectification decided to get to grips first with the party members’ ‘thought problems’ and thereafter launch a rent reduction campaign. Thereby intra-party rectification received a powerful push from outside, at the same time as the villagers’ movement to ‘speak frankly’ gained momentum.

The rectification proceeded from party members speaking out on their ‘degenerate’ behaviour. They were confronted with questions like how to recall their past and the probability of their treading the same path today. By combining into small groups the two factions were broken down and the rectification could be conducted on the basis of concrete problems. By outdoing the powerholders in revealing their ‘hidden self’, the out-of-power faction assumed leadership of the rent reduction drive, with the former having to carry on the self-reflection.

In the rent reduction work two interrelated issues were raised: ‘whether or not to pay rent’ and ‘the demarcation line between landlords and peasants’. The overriding concern of the rectification activities was to heighten class
consciousness, both in self-reflection exercises and in struggles against two GMD spies in the party. One of them had arranged for five more GMD spies to join it. The other had leaked the names of party members. In this way, the original powerholders’ leadership over the branch was supplanted by the activists in the movement.

The second report described the rectification of party branches in nine counties, mainly Wuxiang and Heshun, during 1945. The campaign was initiated by party members summing up their past experiences and by examining the leadership. The results, a meeting in Heshun attended by 440 branch committee members expressed, were to ‘determine the actions to be taken hereafter’. Participants in the meeting spoke at length and ‘without reserve’, and their criticism of the leadership’s injustices was said to have had a ‘sound’ effect on it. Members of two branches in Wuxiang began by rebuking the leadership: ‘There is no truth inside the party. What we have is a tortuous [policy line] and hardship.’ The leadership then issued a call to ‘settle accounts with the suffering, give free rein to freedom of thought, vent your grievances and speak your mind’.

Party members’ anguish had been moulded by earlier ‘work deviations’. Their character had a familiar ring: ‘inappropriate anti-left/right and anti-degeneration policies towards cadres and party members; ‘random expulsions from the party and removal from office’; ‘the leadership’s anti-democratic work style’. As the party members saw it, ‘there is only criticism and reproaches, and demands for exemplary performance. No training or help is provided. For party members at work there is no way of coping with the situation.’ As a corollary of ‘venting their bitterness’ changes in leadership was demanded at a mass meeting in Heshun.

The next phase of the campaign sought to stimulate party members’ class consciousness and provide a sense of historical change, with the focus on relationships to the party, fellow comrades and the masses. Those members who had suffered most tended to be in the forefront. Having brought to light many problems, the campaign entered the high tide of study which meant comparing examples and models and distinguishing good from bad. In Heshun this ‘face washing’ laid bare landlord dreams of restoring their rule, blackmailing peasants to forgo a rent reduction and shifting work on to others.

The discussion then switched to the questions of land ownership and who was dependent on whom for making a living. The conclusion was that
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‘the land belongs to the peasants’, ‘the landlord is a louse’ [i.e. a parasite], ‘a louse dies when it leaves others’. Quite logically, the next issue to be raised concerned the basis of landlord rule. The answer, which is worth quoting at length, contained an emphatic appeal to smash the entire structure of class domination:

Government administration, armed bodies, spies, superstitious and other organizations are all in their service. We poor people are without leaders, and the party leadership is in disarray. Let’s turn to the poor people and arouse and organize them; let’s unite them as one and solidify the peasant association and kick out the rich people. Overthrow the landlords and the reactionaries. The landlords must not be allowed to make their way into the government administration. Their usurping it is tantamount to losing one’s life. The landlords think of restoring their reactionary rule. Let’s go back [to our villages] and build up a stronger militia. We shall take weapons into our hands. Without an armed force we have no means of protecting ourselves.

The radicalizing effect on party members was unmistakable: ‘[T]he struggle was permeated with fervour, land was confiscated and extremist thoughts emerged.’ This prompted the leadership to urge moderation. Party members were admonished to calculate short- and long-term benefits. Confiscating land ‘all at once’, they were told, would only make landlords run over to the GMD-forces, thereby reinforcing them.

Having briefly described the subsequent developments, the report summarized the already noted features of the party branch, which ‘deeply upset’ or ‘greatly affected’ cadres and party members: ‘lack of a democratic work style’; an ‘excessively mechanical’ and ‘absolutist’ party discipline; ‘one-sided’ stress on their model function, which damaged their private production; erroneous anti-left/right policy swings.

One important method to rectify a party branch was to send five or six of its members to a special study class. Upon returning to their branch they were said to have assumed a pivotal role in developing the campaign. This applied to about 700 (60 branches) in Wuxiang county, 133 in Licheng county, 189 (36 branches) in Pingshun county.

Individual party branches did of course manifest attributes diverging from the tendencies generally discerned in this section. Similarly, locally based Western research has noted that one branch had ‘few internal foes’ and was built ‘on a tradition of social trust’, while two other branches operated in secrecy so that ‘[p]arty members knew only their recruiter’. Broadly speaking, however, our data suggests that multifarious factors
making for a high degree of branch instability and disunity were the far more representative pattern.

EXTERNAL BURDENS

The party branches’ external task of arousing the masses was formidable. A report summing up the work of 29 branches in the years 1937–40, when these were claimed to have developed briskly, gives an idea of the kind of problems (‘serious weaknesses’) involved: mass mobilization was not integrated with party policy; a set of concrete policies for the build-up of the base area remained to be worked out; popular struggles against corruption and unfair taxation or those aimed at ‘eliminating traitors’ and ‘solving the land problem’ were pursued inconsistently; the lack of clear policy guidelines hampered activizing the villagers and establishing a ‘good rural united front’; branches were unable to effectively deal with sharpening class conflicts.110

To execute the kind of directing role in the village, the branch had to prove its worth to the poorer peasants by concretely pursuing and defending policies benefiting these strata. Consequently, failure of party branches to take actions against landlords infringing upon the peasants’ acquired rights was likely to alienate them. In this context, ‘the central tasks’, whether of a political, economic or military nature, were all regarded by the people as imposing a burden on them and therefore met with their reluctance. Resting upon such a foundation, branches were incapable of mobilizing strong popular resistance to Japanese military operations. Of 12 villages attacked twice by the Japanese army, two failed to gather a militia, seven had a militia that collapsed when the situation became serious and only three could organize a really viable militia.111

In conditions where party organizers encountered immense difficulties in laying a sustained work basis over large areas, spots of strong CCP influence acquired all the greater significance. These gave the party an indispensable supportive foothold for extending its activities elsewhere, however volatile and sporadic these were. This study will often note the emergence of such ‘advanced’ enclaves even in the early war years, despite their generally chaotic character. ‘Consolidated party branches’, the report on 29 branches concluded, led peasants in reducing (or exempting some of them from) taxes, imposing fines on or borrowing grain from the wealthy, confiscating and distributing collaborators’ property and launching anti-corruption struggles. In the process, the original powerholders were notably
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Weakened. Enjoying a positive relationship to the villagers and being much less afflicted by internally debilitating antagonisms, these branches managed to retain a measure of continuity even in hard times. 112

Such core branches, another survey of 39 branches asserted, also had a favourable record in organizing a militia for combat. In one locality of Xingtai county, the Japanese were said to have been fought ‘hand-to-hand’ seven times in half a month, in the course of which seven Japanese were killed and six collaborators were captured, ‘whilst not a single villager was wounded or killed’. When the party committee in Yushe county asked for 30 more men to replenish the militia, a certain branch (the name was kept secret) succeeded in mobilizing 40 men. 113

Japanese army material confirms the existence of tenacious party activity in various places and throughout the war. As early as 1938, Major Tazoe Masanobu, who was in charge of suppression campaigns, conceded that ‘the communist bandits’ political work is extremely skilful and their firm hold over the peasant strata is due to the CCP winning them over and dominating them’. In 1940, one report said, all policies were concentrated on ‘wiping out the communist army’, but ‘despite the weakening of the communist military strength the party’s underground activity is still vigorous and has a tendency to expand in the areas where the operations are carried out.’ 114 A 1942 study ascribed the ‘strong point’ of the party’s influence in North China to ‘its intimate relations with the masses’. 115 Later army sources described the CCP’s underground work as skilful and vigorous, with the people willingly submitting to the party. 116

Cadres and members who joined the party after 1937 and who all had a favourable record, performed differently depending on the nature of their ties to the villagers. The closer these were, the broader the cadres’ and members’ mobilizational functions, which ranged from a combined, general civilian/military activity to one narrowly focused on a specific work task. 117

Recently recruited cadres with little training of any kind constituted a particular problem. Organizational inexperience notably increased the likelihood of their using compulsion in dealing with the people. As long as an overriding struggle objective united cadres and peasants, such phenomena were muted. Yet conflicts surfaced when the joint struggles had subsided and the bond of common interests was no longer as obvious. A major dilemma for the party was the necessity to swiftly promote these cadres as the resistance movement expanded and, given the varied composition and
limited training, the likelihood of their developing behavioural patterns like highhandedness and corruption when assuming leadership positions.\textsuperscript{118}

Problems were compounded as some of these new recruits belonged to the so-called undesirable categories of party members, variously referred to as hoodlums, local tyrants, opportunists, spies, etc. Their conduct diverged sharply from the experienced and committed party members whose number was sufficient to achieve substantial policy progress or even breakthroughs at spots but not over broader areas. The alienating influence of the undesirables on the populace proved costly for the CCP. One document thus quoted the people’s reaction to these categories in the early years: ‘We heard the communist party was good, but the communist party we saw was bad’. The same source went on to list examples of how party members killed people and molested women.\textsuperscript{119} Generally, the undesirables’ damage could be curtailed but not eliminated as a loose organizational enlargement remained a wartime feature.

The party’s initial organizational effort in the villages chiefly bore the stamp of cadres sent from outside. ‘Many anti-Japanese base areas’, Mao wrote, ‘were established only after the arrival of the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, and much of the local work developed only after the arrival of outside cadres.’\textsuperscript{120} However, the CCP recognized that to push on with the work and arouse the people to sustained action, these cadres had definite limitations. Peng Dehuai told Edgar Snow on the eve of the war: ‘No lasting success can be achieved if the movement fails to inspire, awaken and constantly create leaders from the local mass’.\textsuperscript{121} Peng Zhen’s 1941 report on JinChaJi elaborated on the point by listing a number of areas with different mix of outside and local cadres. Where the outsiders predominated ‘the work has not been penetrating’, whilst in villages with locals forming the great majority ‘the work is rather well done’.\textsuperscript{122}

Song Renqiong stressed the significance of local cadres in developing a mass guerrilla war since ‘they know the local situation, are familiar with the terrain, are trusted in the locality, are determined to defend the surroundings and play a leading role in the locality’.\textsuperscript{123} In Sa county of western Suiyuan, a 1942 document said, the army’s ability to operate in an ‘adverse environment’ was in large part facilitated by the all-native composition of a company and the county government. These natives had ‘natural ties’ to the villagers, were familiar with the locality and could easily move around in secrecy.\textsuperscript{124} Other sources likewise pointed to the difficulty
of dealing with contingencies and engaging in covert work when local cadres were in short supply.  

The advantages of local leaders have been demonstrated in other guerrilla wars. Thus, the above remarks tally with Che Guevara’s comment that the local person ‘has his friends, to whom he can make a personal appeal for help: he knows the terrain and all things that are likely to happen in the region; he will also have the extra enthusiasm of the man who is defending his own home’. But the great potential which local cadres possessed for mobilizing village resources could also be of a negative kind: their resistance to policy intervention from outside. A very strong local character did in fact pose an obstacle to the build-up of a regular army which separated the recruit from his native surroundings.

Given the vital necessity for local and outside cadres to join together, their frequent mutual suspicion and misunderstandings were all the more troublesome. Outside cadres tended to slight their local counterparts: ‘What do these locals know? Clodhoppers!’ On the other hand, local people did not easily accept outsiders.

Hegemonic project I: Inter-organizational

The CCP’s intent was of course to establish its basically uncontested sway over the base areas and, in the long run, over the whole of China. Party leaders differed on the means and pace of realizing this aim, but even for Bo Gu (Qin Bangxian), who took a relatively cautious stand on the issue so as not to antagonize the GMD, it was only too self-evident to tell Edgar Snow at the outset of the war: ‘We must struggle for leadership everywhere and at all times... We do not deny that. A political party that does not lead has no reason for its existence.’

To effectively exercise that leadership, which was defined in vanguard terms, it was first of all essential for the CCP to have directing control over the other main base area organizations that it had sponsored, i.e. the army, the government and the mass organizations. However, speaking of the local context, the already observed poor internal performance of this leadership was bound to affect its external dimension. It is symptomatic that as late as in the fifth year of the war the CCP found it necessary to forcefully restate related leadership principles. This was the central committee resolution on ‘The unification of leadership in the anti-Japanese war bases’ passed in September 1942 and included in the documents to be studied in the 1942–44 rectification campaign – below referred to as the ‘Resolution’.
It reaffirmed that party committees at all levels were ‘the highest leading organs’ with the task of unifying the work of the party, government, military and mass organizations, whose structures paralleled the party. Actually, this supervisory mechanism was reinforced by party members filling the leading posts in the non-party hierarchies, almost invariably in the top echelons and frequently in the local ones.

If loose overall organization formed the general background to the concern to strengthen the party’s coordinating powers, there were other developments which added urgency to this measure. With the intensified Japanese military campaigns dealing increasingly severe blows to the bases, maintaining contacts between upper and lower levels became ‘extremely difficult’. To cope with the resultant geographical and organizational divisions, party leadership in a given area was unified and centralized. Another factor was the enlarged scope of the governmental three-thirds system (see Chapter 6) in which the CCP committed itself to a minority share of seats, making the leadership responsibilities heavier.\(^\text{132}\)

But what exactly did ‘party leadership’ imply? How was it to be exerted to achieve the maximum intended effect? The party was to concentrate on ‘overall policy orientation’ and not ‘intervene everywhere or monopolize affairs’. Thus according non-party organizations a degree of operational autonomy was designed to enable them to tap popular energies and spontaneity upon which a vigorous mass movement ultimately rested. The nagging problem was how wide an autonomy was desirable, indeed possible. In reality, reflecting the CCP’s uneven impact, party leadership tended to be exercised only weakly or, to a much lesser extent, in a strongly top-down, commandist manner. The Resolution pointed out both aspects:

There is too little spirit of unity; there is no marching order; each takes himself as an authority; the army shows lack of respect for the local Party units and local governmental authority; Party and governmental [functions] are not separated; Party members and cadres in the government agitate for the independence of Party leadership; Party members dominate mass organizations; sectarian prejudices, etc. etc.

As this passage indicates, the governmental and mass organizations were particularly vulnerable to party dictates. A Jiefang Ribao article in November 1942 described how the separation of functions had been violated to the point where ‘some leading bodies in the party most of the time do government work’, such as arranging the election schedule. They were so preoccupied with
government tasks that there was no time to investigate political questions. A document from southern Hebei spoke of the party 'transferring government and mass organization cadres at will and directly interfering in the internal work of these organizations'.

The army was a rather different matter. In conditions requiring enormous military inputs, it obviously carried crucial weight, to the extent that the party’s early heavy dependence on it was only somewhat lessened in subsequent years. The army’s relatively tighter discipline, preoccupation with combat and frequent moves over considerable distances were additional resistant factors to the imposition of a clear-cut party leadership. Party sources were often critical of the army’s posture. For example, a statement issued by the North China sub-bureau in June 1941 said the ‘main responsibility’ for the ‘extremely inadequate’ unity between the army and the local party organization rested with the former. Meetings attended by their representatives were discordant, with each blaming the other.

Hegemonic project II: Party–people relations

Party leadership at the grassroots’ level, a 1939 central committee decision on ‘penetrating the masses’ underscored, was not merely a question of closely checking the personnel of the non-party organizations and their work. More importantly, party members had to integrate themselves with the large number of people in these organizations, as well as with the villagers unaffiliated with them. Deng Fa indicated that this imperative was fraught with complications:

Some of our men railed at the people for their ‘backwardness’ and wanted to short-cut the process with administrative orders. We pulled that kind out in a hurry because lasting change never comes from above; it has to be the act of the people. An official can issue a lot of wonderfully radical regulations and think he is way ahead of everyone else, but all he has to do is to go away and after a while things slip back to where they started.

In short, cadres were charged with generating a mass activism of the genuinely voluntary and socially transformative kind which conformed to the Marxist motto that the liberation of the working class must be their own doing; yet this principle was negated by cadres’ use of commands. Such practices had several sources and manifestations. A convenient summary of them is found in the Wuxiang report by Wen Jianping.
The report gave two basic reasons for cadre highhandedness, both having broad applicability. There was first of all a time constraint: ‘To finish the task within the time set by party authorities, struggles were deliberately created.’ This was the often encountered discrepancy between the work assigned to cadres and the time (and other resources) available to them for carrying it out. Secondly, party authority imparted a ruler’s mentality to cadres, justifying both dominating and oppressing others and failure to pay taxes.

As was typically the case, the report did not specify the interaction nor the respective relative weight of the the two factors. However, their consequences were spelled out in devastating terms, leaving the impression of a rather extreme situation. Compared to intra-party life, ‘there is even less democracy in [the party’s] relationship to the masses’. Concretely:

Beating, scolding, tying up and punishing are substituted for political mobilization. During the past two years, there is not a single village which has not experienced struggles, and in all of them people have been beaten... At meetings people are beaten and tied up, and there are even strange things like ‘beatings in circles’ and ‘sum-up beatings’. The masses were afraid of holding meetings, many people belonging to the middle strata were threatened into running away and the rich all felt uneasy. While absolving oneself from responsibility, everyone and everything was blamed.

In these conditions of derailed radicalism, ‘people did not dare to speak at mass meetings’. And when voting by the show of hands, peasants and landlords alike first ascertained the safe option since divergence from party policy was likely to bring beatings. Those who absented themselves from meetings were tied up and punished. Party cadres’ and the people’s massive distrust of each other is further evinced by the former keeping close watch on the latter, fearing that they might run away. Captured escapees were again beaten. Wen had every reason to ask: ‘[W]here has the masses’ democracy gone?’ He was forced to conclude that ‘party members act contrary to their own political advocacy’.

In launching ‘struggles for the sake of struggles’, fear of the rich households employing their formidable cultural capital for obstructive purposes seems to have played a major part. In order not to provide the rich with arguments about legal niceties, etc., and thereby ‘lose the opportunity to struggle against them’, cadres refrained from explaining party policies and government laws to the people. The result was to deprive also them of a class-based weapon and to make the content of policies and laws the
Contested Party

monopoly of party cadres to be wielded for arbitrary purposes with no check from any quarter.\textsuperscript{138}

Generally, the party’s hegemonic aspirations were thus contained, internally as well as externally. In this light, the actual extent of the party’s wartime impact can hardly be explained solely by reference to its activities. To better appreciate its import, it is necessary to examine the army, the government and the mass organizations. Certainly the party connected to these organizations in mediated rather than directly dominant ways that did impose many constraints on it. Yet through this outward link the party reached out to and influenced, however unevenly, areas and numbers of people far beyond its own capacity.

It is natural to first turn to the army and its sub-organizations since these were vital in gaining control over and defending areas in conditions of war with the Japanese army and frequent conflicts with domestic adversaries, ranging from bandits to the GMD army.

NOTES

4. Paulson, p. 35.
16. For example, ‘Zhonggong zhongyang gei Shandong shengwei de zhishixin’, 15.11.1938, SH, p. 27. At the same time, there were statements implying bolder methods. Party members were to be increased ninefold, ninetyfold, the party committee of the 129th regiment told comrades in Pingding in October 1937. Wang Dingkun, ‘Taihang geming genjudi dang de jiandshe zongshu’, introductory essay, DJ, p. 12.
17. He Yingcai, ‘Quanqu dang de jiandshe wenti’, p. 121.
19. Ibid.
20. SW II, p. 199.
22. *Taihang geming genjudi shigao*, p. 44.
27. ‘Luxi qu dangwei guanyu guangzuo de baogao’, p. 113.
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42. Lai Ruoyu, ‘Muqian shiqi’, p. 300.
47. Ibid., p. 157.
48. SW II, p. 381; SW III, p. 176.
58. Zhang Panshi, ‘Guanyu ganyu jiaoyu gongzuo’, February 1945, DJ, p. 401. On the campaign’s limited impact see also: ‘Huang Jing tongzhi zai qu dangwei zhengfeng

59. ‘JiLuYu fenju dui shenru zhengfeng yundong de zhishi’, p. 323.


61. ‘JiLuYu bianqu kangRi genjudi fazhan shilüe’, pp. 400,409.


63. ‘Zhonggong JiLuYu qu dangwei guanyu gonggu dang de gongzuo de zongjie’, pp. 830–831.

64. ‘Shisan xian sanshijiuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, p. 286.


67. ‘JiLuYu qu dangwei de gongzuo zongjie’, p. 113.


72. Chūkyō dōkō jittai chōsa, (1943), pp. 7, 12–13; Chūō mekkōō inin kaihō, Kyōsangun majoหระบบ ni oken ni butaiin narabi ni tōin no sho jōkyō (Kisei chōsa hōkokusho, 1), (1940), pp. 11–12.


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82. ‘Shisan xian sanshijiuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, pp. 279–280.
84. ‘JiLuYu qu dangwei de gongzuo zongjie’, pp. 106–107, 131.
88. ‘Shisan xian sanshijiuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, p. 269. Although the class status of these members is not indicated it may be assumed many of them belonged to the lower strata.
90. ‘Li Xuefeng zai dangxiaio si qi zhengfeng zhong guanyu kaizhan minzhu yundong de jianghua’, 1945, DJ, pp. 414–416.
92. ‘Shisan xian sanshijiuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, pp. 269–270.
95. For example: Da Zhang, ‘Guanyu Jinan dang de gongzuo de jiantao’, p. 48, NU; ‘Zenyang shenru gongzuo guanche quwei jueding’, 2.6.1939, DJ, p. 158.
97. ‘JiLuYu gonggu dang cankao ziliao’, p. 183. A telegram from the area party committee in November ‘completely agreed with the estimate of the North China bureau’.

105. An article on the ShaanGanNing border region argues: ‘Throughout, the rectification campaign was an intra-party exercise, limited to party members’. Lyman Van Slyke, ‘The Chinese Communist Movement during the Sino–Japanese War, 1937–1945’, in Lloyd E. Eastman et al. (eds), (1991), p. 255. At least for the areas covered in the present study, this is a misconception of the campaign’s import.


111. ‘Shisan xian sanshijuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, pp. 270–271.


113. ‘Shisan xian sanshijuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, pp. 268, 272.


117. ‘Shisan xian sanshijuge zhibu de chubu yanjiu’, pp. 275.


120. SW III, p. 45.


122. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 187. See also Liu Shaoqi, Lun dang, pp. 120–122.


127. Nie Rongzen thus described the situation in the early war years:

Some villages organized a company, resulting in the armed force taking on a rather strong local character. In the beginning this did not hinder the work. We could even raise slogans calling on the villagers to resolutely defend their native place and use the advantages of the local population’s familiarity with the terrain to fight the enemy...
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But we can definitely not let the army remain in this stage; it must be regularized. (Nie Rongzhen, ‘JinChaJi bianqu de xingshi’, 16.9.1940, KC, vol. 1, p. 74.)

128. SW III, p. 45.


131. The resolution is translated in Compton, pp. 161–175.


133. ‘Tigao lingdao gaizao zuofeng’, JR, 10.11.1942.

134. ‘Zhonggong Jinan qu dangwei guanyu duguo’, p. 27.


136. ‘Shenru qunzhong’, p. 112.


CHAPTER FIVE

Dispersed Army

PRECIPITOUS REGULARIZATION

Conditions for swiftly organizing a broad resistance to the Japanese invasion would at first glance appear to have been exceptionally favourable. Several early wartime sources list a large number of armed bodies to which the anti-Japanese label is attached. These included, Liu Shaoqi wrote in the autumn of 1937, those directly under CCP leadership; parts of the armies, presumably belonging to warlord and GMD forces, originally making up the defence of North China; armed bands formerly under landlord control; spontaneously organized popular armed units; bandits and secret societies; mutineers of the Mongolian puppet army; Mongolians and the Hui people; and Japanese soldiers who had defected to the Chinese. Another party estimate said there were 16 resistance armies and guerrilla forces active in North China. According to Japanese intelligence research, the resistance forces in central Hebei consisted of old armies, peace preservation corps, CCP-organized workers and peasants, bandits and religious groups.

Nevertheless, the drive of the Japanese armies through North China was speedy and did generally not strain their resources: none of the main Chinese politico-military formations were at the time capable and/or willing to block the occupation. Still less did the Japanese army initially have to contend with a mass resistance movement. But the absence of an effective resistance did not mean that North China was then dormant. The dramatically altered circumstances of war and their manifold consequences were bound to unleash popular reactions. What, then, were their nature and how did they relate to CCP efforts?

Historiography in the PRC typically claims the virtually instantaneous emergence of a widespread popular anti-Japanese awareness and concomitant resistance activity and its close connection with the CCP. Contemporary
party sources, on the other hand, present a more complex picture. Some stress the people’s aloofness from resistance activity and their preparedness to comply with the Japanese authorities. Zhu De thus spoke to Chinese journalists shortly after the invasion:

There is no resistance in [JinSui] and those subdistrict and baojia heads who have not fled actually assist the enemy. We knew that the gentry would dominate public affairs in their interests during peacetime but did not think they would perform the same duties for the enemy. One public security head in Fanzhi county served as county magistrate after the fall of the town. Many people ask the enemy not to kill and pay 3,000 to spare their lives. Even the Japanese call this behaviour shameless!4

Poor results in mobilizing the people for the war effort generally and for replenishing the army and guerrilla forces in particular were repeatedly pointed out during 1938–39.5 A connected theme was the people’s poor understanding of the war – ‘many people even think that “whoever comes we have to pay taxes anyway”’ – and their lack of national consciousness and self-confidence.6 Collaboration was certainly complex in origin and content. For example, some of it represented an opportunistic stand, as when local forces under landlord and bandit control raised the resistance flag while seeking a modus vivendi with the Japanese for personal benefits.7 Yet whatever form, collaboration had similar demoralizing effects. A JinChaji report noted how collaborators’ warnings against fighting Japan made mobilization immensely more difficult.8 Hence the sense of crisis permeating party sources. ‘The traitor movement’, Deng Xiaoping reported from southern Hebei, ‘is particularly strong, and the [puppet] peace preservation committees are widespread.’9 In northern Henan there were about 10,000 puppet organizations, Peng Dehuai bemoaned.10

Non-party Chinese writers made comparable observations. According to Wang Yu-chuan, local administrators who organized armed units in southern Shandong did not make ‘any serious efforts to resist the Japanese’ and were ‘merely interested in building up influential positions for themselves’. Most of the organizations under landlord sway ‘went over to the Japanese ... always excusing themselves, of course, by saying that they were playing for time till the troops of the central government should arrive’.11 Li Gongbo described how: ‘At first, following the retreat of the National Army, puppet organizations were rapidly set up’ and peace preservation committees ‘sprang up like mushrooms’ in the occupied areas.12
Another frequently noted early wartime response was for villagers more or less to spontaneously engage in localized armed organizing – but with the limited primary objective of protecting their livelihood/safety and ancestral graves from the harassment of bandits and/or remnants of defeated warlord and GMD armies. At this stage, the direct destructive impact of the Japanese occupation was still geographically rather restricted.

In conditions of societal decay and rampant outlawry, phenomena long predating 1937 but much aggravated by the invasion, such harassment spread widely. In parts of northwestern Shanxi where army deserters and bandits preyed on the people, local armed groups were mostly formed under the slogan of ‘organize self-defence corps, maintain order in the rear, prepare to meet the enemy offensive head on’. Maltreated and threatened, the people’s hatred was directed at these two internal categories, ‘the most immediate pain’, rather than at the external aggressor. But not all people in this region opted for self-defence arrangements. Some fled their villages, either to hide-outs in mountain valleys or many to Japanese-controlled towns. Nie Rongzhen, in a 1939 pamphlet on JinChaJi, wrote that he often received reports of soldiers and bandits plundering and extorting the villagers who ‘weep bitterly and, demand “the liquidation of the local evil”’. Nie Rongzhen, in a 1939 pamphlet on JinChaJi, wrote that he often received reports of soldiers and bandits plundering and extorting the villagers who ‘weep bitterly and, demand “the liquidation of the local evil”’.14

Yet some area-based organizational initiatives did have genuine resistance intentions. Given the lack of a broad popular upsurge against the invaders and the consequent impossibility of speedily accomplishing a large-scale direct enrolment, these forces greatly facilitated the early communist build-up by providing it with immediate recruits and channels to many more. How the more prominent of these local bodies emerged and became linked to and incorporated into the communist movement has already been analysed at some length in the relevant literature. Here these cases will only be briefly mentioned.

The best-known and most successful one was probably the Sacrifice League in Shanxi. Set up by the province’s conservative warlord Yan Xishan in 1936, the league’s original objective was essentially restricted to defence against Japan. But with the radicalization of the league’s motive force, especially the conspicuous student component, and the closely connected process of growing CCP influence in the organization, its activities shifted to a deepening mass mobilization, both for resistance and for sweeping social reforms. In fact, Yan had concluded an agreement with the CCP
whereby it would help him to build up a resistance movement in return for certain rights to conduct political activities. The league eventually expanded into a truly multi-purpose, broad united front organization reaching down to the village level, with close ties to guerrilla units and mass mobilization committees with a similar character. The CCP’s small share of the league’s total membership was counter-balanced by Shanxi communists taking up many leading posts in the organization, especially on the standing committee and in Bo Yibo’s responsibility for day-to-day running. Ideological differences and their policy practice throughout strained the Yan–CCP relationship and in December 1939 the cooperation finally broke down. Yet by then, party organizers at various levels had gained credentials in dealing with outstanding problems which contrasted sufficiently with Yan’s inept Shanxi establishment to induce many of the league and associated organizations’ members to join the communist side, including some gentry. As was often the case, the CCP reaped handsome benefits from the demonstration effect, which did not have to be dramatic to produce major consequences.\(^\text{15}\)

Another example was Lü Zhengcao’s armed force that operated in central Hebei. Lü, of Manchurian origin and a regimental commander in the GMD army, had refused to retreat south and united with local guerrillas to form self-defence corps. Hard pressed by the Japanese in late 1937 he sought cooperation with the Eighth Route Army, which in time led up to the incorporation of his force into the central Hebei military district of which he became the commander. In the southern part of the province, the resistance force under the Beiping history professor Yang Xiufeng, at first predominantly made up of students and later augmented with peasants and various guerrilla units, provided valuable reinforcement to the Eighth Route Army. Yang, who had been active in CCP circles in Europe before the war, became the chairman of the JinJiLuYu border region government in 1941.

Mention should also be made of the local resistance activity in Shandong led by Fan Zhuxian, an administrative inspector of the warlord governor Han Fuqu who, upon the advance of the Japanese army into the province, fled south with his army without putting up even a token resistance. Fan’s original guerrilla force expanded quickly to about 50,000, mainly in the western part of the province. In the autumn of 1938, however, the force was defeated and largely disintegrated, and Fan himself was killed. Later, Fan’s scattered guerrillas were brought together by communist organizers.
Compared to CCP efforts to win over and wield into a military force a wide variety of groups and individuals in general, the core of the above categories presented organizational problems of a distinctly more manageable nature. These local movements were already bent on resisting Japan and often had a progressive outlook. Excepting these, the incorporation processes were fraught with difficulties that rendered setbacks of various kinds a major part of the picture. By often concentrating on the more prominent cases of absorption, Western research on North China has tended to take these aspects far too lightly, while party historiography has virtually ignored them.

Formal incorporation into the communist-led military forces was frequently only an initial step that left many vital questions unanswered. How long, effectively and determinedly would the recruits fight? Or, how would they relate to members of their own and other armed bodies, to party authorities and directives and to the Japanese army and the puppets? Here lurked a very large element of uncertainty. Even in central Hebei, Lü Zhengcao later recalled, reorganizing the many scattered armed units into the third column of the Eighth Route Army was a ‘complex struggle process’. Placing the original People’s Self-defence Army and the Hebei Guerrilla Detachment under party leadership still meant that a number of influences ‘required an enormous amount of work’ to deal with.16

A 1941 report from the Huxi area along the Shandong–Jiangxi border, where, it deserves stressing, the communist forces were seriously weakened by internal conflicts (see previous chapter), indicates the kind of problems involved. Having observed that ‘some armed bodies are incapable of completing the party’s assigned duties and of responding to the party’s call to keep up the armed struggle’, the report gave concrete examples: continuous battles caused most of a battalion to run away; armed forces in two districts of Feng county failed to coordinate with the people in striking at the puppet army; a company leader handed over rifles to the enemy in the battlefield; troops refused to obey a battalion commander’s order to advance, and when higher authorities pressed him to do so he cried heavily. Hard and frequent fighting, in combination with inadequate political training, gave rise to a high desertion rate, the report concluded.17

Similar, if less grave, problems were experienced in other localities. Desertions were frequent throughout the war, for reasons stated above.18 A few examples will suffice. A directive on army work in western Shandong signed by army leaders Zhu De, Peng Dehuai, Zuo Quan and Luo Ruiqing
in July 1940 called for a large-scale anti-corruption struggle among army cadres and continued:

Since the beginning of the resistance war not a few people drowned in the big sea of the united front and cadre corruption and degeneration and acts of betrayal are constant occurrences. Recently two regimental cadres (of the 129th and 120th divisions) have again turned traitor [sic] and run away. The whole party and army should take serious note of this fact.19

Japanese military campaigns in the JiLuYu region during 1941 caused ‘extremely serious’ cases of defections in the local armed bodies. In the first half of the year these involved about 3,200 people in three sub-districts. The defections were chiefly induced by agents infiltrating the armed bodies. Their tactic was first to win trust and climb to responsible positions by working hard and using friends and relatives. Thereafter, when the time was ripe, they sought to achieve their objective.20

Examples of Japanese attacks producing the same results – usually following a loss of confidence – in this region are plentiful: an independent battalion switched *en masse* to the enemy side and an independent regiment defected twice; within three months, 20 army cadres responded to agents’ call for collaboration; 25 out of 145 army personnel decided to escape from the party school.21

As with the party organization, the armed bodies’ relationship to the people was complex. The difficulties were particularly pronounced in the early war years. Nie Rongzhen commented: ‘At times the party cadres had to spend an enormous amount of time on solving breaches of discipline. For example, in one day a company and a local mobilization committee had to deal with 12 cases’.22

Reforming attitudes and behaviour was a special problem with bandit groups and secret societies. The party tried to dissolve their organizations and absorb them as far as possible. Yet their diverse character necessitated varying approaches producing dissimilar outcomes. In a study of how bandits were disarmed and re-educated in southern Henan, Odoric Wou concludes that ‘bandit policy was employed by the CCP solely as a quick means of building power when the party was weak. Once the party became strong, the Communists frequently allied with other local armed forces to eliminate the bandits.’23 References to bandit groups obstructing the resistance and to the need of eliminating them suggests they were a persistent difficulty for the CCP.24
Party statements on the specific methods for dealing with secret societies resembled those applied to bandit groups. Yet it seems the CCP took a somewhat more lenient attitude to the former, possibly reflecting a recognition that many of them had close links with the peasants.\textsuperscript{25}

The problem of forging an early combative resistance force was compounded by the sheer diversity of groups and organizations more or less intent on resisting Japan. As Liu Shaoqi put it in 1938, ‘[t]here have been all kinds of troops and factions, various thoughts, dissimilar actions and no unified command’.\textsuperscript{26} Moreover, military experience was in extreme short supply. In Bo Yibo’s words, ‘[s]uch a force, composed of students who hardly knew how to fire rifles, of professors who knew nothing of tactics and farmers who knew neither tactics nor politics, was in danger of disintegrating for the lack of directing head and of being wiped out for the lack of technique’.\textsuperscript{27}

In view of the low level of mass activism and the complexities of incorporating large numbers of additional forces, conditions were singularly unfavourable for the intense preoccupation with expanding the regular army which in fact became the hallmark of the years 1937–40. Paradoxically, the same circumstances strongly served to spur this tendency: to concentrate scarce resources on creating a powerful military force in the short term.

Moves in this direction were apparent in early 1938 when most troops were declared to have shifted to regularization. A year later a large-scale campaign was launched to reorganize troops, followed in 1940 by a political rectification campaign and further reorganizations.\textsuperscript{28} By the spring of 1940 the troop strength of the 129th division had reached about 40,000. In the process, the extent of army units’ regularization practices – not to speak of their costly consequences – patently departed from the purposes of the central party–army authorities.

By 1941 many JinJiLuYu reports drew attention to the basic flaw informing these practices: neglect to develop local, mass-based armed bodies. Little thought had as yet been given to the long-term build-up of militia and guerrilla forces, resulting in a very limited spread of guerrilla activity. Frequent references were even made to the ‘impossibility of developing guerrilla warfare’; indeed, it was ‘ignored’, ‘denied’, ‘violated’, etc. In a speech to a cadre conference in February 1941, Deng Xiaoping emphatically declared that ‘regular army comrades’
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do not understand that unless there are powerful local armed forces, the regular army is without ears, eyes, hands and feet, and cannot obtain the supportive cover of guerrilla warfare ... they do not understand that without a militia basis the regular army cannot get a steady flow of recruits.

Operating under harsh conditions, these comrades, who sometimes also included leading party cadres in the area, focused squarely on the immediate strengthening of their own army unit. The reports are replete with accusations of their self-centredness and indifference to the guerrillas and other local forces. Again, Deng echoed a recurrent theme when claiming that regular army comrades

do not help the local armed forces and the militia in their work ... this narrow-minded attitude fails to comprehend the totality of the armed struggle. We come across cadres who sometimes assist guerrilla units and the militia. Sadly, their intention is merely to replenish [the army] ... otherwise they are not keen on helping.

On many occasions the regulars went further and simply appropriated the local forces. Lai Ruoyu’s conclusion in September 1941 is found in many other reports: ‘[D]evouring and not caring for the guerrillas raised big obstacles to developing a guerrilla war.’29 Such practices were not very different from the forcible recruitment of soldiers that was reported from various localities in North China.30

The methods resorted to were another reason for the occasionally high desertion rate. An October 1941 report by the JinJiYu area party committee described how the regularization of local guerrillas caused ‘large numbers of flights every day ... the army’s discipline was very poor’.31 Another source said that regularization resulted in desertion percentages of 16.4 and 20.8 in two army units.32

Examples of guerrilla units fleeing rather than being regularized are likewise abundant. Liu Shaoqi pointed out that ‘some local guerrillas do not go and meet the regulars. When the army comes the guerrillas run away to the enemy’s rear as they fear being devoured by the army. This must be corrected’.33 In one locality of northern Henan in 1938 all the 160 men of a guerrilla detachment, including its commander, ran away.34 When people saw that the village’s self-defence corps was mobilized for incorporation into the army, they came to regard joining the corps as dangbing, i.e. enlisting as a regular soldier, thereby discouraging their participation in the corps.
Similarly, fears of being enrolled in the army drained the membership of
the militia’s youth vanguard.\textsuperscript{35}

To reduce desertions in regularizing guerrillas, a number of specific
measures were proposed. These implied initially transferring guerrillas to
areas close to their own locality where they could co-ordinate with regulars
and gain military experience; a more gradual process than that of sending
them straight to the military district or sub-district; and, as far as possible,
organizing relatives, friends and people from the same school and locality
together.\textsuperscript{36}

Another serious consequence of the early regularization was that
heavy reliance on large army units caused high casualties; given the de-
emphasis on raising localized armed bodies in these years, it was mostly
left to the regulars to do the fighting. As the report by the second column
quoted above said, ‘the guerrillas remained very small in number and a
guerrilla war did not develop, making the regular army dance nakedly’.\textsuperscript{37}
The increasing number of the casualties was thus obvious even before the
big military set-backs from 1941, as shown in figures on the Eighth Route
Army’s losses from September 1937 to May 1940. Note that three categories
are not included: 20,475 who were poisoned, those who died from wounds
in hospital and local guerrillas under the army’s leadership:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Eighth Route Army losses 1937–40\textsuperscript{38}}
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
 & Killed in action & Wounded \\
\hline
The first year & 8,260 & 17,726 \\
The second year & 7,351 & 20,086 \\
The third year & 20,811 & 20,026 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

However, in terms of organizational tightening, there were definite
constraints on the extent to which regularization could be pushed. As with
the party organization, the army was scattered over long distances and
operated under highly adverse military and material circumstances – stark
realities that had corrosive effects on army discipline and generated the
often criticized ‘guerrillaism’.\textsuperscript{39}
Dispersed Army

ENFORCED LOCALIZATION

Painful rethinking

If the drawbacks of regularization for the armed build-up were obvious early on, the major Japanese offensives in the mid-years of the war exposed them devastatingly. An order signed in May 1941 by three military leaders in the Taihang area, Liu Bocheng, Deng Xiaoping and Wang Shusheng, highlighted the generalized crisis caused to the base areas and urged a policy switch to developing localized armed bodies as the basis for a mass guerrilla warfare. About a year later, when the CCP sustained increasingly heavier blows at the hands of the Japanese army, Tao Zhu made a forceful appeal to the same effect. Having called for an end to the practice of ‘everything for centralization’ and ‘realize a high level of regularization’, he stressed the imperative of a ‘guerrilla war with a local and mass character’ where ‘everything must be dispersed’. Hence his recurrent use of the terms ‘flexibility’, ‘localization’ and ‘popularization’ and their contradistinction to the previous ‘handling of everything according to a plan’.

The import of these demands was to better adapt the military organization to actual conditions; specifically, to drastically decentralize its top-heavy structure as the base areas contracted markedly in the wake of the defeats. Or as Mao Zedong wrote in September 1942: ‘When the weather changes it becomes necessary to change one’s clothing’, which meant ‘to shed our winter garments and put on summer clothing so that we can move around nimbly to fight the enemy’. In fact, the resistance forces were both over and understaffed. On the one hand, the shrinking bases made ‘the fish big and water scarce’, i.e. the manoeuvrability of the full-time military bodies was severely circumscribed. And to expand them by imposing heavier taxes on the people was then in any case hardly feasible. On the other hand, locally based forces desperately needed quantitative and supportive qualitative (experienced cadres) reinforcement to fight the Japanese army’s nibbling tactics (see Chapter 1).

To deal with the organizational predicament in the military and broadly governmental fields, the CCP announced the policy of ‘crack troops and simpler administration’ in December 1941. Its essence was to substantially reduce the number of higher-level personnel not engaged in production, who had rapidly increased in the initial expansion of the base area organizations. The reorientation towards greater reliance on popular initiative was apparent in a wide range of policies and activities which wrestled with
similar kinds of organizational problems. Before concretely considering the cuts, mention should be made of a familiar factor that complicated striking novel paths.

The earlier hard concentration on regularization ensured that its reconsideration would encounter strong resistance. A May 1943 document from the post-1942 rectification campaign again indicates that it was pre-war cadres at the grassroots who signalled reluctance to go along with unaccustomed directives from above. Their preference for large formations was criticized as mechanical application of old practices and knowledge to changing circumstances ushered in by war developments.

One might conjecture that the cadres were deeply concerned about their standing in the army. They were said to harbour ingrained habits that blocked rethinking. The experience of the 129th division's 344th brigade early in the war served to illustrate the consequences. Clinging to past methods of anti-GMD warfare against the modernized and powerfully equipped Japanese army, 'the work got nowhere'. Apparently, they also sensed a threat to their authority from the new layer of activists who had entered the army since the outbreak of the war, especially the intellectuals with their superior cultural standard.44

Confirming easier discussions, a Jiefang Ribao article in November 1942 said that 'some comrades' argued for a restricted militia-size on the grounds that its primary function was to supply recruits to the full-time guerrillas and the army. These comrades, the article went on, 'still do not accept reducing the armed forces not engaged in production' despite the fact that 'the contradiction between the war apparatus and the war situation has already reached serious proportions'.45 There were even cases of enlarging the regulars, the same organ reported in June 1942, adding that personnel and companies would increase but not military strength.46

Nonetheless, pre-war cadres' reluctance to deregularize generally proved rather less of a nagging problem compared to their opposition to the rural united front (see Chapter 3) and relaxed rules for party membership (see Chapter 4). The reason is obvious: the destructive impact of the Japanese offensives was of such a magnitude as to render the reorientation virtually inevitable.

A brief outline of the military structure, as it eventually took shape, will facilitate understanding of its decentralization. The organization evolved into the three distinct yet interlinked tiers of the regular army, the guerrillas and the people's armed bands (renmin wuzhuang), which included the
militia and the self-defence corps. Party sources likened these tiers to a person’s fist: the regulars being the bones of the hand, the guerrillas the muscles and the people’s armed bands the flesh. The army regulars, always on the move and relatively few in number, were not capable of defending against sabotage, raids and mopping-up campaigns in large parts of the base areas. This responsibility fell to the lower tiers. In territorial terms, ‘the militia is the protector of the village, the guerrillas defend the county and the district, and the regular army is the mobile force for a region’.47

An important characteristic of this structure has been, somewhat optimistically, elucidated thus by one writer: ‘This enabled anyone, according to their inclination, age, strength, social and family position, to find a place easily in a system which was very open and for that very reason lent itself to the ready mobilization of the masses and facilitated the building of the army’.48 The regulars had on the whole better training and equipment than the guerrillas, but the difference was often slight. In expanding the armed bodies, many regulars started in the militia and were trained in the guerrillas.49

**Demanding operation**

The basic criterion of the overall personnel cuts, or the ‘crack troops and simpler administration’ policy, was that no more than 3 per cent of the population was to be regularly removed from production, two-thirds of whom were to be army personnel and the remaining one-third government, mass organization and party staff. As usual, the record was a mixed one, with considerable area differences.50

These cuts were combined with institutional reforms. Three themes are discernible: mergers of, for example, logistics departments and, partially, of the general headquarters; simplification and tightening of, primarily, command structure/organ; and personnel transfers from leading organs at various levels to companies.51 But as already outlined, in a broader resistance perspective, the salient feature of the reforms was a far-reaching deregularization, with the immediate, overall objective to cut upper echelons’ ‘excess’ full-time personnel and reinforce lower ones which had a shortage of this category, in addition to greatly expanding these forces generally. Specifically, reductions affected regulars and guerrillas above the county level who did not engage in production. The burden of the war effort was thereby largely shifted on to localized bodies. This trend was underscored by diversion of ammunition and weapons made surplus by the reorganization.
to these forces.\textsuperscript{52} Their increased military responsibilities were believed to bring definite advantages: being self-supporting, these forces did not require any public funds and with more weapons the people could better harass the Japanese army and limit its movements and destructive impact.\textsuperscript{53}

Varying conditions precluded a uniform retrenchment. First of all, its urgency was not everywhere the same. One area where the organizational edifice was especially heavy on the people was the core of the Taihang area: the leading party, governmental and military organs of both the base area itself and, partly, of the North China region as a whole were stationed here. The shrinking of the base area following the Japanese offensives aggravated the already heavy financial burden on the people.\textsuperscript{54}

Economic factors also exerted a modifying influence, generally implying a differentiation between the relatively developed plains and the poorer mountainous areas. In the former, the people’s capacity to pay for the war effort and other government expenditures was greater and more personnel could be supported.\textsuperscript{55} This geographical distinction had a military aspect as well. Since the Japanese army was able to extend its occupation with far fewer difficulties and casualties on the plains than in the mountains, a party directive in late 1941 argued, the proportion of the regulars to local guerrillas should be lower in the former areas. Where the situation was precarious the entire regular force was to be localized.\textsuperscript{56}

Reassignment to strengthen lower bodies applied to a part of the personnel rendered superfluous by the ‘crack troops’ policy. Others, probably most, entered the agricultural labour force, while some enrolled in educational and training courses.\textsuperscript{57} Party historiography usually depict these measures as an eminently successful surgery. A report by the area party committee of JinJiYu in September 1942, however, suggests that it could be accompanied by much pain and lasting wounds. Above all, preparations were in no way commensurate to the complex and large-scale nature of the reorganization. Related discussions and decision-making were mostly confined to a small number of people. Planning functions were found wanting. As a consequence, opinions of the surplus personnel were not sought; nor did they receive explanation and comfort. It even happened that the discharged personnel became destitute and homeless. This indifferent treatment shocked many cadres, particularly in the army, who found themselves simply ‘discarded’ (\textit{jiandiao}) or who ‘waited for their turn’ to suffer the same fate. In short, ‘in dealing with problems there was inadequate caution and patience, and a
lack of democratic spirit’. Military uncertainties and pressures of the spring ploughing work intensified anxieties. Even popular attitudes were affected by the rough personnel cuts: ‘The Eighth Route Army is really heartless.’

Yet, immediate cadre reactions to the reorganization were not uniform. These tended to vary with the distribution of power resources. Party members were confident, or rather over-confident, that their CCP membership offered sufficient guarantees and had no qualms about leading a jobless existence, like playing chess and strolling. Local cadres sought the opportunity to ‘comfortably tide over these two years’ by asking for permission to return home and be given long-term training. Personnel doing odd jobs could do no more than grumble and gossip, in addition to expressing concern to party cadres about the timing of the cuts. Apprehension was most strongly felt among non-party cadres, especially those with GMD ties. In accusing the CCP of discriminatory treatment, they were on solid ground: in places they were dismissed in large numbers or even wholesale. For example, of the remaining 79 government and mass organization cadres in four counties, only one belonged to the non-party category.

As with taxation (see Chapter 7), the calls for sacrifices of partial interests for the benefit of the resistance movement as a whole had to contend with organizational and localized ‘selfishness’. This gave rise to a serious mismatch of cadre resources as some localities resisted discharging excess personnel and other localities did not receive needed reinforcements. Hence, ‘mobilizational efforts to assign surplus cadres to other departments and areas have been ineffectual’.58

Overloaded militia

A vast increase of the village-based militia was a prerequisite for launching a mass guerrilla war. While party policy called for this force to be 4–5 per cent of the adult population in the bases, local and overall figures for 1944 point to a 3-per-cent or slightly higher participation rate.59 Towards the end of the war, total militia strength reportedly stood at about two million. A mass of statistics compiled by wartime Japanese researchers on the militia in Hebei show that poor peasants predominated overall as well as among the more important cadres.60 But there was room for class variations. Of the 8,565 militia members in four counties of the Taihang area, poor and middle peasant numbers were not strikingly different.61

The militia was sub-divided into the youth vanguard (ages 16 to 23) and the model detachment (ages 24–35), which, at least in principle, were
organized on a voluntary basis. Another closely connected body was the self-
defence corps (ages 16–55) in which participation was compulsory. In Anguo county, Hebei, Japanese researchers collected detailed data early in the war on the youth vanguard, showing that its members possessed very little land and produced more candidates for party membership and volunteers for the army than other mass organizations. In some places, hardcore secret militia organizations were formed consisting of 3–5 persons and strongly resembled the guerrillas in being mainly preoccupied with combat operations.

The militia was called upon to perform a broad range of duties, often together with the self-defence corps. Militarily these included co-ordinating with the army and the guerrillas, harassing and confusing the Japanese army, placing landmines, arresting and eliminating spies and collaborators, gathering intelligence, acting as sentries and transporting wounded soldiers. The militia also played a vital role on the production front by organizing the villagers to protect harvesting and hiding the grain from Japanese raids (this is examined in Chapter 12). In other words, the militia was far more than a mass organization subordinated to the party branch. Often, in fact, the two were not clearly distinguishable. For example, in one central Hebei village, 21 out of 23 militia men were party members.

The heavy responsibilities placed on the militia tested both its internal affairs and its external relationships. To turn the militia into a combative force required political and military training. This was hard to provide. A JinJiYu document indicated one major hurdle: ‘There is nobody to teach [the militia] and no material to teach with. Most of the cadres on the armed committee do not understand military matters.’ But even the availability of cadres left serious difficulties, namely militia members’ concern that training interfered with essential production activities.

Related to the scanty training was the problem of achieving a sustained militia activity, such as in reconnaissance or where the immediate threat of the Japanese army required constant readiness to fight. In reality, militia involvement exhibited a large measure of volatility, with short periods of intense activity, sometimes leading to radicalism, alternating with relative passivity, or dejection when combat brought causalities. Little training often implied a corresponding lack of confidence in actively engaging enemy forces. Many reports speak of militia members’ fear of approaching them and attacking their communication lines.

Externally, the militia, as the basic-level body primarily in charge of militarily mobilizing the villagers, had to contend with highly complex
popular attitudes to resistance. The long and painstaking road to it was amply demonstrated in combating Japanese mopping-up operations in JinJiYu. Conforming to the general picture of scattered cores, resistance activity was notable in a minority of places. Elsewhere, passivity was predominant, with only occasional popular involvement in the war. But to complicate matters further, the document explained, dissimilar trends were not fixed and quite distinct; each contained a mixture of inconsistencies:

In short, the people’s sentiments in war conditions change abruptly and are complex. Thoughts of struggle and compromise vie with each other; they simultaneously influence and mingle with each other. Depending on circumstances, swings recur.68

The harsh wartime environment and the militia’s qualitative deficiencies combined to produce instances where it committed offences against the people. A JinJiYu work report of December 1941 provided several examples. Villagers’ firewood and vegetables were appropriated by the militia. In one village it even commandeered things buried by the people; in others villagers were fined in order to improve militia members’ living conditions. ’We are not afraid of the Eighth Route Army’s staying in our homes, but we fear the militia doing that’, some people said.

Grain was an issue that sometimes marred the militia’s relationship with the villagers. In Liao county, extravagant militia consumption of the stored public grain was said to have imposed a heavy burden on the people in many villages. Militia concentrations in certain localities particularly vulnerable to Japanese attacks were liable to increase strains. In some cases the villagers’ refusal to supply the militia caused it to dissolve.69

CONTRASTING PERFORMANCES

No single evaluative label can be attached to the Eighth Route Army and the full-time guerrillas. Both exhibited an assemblage of conflicting phenomena. Valour coexisted with faintheartedness, loyalty with treachery, tenacity with fragility, while in between these extremes there was broad space for vacillation.

A very rough distinction can be made between the large number of hastily recruited soldiers and guerrillas, and the veterans from pre-war days and the better trained recruits. Journalist Anna Louise Strong cited a missionary to the effect that ‘[t]he original Eighth Route Army was well
disciplined; we thought that the Kingdom of God had arrived. But these later recruits are sometimes hardly worth more than bandits.’ Strong added: ‘Such a missionary comment [was] typical of many though more extreme than most.’

Party sources often found the later recruits guilty of ‘warlordism’, i.e. disregard for party leadership and government laws, the mistreatment of people and general violations of discipline. The prominence of such tendencies in the early war years has already been mentioned. A 1944 document detailing developments in JiLuYu acknowledges that there was a ‘definite bandit policy line’ in the initial build-up of local armed forces. One ‘did not engage in real work, did not send cadres, only appointed guerrilla units and used bandits and hoodlums as cadres’. With the passage of time, ‘warlordism’ became relatively more manageable, but its marginalization proved too challenging a task. Towards the end of the war it was still described as ‘serious’. This characterization is corroborated in David Paulson’s study of Shandong which presents abundant evidence of breaches of discipline.

The most sensitive aspect of ‘warlordism’ was, arguably, forcible recruitment into the army and the guerrillas that occurred despite the party’s insistent admonitions that enlisting new soldiers had to be voluntary or else they were unlikely to fight. Such practices were not only counterproductive to combativity; giving these bodies a bad reputation placed heavy brakes on efforts to secure replenishment. Forcible methods, which varied greatly in content and degree of pressure applied, were sometimes concretely described. According to a 1941 JinJiYu source, for example, ‘when mobilizing recruits one does not use political persuasion, but intimidate people by pinning political labels on them.’ Their content said: ‘You will join the army, won’t you?’ The targeted person had no choice and ‘of course replied “yes”’, upon which followed a plain order: ‘Well then, get ready!’

It is important to bear in mind, however, that attempts at mass recruitment into the army and the guerrillas raised a wide range of issues. Their nature finds expression in the 1941 report by the Huxi local party committee on war mobilization. Specifically, these touched upon the absence of a spontaneous mass resistance; arrangements inadequate for the task; the provisional character of the work organization; the loose fit of higher and lower echelons; the party being without real vanguard functions; the rough and arbitrary handling of personnel; and the psychology of the war environment. As can be readily observed, these were issues that had a bearing on the CCP resistance movement also in a general sense. Let us
consider the content of the Huxi report, which also placed in the concrete local context a number of problems discussed earlier.

Recruitment for active resistance relied on organized and planned efforts rather than on autonomous popular initiatives. In early January 1941, the area party committee of western Shandong was instructed by higher authorities to concentrate on completing targeted recruitment levels within three months, starting on 15 January. For the Huxi area this meant increasing armed strength by a thousand. A division of labour was decided upon whereby the regular forces were to accomplish two-thirds of the expansion and the local party authorities the remaining one-third. To implement the plan, the local party committee summoned the county heads of the mass movement and military affairs departments to a conference on 15 January. This conference heard reports on the recruitment plans and discussed related problems.

Yet time was very short. To cope with the situation, several conferences, presumably intended to work out the details, were held simultaneously. As a result, the work on armed recruitment could not be fully discussed. These circumstances were bound to have strongly negative consequences as each county transmitted the mobilization orders downward.

Following three months of recruitment activity the familiar picture of highly uneven progress was clearly manifested, geographically as well as in regard to the type of armed body.

### Table 5.2. Recruitment to armed bodies in four counties, 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yutai</th>
<th>Fengxian</th>
<th>Tanxian</th>
<th>Jinxiang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County armed bodies</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District company</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Township squad</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guerrilla unit</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police force</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigned recruitment number</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While none of the areas succeeded in fulfilling the assigned quota, Tanxian and Yutai came relatively close. The difference in performance reflected the varying extent to which an organizational framework for the recruitment drive had been established. Tanxian was well ahead: below the county’s army recruitment committee, responsible organs of army, government and mass organizations set up small groups which planned, supervised and examined the recruitment work.

But even in Tanxian organizational weaknesses were conspicuous. Reports were regularly submitted but ‘lacked substance’. While the conference system operated to some extent at the county-level army recruitment committee, most districts failed to hold official meetings.

Above all, as bodies at various echelons were unable to co-ordinate their activities, the recruitment machinery did not function as one whole. In some cases the organization was characterized as a ‘mere skeleton’; ‘in other cases even the skeleton has not been erected’. At meetings, participants failed to earnestly inquire into problems and push the work forward.

Under these circumstances, political mobilization for resistance duties made little headway. For example, army recruitment notices might not even be transmitted. And often intentions of higher levels failed to elicit an active response at the grassroots. The unobstrusive existence of the party organizations was especially noteworthy. Thus, even in Tanxian such propaganda activities as setting up posters did not extend widely, ‘turning the army recruitment work into a mystical thing’. In short, recruitment efforts met with cold indifference in many areas, Jinxiang being the worst example.

But party cadres did not always take a passive attitude. In fact, their high-handed behaviour raised ‘two big obstacles’ to recruitment. First, by forcibly bringing back soldiers who had run away and by imposing fines on their dependents, these cadres created fear among the armed personnel who in a number of cases fled with their families. The second obstacle has been mentioned earlier: the methods of regularizing the local armed forces ‘made people in general afraid of participating in armed bodies, particularly in the regular army’.

War experiences could also discourage armed mobilization. These included the hard realities of combat and the sight of bloodshed and wounded soldiers. Combined with the above two obstacles, these experiences exerted a strongly downward pressure on recruitment levels. Some people even cried out: ‘rather die than join the Eighth Route Army’. In Fengbei county 16 families fled to avoid their men being taken into the army.77
Dispersed Army

On the other hand, the army/guerrilla hardcore demonstrated qualities of a contrasting kind. Evidence to this effect is furnished in Western eyewitness accounts and in Japanese intelligence reports. These paint a picture of armed resistance forces that leans to the almost heroic. Westerners who saw them in action behind the Japanese lines in the early war years were enormously impressed by their energy and stamina:

[T]he valley, the paths, the river bed became filled with a whole division... They marched in units of about a thousand men. They came swiftly as if it were early morning and they had just risen from bed. Yet they had marched most of the night... One wave of a thousand would pass, as we halted to give them the right of way, then we would go on for a few minutes and stand aside for another column... When they came down the hills they broke into run. The rest of the time they marched with remarkable swiftness.78

Many of the fighters of the army walked in their bare feet, right through the mud and snow. They had no stockings at all. I saw these barefoot men wade frozen streams, breaking the ice with their feet. They were laden with packs and weapons, and some of them with an additional shovel or pick. And yet they march on through driving snow and fierce winds.79

Up and down hill the men marched at a uniform rate of three and a half miles an hour, thirty-five miles a day and 250 miles a week. Nothing seemed to interfere with their tireless pace... I saw them sleep without blankets nights after nights on the mountain sides, yet they felt no stiffness... The boys in this army have a positive zest for physical hardship. Dr Brown told me that he saw a unit of Eighth Route Army soldiers cross a half-frozen river on a night march in mid-January. The men stripped themselves naked, tied their clothing to their rifles, held one hand grenade for emergency, and raced into the icy water with a scream like wild Indians. Their chilling war whoop was easily audible in the nearest Japanese garrison a few miles away.80

The soldiers’ relationship to the people was portrayed as highly disciplined and well behaved:

We are witnessing a remarkable thing in this town. Large numbers of people who had fled this and nearby villages have come streaming back. News spreads like wildfire amongst the people that the Eighth Route Army has come. And the people picked up their bundles, or loaded their donkeys, and returned to their homes. Tonight a delegation of townspeople went to our military headquarters and thanked them for coming. They asked them to remain and protect the people.81
Peasants stand by and hand us the bowls of water, offering them with both hands. It is a touching sight. Often we turn a corner and far down the road we see clouds of steam. The people are waiting for us. In some places they have big vats of boiled millet. They accept no money, but give all they can.82

As we come to the district town of Chungyuan thousands of the townspeople were on the streets with banners to welcome us. It was mid-day and I heard the beating of gongs and the shouts of [‘kaihui! kaihui!’]. There was the usual meeting to welcome the Eighth Route Army such as most district towns call...83

Morale, of both army and people, could not possibly be higher. The enthusiasm and spirit of the people has to be seen to be believed. There was constant fraternization between the soldiers and the people in the most spontaneous and friendly manner.84

Westerners in China also lauded the egalitarian spirit inside the Eighth Route Army:

Coming back from the fields, I saw a sight which I suppose could be seen only in the Eighth Route Army. A commander was passing through the streets and a fighter...was coming towards him. The [fighter] halted and saluted, the commander returned the salute. Then the two men turned, one threw his arm around the shoulder of the other, and they walked down the street, heads down, engaged in a conversation that seemed to be quite exciting and joyous.85

That these high opinions of the Eighth Route Army had substance is strongly suggested by Japanese army sources. As was frequently noted, it was capable of putting up stubborn resistance. A 1939 document claimed the soldiers ‘resist very tenaciously and when launching surprise attacks jump over their comrades’ dead bodies and rush ahead.’86 According to a recollection by Nakamura Saburō, a staff officer of the 110th division, the communist army in western and central Hebei in early 1940 ‘carried out skilful underground work and vigorous guerrilla warfare. Consequently, it was extremely difficult to grasp its movements’. Several documents on the Japanese army’s operations in central Hebei in 1942–43 speak of a very determined resistance by communist military forces, especially when being cornered. In defending the villages it was not rare for soldiers to fight to the last man. Similarly, wartime material and reminiscences on
the Japanese army’s attacks against resistance forces in the mountains of central Shandong in November–December 1943 concede their refusal to surrender.87

Japanese materials also testified to the Eighth Route Army’s popular base. From operations in the Wutai mountains in March 1939, Kobari Akira, staff officer of the 36th division, learned of its ‘strict military discipline towards the people’ which ‘often won the hearts of the people’. Many documents repeated already familiar themes: the communist resistance forces had ‘struck deep roots among the people’; they ‘skilfully grasped the mind of the people’; and distinguishing them from the people was difficult.88 Pointing to its strict discipline, army directives said that the way to detect who was a communist among prisoners was to observe them during meals: ‘If someone willingly gives the food to others and quietly takes the worst, generally he will be a communist.’89

The above Western and Japanese sources indicate the existence of impressive resistance qualities. Yet by interpreting these in unjustifiably broad terms, many Western accounts have tended to inflate the movement’s overall strength greatly. Inevitably under the circumstances, these qualities were quite unrepresentative minority phenomena. Nonetheless, to repeat a crucial point often dwelt upon, as supportive spots of a vastly broader, though highly volatile, movement, the significance of these qualities extended far beyond their actual scope.

In one respect, bearing heavily on resistance strength, the quality of the CCP movement remained extremely poor – the armed equipment. A Japanese army source described it as ‘cruder than that of any nation’s army in the world’.90 To journalist Harrison Forman it ‘made an unforgettable sight, with their mixed assortment of weapons, including red tasseled spears and broadswords, shotguns, blunder busses, flintlocks, landmines, battered old rifles, and Chinese-made Tommy-guns’.91 Without more sophisticated weaponry the communists were handicapped: they could not drive the Japanese out of a bigger town, usually defended with heavy weapons, and then repulse counter-attacks; and even cutting railway lines and assaulting strong points proved difficult.92

What is more, vastly inferior fire power easily exposed the guerrillas to disastrous blows, unless the terrain strongly favoured them. A further consequence was that guerrillas were hard pressed to score quick results – the longer an engagement lasted, the more vulnerable they became.93

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Weapons and ammunition were in short supply throughout the war. Travelling with the 115th division of the Eighth Route Army in Shanxi in late 1937, journalist Agnes Smedley found that ‘[a] few have rifles, but most are still unarmed’. A 70-man guerrilla detachment in the Daqingshan base area, Suiyuan, in mid-1938 had only 20 firearms. Their proportion to 9,506 guerillas in 10 Taihang counties in 1939 was about one-third. A 1943 military report from JiLuYu said that 200 men making up eight model squads had to share 90 firearms. The problem was particularly serious in newly formed units. According to Zhu De, only 15–20 men out of a hundred might carry rifles, with the others armed with hand grenades.

The scarcity was aggravated by the damage done to weapons due to their careless handling and by the waste of ammunition, both characterized as ‘very great’. In one case in Xiangtan county, the 300 bullets expended only resulted in killing one enemy soldier. A locality in Anyang county had an even poorer record; the use of 318 bullets failed to inflict a single casualty on the enemy. This draining of meagre military resources was not simply a matter of negligence. A November 1941 JinJiYu report hinted at a more basic cause: inadequate military training, described as no more than a ‘formality’. In fact, ‘[m]ost guerrilla members cannot use the weaponry. Thus, although they are active and brave, it is difficult to fully give play to their functions.’

There were of course variations. Some were institutionalized so that quantity and quality of military equipment improved with higher organizational levels. But these differences were not always striking. As reported from the Shuidong area of JiLuYu in 1943, the 1,254 soldiers belonging to the regular forces possessed 705 carbines, 90 handguns and 14 machine guns, while the 682 in the local forces had at their disposal 411 firearms, 208 hand grenades and 32 handguns. Others were specific to the locality.

With hardly any weapon supplies from the Soviet Union and those from the GMD drying up after 1939–40, the resistance forces had to obtain more from other sources. One alternative method often given prominence to in party reports was seizure from the Japanese and puppet armies. Statistics from various localities in JiLuYu and JinChaji during 1943–44 do indeed point to massive acquisitions. However, these weaponry gains must be set against losses to the Japanese. For example, Taihang reports in 1943 show big deficits in firearms and hand grenades, while other items of losses suggest a hard blow to the resistance bodies. The fierce battle to disarm each other which thus unfolded between the two sides, has been reminisced...
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by Fujiwara Akira, then Japanese platoon commander and later historian. Having noted instances of guerrillas annihilating Japanese army units and thoroughly looting their equipment, he thus describes the Japanese fixation with depriving the enemy of arms:

In recording combat results greater attention was paid to the amount of captured weapons than to the number of abandoned corpses. For that reason, army units put aside seized weapons to prepare for the eventuality of heavy combat losses by diluting these in reports on battle achievements.105

Other sources of weaponry included firearms discarded by defeated warlord and GMD troops and arms spread among the people – landlords and well-off peasants were of course better equipped.106 The CCP also manufactured weapons.107

As the big discrepancy between the number of soldiers/guerrillas and the availability of weapons indicates, expanding military bodies was easier than arming and training them. This could be true even where weapons were widely scattered among the people. In parts of Suiyuan, for example, people ‘ardently loved’ their firearms and were unwilling to hand them over to anybody. Attempts by resistance forces to persuade the people yielded little. Bandits achieved more by looting.108 So desperate was the shortage of weapons that, sometimes, cadre actions did not stop at voluntary appeals: force was applied, against both upper and lower strata.109

Compared to the GMD and other domestic forces that the CCP fought in the 1920s and 1930s, the Japanese employed far superior armory. As Nie Rongzhen told journalist Harrison Forman: ‘In the beginning we had no experience fighting an enemy armed with such powerful weapons as tanks, artillery and airplanes.’110 Japanese army tactics were also a novelty to the CCP. Referring to the early Japanese mopping-up operations, Bo Yibo conceded that ‘[w]e did not know the rules for fighting Japan’ and building bases.111 In addition, the communists had never encountered an adversary whose fighting spirit was as ‘determined’ and ‘tenacious’ as that of the Japanese soldiers.112 In Zhou Enlai’s words to journalist James Bertram, ‘[t]hey will fight to the last, even when they are wounded.’113

Faced with an unfamiliar and unprecedented hard-fought enemy, the CCP sought to make use of a great potential advantage that it enjoyed over the Japanese to counter-balance its military inferiority: to obtain the villagers’ information on Japanese troop movements so as to facilitate

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guerrilla operations against them. In other words, popular enrolment into an intelligence network crucially complemented that into a combat force.

Yet villagers could not automatically be relied upon to actively report on Japanese troop deployment, etc. They might just as well choose to stay away from such, often risky, activities. Intelligence therefore had to be mobilized. Early weaknesses in this regard made bases vulnerable to Japanese attacks, with losses of life and property. Nevertheless, Japanese sources again indicated the presence of a strong resistance quality already in the initial years. A few examples will show how the resistance forces’ prior knowledge of Japanese army manoeuvres frustrated the latter’s objectives.

Documents and recollections demonstrate that the CCP’s intelligence network in Hebei and Shanxi was extensive already by 1939–40. Thus, ‘the communist army gathered and transmitted information very skilfully and quickly, and often [they] had investigated the suppression campaigns beforehand’. Later documents paid very generous tribute to the communists’ ability to organize a popular intelligence network. From questioning captured prisoners, the Japanese learned that the CCP closely registered their operations. According to a reminiscence by a Japanese private serving in Shandong, this network functioned so accurately by 1942–43 that several attempts by the Japanese punitive forces (tōbatsutai) to come into contact with the Eighth Route Army yielded nothing.

One important aspect of intelligence gathering was to avoid frontal Japanese attacks. Another objective was to locate the occupiers’ weak points to strike at. CCP information on Japanese vulnerabilities even extended beyond field operations, one report candidly admitted:

The enemy’s efforts to learn about our military and political situation show meticulous zeal. One is astonished at the accurate material they have obtained. It includes not only troop locations, troop strengths ... but also staff personnel and the complex rivalry and friction in every organ in the military and the government.

Indeed, party documents provide a wealth of data on the Japanese army, including composition, cultural standards, quality of spy operations and ability to co-ordinate military, political and economic tasks.

Fujiwara Akira’s recollections from Hebei graphically sums up the bearing of the intelligence mobilization on the guerrilla activities. On the one hand, it enabled their elusiveness – frustrating Japanese ‘punitive’ search-and-destroy operations. So utterly inconclusive and uneventful
could these be as to make Fujiwara feel that ‘combat itself did not frighten us’? On the other hand, he adds a crucial qualification: ‘... unless caught in a surprise attack [by the guerrillas] lying in wait’. That is, the guerrillas were not simply fugitive; they were also deadly dangerous, a quality imparting sharply contrasting sentiments – tension instead of weariness, apprehension instead of assuredness, vulnerability instead of superiority. Lessons from eastern Hebei were palpable: in December 1942, a Japanese army unit of 48 men was ambushed and liquidated en masse; in June 1943 a company met the same fate (‘everybody from the company commander down had been mowed down instantaneously’); in fact, it ‘frequently happened’ that the punitive forces were ‘completely annihilated’.

Fujiwara concludes that ‘no matter how much defence arrangements were strengthened, it was impossible to establish order and peace’, a fact he attributes to the CCP’s popular base and ‘overwhelming advantage in the intelligence war’. This advantage meant that while ‘the enemy’s fire power was not menacing’ – giving the impression the Eighth Route Army did not constitute a real threat – there always lurked the fatal hazard of ‘being assaulted at short distance’. The war seemed so distant, yet so close at the same time.119

Gathering intelligence implied the villagers’ broad and continuous cooperation with the resistance forces. To back up such an activity, not to mention the people’s required contributions to direct combat tasks and to socially transformative endeavours, organizations were needed that assumed responsibility for and stimulated popular participation in the daily running of village affairs – i.e. a government administration and mass organizations. These were not burdened with the party’s vanguard strictures and by the armed bodies’ military commitments and thus possessed the latitude to concern themselves more concretely with the villagers’ daily living conditions. Herein lay possibilities as well as uncertainties and dangers.

NOTES


8. Liu Lin, ‘JinChaJi bianqu di guoqu he xianzai’, JF, 8.9.1938, p. 20. In August 1939 Mao Zedong wrote: ‘The traitors are still very active and very few of them have been killed’. SWII, p. 257.


10. ‘Jianzhi Hebei kangzhan yu gonggu tuanjie’, QZ, 16.7.1939, p. 241. Peng Dehuai was interviewed by Chen Kehan in May 1939.


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22. Nie Rongzhen, Mofan kangRi genjudi, p. 8. For additional examples of problems of discipline in the beginning of the war see Chen Geng Riji, pp. 6, 12, 64.


31. ‘Xixi duidi douzheng de liangge cailiao’, October 1941, GB, p. 87.


33. Liu Shaoqi, JF, p. 49.

34. ‘Zhinan Yubei gongzuo baogao’, p. 490. See also Wang Ruofei, p. 120.
36. Wang Ruofei, pp. 120–121.
37. ‘Genjudi de chuangzao yu gonggu jiben zhengce chubu’, p. 15.
42. SW III, p. 101.
43. ‘Zhuli minbing’, JR, 2.11.1942.
45. ‘Zhuli minbing’. Two months earlier Mao noted: ‘we are still padded and weighed down and quite unfit for combat’. SW III, p. 101.
49. Li Zhan, Zhandou zhong de jiefangqu minbing, (1938), p. 22.
53. ‘Zhuli yu minbing’.
54. Taihang geming genjudi shigao, p. 158.
56. JiLuYu bianqu geming shi, p. 278.
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63. ‘Huoyue yu dihou zhanchang de minbing’.

64. Cheng Zihua, ‘Jizhong’.


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77. ‘Huxi diwei yijiusiyi nian yi, er, san yuefen zhanzheng dongyuan gongzuo baogao’, pp. 592–595.
78. Smedley, China Fights Back, (1938), p. 129. From Smedley’s diary when she accompanied the Eighth Route Army in Shanxi.
79. Ibid., p. 138. According to Japanese intelligence, most soldiers in the communist-led forces had only one pair of straw sandals and when these were worn out they had to walk barefooted. Hokushi Katayama butai, ‘Sekitate seniorsu shūjūkei seru kyōsangun, tainshū kōsaku sono hoka no jōkyō’, 1.9.1940, in Awaya and Chadani (eds), vol. 5, p. 550.
80. Hanson, Humane Endeavour, (1939), pp. 266–267.
82. Ibid., pp. 159–160.
83. Ibid., pp. 178–179. In some areas, however, the villagers fled as the Eighth Route Army approached. When getting to know its policies and learning that it was the former Red Army, the people returned and asked the soldiers to remain (ibid., pp. 159, 190). Yet the people’s fear of an army could be so great that scepticism persisted (ibid., p. 160). On the people initially being afraid of the Eighth Route Army and then changing their mind see also Balujun Shandong jiaodong junqu zhengzhibu, Xiezhan banian de jiaodong zidibing (Jiaodong: Xinhua shudian, 1945), p. 9.
85. Smedley, (1938), p. 259. There were no insignia of rank and pay differences were insignificant. Regarding uniforms, food and sleeping accommodation, everyone was said to be treated on an equal basis. Carlson, The Chinese Army, (1940), pp. 36–37; Bisson, Yenan in June 1937, (1973), p. 71.
86. Hoku Shina hōmengun shireibu, Kyōsantō no waga gun tai taisuru shisōteki gakai kōsaku no shinsō to kore ga bōatsu hōsaku, (1939), p. 10.
90. Tada butai sanbōbu, Chūgoku kyōsantō undō no kaisetsu, (1941), p. 16.
91. Forman, p. 204.
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95. ‘Guanyu Daqingshan lairen jietou suo tan wenti baogao’, July 1938, NM, p. 66.
113. Bertram, North China Front, (1939), p. 249. A Chinese writer described how the Eighth Route Army, having encircled the Japanese in the battle of Pingxingguan in 1937, called on them to hand over their weapons, promising they would not be killed. The Japanese refused and ‘on the contrary seized the opportunity to strike at us even more tenaciously. They did not flee but resisted stubbornly and fought to death rather than surrender’ (Li Gongbo, p. 46). The CCP acknowledged that ‘we
have taken very few prisoners, although we have killed and wounded a great many enemy troops’. (SW II, p. 176) See also: Gan Siqi, ‘Yijiuling shi kangzhan sannian lai de zhengzhi gongzuo’, 1941, ZG, p. 205; Zhu De, ‘Yinian’, p. 12; Qiu Jiang, ‘Likai Taiyuan de qianhou’, in Xixian xie zhanji’, (1938), p. 84.

117. Yamazaki Shōsa, Hokushi ni okeru Chūkyō to gun no dōkō narabi ni chian jōsei ni tsuite (1944), p. 64. As one Japanese general observed, ‘the communist army’s intelligence network penetrates deeply into our heart’. He contrasted this with what the Japanese had achieved. Bōeichō, vol. 1, p. 572.
CHAPTER SIX

Government Openings

EMERGING ENCOUNTERS

The social dislocation brought by the advancing Japanese armies was bound to affect the traditional elite’s grip on the local administration. Asked by journalist Haldore Hanson at the beginning of the war if ‘the experiment in democracy at Mount Wutai was an example of the democratic revolution’, Mao Zedong answered affirmatively and then explained:

But those people won their freedom directly from the Japanese, not from the Chinese government. The Japanese army drove out all the former Chinese officials. Then the guerrillas recaptured the territory and introduced political reforms. In most areas behind the Japanese lines the peasants will win their freedom and political reforms in this way.1

Many reports at the time did indeed describe how the local administration fell to pieces as its personnel fled. Travelling through northeastern Shanxi, Nie Rongzhen found desolate towns and places where only old people remained. Disorder and devastation had spread throughout the area.2 In Shandong governor Han Fuqu’s infamous retreat was matched by magistrates and local officials, and, Wang Yu-chuan wrote, ‘[w]herever the Japanese army succeeded in capturing territory, the military and political structure was completely destroyed, and the social order became utterly chaotic’.3 A central Hebei source offered a similar characterization, etc.4

This aspect readily caught the eye of contemporaries but in view of China’s vastness its generalization must be resisted. Often the elite remained as entrenched as before. Thus a Japanese wartime study noted very few county magistrates fled when southern Shanxi was invaded in early 1938.5 Another feature was for the elite to regain domination after a temporary disturbance, as in parts of northern Henan.6 And where local
authority had disintegrated, the elite lost no time trying to reassert its rule, whether a new resistance government had come into being or not. Yet in the complex war conditions these elite activities assumed many forms and did not necessarily imply an immediate, straight oppression.

Before the build-up of a local administration was initiated, a great variety or organizations sprang up to deal with the host of problems caused by the Japanese invasion – the pre-war administration, to the extent it still performed social functions, was plainly incapable of meeting the mounting challenges. These unofficial organs had a semi-governmental character and at first undertook a wide range of work tasks relating to war mobilization, maintenance of order and levying of taxes. In the Suiyuan–Chahar region, for example, the initial target of mobilization included horses, money, shoes, fur clothing and grain. Gradually, these organs became more concerned with organizing people – especially for self-defence – than material and financial resources.

Some were set up by the CCP, others by non-communist groups, still others were a joint effort. They were provisional and included people of different backgrounds. Their names varied from one area to another: Self-defence Associations (western and eastern Hebei), National Salvation Associations (central Hebei), Mass Organizations (southern Hebei), etc. Perhaps the best-known were the already mentioned Mobilization Committees which operated especially in Shanxi, Chahar and Suiyuan, and also in parts of Hebei and Shandong.

Reference to the Mobilization Committees in the previous chapter indicated great complexity; their composition and political orientation varied over a wide spectrum. Yet attention was also drawn to the CCP’s growing influence over the broad movement. In fact, many of the committees’ county and district bodies were headed by secretaries of the party organizations at these levels. Journalist Agnes Smedley witnessed the popular activism generated in areas where the CCP had made an impact:

Here where the Eighth Route Army alone dared to penetrate, mass organizations swarmed everywhere, forming anti-Japanese associations of peasants, students, merchants, women, and children. They were drawing young men into village self-defence corps.

Politically unaffiliated students were another important source of the mass mobilization impetus of many committees. This was strongly feared by the conservative Shanxi provincial authorities, as Smedley’s description
of why they tried to circumscribe the activities of the People's Mobilization Committee in Taiyuan vividly brings out:

The efforts of the Taiyuan committee had been frustrated by officials who thought of war only as a conflict between armies. If the common people should be trained and armed, they thought, they would indeed fight the Japanese, but afterwards they might refuse to lay down their arms and return to pre-war conditions.

So the Taiyuan People's Mobilization Committee had to pussyfoot around, trying to convince the authorities that mobilization would make them popular and consolidate their power. Grudgingly, cautiously, the authorities permitted the committee to hold meetings and explain the purpose of the war, but only to the people living in regions bordering the actual battlefield. This region did not even include Taiyuan, for the authorities did not believe that city would fall.12

The radicalizing effects of the Mobilization Committees were also noted by Want Yu-chuan in southern Shandong where the peasants had ‘become aware of their new political strength and social status. In the past none of them dared to walk close to the doors of the [county] government, but now they not only step into the magistrate’s building, but actually demand that the magistrate suppress the reactionary forces.’13

The Mobilization Committees’ usefulness to the CCP was well summarized by Peng Zhen: they performed several emergency functions at a time when ‘the masses had not yet been mobilized and there was an acute lack of cadres, above all government cadres; the CCP was not strong enough to thoroughly reform the old administration in such a short period of time.’14 These problems did indeed prove enduring.

Administrative reform clashed with elite defence of vested interests. Wang Yu-chuan observed the formation of a ‘new political organization’, which was ‘in the hands of anti-Japanese youth’ and enabled the people to take part in government affairs and would eventually eradicate the decadent practice of the gentry in their control of the [county] politics. The gentry themselves realize this, and for this reason they are doing everything in their power to sabotage the reorganization. At first they do not dare to fight against it openly, but try in every way possible to establish themselves in the various councils. They do not care who is the [county] magistrate so long as they can themselves control the local government. In order to achieve their purpose, they pretend to welcome the reorganization heartily. But as soon as they discover that the policy of
In the early war years, when mass mobilization had not as yet made headway, the elite sought to seize control over the village government in a bolder, more direct way; that is, where the old administration had collapsed and a new one was being set up. Positions of village head and deputy head were often occupied by elite members, or bandits and hoodlums. Village and district administration were largely in the hands of a tiny minority, a JinChali report said. This naturally had major policy implications.

As with the local party organization, therefore, expelling those judged ‘undesirable’ was early on perceived as an urgent necessity. Statements to this effect were plentiful. In central Shanxi the Eighth Route Army and its allies in the Sacrifice League arranged a conference of village leaders at which it was decided to ‘carry out democratic politics and get rid of bad bureaucrats, bad gentry and bad people’. A party document from Heshun county in Shanxi insisted on ousting all bad officials, gentry and rascals who, by cheating and exploiting the peasants, were mainly to blame for the ‘misfortune’ and ‘cruel tragedy’ afflicting the villages. Similar calls for cleansing the local administration were of course also notable in later years as the variability of CCP influence persisted. Generally, elite defence of their positions indicated a low level of mass activism. There were certainly organizational efforts, but, as Peng Zhen pointed out, these proceeded in a non-mobilizational, top-down manner that left the poorer peasants in an ‘indecisive, irresolute, timid and fearful’ frame of mind vis-à-vis landlords and rich peasants. Assuming administrative leadership in the villages did not necessarily have an emboldening effect on the poor:

Some workers and poor peasants have already been elected village heads, but they run over to the landlords, gentry or employers to ask for instructions on everything. They look pitiable as they wag the tail ingratiatingly or pray to be forgiven.

Only with ‘a few real struggles’, Peng argued, did the poor gradually gain courage and a rebellious spirit. These were prerequisites for a ‘democratic politics’ in which ‘the landlord class has no choice but to yield’. Peng was emphatic on this point: ‘Facts prove that unless the peasant–landlord
relationship has gone through the necessary struggle and friction, enlightened landlords are out of the question and it is also difficult to adjust the relationship between landlords and peasants’.20

Frequent criticisms in party sources of the top-down method did not concern its principle; their target was rather the failure to follow up with a politics from below. Peng heavily stressed the latter aspect. A 1943 JiLuYu document on mass work paid somewhat more attention to the former facet. Proceeding from above in establishing an organization, whether in the government, party or military field, was declared ‘the law’ in areas ‘where our work does not have a foundation’, initially practically everywhere. While the ‘political task’ was thus to first set up an organization, its actual consolidation was said to require a subsequent bottom-up movement.21

However, compared to the top-down method, this vital second phase involved far more long-term, arduous and intricate efforts, rendering the achievement of an adequately generated and sustained popular movement extremely difficult. These two contrasting conditions, combined with the wartime environmental pressures, tended to prolong the top-down practices at the movement’s expense in virtually all kinds of organizational endeavours and easily produced the often noted cadre highhandedness.

**Elections: Stimulus and snags**

There was, however, one means through which emancipatory stirrings of numerous villagers were gradually initiated from 1938 – elections to village government (those to the ascending levels of district and county were infrequent and carried lesser mobilizational significance). The village elections were part of the later developing, overall restructuring processes.

Above all, by providing a channel for filling the government administration with large numbers of people who had hitherto been excluded from the political process – the poorer people in particular, but also women and youth from various social strata – the elections were of epoch-making proportions. To be sure, this statistically impressive mass leap into politics was subject to glaring limitations in terms of transforming government politics. But in this case, a long-term dimension narrowed the import of the actual quantitative-qualitative gap: the wide social diffusion of the experience and taste of administrative power.

A similar, even broader, incremental qualitative effect in the long run may be attributed to the election activities. These were dramatic novelties to the people, especially the election campaign. Cadres were trained and
organized into teams to explain the meaning and methods of the elections to them. Debates and meetings were held, drama troupes toured the villages and various propaganda and educational activities were undertaken. The peasants thereby gained a better understanding of the social issues at stake and were presented with an opportunity to examine the government’s work and criticize its failings. Several voting methods were used. A common one was for the voter to drop a bean in a basket behind the seat of each candidate. The high illiteracy rate and the unfamiliarity of elections required readily understood methods.\(^{22}\)

Obviously, then, mass mobilization and politicization rather than safeguarding pluralistic competition were the essential objective of the elections. Stipulations regarding the party’s prior screening of candidates in any case ruled out the latter, although in practice the party branch’s power was usually not adequate to the task of tightly supervising the electoral process.

Party sources provide ample voting statistics, mostly on JinChaJi, to demonstrate mass involvement in the village elections. Yet the first ones in this border region, in 1938, got off to a rather slow start with a participation rate of 40–50 per cent. Two years later this rate rose to roughly 70 per cent or in some areas even to about 90 per cent. The upward trend continued and the following local turn-outs in JinChaJi were reported after 1940: central Hebei – 80 per cent; the Wutai area in Shanxi – 60–90 per cent; Beiyue – 80 per cent. In JinSui, village elections were not widely implemented until 1941 when the turn-out in 79 villages varied from 70 to 87 per cent.\(^{23}\)

A number of election systems were used to staff the village government. In the more complicated procedure, the villagers were registered and then organized themselves into small groups of mostly 15 persons. Depending on the size of the village, the membership could vary from nine to 45. These elected one representative each for the village representative assembly; significantly, the representatives were subject to recall if the small group so demanded. From the assembly was then elected the village head, his deputy and members of the village government committees. There were usually six committees for civil administration, finance, education, production, justice and public security. The highest organ was the village council which was composed of the village head, his deputy, the chairpersons of the six committees, the head of the self-defence corps and a secretary.

Yet organizational variations by area and over time were considerable. There were also direct elections, at mass meetings, of the village head/deputy and members of the village government committees from among the
candidates submitted by the village’s election committee, mass organizations,
various anti-Japanese parties and groups, or the villagers themselves. Most
importantly, the actual functioning of the village governments assumed highly
diverse patterns, whatever the content of the regulations. As will become
apparent, formal authority relations in the government administration
were often outflanked by a range of factors, also in the core of the base
areas. Thus, in a by no means exceptional report from Guancheng county,
western Shandong, in 1942, it was pointed out that a village head completely
dominated the government committees. And this was after all a ‘reformed’
village with a ‘rather good’ work record.

The democratizing thrust of the elections contended with several
impediments. Some were suggested in a Xinhua Ribao (North China edition)
article of September 1941. Based on experiences in western Hebei, it listed
four conditions that swayed the villages’ electoral mobilization. First, ‘the
key to success’ lay in thoroughly preparing cadres for their work tasks since
‘one cannot be content with the instruction given at the very short training
courses and at discussion meetings’. Second, ‘propaganda directed to the
masses must be connected with the concrete demands deriving from their
living conditions’. These included settling accounts with their oppressors.
Third, leading organs should draw up propaganda material explaining
general trends. Fourth, in order to ‘concentrate strength and increase
efficiency’, propaganda and educational bodies had to be merged into the
propaganda department of the election committees at various levels. In
other words: prepare cadres adequately, ground propaganda in material
reality and explanatory power, and concentrate organizational resources.

Another basic constraint on electoral objectives was the shortage
of qualified persons willing to engage in administrative work, especially
in areas of frequent fighting. Here, a 1944 JinChaji directive stated, ‘the
people’s harsh living conditions, the heavy work in the village government
and the acute struggle against the enemy’ discouraged capable persons
from seeking elective office. In shunning it, there is even a tendency to
‘intentionally elect bad or lazy persons’. A JinJiYu source spelled out the
consequences: ‘Many newly elected village heads cannot shoulder their
responsibilities since they do not enjoy popular support.’

But as already indicated, the biggest challenge to the elections’ political
levelling ambitions was the elite. Again, Wang Yu-chuan’s account from
southern Shandong usefully illustrates some ways in which the elite
manipulated elections, particularly to responsible positions in village organs.

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Two forces contested the election of village leaders and representatives to the county and district councils at the start of the war. One was ‘the party of the people, which includes the peasantry, the anti-Japanese youth, the guerrillas of the Eighth Route Army, and members of the various mass organizations’. The other was ‘the party of the former ruling class which includes members of the old bureaucracy, the gentry, the landlords, and those who have connections with General Sun’. In this case the landlords’ methods were non-violent, but their intention to prevent effective elections is clear:

The party of the ruling class possesses the advantage of being in control of the election machine and is wealthy enough to spend a lot of money on the election campaign and practice bribery where necessary and possible. The gentry usually map out an effective election campaign and give elaborate banquets for the important people in the community. Since the election machine is in their hands, they deliberately mail far more election notices to their associates than to their rivals. Besides, the notices mailed to their rivals are usually late...

This resort to superior administrative and economic resources to retain minority rule was a well-tried elite practice – as it has been elsewhere in varying contexts. What usually varied was the degree to which the elite’s resource mobilization was strained.

To hold successive elections was one important means whereby the CCP sought to get rid of those members of government thought to be too ‘intransigent’ or ‘backward’, whatever their class background. Liu Shaoqi made clear that the representatives had to prove their worth to the resistance and the people or face removal at the next election:

All corrupt, rotten, and bureaucratic elements must be purged during the elections of responsible persons for government. Elect only those who are upright, anti-Japanese, brave, capable, and trusted by the masses so that this government will be further cleansed and strengthened.

The slogans used in the JinChaJi elections of January 1939 contained a similar message: ‘Elect genuine representatives’; ‘Elect to village head progressives who are conscientious in their work and are not afraid of difficulties’; ‘Elect those to village head who represent the masses’ interests’.

Yet the electoral surgery was hard to accomplish. According to Peng Zhen, electing new village heads in many places of JinChaJi in 1938–39
simply ‘replaced one tyranny by another’ since the successful candidates – how many is not indicated – also belonged to the ranks of the ‘local tyrants and evil gentry’. The party’s screening of candidates’ suitability did not prevent the ‘frequent’ election to office of elite-hired bandits. Nor could the poor- and middle-peasant office holders always be trusted to do a good job; apart from sheer incompetence, they sometimes lacked the integrity to turn down bribes and other forms of landlord seduction.\textsuperscript{32} The experience in parts of JinJiYu, a 1939 report to a cadre conference said, was that ‘the more elections [to village head] are resorted to, the worse the result’.\textsuperscript{33}

Recognition of the limited usefulness of these successive elections in reforming governments began to grow in the third year of the war. Electing a new village head while keeping the old administrative set-up largely intact was in Peng’s view a ‘futile effort’. Greater attention, he argued, had to be devoted to institutional reforms that improved the quality of government.\textsuperscript{34} What kind of problems these ran into in a general perspective will be exemplified in the final section of this chapter.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the crises dealt to the base areas by the Japanese military offensives in the mid-years of the war forced the CCP to embark upon a drastic organizational retrenchment. In the government field, party sources assert, the overall number of employees was roughly halved in JinChaJi, JinJiLuYu and Shandong. The enormous scale of this operation obviously required protracted efforts.

In the Taihang area three stages were distinguished. The initial one in early 1942 involved general personnel cuts at all echelons. The second stage from May 1942 emphasized reducing county- and higher-level organs and strengthening lower ones. These measures were pursued with greater vigour in the final stage beginning in January 1943, but with more heed paid to leadership and work performance at the district and village levels and mergers of higher bodies. Regarding the border region government and the administrative office immediately below it, the personnel reductions in the second and third stages amounted to 66 and 57 per cent respectively. On the other hand, district level personnel saw an increase by 42 per cent in these stages. The cuts primarily hit personnel doing ‘miscellaneous jobs’. At the conclusion of the third stage their percentage relative to cadres were 50 (administrative office), 40 (county) and 39 (district). A similar process was identified in JinChaJi, where the dominant concerns were personnel reductions in the first two stages and reorganization and leadership issues only in the last one.\textsuperscript{35}
This summary points to a spasmodic policy implementation in which quantitative pursuits by far outweighed the incomparatively more complex qualitative issues of governing. Certainly large efficiency gains were recorded. In one case, one person was said to accomplish what previously took 3–5 persons; in another, 16 persons reportedly assumed the daily duties of 46 persons in 10 village councils. Relatedly, much red tape was eliminated: within a year from March 1942, the proclamations issued by the border region government’s committees of JinJiLuYu had dropped by 68 per cent. While the result was an extremely important economic saving, these figures were essentially quantitative indicators of organizational rationalization. As in the military field, party sources’ description of the haphazard ways of instituting the cuts – rough treatment of discharged personnel, and particularistic resistances to the policy (‘departmentalism’ or ‘selfishness’ in party parlance) – suggest that the retrenchment was so burdened with emergencies that little room was left for time-consuming endeavours.

### BROADENED POLITICS

#### Coalition links

The CCP introduced a novel governmental device bearing heavily on the resistance movement generally, the elective three-thirds system. This was to represent three sections in Chinese society, each making up one-third of the seats: CCP members, ‘progressives’ and ‘middle-of-the-roaders’. The system contributed critically to the rural united front, both by positively legitimizing the participation of the upper strata in it and by restructuring their organizational resources.

At the same time, the dimension of the system extended beyond this front. Being applied from the village up to the border region level, it is clear that the overall objective of the system was to gain the cooperation of a still wider range of parties, groups and individuals. They had particular skills and political influence and could furnish urgently needed resources to building and running the administration at various echelons.

The three-thirds system at the local level, which is the focus of this analysis, was thus an integral part of the overall rural united front dynamics. The system, Peng Zhen declared, implied ‘smashing’ the landlord (rich peasant, merchant) dictatorship. While this subordination aspect led to ‘very fierce’ struggles to achieve ‘the basic masses’ supremacy’ within the government, the specific absorption processes, he cautioned, were to be
Government Openings

‘gradual and peaceful’, not an ‘ instantaneous, complete overthrow’. In a similar vein, Peng Dehuai spoke of the system ‘breaking the age-old rule of the landlord class in the villages’ (elite subordination) and of realizing ‘joint efforts and struggles’ of all classes (elite utilization). In brief, the elite was offered a guaranteed place in the deliberative bodies where they could argue their case freely and influence certain issues, on condition that these strata confined themselves to the minor and largely formal powers which their seats carried.

The two counter-currents to the party’s rural united front policy (identified in Chapter 3) – i.e. cadre radicalism and elite subversion – figure prominently in documents on the three-thirds system. Examples from JiLuYu said that ‘some government work personnel do not give consideration to all classes’ (spring, 1941); the absolute majority of the village and district governments are still in the hands of landlords and hoodlums’ (October, 1942). According to the area party committee of JinJiYu in August 1941, the “left” control concept was practised to the extent that ‘in various places ... generally the absolute majority of the village heads are party members, while their number...on the village government committees is very small’. On the other hand, most villages in the Wuan and She counties were ruled by rich peasants and landlords. A simultaneously dated report by the same party organ for Suiyuan–Chahar declared that some governments had absorbed very few persons with a progressive or ‘friendly party’ (i.e. GMD) background due to some comrades’ ‘distrust of non-party personages’. Many people thus came to regard the three-thirds system as the ‘Eighth Route Army government’. Often governments were under the sway of landlords and rich peasants, directly or through hired hoodlums. In these changeable conditions, Peng Tao, in a 1943 report on the mass movement in Taihang, realistically concluded that the basic function of the three-thirds system to institutionalize the class struggle mechanisms of the rural united front belonged to a future developmental stage.

Nonetheless, some party sources also depict the three-thirds system as drastically attenuating elite antagonism to the CCP. The introduction of the system, in conjunction with regulations guaranteeing the politico-economic rights of all persons supporting the resistance, was thus claimed to have induced the return of those landlords who had earlier fled the base areas. According to one account, the system gradually changed their attitude and motivated their high voting percentages in the 1940 central Hebei elections.
That the communists were to restrict themselves to a distinct minority share was easily understood and could no doubt be expected to allay elite fears of abrupt social changes. However, evidence presented in Chapter 3 suggests its response to party overtures was mostly highly contingent, particularly where the party branch was hard pressed by the elite, from within as well as from without (see Chapter 4). Hence the caution to ‘gradually’ implement the three-thirds system at the village level, a precondition being that the ‘democratic movement has gained depth’.

Peng Dehuai even thought that the system was ‘only feasible in areas where the communist party, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army occupy supremacy’.

Given the shifting nature of CCP influence, this concern with the essential functioning of the system led to a stress on flexibility in filling the three quotas. These were only to be understood as ‘a rough proportion which every locality must apply according to its specific conditions’.

Thus admonishing against mechanical implementation, one JiLuYu document underscored that ‘the proper coordination of quantity and quality should be sought according to concrete circumstances, thereby safeguarding the party’s supremacy’.

Or as the party’s Shandong sub-bureau stated, one should ‘not only pay attention to the allocation in the three-thirds system, but also to the party’s leading position’.

Peng Zhen pertinently characterized the system as ‘crude and rough’ and hardly realizable in equal, direct and democratic elections.

CCP members’ share of seats did indeed vary. At times their proportion went beyond the stipulated limit. In the 1940 elections to 13 county assemblies in JinChaji, party members were about half of the 656 delegates. The party’s presence among the 4,231 district assembly delegates in 12 JinChaji counties in 1940 amounted to slightly less, with fluctuations ranging from 12.7 percent in Mancheng county to 90 per cent in Fuping county.

In some cases the party’s quota was not filled, like in many village assemblies in northwestern Shanxi, while in the county assemblies of the same region the party could point to successes in keeping with the one-third rule.

Massive statistics from August and December 1941 on 26 Taihang counties showed all three tendencies at work in the village, district and county organs. Again, the data strikingly reveals the CCP’s uneven presence, as well as the sharply varying relative shares of the other two social categories. Arguably, local dissimilarities made their quota fulfilment even harder to achieve.
## Government Openings

Table 6.1 Class composition of elected village government (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Landlords</th>
<th>Rich peasants</th>
<th>Middle peasants</th>
<th>Poor peasants</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Central Hebei (1940)</td>
<td>Assembly delegates</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village heads, secretaries</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committee chairpers.</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fuping (1940)</td>
<td>Assembly delegates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shanxi (1940)</td>
<td>Assembly delegates</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Northwest Shanxi (1941)</td>
<td>Committee chairpers.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38 + farm-hands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village heads</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taihang (1942)</td>
<td>Village cadres</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>28.1+ farmhands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Taihang (1942)</td>
<td>Assembly delegates and committee members</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Central Shandong</td>
<td>Village cadres</td>
<td>0.8, 1.2</td>
<td>6.2, 1.5, 11.3</td>
<td>36, 35, 37</td>
<td>56.4, 51.5, 46.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


CCP over-representation was liable to reflect the cadre counter-current to the three-thirds system, a tendency anchored in the concept of a straight, uncomplicated party dominance. A 1941 JiLuYu report summed up its chief manifestations. Due to cadres’ ‘narrow sectarian’ attitudes, ‘many gentry and distinguished personages have been squeezed out’. Cadres violated party principles which stipulated that their role was confined to checking the government’s broad policy orientation. This inability to join and work with
non-party people, deeply rooted as it was in the CCP, ‘dealt a most serious blow to our united front policy’.56

Reporting to the party’s North China bureau in October 1940, Yang Shangkun furnished additional evidence of the kind. Cadres took over and mechanically applied to the government ‘the slogan of “cleansing the class alien elements”, used in adjusting the party’ composition. Promotion discriminated in favour of the poor so that the main posts in the county government, including its head, were ‘filled with illiterate peasants’. Cadre highhandedness could alienate people in general. To illustrate the consequences, Yang referred to the election of a village head in southern Hebei. While the candidate put forward by the village’s seven party members only received their support, the other 100 villagers voted, by the show of hands, for their own candidate. The cleavage was graphically demonstrated by the party members lining up to the left of the candidates and the other villagers to the right side of them.57

To appreciate the societal impact of the system more concretely it is necessary to go beyond the political labels ‘communists’, ‘progressives’, and ‘middle-of-the-roaders’, and their interactions, and examine the specific sociological categories that came to compose the local governments (see Tables 6.1 [p. 229] and 6.2).

Table 6.2 Class composition of elected county government (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Landlords</th>
<th>Rich peasants</th>
<th>Middle peasants</th>
<th>Poor peasants</th>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Merchants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Central Hebei (1940) Assembly delegates</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assembly heads, secretaries</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>61.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>County magistrates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fuping (1940) Assembly delegates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Shanxi (1940) Assembly delegates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


At the district level, the 1940 survey in central Hebei yielded the following class composition of assembly delegates (per cent): middle peasants – 47,
poor peasants – 38.4, rich peasants – 7.1, workers – 6.2, merchants – 0.7, landlords – 0.6. The vast majority of the district heads were middle peasants (58.89 per cent) and poor peasants (35.29 per cent). In northwestern Shanxi, the middle peasants made up 36.6 per cent and the poor peasants 27.4 per cent of 1,282 delegates. The combined landlord/rich peasant share was 19.9 per cent. The three first investigations in Table 6.1 also include the county level; see Table 6.2. A 1942 survey of 1,084 government cadres in Taihang yielded a broadly similar picture (per cent): middle peasants – 41.2, rich peasants – 19.5, poor peasants – 16.2, landlords – 6.3, workers – 0.7.

The statistics show that roughly 80–90 per cent of the villages’ representative institutions were composed of poor and middle peasants, with the former somewhat more numerous as village heads. At the district and county echelons the proportions of poor peasants declined markedly, but the general trend of poor and middle peasant predominance remained. Peng Zhen gave two reasons for the lesser poor peasant presence in the county organs. It reflected the party’s efforts to adhere to the standards of the three-thirds system on the one hand, and on the other, their lower educational standard put them at a disadvantage in getting elected to and qualifying for posts at this level. In addition, the village administration was said to be closer to their concerns.

How did the three-thirds system fit with the above statistics? While ambiguity of the social class epithets attached to ‘progressives’ (i.e. ‘petty bourgeoisie’) and ‘middle-of-the-roaders’ (i.e. ‘enlightened gentry’, ‘middle bourgeoisie’) precludes a categorical answer, it is reasonable to conclude that the poorer sections of the peasantry were notably over-represented, especially in the village bodies. At the same time, a fair number of government representatives were landlords and rich peasants. In short, the shifting composition of the local governments conformed more to the spirit than to the letter of the three-thirds system. That the poor peasants were more numerous in the village bodies than in higher ones made sense: in the context of the social restructuring, the basic level clearly carried greater weight. Politically absorbing the elite primarily at the county level, and giving them relatively more leeway there, while narrowing their participation in the village administration, might well have been deliberate party policy. Given the greater need for their skills and knowledge in the county organs this also had a rational basis from the party’s standpoint.

Another novel feature of the government administration was its youthfulness. Consider statistics from central Hebei (see Table 6.3 over-leaf).
Table 6.3 The age distribution of village, district and county government personnel in central Hebei (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Assembly delegates</th>
<th>Village heads, secretaries</th>
<th>Committee chairpersons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Assembly delegates</th>
<th>Committee chairpersons, secretaries</th>
<th>District heads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>47.61</td>
<td>21.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>46.28</td>
<td>76.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Assembly delegates</th>
<th>Assembly heads, secretaries</th>
<th>County magistrates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-aged</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Pu, QZ, p. 610, includes seven counties.

The youth of the county magistrates is striking. Other sources confirm the generational shift at this echelon. Of the county magistrates interviewed by George Taylor early in the war few were as much as 30 years of age. A document seized by the Japanese in Fuping county shows that among the listed 33 county assembly delegates, 19 were under the age of 31, seven were from 31 to 40 and the remaining seven were between 40 and 60. Regarding the district organs, data from Lingshou county in western Hebei says that 20 per cent of the 339 assembly delegates were between 18 and 23 years of age and 24 per cent were above 45.

In the village government, it was not rare for the village head to be under 31 years of age. This applied to 12 out of 18 in Xing county, northwestern Shanxi, with five between 20 and 25. In Guancheng county of western Shandong, 11 of 63 village heads were below 31, 13 were in the age group 31–40 and the remaining 39 were above 41. Perhaps the most noticeable case was a village government in Dai county, Shanxi, where 80 per cent of the personnel in leading bodies were around 20 years old. Travelling in northwestern Shanxi in 1944, three Western journalists were ‘surprised by the large number of young people of college or middle school student class who were actively working with the army or in local governments’.66
A third characteristic of the wartime local governments was the women’s involvement, by running as election candidates and assuming posts in the administration. This lowered the traditional social barriers isolating them at home. As one peasant woman described that situation:

In the old days the men used to talk about village affairs on the street, but we never dared to take part. And when someone came to the door and called out, ‘Is anyone at home?’ we women ourselves would answer, ‘No there is nobody at home.’ Women didn’t count as human beings.67

The mere participation in the election and government activities was a new experience for many women and certainly raised their confidence and understanding of society. Party sources provide abundant figures on women getting elected to governmental organs. According to a central Hebei survey of seven counties, the share of elected women amounted to (per cent): on the village level, 21.3 (assembly delegates), 7.1 (village heads, secretaries) and 7.2 (committee heads); on the district echelon, 12.8 (assembly delegates), 15.65 (chairpersons, secretaries) and 5.88 (district heads); in the county organs, 15.9 (assembly delegates) and 14.3 per cent (assembly heads, secretaries).68 Additional statistics on women’s government representation in several counties of western and central Hebei also indicate their advance into politics:69

- Tangxian: 447 village representatives compared to 939 men.
- Dingxian: 30 out of 269 village heads.
- Pingshan: 344 out of 5,337 village representatives
- Wanxian: village heads and deputies in 23 villages.
- Laiyuan: 186 village representatives.
- Lingshou: 27 out of 339 district representatives.

Although the data does not indicate the social background of the elected women, their large number suggests that the emancipatory function of government politics was quite significant in terms of both gender and class.

Theoretically, the three-thirds system could be viewed as a convenient tool for the CCP to simply impose its will on society: a one-third minority vastly superior to a two-thirds majority in regard to administrative, repressive, financial and policy-making resources was likely to prevail, at least in the long run. But as demonstrated earlier, especially in Chapters
2 and 4, these potential advantages were markedly circumscribed by the qualitative limitations of the CCP’s manpower resources. At the same time, the resulting openness of the system was also due to conscious party strivings, that is, its objective to forge a cooperative relationship with at least a sizeable part of the local elite. Peng Dehuai was therefore on fairly safe ground in arguing that the system was not merely a temporary propaganda device.\textsuperscript{70} Partial validity may also be accorded Lin Feng’s criticism of people both inside and outside the party who regarded the system as a tactical and deceptive manoeuvre and a wholly negative choice forced on the CCP by the wartime circumstances.\textsuperscript{71}

Whatever their relative weight, the system did make the CCP more responsive to demands and needs of various quarters in society than at any other time in its history. In different ways and degrees, the system offered a place to all those who could provide useful services to the base areas. Definite conditions were certainly attached – i.e. approval of ‘democracy’ and non-opposition to the CCP\textsuperscript{72} – but generally these did not prove suffocating. There was considerable justification for Peng Dehuai’s claim that the system was a ‘great political advance’ upon the character of GMD rule.\textsuperscript{73} For the people living at the time this was the relevant contrast. A 1944 GMD intelligence report referring to the system in Central China highlighted this basic fact, although in rather too dramatic a language:

\begin{quote}
Gentry who in the past had been dissatisfied … filled the skies with praise, feeling that the [CCP] government wasn’t so bad after all, that it could recognize its own mistakes and ask for criticism. This was stranger than anything in all Chinese history... The [GMD] Central Government has been away from them too long.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

While flexible application of the CCP’s stipulated share of seats was stressed, the party also insisted on keeping the one-third limit as far as possible. Withdrawal of party members in excess of it was reported, as were stern reminders to local party committees to make greater efforts in this respect.\textsuperscript{75} In conclusion, the three-thirds system had a very substantive role to play both in absorbing the elite and in infusing local governments with a novel social content that, however tentatively, opened up vast transformative possibilities.

\textbf{Mass scope}

A still broader, more spontaneous and direct channel for popular involvement in village affairs were the mass organizations. Apart from the armed
bodies (the militia and its sub-organizations) treated in Chapter 5, the main ones were the peasant, worker, women’s and youth associations.

These originated in the provisional organs which sprang up in the early war years and then had a highly variable record. A 1939 JinJiYu report on the mass movement explained: in some places the work proceeded from setting up a peasant association which became the nucleus for promoting tasks in other fields; this association could be dominated either by the gentry or by the poorer peasants; in parts of southern Shanxi the leading role was played by the workers’ association; in Xinyuan county it was the women’s and youth associations which were in the forefront.

In a general village perspective, however, the peasant associations stood out, warranting primary focus on this type. Often they were instrumental in founding other associations. If even happened that the village party branch originated from the membership of the peasant associations or from training classes run by them. Maybe the clearest sign of these associations’ actual or potential impact was the opposition that they aroused from the village’s upper strata. In the village of Ten Mile Inn, for example, the landlords and rich peasants, apprehensive of the influence of the peasant association, ‘began to launch a campaign to terrorize the [association] members into inactivity’. One landlord threatened that if the GMD returned, ‘membership in the peasant [association] would be punishable by death’ and ‘he and his fellow landlords held an elaborate ceremony in the temple – calling on the gods to bring about the return of the [GMD]’.

The greater weight of the peasant associations was reflected in membership figures. The only fairly extensive ones are from 1942 (see Table 6.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass organization</th>
<th>JinChaji</th>
<th>JinJiLuYu</th>
<th>JinSui</th>
<th>Shandong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peasants’</td>
<td>875,761</td>
<td>1,970,001</td>
<td>215,000</td>
<td>1,070,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers’</td>
<td>234,682</td>
<td>123,625</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>280,954</td>
<td>273,960</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s</td>
<td>710,535</td>
<td>834,673</td>
<td>87,000</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As with other organizations, however, membership statistics were heavily devalued by the qualitative dimension. Especially in the early war years many peasant associations were largely a paper product. Problems of
malfunction tended to linger on; a 1941 JinJiYu report, for example, berated their organizational weakness and 'very small real membership'.

Cadres’ often criticized highhandedness in setting up mass organizations was another symptom of qualitative underdevelopment. Yang Shangkun acknowledged that ‘using force and issuing commands are still rather serious phenomena in the mass movement; generally mass organizations are established in a top-down fashion’. But such practices must be measured against the extremely high ideals and demands that emanated from higher echelons. Liu Shaoqi, while discussing the mass movement in Shanxi, explained both their nature and accompanying dilemmas:

[I]n order to organize them, [we] should make them organize themselves automatically, make the masses feel the necessity of organizing themselves. Without this point, you cannot organize no matter what. On the other hand, when the masses feel the necessity of organizing and are organizing, no matter how hard you [try to] stop [them], even beating [and] cursing them, they will still organize.

There were of course qualitative advances; Japanese intelligence pointed out how ‘persuasion and concrete educational work’ in central Hebei had proved effective in expanding the peasant association, but the more likely way of rooting the association in the villages was its bringing the peasants tangible benefits. In Ten Mile Inn a famine sweeping the area provided an opportunity. The establishment of the association ‘as the village’s most powerful mass organization’ was due to its success in forestalling the landlords and rich peasants from ‘hoarding, speculation and profiteering’. Their hoarded grain was marketed ‘at a reasonable price’, inducing ‘the entire mass of the poor and middle peasants’ to join the association. Now much stronger, it could take direct action about the concealed grain instead of merely using persuasion. Informed by the farmhands as to who had hidden the grain and of its location, the association launched a campaign to uncover the precious foodstuffs. Called ‘digging out the landlords’ hidden grain’, the campaign meant seizing the hoards of those who refused to sell their grain. The booty was distributed free to those in need. At times a grain fire was lit on the hoarders’ courtyard and large cauldrons full of millet were cooked on the spot and distributed to the hungry.
On the other instances, peasant associations mobilizing villagers against landlord and gentry manipulation of the local government reportedly turned the peasants’ mental dependence on these strata into pinning their hopes on the association. Its subsequent rapid growth was accompanied by peasant radicalism, with calls for ‘all powers’ to the association.86

The mass organizations’ predominantly poor and middle peasant membership roughly reflected social structures. Yet party policy intervened to modify membership composition to accord with the mass organization’s specific character. Thus in a village of Hua county, Hebei, the class orientation of the peasant association was apparent from the absence of landlords and rich peasants among its 92 members, of whom 74 were poor peasants and 14 were middle peasants. In contrast, organizations with a broader class objective had a notable presence of the upper strata. Thus, the women’s association included 10 landlord and 30 rich peasant members out of a total of 137. In the youth association these class categories made up somewhat more than one-fourth of the membership. A more direct indication of progress in united front work is the participation of two landlords and two rich peasants in the 18-person-strong militia, an organization which carried heavy military and political duties in the locality (see Chapter 5). This impression is reinforced by the relatively large number of these strata in cooperatives, which were explicitly geared to a cross-class alliance to develop the economy (see Chapter 11).87

Whereas the women’s, workers’ and youth associations had fairly clearly demarcated concerns, the peasant associations were a different matter. Instructions on their work content, issued by the JinJiYu area party committee in January 1941, brought home the vital point. These stated that since the associations ‘are bound up with the land problem and [thereby] effect changes in the social foundation’, virtually all activities related to base area creation and resistance concerned the members. Consequently, ‘it is critically important that the scope of the peasant associations’ work is determined’.88

Under the circumstances, the actuality of the peasant associations’ wide-ranging activities clashed with the desirability of their enclosure. In fact, the peasant associations’ very structure pointed to almost all-inclusive responsibilities. Below the executive committee, there were departments for general affairs, propaganda and education, improving living conditions, armed mobilization, organization, etc. At the village level, the associations were further divided into small groups to mobilize all categories of the
population for various economic, political and military tasks. Hence the action programme of a peasant association in Heshun county, Shanxi, included defending the locality, implementing tax policy, assisting the war effort in various ways, expelling ‘bad officials, gentry, rascals’, carrying out rent and interest reduction and cooperating in giving preferential treatment to soldiers’ families.

Although the peasant associations in principle were chiefly geared to improving their members’ material conditions, direct resistance commitments could be exacting, especially during the first half of the war when the militia organization was still very weakly developed. Liu Shaoqi claimed that the associations contributed ‘to organize self-defence troops, guerrilla teams, to assist the troops in fighting, [and] cooking, to transport, to patrol, to sound alarms, to rescue wounded soldiers, to serve as scouts, to destroy roads, etc.’ Many of those who were enrolled in the regular army and the guerrillas once belonged to the peasant association. One report in 1939 identified as many as half of the 20,000 soldiers who had been recruited over a 17-month period as members of it. Occasionally the associations were credited with striking at bandits to maintain order in the locality and with removing ‘obstructionist’ forces in the administration.

Wartime conditions thus produced multiple policy linkages that precluded a neat organizational division of labour. This easily generated inter-institutional tensions. The ambiguous relationship of the peasant associations to the government administration was sometimes given a discordant dimension by the persistence, although gradual attenuation, of their initial governmental character. Weakly implanted local governments were then a basic reason, leading to their very extensive replacement by the peasant associations.

The relationship of many peasant associations to the party was likewise problematic, which complicated its objective to use the former, and other mass organizations, as a transmission belt between it (plus the government) and the people. According to this belt function, mass organizations were to be accorded a degree of autonomy suitably limited so as not to conflict with basic party policy, but broad enough to enable their tapping popular energies vital to sustaining party endeavours. However, social dynamics introduced a range of uncertainties and local specificities. Consequently, from the viewpoint of party principles, the pendulum sometimes swung too far in the direction of curbing the autonomy of the mass organizations, while in other instances they were permitted an excessive degree of
latitude. In both cases their usefulness to the party was impaired, either by emasculating them or losing control over them. An investigation of a campaign to check the results of the rent and interest reduction work in Pingshun county, Taihang, revealed both tendencies at work.

Beginning with the ‘restrictive’ problem, Wang Zongqi, who reported on the investigation to district level cadres, admitted: ‘We have not yet determined the mass organizations’ appropriate [degree of] independence ... and the correct relationship between the party, the government, the army and the mass organizations.’ Regarded as merely ‘auxiliary organizations of the party and the government’, their independence was denied both ‘conceptually’ and ‘in actual fact’. At joint meetings of government and mass organization cadres, the former in effect dictated the main work content and the allocation of tasks. In implementing economic policies, government cadres severely curtailed the room for mass organization initiative and took an overbearing attitude to peasants and landlords alike. In army recruitment campaigns, the mass organizations were ordered about.

Their relationship to the party was similar. It kept violating its repeatedly stated principle that the masses themselves put their organizations in order. Supposedly autonomous mass struggles were taken over by the party. Thus the district party committee brushed aside the peasant association and seized direct charge of the campaign to carry out the party centre’s land policy. The party also intervened in the running of the mass organizations. Their slightening was evident in the party’s grading of cadres. Those doing party work were assigned the top rank, with government and mass organization cadres classified second and third respectively. The outcome was the unfavourable reputation and dampened popular activism of the mass organizations. Disbelieving their own strength, the peasants looked to the government to reduce rents and interests on their behalf.

On the other hand, Wang noted, ‘in some places the mass organizations [in effect the peasant associations] also substituted themselves for the government’ by arresting people, imposing fines, recruiting the militia, etc. These occurrences were particularly frequent during late 1939 and early 1940. Having subsided thereafter, this peasant radicalism resurfaced in the 1944 mass struggles to reduce rent and interest. The associated politicization of the peasant associations even developed to the point of their assuming tasks reserved for the party, like issuing declarations. 95
The wartime running of local politics in the base areas therefore embodied a dual sociological widening, of the CCP’s previous elite-exclusive orientation and of this field’s customary elite-restrictive scope. In other words, the CCP came round to admitting the local elite a certain place and role in the government, while involving broad popular strata in the processes of determining and executing village tasks.

ELUSIVE JUSTICE

Legal dimensions
The CCP defined the role of law essentially in rural united front terms: law was to ‘thoroughly serve the people’, while ‘protecting the interests of every class’ and ‘guaranteeing [their] human, political, financial and property rights’ conditional upon ‘approval of resistance and democracy’, in effect implying the erosion of elite rule.96

Judicial work, like other undertakings, thus entailed joining the two-front struggle of mobilizing the poorer villagers’ collective strength and of safeguarding the elite’s basic living conditions. Beginning with the former aspect, a lengthy Taihang report often cited in the present context was at pains to impress upon cadres the imperative of relying on popular involvement in implementing laws. To illustrate the point, a negative example was cited. When party cadres arrived on the spot, people were waging a struggle to ‘settle accounts’ with a ‘feudal ruler’. The cadres then took over the case and required him to pay compensation in grain within three months. Villagers and cadres alike were confident that the matter had been settled. However, since the cadres had ‘run the show entirely’ the people had not been genuinely activated. Not subjected to their pressure, the ‘feudal ruler’ could well afford to procrastinate; only two years later did it transpire that the agreed amount had not been returned.97

Criticizing those who believed that policy execution was a government concern not requiring active popular participation, the same report emphatically declared that ‘smashing the feudal order’ and building up a democratic system could not be confined to a legal procedure: ‘A government judicial department alone cannot solve this problem.’ Look at the GMD’s failure to realize its law to reduce rents by 37.5 per cent and the CCP’s adopting and putting it into practice, the report exclaimed. Its conclusion was that only when people became politically conscious and ‘really struggled against the old forces’ was it possible to adequately implement laws.98
Experience from tenancy, debt and wage struggles in Taiyue, Bo Yibo reported in late 1942, taught that first educating the people about laws and then relating their content to the peasants’ concrete problems was the ‘best method’ for arousing popular activism to carry out laws. Bo rather optimistically assumed that the peasants then realized that justice was on their side and would use the law as ‘a weapon in the anti-landlord struggles’. But he was also forced to note the big dilemma of these methods. Having stimulated the peasants’ class hatred, he explained, they tended to make ‘excessive’ demands on landlords and resort to retaliatory acts, even ‘liquidating’ them.99

These mobilizational dangers in particular thus necessitated the other struggle facet of protecting the party-defined interests and rights of the elite strata. A prime example in the field of legal proceedings was the use of what was termed ‘mediation’ in civil cases, the formula found most appropriate ‘for improving the relationship between classes’. Mediation was conducted either through a court of law or separately; court mediation cases were usually relatively simple and easily judged, whereas private mediation was preferred in more complex cases where the dispute was of some years’ standing. The flexibility inherent in mediation fitted the rural united front logic. Related measures offered the elite a measure of security, while simultaneously serving the restructuring by being heavily biased in favour of the poorer strata.

In court mediation, circumstances concerning the case were brought to light by consulting the people and ascertaining their opinions. This mobilizational function was even more important in out-of-court cases. There were two kinds of mass-based (qunzhongxing) mediation committees. One had a fixed membership of village cadres, ‘fair-minded personages’, labour heroes and ‘mass activists’. The other had the village civil law chairman in charge and the composition of the additional members depended on the nature of the dispute. In a tenancy case, for example, peasant association cadres would mediate. Neither committee was wholly advantageous. Any activist could become a member of the former, but with a fixed personnel the scope might be too narrow. Besides, this type of committee was easily manipulated by the elite where reform and popular mobilization had failed to make appreciable headway. The latter committee was more all-inclusive, yet much depended on the chairman.100

The mass mobilization and mediation processes epitomize the highly informal character of judicial work. One background explanation was given
above: the social dynamics with which the law was bound up. Another basic factor were the enormous difficulties of instituting an elaborate law system under the circumstances. It is symptomatic that significant steps in creating a judicial system in JinJiLuYu were not taken until 1941 – when a higher court was set up – and that the unification of laws and ordinances required another two years. The major predicament was the insufficiency and inexperience of legal personnel in CCP service, leading to a heavy initial reliance on old judicial systems and methods of prison management.

The administration of justice was therefore beset with troubles. A JiLuYu document of late 1944 conceded: 'We have accumulated many problems and have basically still not escaped from the trap of the old judicature.' Cadres' work in this field was severely criticized on several accounts: inadequate investigation; application of old laws to new phenomena; slow dealing with cases; impatience in persuading; failure to gather concrete evidence before drawing conclusions; violation of human rights by random beating, fining and detaining, etc. Another JiLuYu report drew attention to the persistence of arbitrary arrests, killings and torture. Informality of justice reached a height in 'political' or 'traitorous' crimes, mostly denoting collaboration with the Japanese but sometimes also spy activities for the GMD. These were distinguished from 'poverty' or 'feudal' crimes, the latter typified especially by discrimination against females and corruption. In view of the delicate and varied nature of collaboration, with its shifting degree of involvement and responsibility, the necessity for flexible handling was arguably greatest for this crime category. By the same token, it also implied the greatest difficulties and dangers.

Table 6.5 Number of criminal cases in Taihang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1945</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>7,857</td>
<td>1,779</td>
<td>2,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opium-smoking</td>
<td>1,571</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>2,192</td>
<td>1,421</td>
<td>516</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Problems were compounded by the very frequency of these offences. In parts of JinChaji, collaboration made up almost 80 per cent of all legal cases early in the war. The earlier mentioned Taihang source showed that this
category greatly outnumbered other criminal cases also in the latter half of the war, in addition to recording significant fluctuations (see Table 6.5).

Among the 580 convicted criminals who were executed in JiLuYu during 1943, 332 were collaborators and 149 were bandits. Higher party organs reacted by criticizing lower authorities for failing to grasp the social causes of the crimes, pinpointing the definitional ambiguity surrounding the collaboration issue (see further below).106

Virtually no area was immune from it, creating a large element of uncertainty even where the CCP was supposedly in firm control. In a 1943 report to the JinJiLuYu border region assembly, Yang Xiufeng described concretely how ‘many’ Japanese-hired agents had infiltrated the army and the government to kill cadres, engineer defections, sow dissension, gather intelligence, steal documents, etc. On two occasions they even succeeded in organizing ‘revolts’.107 Other party documents from the same region in 1943–44 gave similar accounts, including the instigation of ‘mass revolts’ extending to the core of the base areas. The rich variety of means used by the agents caused ‘much damage and a hidden crisis’. Many ‘real spies’ were discovered.108

In the early war years, pressures of military duties and the lack of stipulations for a ‘new crime’ like collaboration meant that cases were settled in particularly speedy and arbitrary ways, often by army units.109 Gradually two bodies attached to the government administration took over the task of combating collaboration.

One was the relatively more formalized public security bureau. Although its operations were to be covert, it did not escape the general organizational feature of an ‘extremely complex social composition’, in one case even including ‘enemy policemen’. A sharply varying impact was another salient wartime trend pervading the bureau. On the one hand, in some Taihang districts the bureau was incapable of sustained activity even when expressly ordered by higher organs to investigate cadres’ reliability and the presence of enemy spies in the locality. On the other, administrative authorities in some areas criticized the bureau’s anti-collaboration ‘policy of slaughtering in the past’ and demanded a shift to educational efforts.110

The second, closely related, instrument was the ‘traitor elimination group’, which likewise bore the stamp of unevenness. Concentrated efforts to set up the two anti-collaboration bodies in six JiLuYu counties during June–August 1943 brought a certain organizational expansion, but popular reactions raised complications: some villagers refused to take part in the
security/anti-traitor work on the grounds it was too hard and ‘red’. Like many other war-related duties, this reluctance was probably also due to their interference with precisely needed time for agricultural labour. This lack of more precise criteria, together with the complex and emotional circumstances surrounding the collaborator issue, gave rise to a highly volatile policy implementation.

One tendency was for the chief collaborators to be executed while relatively lesser figures got off very lightly. Pointing to legal formalities, cadres neglected to arrest collaborators and investigate their activities. Cadre indifference to them and failure to alert the villagers led to the shooting at, killing and beating of resistance personnel in the Piancheng, She and Wuan counties. Given this changeable and risky environment, people were wary of reporting to the authorities on collaboration since the accusation might well be hurled back.

In the harder case, cadres ‘always thought [that] killing would solve the problem’, as one document expressed it. Described as ‘a most dangerous thing’, it reprimanded cadres for ‘not distinguishing between suppressing traitors and protecting the anti-Japanese people’, so that ‘we only stressed the suppression aspect and were very bad at safeguarding the people’s security’. In other words, there had been ‘random killing’ (luansha), to borrow a wording that crops up in so many other reports. Four examples, two from JiLuYu and two from JinJiYu, concretely illustrate this policy swing.

In three localities of JiLuYu ‘more than 200 enemy agents, traitor soldiers and deserters’ were killed or buried alive from July through September 1941. Only in one village, 19 of them were buried alive by the self-defence corps in one night. The public security forces were also mentioned in this context. The background to the massacres, which spread further afield, though on a lesser scale, seems to have been a surge of vengefulness following a major Japanese army operation in June in which the ‘traitor army’ took part. Prior to these acts a list of names of diehards to be killed in a number of counties was drawn up, with the government assuming responsibility. But in the chaotic situation following the June operation, when the resistance forces’ organization and policy perception was said to be in disarray,
the executions took on an ‘indiscriminate’ character that probably exceeded original intentions.\footnote{115}

\textbf{The second example} also contained a spontaneous element that local authorities were unwilling to check or played a certain part in. The incident centred on Feicheng county in western Shandong and arose in the course of the radical Red May Movement in 1940 (discussed in Chapter 3). Many of the persons killed (over 90) or denounced as traitors (83) were innocent. Whilst the decision to punish a collaborator to death belonged to the county organs, these lost control over events as the wave of arrests spread rapidly: with no fixed prison sites, the problem of detaining, feeding and shifting an ever larger number of people became acute, thereby providing the occasion for the mass killings. In at least one instance personal revenge was the motive, which later led to the perpetrator’s execution. The ambiguous meaning of terms like ‘spy’, ‘traitor’ and ‘quasi-traitor’ significantly influenced the massacres.\footnote{116}

\textbf{The picture painted by a 1940 JinJiYu source} was likewise one of the traitor elimination work unleashing almost unrestrained and aimless repression. In fact, ‘[r]ecently there have been repeated occurrences of indiscriminately arresting and killing people in various places’. Sometimes the cause stemmed from ‘narrow retaliation’, which explained why one ‘acted with utter disregard for human life and instituted terror’. The consequence was a widespread ‘uneasiness’ among the people and an ‘enormous damage to the consolidation of the base area’. The self-inflicted crisis situation brought forth a strongly worded upper-level denunciation of ‘unwarranted charges of “diehard elements” and indiscriminately striking at people’. The vital ‘toleration’ aspect of the traitor elimination work had simply been ignored. The party’s deep concern extended to the rural united front since ‘all facets of our work, policies and actions are paid attention to by outside persons’.\footnote{117}

\textbf{The theme of the second JinJiYu document} (1943) was the ‘crude and careless’ work of the public security cadres, their failure to ‘investigate circumstances and causes and to distinguish between different categories of targets’. By ‘only looking at what is happening before their eyes’, cadres were found guilty of many ‘mistaken’
killings. Naturally, the people grew ‘suspicious of the government’. A major background cause to the incidents appears to have been the atmosphere generated by Japanese army campaigns. These gave rise to ‘emergency measures’ which treated all cases of collaboration as punishable by death, irrespective of their differing character. In one instance a bureau secretary had five persons executed without even knowing their names and specific offences. Apprehension of higher organs’ disapproval of executions could also influence their rash enforcement, such as when an accused collaborator was first set free on the road and then shot dead on the charge of trying to escape. Similar recklessness occurred in struggles against puppet organizations. At first, those officially in charge were targeted for killings; only later, when getting to know who were actually pulling the strings behind the scenes, did those ultimately responsible meet with the same fate. In other situations cadre inattentiveness resulted in freeing ‘the main backstage elements’, while collaborators of lesser importance were killed.\(^{118}\)

Materials presented above demonstrate that collaboration-related problems were a general wartime feature that cannot be isolated to a certain period or region. It is also clear that the hard version could involve largely spontaneous popular actions or be more organized in character, an ambiguity that again bespeaks the party centre’s limited control capacities. At the same time, basic to the described events was of course the hardship brought by the Japanese military campaigns and its sharpening of domestic socio-economic conflicts; extreme affliction easily provoked extreme reactions, both in their simplicity and consequences.

**Political facets**

Judicial work was integrally linked to a broader CCP pursuit of governmental justice, that is, making the traditionally elite-dominated local administration more responsive to popular needs and demands. Many wartime Chinese sources, and not only those bearing a CCP imprint, do indeed speak of newly emerging county, district and village heads who no longer shut themselves up in their offices but personally went to the people to listen to their views, mobilize them, mediate disputes, etc., while at the same time the people could report directly to them. Journalist Zhou Erfu, for example, was told on his travels in JinChaji about a county magistrate in central Hebei, Chen Wenru, who represented something quite new for a person in
his position. Chen was unlike ‘the former county magistrate who spent the whole day in the yamen [office] asking for grain and money, ate and dressed well, had several wives, and when going out majestic-looking did not ride a horse but in a vehicle’. In contrast, Chen with his 15 yuan was lowly paid. Eating the same food and dressing in the same way as the villagers, he was said to have refused to accept new clothes for the summer since it would increase the tax burden on the people.\textsuperscript{119}

The local governments certainly contributed to the societal changes set in motion. Yet also these organs were beset by incompatible trends impairing their work. Thus an editorial in \textit{Xinhua Ribao} (Taihang edition) in June 1940 first lauded progress in democratizing the government administration, but then declared that decrees by higher echelons had made little impact in the villages; the reformed taxation slipped back to its old practices, rent and interest reductions were nullified by landlord intrigues and preferential treatment for soldiers’ families met with indifference. It followed that ‘the emphasis on reforming the government administration... should be placed on the village level’. The conclusion of the editorial that higher organs were ahead in this respect highlighted a decisive feature: the far greater complexities and resistances at the village echelon.\textsuperscript{120}

Broadly speaking, the village governments’ malfunctioning persisted. A JinJiLuYu border region government report of September 1943 summed it up in three points. First, few villages were able to hold meetings, listen to work reports and discuss village affairs on schedule. Second, so confused was the work of the village’s representative committee and council that these were only capable of performing some routine functions, not those of active policy implementation. Third, only at the time of elections did the representatives gather, while in between they ‘forget they are representatives, not to speak of exercising their functions and powers’.\textsuperscript{121}

What specifically, then, hampered government performance? Leaving aside some basic environmental factors (discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 10), the focus below will be on the governments’ personnel.

One prime factor was the influence of the traditional elite, despite the large infusion of new blood into the local governments. Elite presence was of course actively promoted by the party’s rural united front policy. The problem was, however, that members of the elite were reluctant to conform to their designated subordinate role. In the words of a 1940 Shanxi report, ‘many lower level governments ... are still in the hands of scoundrels, who overtly agree but covertly oppose and resist implementation of progressive
laws’. Elite strata’s subversion was probably most effective and lasting when they, entirely openly and within legality, employed the formidable persuasive power of their occasionally mentioned cultural resource. As expressed by a 1943 JinChaji border region directive, ‘the assembly meetings are often dominated by gentry speeches’. The elite also influenced government politics from outside by various manipulatory means which swayed village heads in western Shandong and paralysed village governments in northwestern Shanxi.

On the other hand, deficient cadre and personnel qualities meant a ‘correct’ coincidence of class composition and organizational conduct was a major uncertainty. One account from northwestern Shanxi described how the work proceeded very tardily. True, there were practical difficulties, above all the widely scattered villages, but endless discussions caused unreasonable delays. Thus one village head replied only after a few months to a higher level that lacking material nothing could be done. In other cases there might not be a report at all. In fact, reporting from villages upward was not accurate and required further time-consuming investigations. Other reports found comrades guilty of corruption, waste and degeneration.

In summary, qualitative drawbacks were evinced in two ways especially. One concerned decision-making procedures. A lack of familiarity with these and a democratic way of life in general, the above-cited Xinhua Ribao article pointed out, marred the work of government cadres at the county and lower levels. The problem was much aggravated by war-induced tensions and exigencies, conditions singularly unconducive to the flourishing of democratic practices and liberties, as evidenced in their wartime curtailment in countries long accustomed to them. The cumulative educational function of elections to village heads was impaired as cadres ‘generally beat the gongs and summon the people, and having taken a vote by the show of hands, they believe that “democracy” has been realized within half a day.’ Reporting from northwestern Shanxi, Lin Feng passed a harsh judgement: ‘We keep saying our government is a newly democratic one [xin de minzhu], but in actual fact democracy is hardly visible. What there is of democracy is thin and pale’. A reluctance to give heed to the people’s views were noted in many other sources. Cadres’ inexperience in this field naturally affected intra-organizational life. According to a 1943 JinChaji border region directive,

many cadres have an erroneous understanding of the character, tasks and authority of the county [assembly] conferences ... cadre meetings turn into
talk sessions or endless quarrels. [The meetings are not fully prepared, and] the resolutions discussed and passed are often grandiose but impractical.\textsuperscript{130}

The other, partly related, manifestation similarly had deep roots: the new government leaders from the poorer strata taking over the methods of rule from their predecessors, a drama so often replayed in the history of revolutions. The poor peasants who in the course of social restructuring had risen to middle peasant status in the village of Ten Mile Inn is a revealing case. Assuming positions of power they became more interested in guarding their own and the other middle peasants’ interests than devoting themselves to the poorer strata as a whole. Like the rich peasants and the landlords, these new middle peasants ‘felt strongly about their property’. They also inherited the use of force in administering law from past village rulers. Even more telling of how traditional governing practices lived on was the new cadres continued resort to an old principle whereby office-holders were granted gifts or favours from the people. The landlords were not slow in seizing the opportunity to pay off the cadres in exchange for a more favourable treatment in regard to progressive taxation and debt payments.\textsuperscript{131}

The qualitative problem was compounded by the quantitative insufficiencies. The two aspects came together with particular severity in the case of the village head, a key position in the running of the administration at this level. The \textit{Xinhua Ribao} article summarized the former weaknesses. Since ‘selection has not been careful’ the newly installed village heads were of ‘the same stuff with a different label’, bringing little reformative impact. Besides, their lack of experience of government work easily exposed them to elite or ‘evil persons’ manipulation and cheating and machinations.\textsuperscript{132} The extended elite influence also applied to instances where it intentionally stepped aside to let poor and middle peasants serve as village head. A 1942 investigation of a village in Neihuang county, JiLuYu, revealed that landlords and rich peasants even paid the lower strata to take up this position, the so-called hiring system. The elite’s abdication of formal, but not real, village leadership was due to the hardship and dangers to safety that went with it in conditions of banditry and raids by the Japanese and puppet armies.\textsuperscript{133}

As earlier noted, the same circumstances and a heavy work load also discouraged the poorer peasants, including those newly elected, to become village heads, thus aggravating the supply problem. This disinclination could in places even apply to most party members and poor peasants. A high turnover also affected other government personnel, which thwarted or slowed endeavours to raise quality by means of training classes.\textsuperscript{134}
Organizational changes were one main impact on the allocation of power resources. The other involved measures regarding the redistribution of wealth. The two were of course interlinked, but differing conditions produced variations on the common theme of restructuring.

NOTES

6. ‘Taihangqu jingji gongzuou lishi chubu yanjiu’, April 1945, p. 3, NU.
8. On southern Hebei, for example, see ‘JiTai lianban zhuren Yang Xiufeng xiang JinJiLuYu lin canhui baogao gongzuou’, JR, 26.7.1941.
10. *Zhandi zong dongyuan*, p. 3.
12. Ibid., p. 189.
Government Openings


30. 'Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938', p. 41.

31. Li Gongbo, p. 92.


33. Peng Tao, 'Shiqi geyue', p. 258.

34. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 23.


36. 'Taihangqu sanci jianzheng zongjie'; Li Youjiu (ed.), Taihangqu shehui jingji diaocha (1944), p. 80; 'Sici jianzheng mianmao yixin'.

37. 'JiLuYu xingshu guanyu jianzheng de zhishixin', 30.7.1942, pp. 229–230, NU.

38. Peng Zhen baogao, pp. 44, 50, 53–54. At times Peng lists rich peasants and merchants as component parts of the dictatorship.


41. 'Beifangju dui JiLuYu qu dangwei junqu gongzuo', 20.10.1942, p. 178, NU.
43. ‘SuiCha qu dangwei guanyu SuiCha diqu xingzheng gongzuo de jueding’, 24.8.1941, NM, p. 228.
44. Peng Tao, ‘Qunzhong yundong de fazhan yu jieji guanxi de bianhua’, February 1943, pp. 1–2, NU.
45. For example, Fang Cao, QZ, 1.6.1945, p. 346.
47. ‘JiLuYu bianqu jun zheng weiyuanhui guanyu tongzhan, caijing, zhengquan, wuzhuang deng gongzuo wenti de jueding’, 12.1.1941, ZJ, vol. 1, p. 444.
49. SW II, p. 419.
50. ‘JiLuYu bianqu jun zheng weiyuanhui guanyu tongzhan, caijing, zhengquan, wuzhuang deng gongzuo wenti de jueding’, p. 444.
52. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 45.
53. Ibid., pp. 46, 48. For central Shandong see Luzhong xingzheng gongshu, Luzhong kangRi minzhu zhengquan jianshe qinian lai de jiben zongjie ji jinhou jiben renwu, (1945), p. 22.
58. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 41; Mu Xin, (1946/1984), p. 34.
60. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 44.
63. ‘Xing xian cunzhang ceyan’.
64. ‘JiLuYu bianqu huanjing xingshi ji cunzhenh jianshe xiankuang baogao’, p. 261.
68. Li Pu, QZ, p. 606; Peng Zhen baogao, pp. 40–42.
Government Openings

70. Peng Dehuai, ’Minzhu zhengquan yu sansanzhì’, p. 284. See also SW II, pp. 418–419.
71. Lin Feng, “‘Duiyu gonggu yu jianshe Jin xibei de shizheng gangling’ de shuoming”, October 1942, WX, p. 346.
77. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 35; ’Guan xian kangzhan chuqi de nongmin yundong’, JL, p. 450.
79. Crook, p. 54.
80. Zhandi zong dongyang, p. 46.
83. ’Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938’, p. 51. The square brackets are the translator’s.
84. Chūō mekkyō iinkai chōsabu (ed.), Kichūku seinanbu hōmen ni okeru Chûkyō no minshū kakutoku kōsaku no jitsujō chōsa hōkoku, (1940), p. 32.
85. Crook, p. 58.
86. ’Guan xian kangzhan chuqi de nongmin yundong’, pp. 452–453.
89. ’Kahoku ni okeru kyûkokutai soshiki’, Sōkyō Shishin, 1.2.1942, p. 34.
91. ’Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938’, p. 55. See also: Chen Kehan, Mofan kangRi genjudi, pp. 69–71; Kichūku seinanbu, p. 32.
97. Ibid., p. 17.
100. Taihangqu sifa gongzuo gaikuang, pp. 5, 10–12.
106. Jia Qian, p. 363. In one sub-district, 64 per cent of the executed people were categorized as hoodlum and local ruffian. It is unclear, however, whether they were included in the 580 people and to what extent they collaborated.
108. ‘Li tingzhang dafu chujian wenti zhixunan’, p. 21, NU; Li Xuefeng, ‘Zuo Quan sinian gongzuo jianjie ji jinhou gongzuo yijian’, 1943, DJ, pp. 309–310; ‘Guanyu gongan gongzuo de zhiishi’, November 1944, GB, p. 120.
Government Openings

118. ’Gongan renyuan shouze’, p. 177.
120. ’Chedi gaizao cun zhengquan’, 19.6.1940, ZH, pp. 94–95. The slower pace of change at the village level is also drawn attention to in other sources. For example, Xing Yu, ’Jinxi shijian de jingyan jiaoxun’, 1940, WX, p. 36.
126. For example, Lin Feng, ’Jin xibei zhengquan gongzuo de yijian’, 21.9.1940, WX, p. 223.
127. ’Chedi gaizao cun zhengquan’, p. 95.
131. Crook, pp. 76–78.
132. ’Chedi gaizao cun zhengquan’, p. 95.
134. ’Chedi gaizao cun zhengquan’, p. 95; ’Zhongyang dui Luxi he JiLuYu bianqu gongzuo de zhishi’, p. 665; Xing Yu, p. 37.
PART III
MULTIPLE REDISTRIBUTION
Chapter Seven

Shifting Levies

DIFFERENTIATED INCREASE

The overall level of taxation necessarily followed a long-term rise. Military setbacks as well as successes had an upward push-effect due either to compounding economic difficulties that resulted from shrinking base areas or to the need for greater financial resources in the wake of territorial and organisational enlargement. Data from the Beiyue area in JinChaji roughly corroborates this trend (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 The grain tax in Beiyue, JinChaji, 1938–45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Individual tax (jin of millet)</th>
<th>Tax's share of the registered yield (%)</th>
<th>Individual tax (jin of millet)</th>
<th>Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>41.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>46.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>65.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>14.98</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>13.62</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>97.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>10.07</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>84.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>8.90</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>78.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>124.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These figures also indicate countervailing factors at work from the mid-years of the war. In terms of party policy, these primarily included production campaigns (see Chapter 11) and the reduction of full-time personnel (Chapters 5 and 6). While generally unable to prevent climbing
taxes, these policies contributed significantly to their temporary or relative curtailment in places. In a part of Taihang, the tax percentage of an average person’s total income was 16.96 in 1942, 10.5 in 1943 and 12.75 in 1944.\textsuperscript{1} Notable fluctuations were also recorded in JinSui (see Table 7.2).

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Amount of grain tax collected (dan)} & \textbf{Tax share of income (%)} \\
\hline
1941 & 204,430 & 24.60 \\
1942 & 163,200 & 17.40 \\
1943 & 219,500 & 19.61 \\
1944 & 205,600 & 19.35 \\
1945 & 324,500 & 21.00 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{The grain tax in JinSui, 1941–45}
\end{table}


Some localities in Shandong even claimed to have reduced grain taxes by 10–20 per cent during 1942–44.\textsuperscript{2} As implied in the party’s basic principle of ‘those with more money pay more, those with less money pay less’, increased taxation did not have a uniform effect. While wartime taxes weighed heavily on most people, they fell disproportionally on the upper strata.

Many sources said that they were even forced to pay a crushing share of taxes. According to Japanese intelligence, these ‘amounted to plunder’ and ‘paved the way for the disintegration of the feudal forces in the villages’.\textsuperscript{3} Chinese sources contained similar assertions. One party report noted that severe taxation caused landlords to flee CCP areas in central Hebei; another declared that taxes were ‘one-sidedly’ extracted from the wealthy in central Shandong.\textsuperscript{4} A newspaper article on Shanxi commented that the tax policy is often not carried out reasonably since it levies excessive taxes on the rich peasants and has caused disputes. At the instructions of the army commander the cadres mediated. Those who had no understanding for the policy therefore accused the cadres of being ‘the protectors of the capitalist class’.\textsuperscript{5}

As will be observed, localized radical occurrences relating to taxation were indeed an important wartime feature, but these were outweighed by the combined effects of technical-practical, political and socio-economic difficulties of devising and implementing novel taxation schemes. Before examining the content and complex practice of the taxation in the following
two sections, let us broadly survey its class structural impact in the more strongly CCP-influenced areas.

That taxation measures after 1937 took a distinctly unfavourable turn for the upper strata is apparent from widely scattered figures. Not only do these starkly contrast to the landlords’ pre-war land tax of about 10 per cent; even the party’s stipulated ceiling of a 35–40 per cent income tax was frequently exceeded (Tables 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5)

Table 7.3 Tax share of income in Taihang, 1942–44 (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>47.40</td>
<td>45.00</td>
<td>39.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>27.70</td>
<td>20.20</td>
<td>19.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>11.47</td>
<td>11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: JinJiLuYu bianqu diaocha yanjiushi Taihangqu yijiusisi nian guomin jingji diaocha chubu yanjiu, 1944, pp. 44–45. See also p. 28

Table 7.4 Tax share of income (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beiyue, JinChaji 1943</th>
<th>Shandong 1943–45</th>
<th>JinJiLuYu 1943</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>33.50</td>
<td>35–50</td>
<td>25–40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>16.75</td>
<td>28–30</td>
<td>15–25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>5–18</td>
<td>8–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>6–8</td>
<td>3–8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Chengrui, Jingji Yanjiu, p. 112.

Table 7.5 Tax share of income in Taihang, 1941–42 (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>22.78</td>
<td>36.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>22.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>10.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Youjiu, ed., Taihangqu shehui jingji diaocha, 1944, p. 67

According to a JinChaji government directive in April 1945, the highest taxation percentage in Beiyue during 1944 was for landlords (52), rich
peasants (18), middle peasants (10) and poor peasants (4–5). In JinSui, as well, taxes climbed to above-ceiling levels for landlords in five villages (Table 7.6).

Table 7.6 Tax share of income in JinSui, 1940–45 (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
<th>1945</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>7.97</td>
<td>10.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Chengrui, Jingji Yanjiu, p. 112

A Taihang investigation furnished additional scattered data on the tax share: landlords and rich peasants together in two villages – 97 and 76 per cent respectively; three landlords in one village – 67 per cent; one landlord – four times his income. Rich households making up 11 per cent of the population in one village of Heshun county, Shanxi, were allotted a provision and fodder share of 80.7 per cent and a money share of 63.9 per cent. Eleven landlord households in a locality of Lingshou county paid 24.69 per cent of the total tax volume compared to 21.23 per cent for the 186 poor peasant households; the 44 rich peasant households paid 32.56 and the 87 middle peasant households 21.5 per cent. The distribution of taxes in a village of Hou county corresponded roughly with the pattern of land ownership. The percentages for the 17 rich peasant households were 52.6 (land) and 66.29 (taxes), for the 10 middle peasant households 22.2 and 20.2, for the 18 poor peasant households 20.2 and 8.46, and for the landlord households 5 and 5.23 respectively. Areas uninhabited by landlords tended to see a downward targeting of the tax imposition, as in a locality of central Hebei where rich and middle peasants paid 79.57 per cent of the taxes.

As emerges from above data, within the broad trend of transferring a large proportion of the taxes to a small minority of the better off there was room for notable variations. Yet it must be emphasized that redistributing taxes did not necessarily entail a substantial betterment for the poor. Overriding war imperatives raised huge obstacles. Liu Lantao explained when discussing the financial situation in JinChaji in early 1941: ‘First we must understand that during the war period the so-called reduction of the people’s burden can only be a relative matter. The war causes destruction
and needs large amounts for running, and the various expenditures have to be shouldered by the people.’ The war conditions were the decisive criterion for measuring the tax burden to be borne by the people, Liu maintained, adding that it should be compared to the occupied or GMD areas, not to peace-time.\textsuperscript{12}

Squeezing the upper strata and launching production campaigns were thus not sufficient to cover the burgeoning resistance expenditures. There were even instances of very severely taxing the poorer strata. A post-war CCP reminiscence on Taihang, for example, says that increased grain taxes in 1941 incurred peasant grievances of hardship and strongly contributed to their repugnance and flight to the enemy side in Licheng county. The party thereafter eased the taxes on them.\textsuperscript{13} An acknowledgement by the JinChaJi border region government in August of the same year that the people’s taxes were higher than before the war underscores, however imprecisely, just how serious a challenge these could pose to the resistance authorities. The populace was urged to endure ‘temporary difficulties, cut down on food and clothing, make big sacrifices and supply the front’.\textsuperscript{14} While this was at a time of intensified Japanese military campaigns against the base areas, heavy demands for the war effort were constant.

The CCP’s relative reversal of the pre-war class bias of taxation inaugurated a historical break. Apart from the mechanisms of tax extraction, this drama found tangible expression in two measures that immediately affected many, albeit a distinct minority of, peasants. One was the introduction of a tax exemption for the poorest. Almost up to the mid-years of the war, its extent was determined essentially by the exigencies of the situation in the locality. The inevitable result was extreme variations. A party investigation of western Hebei, published in \textit{JinChaJi Ribao} in February 1941, showed that while in parts of Fuping county only 16 per cent of the people paid taxes, in some localities of Pingshan county 94 per cent did; in the other 14 counties the corresponding percentages also ranged widely.\textsuperscript{15} In Shanxi, households absolved from tax obligations numbered 96 out of 100 in one village, 66 out of 183 in another.\textsuperscript{16}

A background factor to the occasionally very high exemption rates was the urgency to get hold of supplies for the expanding resistance bodies, giving rise to haste and haphazard tax collections from the rather few who possessed an easily identifiable surplus. By 1940–41, the same urgency moved the party to declare the rate’s sharp curtailment. The party argued
that to sustain the large-scale build-up which had by then taken place, the tax base had to be broadened; there were definite limits to what could be extracted from the upper strata. Since local variations in living conditions precluded a uniform exemption rate, the party opted for lowering it to an average of 20 per cent, with a 10 per cent minimum and a 30 per cent maximum.17

As sometimes happened, significant policy retreats collided with cadre and popular radicalism. Rong Zihe, who was responsible for financial matters in JinJiLuYu, later recalled the decision was not easily arrived at: ‘During discussions [on how to implement taxation], the most controversial issue was what proportion of the village population should pay taxes.’18 To make people in Taiyue understand that they had to shoulder the tax burden took no less than two years, a document on financial work in the area pointed out.19

Yet war pressures for spreading the tax obligations proved too strong to be contained. From a four-village investigation in JinJiYu it may even be inferred that these were at work in some localities before the party’s official decision to restrict the exemption rate. In the years 1939–40, the percentage of households paying taxes in these villages increased from 28 to 40 (70 households), from 36 to 53 (53), from 6.7 to 33 (30) and from 17 to 30 (300).20 This trend broadened after 1940. Two central Hebei surveys covering 25 and 22 counties during 1940–42 showed that 80.9 per cent of the population and 81.49 per cent of the households respectively paid taxes.21 Fairly similar rates are available from several other areas during 1940–42 and towards the end of the war still higher percentages were reported.22

The reduced exemption rate after 1940 did not mean the mass of peasants were economically better off in the initial war years. The reverse was true. The impact of social reform was then still very patchy, and although many peasants benefited from the exemption policy a far greater number of them were heavily weighed down by the exploitation and oppression of the local elite. Having noted a widespread existence of property concealment and old tax practices, Yang Xiufeng, reporting to the JinJiLuYu border region government in 1941, expressed a recurrent theme: ‘Therefore, whereas in some areas wealthy individuals have to pay a rather heavy tax burden, in most areas it is the middle and lower strata who pay high taxes (this is particularly extensive and obvious in the fifth and sixth special districts of Taihang).’23
Shifting Levies

The other measure was to abolish 30 to 40 ‘exorbitant taxes and miscellaneous levies’. The infinite and arbitrary nature of these impositions has been well described by one student of this period:

Miscellaneous taxes included military exactions, official corvée, compulsory subscriptions, and other legal taxes. Troops came like locusts, demanding supplies of rice, pork, mules, and oxcarts – almost anything of value. The military drafted peasants to construct roads or fortifications with little or no compensation... In addition, rural people shared the administrative expense of the pao-chia, local police, or militia.24

In alleviating the peasants’ plight, cancelling these taxes had top priority. A protestant missionary from Shandong reported about the Eighth Route Army that ‘where they have control, the common people enjoy a measure of security and of freedom from the exorbitant taxes’.25 As with the exemption rate, this could be expected to pay considerable dividends in terms of popular attitudes to the CCP since these taxes were deeply resented. A Japanese source described the villagers’ reaction to their elimination as ‘wild joy’.26 Yet the broader curtailment of these taxes required time and, given the continued highly shifting degree of CCP influence, was far from complete towards the end of the war. In the Jiaodong region of the Shandong base area, for example, many were still collected in May 1945.27

The prime taxation example of how the legacy of the past thus lingered on was the old GMD land tax payable in money, the tianfu. In this case the CCP consciously opted for its retention, albeit in a somewhat altered form, on the grounds that this tax had comparatively reasonable features and useful functions as a source of revenue in the initial conditions of utter financial disarray. But tianfu was only intended as an interim tax since it contained elements contrary to party policy: calculation was based on land size rather than land yield; land quality was not taken into account; and there was no graduated scale.28

As often was the case, however, doing away with old practices proved hard. In JinChaji the initial abolition was retracted in March 1938 and a month later tianfu made up 19.5 per cent of the revenue in central Hebei. In 1941 tianfu was again discontinued. In the mountainous areas of JinJiLu’u its collection ceased only in 1942–43. Tianfu’s use was by far greatest in the Shandong base area where it was calculated and collected independently of the co-existing grain tax.29
Emergency measures

Socially transformative practices met with even higher hurdles, not least in a complex and contentious field like taxation. An article by Li Xuefeng in September 1940 on the CCP’s initial attempt to introduce a new tax, ‘the reasonable burden’, said that it ‘cannot be achieved within a short time’. In fact, he still considered it to be in a ‘transition period’.

At first, when levied by the county authorities, this tax lacked definite standards for calculation; the pressing task to obtain supplies left little room for investigating taxpayers’ property and income. The needs of the army in the area were then in effect the basic criterion for determining taxes, which were collected by the army itself or by mass organizations on its behalf. The tax acquired a more detailed content from the spring of 1938, when the village was declared the unit for tax assessments. Henceforth only the village council and the county government were empowered to collect taxes.

Regulations for the reasonable burden tax thereafter underwent a number of revisions, and methods for calculation differed from one area to another. Nevertheless, several sources give a roughly similar description. The total assets of each village were estimated and its obligation was set according to an 11-category scale. The village’s position on this scale determined its share of the total county tax quota. Within the village, households not granted exemption were graded into 20 levels by property and income. The relative weight assigned to property and income, and sometimes also to consumption standard, in calculating taxes varied over time and by area. Taxes to be paid by the individual household were assessed by the village authorities or some other mass-based body. According to a Shanxi report, failure to comply with the decision brought forcible payment, while land was confiscated in cases of absenting oneself from the village without leaving any grain behind. The land was returned to the owner when the stipulated share of grain had been paid.

In its broadly original form, the reasonable burden was itself too burdened with weaknesses to enable it to last longer than 2–3 years. (However, as will be noted below, area-based elaborations of this tax meant that it was not clearly distinguishable from later tax innovations and led to its continued use in places.) Technical drawbacks, like incomplete stipulations, were less important than the social strife and consequent damage to agricultural production which this tax tended to aggravate. Thus contravening the rural
Shifting Levies

united front, party sources stressed, the reasonable burden could not be a long-term policy. Related troubles emanated largely from allocating average taxes for counties and villages. The result was an arbitrarily distributed tax burden: within the village, concrete application depended essentially on the power relationship between the elite and lower strata, especially in the many areas where the grading of the households was based on approximate estimates.

The upper strata did not necessarily have to employ brute force in defending their economic prerogatives. The very intricacy of taxation compounded by the co-existence of the reasonable burden with tianfu and other pre-war taxes afforded the elite an excellent opportunity to apply its cultural weapon for peaceful subversive purposes. Forging land ownership documents required lesser sophistication. Still another tactic was to store taxable objects in hideouts, even if it meant that the grain was left rotting.

The anti-elite tendency, on the other hand, could develop into radicalism. Rong Zihe says that the reasonable burden was ‘one-sidedly’ levied on the rich households, in some places ‘almost assuming the formula of “down with the landlords, down with the rich peasants”’. Instead of following the party prescription to encourage and praise tax payments by the rich, one Taihang source explained, ‘impoverished masses and some cadres’ simply demanded increased amounts. According to another Taihang report, so ‘excessive’ was the “left” mistake of placing the burden solely on the rich’ that ‘the middle peasants did not shoulder anything’. For this purpose they linked up with ‘obstinate “left”’ comrades and cadres. Apparently the local radicalism was deeply entrenched: to persuade them to take into account the broader concerns of the rural united front and agricultural production was considered a prolonged, ‘hard’ process.

Paradoxically, the poorly developed organization for tax collection might have contributed to or facilitated the tax assaults on the upper strata: inefficiency turned collection into a year-round activity, consuming much of the government’s time and energy. In fact, the reasonable burden had ‘no limits and could be levied any number of times in a year’.

Possibly radicalism was lent a helping hand by the collection of taxes in kind. Initially these were payable in cash, but this proved impractical in the war conditions and in September 1939 the JinChaJi border region government announced a switch to the ‘national salvation public grain’ as it was called in many places. This was already practised in Beiyue from
November 1938 and fairly widely in central Hebei by June 1939. Collection in kind rather than money had several advantages. Above all, it saved the considerable trouble of buying grain for the army, which was directly dependent on supplies. With the army and guerrilla units constantly on the move, the ready availability of purchasable grain could in any case not be taken for granted. Moreover, transportation difficulties in the mountainous base areas and economic factors, inflationary pressures and potential peasant losses depending on the levels of grain prices and taxes, spoke against using cash to buy large quantities of grain. Widely scattered grain depots and army service stations facilitated storage and provision of army supplies. This system was also helpful in enabling the peasants’ full tax payments: in addition to grain, the tax was payable in other material objects. 

**Integrative strivings**

To make taxation better accord with the dualistic purpose of utilizing and subordinating the maximum numbers of people belonging to the upper strata, the CCP launched the ‘unified progressive tax’ to replace the reasonable burden. (The same objective guided the advanced form of the reasonable burden; in Li Xuefeng’s words, it was both a ‘united front policy’ and a ‘class policy’.) As the designation denotes, this required giving taxation a measure of uniformity. The word ‘unified’ implied bringing together all taxes on property and income and restricting the right to levy taxes to the border region government, which was designed to curb the deceptive and wasteful practices of local governments invested with this authority.

While specific tax calculations underwent several revisions, suffice it here to illustrate this tax’s basic working by reference to the JinChaJi tax regulations issued in January 1943. The accounting unit for cultivated land was called a ‘standard mu’, which was that amount of land producing 10 dou in an average year. The unit of accounting for property incomes was referred to as ‘wealth power’. One wealth power was equal to eight dou of millet on a plot of land with a rent below 20 per cent of the produce, or to 10 dou of millet in the case of income from rent and agriculture, or to 7.5 dou of millet for other incomes. From the gross product the cultivator could deduct 25 per cent for expenses, and the remainder was used to measure wealth power. The wealth power liable to taxation was then divided into 16 classes. The first class was up to one-half wealth power and the 16th comprised 81 or more wealth power. The calculation was concluded by converting the wealth power into points (fen), the unit for deciding the
amount of tax to be paid, according to which the first class on the scale counted as 0.8 points, the second as 0.85 points, etc., up to the 16th class which was counted as 2.1 points. The exact worth per point is difficult to generalize since it tended to vary by place and time. Where harvests were damaged by war and natural disasters, payment per point was reduced.

The poorer strata *en masse*, although mostly obliged to pay taxes according to the lowered exemption rate, stood to gain relatively from the redistributive mechanisms of this tax and still more tangibly from its linkage to other socio-economic policies. Among these strata, only a small minority who had benefited both from tax exemption and ‘excessive’ Robin Hood tactics had reason to grumble. By the same token, the upper strata were to be spared such attacks, which had soaked them in scattered localities. But given the marked progressivity of this tax and its wider application also to the upper strata, it seems that the overall rise in the volume of taxation fell increasingly on them. This inference finds support in the very high share of taxes that landlords and rich peasants shouldered in the last three years or so.

Thus, most of the many (i.e. the lower peasant strata) got a far better deal, a few of the few (i.e. the elite) became safer from ruinous extractions, a few of the many were subjected to rules of constraint, and many of the few lost ground steadily. There was more than a grain of truth in a Japanese intelligence report of 1941 which pointed out that the unified progressive tax, being more uniform than the reasonable burden, advanced the class character of taxation and significantly strengthened the basic force of the resistance, the poor and middle peasants.

The transitional impact of the tax must only be understood as a tendency within which variations were numerous. The general lateness of this tax also needs emphasis. To be sure, early local advances were made that again demonstrates the importance of the rather stronger CCP enclaves. But only from 1943 did the tax have a wider impact, with JinChaji far ahead of the other border regions.

The multi-layered problems of enforcing this tax, and the advanced reasonable burden, will be considered in the final section. The rest of the present one will examine a phenomenon we shall call ‘extra taxation’, i.e., diverse practices to obtain revenues from the upper strata which developed separately from or in close connection with the more formal tax systems.
Extra-taxation: A survey

Any account of fiscal extractions that omits extra-taxation is seriously defective: its revenue-boosting and redistributive impact was of major proportions. The non-specific character of this tax variety was indicated in a central Hebei document according to which ‘the source of money and grain depended on levies, fines and contributions; their collection knew no limits’.49 These impositions had an ambiguous existence. While often, in principle, sanctioned by higher party authorities, they were not to be carried out in a ‘disorderly’ and ‘arbitrary’ way, in which case they were labelled ‘leftist mistakes’.50 Generally, the party’s concern was to get hold of additional resources over and above the tax rate to a maximum allowed by the rural united front.

Extra-taxation was mostly referred to as ‘contribution’. Party policy, Liu Shaoqi emphasized, permitted its collection ‘on a voluntary basis’, but ‘absolutely prohibited’ the use of force.51 There were reports of landlords and gentry ‘voluntarily’ giving up grain and money, but the distinction between this claimed behaviour and actual compulsion was a fine one since pressures of various kinds were usually brought to bear.

Donations by the rich were given wide publicity to encourage emulation. Typically, the accounts were couched in terms of assisting the war effort and were accompanied by nationalistic slogans. The work on mobilizing the rich for this purpose in one locality of Shanxi, a 1938 source noted, had been ‘very well done, and not a few rich households willingly and automatically contributed money to help the government, the army and even the poor people’.52 A 1944 article on the same province says the gentry were called upon to do their utmost in ‘lending’ grain and seeds to the impoverished militia families and assist in cultivation.53 In central Hebei ‘a broad and penetrating political mobilization’ to raise funds, lasting from May through September 1939, resulted in the collection of half of that year’s total fiscal revenue.54

Pressures to contribute easily spilled over into the application of force. Examples abound. ‘If those with money are not willing to contribute money we shall have to coerce them’, it was declared in a Shanxi village in the beginning of the war – a warning that was frequently actualized in central Hebei during 1939–40.55 In October 1940 Yang Shangkun reported to a cadre conference in Taihang that demands for landlord contributions had resulted in 26 suicides and 201 flights in three counties.56 Japanese investigators made similar observations: in Heshun county, Shanxi, various
emergency expenses were covered by ‘loans’ which in reality amounted to ‘confiscations’; on the occasions the rich were ‘prevailed upon’ to foot administrative outlays.57

Urgency to obtain supplies, aggravated by evasive landlord tactics, largely explain such practices. Cadres quickly ran out of patience with trying to ‘persuade’ the landlords to contribute materially and went straight to their cellars to dig up the hidden grain.58 The extent to which expenditure was covered by contributions bespeaks the extremely severe demands that the war effort raised, above all initially. A 1940 Shandong report states that the percentage of fiscal revenue of the contributions was 48.8 in 1938 and 32 in 1940.59

One category of extra-taxes was designated ‘fines’. Reports from several areas around 1940 speak of their being imposed ‘at will’ and accompanied by ‘random beating’ of the targeted landlords.60 In central Hebei, conferences were held to determine fines. Their variety was striking, applying to cases like failure to stand sentry and hold meetings and to maltreatment of young married women. The fines could be ruinous. Following criticism of ‘excesses’ it was decided in August 1940 that only county and higher government organs were authorized to levy fines, which were to have a 100 yuan ceiling for each case. Within a year a drastic reduction in the volume of fines was claimed.61

The ad hoc character of the contributions, fines, loans, etc., is evident from the diversity of actors involved in this pursuit. Initially the army predominated, but from about 1938, mass organizations and government and self-defence bodies increasingly resorted to extra-taxation. At times some of these organs performed the extractive function jointly, on other occasions they acted separately. From the many references that these organs operated on their own accord it appears that the concrete decisions related to the extra-taxes – i.e., amount, frequency and methods of collection – were essentially made at the local level rather than being an activity controlled by central or higher party echelons. The pattern of multiple extra-taxation, both in terms of kinds of impositions and of agencies enforcing them, was very prominent in 1937–40 and had a notable existence also thereafter.62

While a vital source of revenue, the practice of extra-taxation almost inevitably spelled deep troubles in many places. Some were political in character. Obviously, its more radical tendencies threatened the rural united front, as demonstrated by the flights of the better-off to other areas,
including the Japanese-occupied zones. Higher party authorities reacted disapprovingly. Yang Shangkun (1940), for example, called for an end to methods ‘such as “grain-borrowing” and “voluntary contributions” which in reality are forcibly’ extracted and stressed that the ‘party centre’ considers these ‘definitely violated the united front’. He quoted a ‘widespread saying’ in Wuxiang county, Taihang, to the effect that one should ‘punish a person with a voluntary contribution’, adding, ‘this is a typical example’.

But extra-taxation could also incur the disgust of the poorer peasant strata. One document said that contributions and gifts demanded from the people hit them so hard as to make them receptive to ‘diehards’ rumormongering. The peasants had other reasons for resentment. It happened that the fruits of related redistributive struggles benefited them little, while party members reaped major gains.

Other problems concerned the menace of extra-taxation to the economic foundation of the base areas, that is, the scruples lacking in raising and spending resources, often expressed in terms of ‘waste’ and ‘corruption’. In fact, sometimes only a small portion of the total money and grain levies actually reached government coffers. Related evidence is abundant.

A report by the JinChaJi border region’s chairman Song Shaowen in 1940 instructively related ‘waste’ to the resistance movement’s general developmental features. Most fundamentally, the task of systematizing finances was beyond the capacity of organizational resources. Popular involvement through elective governmental organs lacked a degree of vigour and institutionalization sufficient to exercise their prescribed supervisory functions. The army carried even greater responsibilities for the financial disarray, Song maintained, without elaborating. Another weakness was the discontinuity between higher and lower echelons. The case of finance vividly demonstrates the consequences:

In the past we demanded that all local revenues must be reported to higher organs. But how many counties did in fact report on fines and confiscated property and on revenue from public property? Yet this money was all spent; and that was no small amount. In the past we laid down that stipulating additional expenditure must be subject to approval by higher authorities. But how many counties respected this ordinance?

Evidently the movement had become too big and dispersed to be effectively directed from above. Some areas were found more guilty of waste than others. Comparing the monthly expenditure of county governments in
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central Hebei with those in western Hebei and northeastern Shanxi, Song complained that the former’s expenditure ran at more than 10,000 yuan whereas the latter’s did not exceed 7,000 yuan. Of course, without details the accuracy of these figures cannot be ascertained. Nevertheless, the broad trend was one of squandering resources, which was said to have reached ‘amazing’ proportions. According to one example, the ‘yearly waste of grain is enough to feed an army for three months’.68

Financial disorders must of course be placed in the context of the war’s exigencies and pressing demands. These tended strongly to block the kind of long-term perspective, especially at the village level, that party sources so often found wanting. As usual, their tone was impatient, reflecting the gap between expected results and harsh realities. In the early days of the war there was the belief – presumably among village cadres – that contributions, etc., from the rich ‘could solve all problems’ of securing supplies for the swelling armed forces. At the same time, funds extracted from collaborators and the wealthy were used up in a random manner that left no room for planning. As financial difficulties deepened in 1940–41 and military expenses could not be covered, only temporary expedients like increasing taxes were resorted to.69 A 1938 report from Shanxi similarly drew attention to the limits of arbitrary taxation practices:

[I]n almost every place the daily expenses and grain for the organized guerrilla units were all paid by the rich. But it is difficult to call on ‘the rich’ to pay money continuously. We are preparing to carry on this work in a more planned way.70

But these phenomena proved hard to come to grips with. Yang Shangkun’s October 1940 report, while accentuating the need for ‘base area construction and long-term planning’, noted that ‘army units still eat wherever they are. There are no specific methods to solve the grain problem. This [forcibly collecting contributions from the rich] must be terminated immediately’.71

With the passage of time, the work on building financial structures did make substantial progress where CCP influence was strongest. If budgetary estimates, accounting and saving received little attention in the initial years, a rudimentary financial system was coming into being by about 1941. A measure of planning of revenues and expenditures was instituted at the county and higher government levels. Regulations were issued that empowered only government organs with collection of levies and with extracting contributions and fines. The government thereby assumed
responsibility for supplying the army. Gifts to it were to be encouraged, but only on condition of voluntariness.\textsuperscript{72}

Early wartime reports justified the principle of extra-taxation at a time when financial regulations and organs were inadequate and supplies from the rear areas could not be counted on. At the same time, these sources also criticized or regretted those extractive practices that violated the rural united front, while predicting their effective curtailment as the base area structures were built up and consolidated.\textsuperscript{73} As already noted, this scenario was rather too optimistic; related problems were serious throughout the war. Glaring inadequacies in financial work were of course most noticeable where the CCP presence rested on a weak basis. A report from the east Hebei/Jehol region in July 1944 stated:

We still have not been able to thoroughly redress the bad habits of corruption and waste … newly arrived cadres [from ShaanGanNing] are quite astonished at our wasteful practices. For example, our cadres turned a blind eye to the corrupt and wasteful handling of village finances. As everybody knows, this created a big leak in the finances. A small number of people still fish in troubled waters, seizing the opportunity to enrich themselves. They place a heavier burden on the people.\textsuperscript{74}

Other areas had a better record, but manifestations of the provisional and conflict-ridden nature of the financial practices were generally evident. A useful illustration is given in a central Hebei report of April 1945. Its analytical merits are threefold: this was a so-called advanced CCP region late in the war; the content sums up some important issues discussed in the last section; the conclusions, which were backed up by concrete examples, had wide applicability

Revenues were managed in a haphazard manner that showed itself in ‘trying to tackle all problems at once regardless of their relative importance’. In some villages, expenditure was covered by borrowing or ‘arbitrarily drawing on cooperative funds’ instead of by regular tax collection. At times public grain was allocated without regard to budgetary constraints, such as when honouring newly recruited cadres and soldiers.

Slightening financial regulations caused ‘enormous expenditures’. Thus although central Hebei had less people separated from production than Beiyue, expenditure was higher in the former area. As was often the case, localities had a certain autonomous dynamics: ‘There is no way of grasping
the situation at lower levels.’ These dealt with ‘impractical figures’, leading to a ‘complete mess’. Given the fragmentary financial organization, it was difficult to harness energies for large-scale work projects.

Although it was the elite who bore the brunt of extra-taxation, the lower strata were not unaffected by it – and central Hebei was not unique in this respect. Evidence of yearly increases in the average economic burden placed on the people was cited, with the stark message that it had now reached a breaking point for what they could tolerate: ‘This situation can definitely not be allowed to continue, otherwise it is bound to influence the implementation of this year’s overall work tasks and the consolidation and development of the central Hebei base area’.

Following the usual pattern, the report concluded that the troubles of financial management derived from subjective circumstances, i.e. cadre posture. They were accused of ‘departmental egoism’ (unwillingness to transfer grain and funds to higher organs); exaggerated budget figures; resistance to allocating resources on an overall basis; and false expenditure reports to higher echelons.75

The ‘grain-borrowing’ movements

Extra-taxation assumed multifarious forms. One prominent example were the so-called grain borrowing movements, which in effect amounted to grain seizures.76 Essentially, these socially levelling actions were spurred by acute poverty and the availability of surplus grain among the better-off in the vicinity. This ‘starting point’ for alleviating the misery of the poor, as one source characterized grain borrowing, acquired a particular dynamic at times of crop failure, as in parts of Taihang, Hebei and Shandong during 1940–43. Other circumstances might have similar effects, like the big grain losses to the Japanese army.

As with extra-taxation generally, the grain borrowing actions enjoyed a largely unofficial existence. Thus not constrained by a concretely stipulated policy line, leading party figures and cadres were given room for a certain diversity of opinion regarding the degree to which the movements could be considered justified. Xu Daben, writing on the famine sweeping the Sha area, southern Hebei, in March 1943, took a distinctly optimistic view of the grain borrowing. He considered it a ‘very realistic way of providing disaster relief’ to refugees and, since they were starving, other people considered this measure unavoidable anyway. But Xu's support for grain borrowing was not unconditional. First, the amount of grain to be borrowed was
subject to certain criteria. Second, he considered these movements only in
the context of the more lightly disaster-affected areas, presumably because
it was easier to exercise control there as compared to the rather chaotic
situation in the worst hit regions. In other words, grain borrowing had to
be conducted in a predictable and orderly way.

An eminently clear rural united front perspective on the grain borrowing
phenomena, with a commitment to keeping its various components
together while bringing about mass supremacy – such was the gist of the
instructions by the Suiyuan–Chahar government authorities in July 1942.
In this spirit, the instructions emphasized that one should ‘definitely not
incite’ nor ‘unconditionally suppress’ the ‘stealing’ and ‘forcible borrowing’
of grain from the rich. The proposed course of action was instead to take
unspecified, ‘appropriate’ measures and ‘calm down’ the starving refugees
so as to desist them from taking ‘desperate’ actions. In this context, ‘some
comrades’ were accused of one-sidedly favouring the rich: apart from only
considering their opinions, these comrades advocated executing people
guilty of unlawful grain seizures and compel the ‘chief instigators’ to wear
‘trouble-maker hats’. But, the instructions warned, ‘this is a mistaken
method ... it will only reinforce the hatred between the rich and the poor’.
Then followed a number of admonitions that sum up the general features
of the party's policy approach to the rural united front. On the one hand,
the use of ‘reckless’ and forcible methods was banned; on the other, those
with accumulated stocks of grain were targeted for ‘persuasive’ efforts,
while receiving government guarantees against theft. The manoeuvrability
of the rich was to be circumscribed by prohibiting their selling the grain
or moving it elsewhere and by strictly investigating their grain resources,
which a mobilized mass were to keep a close watch on. The sale and shifting
of this grain had in fact resulted in ‘further increasing the difficulties for
our army and people’.

A brief, negative comment on grain borrowing occurrences was contained
in Zhang Linzhi’s report on mass work in December 1943. These could be no
more than a ‘temporary solution to the peasants’ difficulties’ and should as
far as possible be avoided, save for the most famine-stricken areas.

Similarly shifting patterns of leadership concerns vis-à-vis (semi-)auto-
nomous mass activity were observed in the analysis of peasant radicalism in
Chapter 3. In a sense, different perceptions were inevitable; circumstances
under which the grain borrowing unfolded were of diverse character.
Moreover, the very complexity of the issue itself was likely to elicit various
responses, a major factor in this regard being the largely spontaneous inclination of much of this activity.

This tendency was accentuated in all three statements cited above, despite their varying evaluations. Xu Daben particularly drew attention to the grain borrowing movements’ volatility. They arose ‘very quickly’ but subsided just as fast. These abrupt swings were observable within a mere ten-day period. Unpredictability was thus the key word: ‘In disaster conditions, grain borrowing movements may be triggered at any moment.’ The unstructured nature of mass actions was reflected in ‘hoodlums’ often assuming leadership and in the direct assaults whereby people obtained the hidden grain of the rich.

Concrete examples of such attacks were mentioned in the Suiyuan–Chahar authorities’ instructions. On 4 July 1942 about 60 starving people, equipped with spades and axes, marched on landlords and ‘forcibly borrowed’ grain. It required the intervention of the county government to bring an end to the ‘disorders’. In another village, about 70 people broke up the landlords’ cellar in search for grain. Assisted by the Japanese, however, the landlords thereafter managed to recover half of the seized grain.

Zhang Linzhi’s scepticism towards the grain borrowing movements was based on what he saw as their unruly and destructive nature:

From the experience of grain borrowing struggles in various places during the past few years the below problems can be deduced: once the grain struggles start they easily throw the social order into a mess, deliver a great blow to the development of the rural economy, make landlords and rich peasants hold down production, and greatly provoke them.

Spontaneous grain borrowing did of course manifest itself in diverse ways. Very likely, documents exaggerated its ‘disorderly’ aspect, apprehensive or uncertain as leading party personnel at various levels often were of autonomous popular activism. An early wartime account from southern Shandong suggests a measure of planning when the peasants developed a movement to redistribute the grain of the local elite. The peasants organized themselves, gathered information, discussed the issue and held a mass meeting to prepare for the grain seizures. At times spontaneity unfolded on an already existing organizational basis, as in the western Shandong counties of Feicheng and Zhangqing where the initiative in spring 1940 was taken by the basic-level peasant associations. It was a timely decision as the landlords and peasants had accumulated a grain surplus to be sold off to
the highest bidder. There were also instances of local party and government authorities playing an active, even leading, role in the movements.

The specific means of obtaining the grain either took a soft form of ‘discussion meetings’ with the well-off or a hard form of ‘mass reasoning struggles’ that were often accompanied by the use of force. The former method, also called ‘propaganda mobilization’, included exhortations to provide grain to famine-stricken people for the sake of the resistance. To put psychological pressure on the landlords, etc., and make them more pliable, the meetings were preceded by demonstrations. The hard form was usually resorted to when the targeted ‘big households’ had refused to hand over the grain by, for example, absenting themselves or hiding it. Mass meetings were then held and the peasants marched to the doors of the rich. But there were also cases of cadres simply confronting the landlords with demands for grain provisions without prior discussion or explanation.

There might well have been cases of the elite responding positively to patriotic appeals for grain deliveries. After all, these strata also suffered at the hands of the Japanese army in a number of places. Yet evidence is overwhelmingly on the side of the rich resisting these impositions. In addition to those tactics mentioned above, the better-off camouflaged their living conditions and pretended to be poor; they tried to lessen the demands and prevent politicization of the grain issue by acting in advance of the threats and offering ‘relief to the poor’; they moved the grain and other family members to a hide-out in another village; they sold off the stored grain (and left for another area); they spread rumours of approaching GMD armies to deter people from demanding grain.

Usually the elite reacted with a mixture of counter-measures when their vested interests were under attack, threatening with the stick on one occasion and holding out the carrot on another. Party sources typically stress the stick tactic, but evidence of the carrot effect could be compelling. In fact, when the elite offered tangible material advantages, of however short-term character, they might win the peasants over to their side against the party and government authorities, when these played a directive part in redistributing surplus grain to victims of natural disasters. Compared to simple elite obstruction, this cross-class alliance, resting on so-called egoism, presented the CCP with an even more intractable problem. Two examples will clarify how it might connect with grain borrowing.

Upon learning that people in the village wanted to borrow grain to eke out a living in the disaster conditions, a landlord struck pre-
emptively and distributed 20 hectolitres to them. The initiative paid off: the beneficiaries made common cause with the landlord and did not reveal to the government that he had surplus grain and unreported land. When the district government authorities later heard about the cover-up, they took possession of the 20 hectolitres and sent it as relief aid to another area. This measure incurred the people’s dissatisfaction and worsened their relations with the government.

A landlord in another village tried to play the same game. To make sure the government would not get wind of 100 hectolitres of hidden grain, he bought his neighbours’ cooperation with grain supplies. Unfortunately for the landlord, one neighbour not included in the scheme vented his resentment by informing the government of the stored grain. But then it was too late; it had ‘already become ash’.

Where grain borrowing gained momentum the rich were hard hit. But there were important differences in degree. If returning very little of the grain borrowed from ten rich households in Zanhuang county, Taihang, represented a relatively moderate instance, the movement easily generated so-called excesses. In the Taixi area, Shandong, poor peasants and farmhands first laid hold of as much grain as they could in their own villages and then roamed other villages for the same purpose. Having exhausted the supply of grain, they turned to furniture and other property. Not even the middle peasants were safe from this marauding, which in the end alienated the people and played into the hands of Japanese schemes to destabilize CCP bases. In the name of borrowing, the Suiyuan–Chahar report said, grain, money and horses were arbitrarily obtained from rich households whose response varied from suspicion to fear.

Zhang Linzhi’s earlier quoted negative view of grain borrowing was based on these kinds of occurrences. His essential criticism was two-fold. First, in the long run the interests of everybody were damaged since such actions were socially disruptive and promoted the ‘thinking of the sluggard’, meaning a search for immediate and big (and therefore wasteful) consumption instead of working out a plan for developing the economy on a sound basis. Second, grain borrowing had ‘no definite constraint’ in regard to the amount of grain demanded and to geographical range. In this anarchical state, undesirable elements assumed leadership, resulting in the occasional bullying of the weak rather than the powerful. Again, the lower strata were on the losing side.
Such criticisms were often voiced by leading party officials in other policy contexts as well. Indeed, the build-up of a sustained mass movement and leadership over it were the CCP's primary concerns. Hard concentration on these twin issues tended to make party leaders suspicious of popular spontaneity, regarded as an activity with a highly unpredictable dynamism. The demonstration effect of developments in nearby localities was a case in point that Zhang Linzhi felt apprehensive about. Such phenomena did indeed occur. It was this potential spread and not unlikely concurrence of peasant radicalism that sometimes created a curiously alarmist reaction in party circles.

A 1943 report by the committee responsible for the disaster relief work in Lin county, northern Henan, furnishes more detailed material on grain borrowing, graphically demonstrating the sheer complexity of putting the rural united front schema into practice under highly adverse conditions. Two salient themes issued from the already noted heavy imprint of popular spontaneity. First, the way the party – unsuccessfully, in this case – sought to direct the grain borrowing activity into non-confrontational, securely structured channels. Second, how perceptions of higher organizational and grassroots levels differed in regard to preferred policy measures and action patterns, and their relationship to short and long-term considerations.

The report summed up the grain borrowing work in two parts; the first dealt with concrete experiences gained and the second with principles of conduct. The initial 'Outline of grain borrowing at present' reveals the very urgency from which such actions sprang. In the deepening calamity it was the people, rather than the party and government authorities, who took the initiative. These then responded to popular demands for grain borrowing by making arrangements for its 'peaceful' realization, obliging district governments to appoint personnel specifically in charge of directing the work at the village level. But as often happened, grassroots activity diverged from the instructions of higher organs, the responsibility for which, again, following a well-tried pattern, was laid at the door of local 'work comrades' who were accused of disregarding the spirit of the instructions as well as local peculiarities in Lin county. The result was termed a definite failure, mainly because 'the political losses were very great'. In plain language, the grain had been obtained in ways that negated the fundamental task of building up the rural united front. Hence, the seizure of 45 hectolitre in eight villages of the first district or of 20 hectolitre in three other villages.
of the second district were viewed as outright counter-productive to the prospects of the resistance movement.

Within this current, there was room for area variations. In the first district, village cadres ‘acted single-handedly’ and forced and threatened the upper strata to comply with the grain requests. These methods not only alienated the elite. Other villagers, who had been on the sidelines, felt no solidarity with the cadres and took no notice of them. In a word, these cadres led an isolated existence and as such were clearly incapable of developing a staying power base in the locality.

Developments in the second district are not easily determined. On one hand, party (‘our’) cadres were credited with having brought about a measure of procedural order; at first meetings were called with village cadres and activists, and thereafter investigations were launched into who had stored grain. On the other hand, actual enforcement was entrusted to village cadres and the militia, who together called on households with a grain surplus and ascertained that they had left it outside the house. Failure to do so even allowed the village cadre and militia investigators to forcibly search the cellar of these households. The impression of ambiguity and uncertainty is reinforced by the indeterminate standards for dealing with the investigated grain.

Popular spontaneity came to the fore in the third district, where efforts by party cadres to restrain mass-backed grain seizures proved quite ineffectual. These actions were said to have been ‘incited’ by “left” (quotation marks in the original) slogans of hoodlums and village cadres, a frequently employed characterization of popular initiatives developing beyond party prescripts. This explanation, of course, says nothing about the more basic issues as to why the people were so easily aroused and why party cadres failed to make their influence felt. The higher-level party authorities’ sharp disapproval of this popular radicalism is evident in the derogatory tone whereby it was described, like the masses ‘persisting in acting blindly’. Under the circumstances, the politics of the rural united front sustained a heavy blow.

The above accounts show that the dissimilar experiences in the three districts were overshadowed by their commonality of a strongly autonomous action dynamics at the grassroots – a matter of crucial concern to the party. Not surprisingly, in trying to account for the ‘mistakes’ committed in the grain borrowing, the report concluded that only the leadership at the county level was able to grasp the spirit of this work. In short, this
level and lower echelons were separated by a long distance, as illustrated in the neglect of the latter to examine and discuss instructions of higher authorities. One district cadre was even ignorant of what had already been announced in the newspaper. As a consequence, sub-county cadres ‘still rely on narrow individual experience of past struggles, do not care about the united front policy, do not consider the political effects, act single-handedly, do not educate the masses’. Straight and simple action patterns, especially in striking at the elite, were rather more pronounced among village cadres. Their – and the masses’ – thinking was said to be in ‘disorder’, giving rise to ‘extreme illegal actions’. Put differently, official party policy and local perspectives were in disharmony.

Yet the repeated use of the expression ‘extreme illegal actions’ in the report was mostly directed against popular spontaneity or radicalism, with the grave consequences such phenomena had for the prospects of forging a rural united front. Several examples of ‘illegality’ were given. Without permission the people went straight to the cellars of the better-off and unearthed their stored grain. They were denounced at village gatherings: ‘Those who do not lend grain are traitors!’ ‘Oppose landlords who do not lend grain!’ In investigating the stored grain, the people took liberties to provide themselves with fried noodles and many other things belonging to the targeted households. Claiming that they were helping the poor, people’s grain seizures also exceeded the stipulated amount for lending.

Popular and village cadre radicalism reflected a massive suspicion of the rural united front policy. The latter were quoted as taking a highly scornful and provocative attitude:

Prohibiting digging [after grain] and engaging in peaceful persuasion – this is the united front business of work personnel and the government. They cannot but talk about the united front. We can still act according to a fixed plan. They cannot stop us.

Although popular ‘misconceptions’ about the rural united front were often ascribed to insufficient educational efforts regarding party policies and laws, the more basic, objective side of the problem did of course receive attention – the calamity conditions and the ‘heartless rich’ who were unwilling to lend the needy a helping hand. Popular hatred tended to surface when households with a large grain surplus turned a deaf ear to repeated pleas for grain loans or purchases. To reap maximum benefits, these households chose to sell the grain elsewhere.
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The prospects for a workable rural united front under these adverse circumstances were obviously dim. The report nevertheless stuck to its essential elements in the concluding part on ‘The disaster relief work policy hereafter and concrete methods’. The grain borrowing was not simply ‘for the purpose of solving the urgent problems confronting the masses at present’. Rather, this practice was to be part of a broader, more ambitious project to ‘safeguard the masses’ eternal rights [yongyang liyi] and achieve certain political and organizational tasks’.

But this semi-officially sanctioned grain borrowing was subject to stringent conditions. Above all, it had to be conducted in orderly ways, meaning that the people were to be taught the ‘spirit of government laws’ which said that ‘there must be specified provisions and one cannot act recklessly’. The report recognized that the grain borrowing required mass mobilization/backing (‘The one who grasps public opinion is victorious’); yet the stress was on organizational guidance, primarily by the peasant association, and on strictly observing regulations regarding which strata (middle and rich peasants and landlords) were to contribute how much of the stored grain and who were eligible for grain borrowing. Only when such procedural arrangements had been made was the time ripe to move into action, which mainly meant holding informal discussions and negotiations.

Consequently, grain borrowing had to be a controlled process within the confines of the rural united front. This law-abiding aspect received particular attention. As was stated under the heading ‘Demands in relation to the grain borrowing work’: ‘Through actual practice, make the upper strata understand [that] the government’s laws are democratic and reasonable and care for the interests of all classes. In the struggles one should try to win over elements who are suspicious of us and isolate the diehards.’ Even the most ‘obstinate’ persons had to be given due consideration. To be sure, it was necessary to put powerful popular pressure on them. Using threats was also permissible, but there were three prohibitions that imposed very definite limits on legal grain borrowing actions: to dig after grain, to shout slogans and to enter homes in large numbers.

The above stated principles for grain borrowing well describe the party’s general strivings to realize the rural united front; popular activism and intervention were essential, but these must not exceed certain, indefinable boundaries. Yet, grain borrowing’s practices in Lin county also illustrates the enormous challenges these principles encountered: their fluctuating
gap to the social dynamics and to popular attitudes. Like elsewhere, the grain borrowing’s pronounced spontaneous tendency was a crucially complicating factor. Thus, while ‘the broad masses are easy to arouse, they are not easily controlled and organized’. In this context, the stated principle that recipients of borrowed grain were to be of the poor peasant category having land and labour power but lacking purchasing power, whereas the destitutes were to be excluded since they did not have the capacity to return the grain, was bound to clash with a reality that demanded policy measures capable of dealing flexibly with a broad range of complex contingencies.

Lin county was by no means an exceptional case: as will be seen in Chapter 10, natural calamities combined with war destruction wrought havoc in extensive regions of North China.

**TORTUOUS FAIRNESS**

For policy implementation to be ‘penetrating’, party directives constantly inculcated, ‘mass struggles’ were imperative. In other words, since the elite could not be expected to acquiesce in the transformative socio-economic policies they had to be pressurized into submission. A policy as central to the redistribution of resources as taxation naturally received the same emphasis. A Taiyue document on financial work in 1942 was typical in declaring that a ‘fair’ spread of the (reasonable) tax burden hinged on such struggles, the outcome of which determined the peasants’ willingness to share in it.\(^78\) The reasonable burden mentioned in this section refers to its advanced form, which Rong Zihe described as ‘broadly similar’ (chabuduo) to the unified progressive tax.\(^79\)

The crucial concern of the CCP’s approach to taxation was precisely how to link fairness, i.e. high progressivity, to a broad shouldering of expenditure. Tilting the burden on to the rich but not to the point of overloading them politically was the party's leitmotiv. A 1941 report summing up the work on the reasonable burden in Pingbei county, Hebei, starkly brings out the dilemma this involved. As the tax issue contained ‘class disputes of an extremely complex and delicate nature’, great care was urged in implementation – otherwise ‘the consolidation and expansion of the rural united front will run into obstacles and harmful class contradictions and conflicts will ensue’. The objective was to ‘adapt the interests of the various classes and balance the burden’. Yet here lurked the danger of the peasant masses being subjected to ‘unfair’ taxation. Its consequences for popular
support and cooperation and for the solidarity inside the core of the resistance forces could hardly be taken lightly: ‘extremely big difficulties’ in collecting grain and money; corrosive influences on the unity between the army, the government and the people; waste of cadres’ and masses’ time and energy; ‘hindrances to progress of other work tasks’.80

In this balancing act the preparatory qualities of policy implementation were of central importance, that is, gathering basic data, testing in selected villages, examining and evaluating preliminary results, revising original drafts, etc. To the extent these had laid a work basis to build upon, the greater the possibility of carrying out the intended taxation. However, these were extremely complicated processes, both in terms of technical and practical issues and of social dynamics. The claims that preparatory arrangements took seven months in central Hebei and 20 months in JinJiLuYu did not mean their final but only their provisional completion.81 As the above preparatory examples show, these were not tightly separated from implementation. Hence the rather mechanical separation of stages in one reminiscence on the unified progressive tax in JinChaji: first, the tax was studied and cadres were trained; second, investigation, evaluation and calculation were conducted; third, the tax was levied.82 In reality, these aspects were intertwined and moved both forwards and backwards. In the forward momentum each aspect was an extension of the previous one, whereas retreats resulted in retrials.

Work on appraising taxable income and property was obviously critical to taxation. A 1941 document from Pingbei county elucidates some key issues involved and their extremely sensitive, time-consuming and intricate character. Tax appraisal was recognized as ‘the most laborious’ work, in the course of which ‘many people get angry and kick up a row, and many cadres do not sleep for nights; and there are even those who sacrifice themselves for the work’.

The evolution of tax appraisal was described in terms of three phases. In the first and most basic one, 10–12 households were selected as test cases for establishing standards. To be representative of the village as a whole, these households were from social strata possessing land of varying qualities. Having determined the land’s grade, discussions centred on the specific grading distinctions, i.e. how large the relative differentials should be. Related conclusions were drawn only after repeated trials, with appraisals of individual households compared against each other, followed
by further considerations and so on. These activities were accompanied by propaganda and mobilization drives. The appraisal results were announced on a board in the village’s main street and people were given the opportunity to air their views. The second phase was essentially an extension of the standards for appraisal already laid down to all households in the village. The last phase involved re-examining the appraisal results and scrutinizing the villagers’ views once more - thereafter the decision was taken.

The wariness with which the appraisal work was conducted stemmed both from its complex nature and from the concern to minimize as far as possible the discord and other troubles which inevitably arose in the implementation process. After all, not only the elite but also the lower strata were said to harbour a great deal of ‘selfishness’ by concealing actual crop yield (see below). In addition, practical difficulties were enormous in conditions of household dwellings being separated by 15–20 kilometres within a single village and even longer (and not easily travelled) distances between many of Pingbei’s 32 administrative and 296 natural villages.83

The Pingbei source had little to say about the intra-organizational problems in connection with the appraisal work. Fortunately, a 1942 Hebei report provided details on the subject. The report described in six points circumstances that during the previous year had hampered the proper functioning of many village organizations and committees in charge of investigation and appraisal.

The first tendency trampled on the elective principle: the committees’ undemocratic management and arbitrary appointment of members. As a consequence, work duties were performed in a perfunctory manner, gathered data was inaccurate and hence the appraisal was unfair. The committees assumed a domineering attitude and shifted the responsibility on to others. Second, the three-thirds formula clashed with class contradictions. True, there were area differences, but few ‘fair-minded’ persons from different walks of life got elected to the committees which tended to be dominated either by landlords and rich peasants or by poor and middle peasants, with each block pursuing their own specific interests at the expense of others. The larger number of committees controlled by landlords and rich peasants was attributed to the advantage which their superior ability to calculate lent them in elections and appointments. Third, honesty and fairness was in short supply on the committees, which was primarily ascribed to the conspicuous landlord and rich peasant presence. To rectify the situation, demands were raised for them to reform and for their calculation skills to
be devalued to the point of putting these categories on par with illiterates – ‘there is nobody who cannot calculate’.

Fourth, committee members resorted to delaying tactics; in one locality the work on the reasonable burden had continued for seven to eight months without producing a solution. This practice was widespread. Fifth, the results of the investigation and appraisal proceedings were not made public, and nor were higher levels asked for instructions and approval. Worse still, the people were threatened into silence. To quote one typical intimidation: ‘Unless you obey, a lawsuit will be brought against you.’ Proper procedures had to be observed, the document stressed, which meant submitting the appraisal to the village assembly and letting people state their views on the issue. Sixth, the crucial role of the finance and appraisal committees (in places one committee housed both) in apportioning the reasonable burden, and in thereby determining individual living standards, often turned them into battlefields for contending social interests. Competitive elections to the committees were fine, the document said, but tightly squeezing out rival strata from the decision-making bodies violated ‘the spirit of the three-thirds system’. Concretely, these committees should not be ‘monopolized by one party, one group, one social stratum or a small number of people’.84

The report points to a number of conflict-ridden trends identified in various contexts in this study: the antagonism between upper and lower strata; the effective elite use of its cultural weapon; the difficulty of implanting democratic decision-making procedures; and the notable autonomy at the grassroots vis-à-vis upper echelons.

A report summing up the investigation and appraisal work in Anyang county, northern Henan, during 1943 also stressed conflicts, but in this case these centred on the CCP versus the villagers at large, a phenomenon that was explained mainly in terms of a highly successful class struggle from above waged by the elite. In ‘using all possible methods to achieve their own selfish objectives’, i.e. manipulating the appraisal of the land yield, the landlords also induced the other villagers in the same pursuit. The result was a ‘village egoism’ in which all joined together to collectively lower their grain taxes by concealing real crop yield.85

‘Village egoism’ derived from shifting circumstances. Put schematically, these ranged from elite pressure on the lower strata to strike a deal to the latter’s freely chosen class collaboration. More finely-drawn variations were found in a 1943 JiLuYu report on grain work. The specific issue was land
concealment which was practised by a ‘village egoism’ of a largely active or passive character, depending on the peasants’ posture. In the first case they played a prominent part in the cover-up, whereas in the latter they simply chose not to notify higher organs of ‘collusion’ between the elite and the village government, which was conducted in secrecy but was not completely unknown to the other villagers.86

Reference to ‘egoism’ or ‘selfishness’ in party documents denoted an unwillingness to go along with party policies. While this labelling was used in diverse contexts (see for example Chapter 4), it no doubt acquired greatest prominence in the field of taxation. The explanation is arguably that taxes weighed heavily on most people and had a strong class-bias against the upper strata, thus providing a breeding ground for elite as well as popularly manifested ‘egoism’. Elite machinations are described at length in party sources. Yet the other part of the picture, popular inclinations to escape taxation, received disproportionately little attention and were often wrapped up in an ambiguous and disparaging language.

Nonetheless, evidence demonstrates that the ‘reverse’ rural united front was no minor nuisance to party organizers. Instructions by the JinChaji border region government on implementing the unified progressive tax indicate how pervasive this local anti-tax alliance could be:

In launching experimentation, generally, the upper-level government sends 8–10 cadres to a village. In this process one discovers the importance of a widespread village egoism. In investigating each village one relies on about ten cadres, but overcoming village egoism still presents great difficulties.87

In September 1943 a report by the JinJiLuYu border region government concluded that ‘there are still many cases here and there of village egoism, of shielding each other and concealing, of manipulation by the rich and influential families’. Again, the tenacity of ‘village egoism’ is vividly suggested: this description applied to areas with, the claim went, a strong policy impact and an extensive mass movement. As could be expected, ‘where the work is weakly developed, these phenomena are even more widespread’. The elite’s penchant for ‘village egoism’ was ascribed to the relative ease with which a cover-up could be accomplished as compared to an individual initiative. To make the peasants and cadres play this tax-evasion game, the elite resorted to the usual variety of threats, bribes and promises of grain.88
Land entirely concealed from taxation was referred to as ‘black land’ in party sources. There was also a ‘semi-black land’ category: here the amount of tax depended on the extent to which sales and mortgages of land and population data had been falsified. Several documents mention a widespread practice of ‘black land’. Despite three years of ‘continuous’ tests and surveys in the Taihang area, a 1943 report noted, ‘land concealment still exists to a serious extent’. In fact, re-examination had to be carried out even in the ‘advanced areas’. In some villages of this region taxes were paid on only half or one-third of all taxable land.

A document detailing social conditions in parts of eastern Hebei and Jehol similarly pointed to an extensive land concealment: ‘Generally, the evaluation of the appraisal committee is inaccurate.’ Although these sources do not specify who was involved in the concealment and do not employ the term ‘village egoism’, there was arguably a significant element of it also in these instances. Such scales and persistence of ‘black land’ were unlikely to have been the work of a small minority; taking into account the generally dispersed nature of landholding in North China it would appear that many in the lower strata also jumped on the black bandwagon.

A broader range of more or less concealed items was given in a 1941 document on the unified progressive tax in parts of JinChaji, primarily central Hebei. These included land ownership, crop yield, population and movable property. All of them were difficult to investigate, with the partial exception of crop yield which was known to the village cadres and personnel on the appraisal committee. Ascertaining movable property presented the most intractable problems, especially the grain and money secretly kept in cellars. Also capital and shop income belonged to this category. Certain plots of land could be hard to discover, such as those on the fringe of the villages, along roads or in ancestral temples. The extent of ownership was also easily manipulated in the process of buying and selling or by dividing up the household. Population figures were inflated by concealing deaths and by over-reporting, as in marriages when both the daughter’s own family and her in-law family registered an increase.

Such were the effects of these tax-evasion tactics that the ‘work of conducting in-depth investigations [was] extremely difficult’. The biggest obstacle was the very broadly based tax-resistance, the breaking down of which required cadre resources and policy skills of a quality precluding overall effective counter-measures. In fact, virtually all rural strata were suspected of hiding something from the government authorities: ‘Some
landlords and tenants, rich peasants and farmhands, merchants and fellow partners act fraudulently in collusion with each other'.\(^{93}\)

Peasant-based ‘egoism’ reflected a concern about living conditions. According to one document on the unified progressive tax, what made people give false reports or not report at all was the ‘apprehension that they themselves will be put at a disadvantage’.\(^{94}\) Another source on the same tax traced the ‘rather widespread occurrence of village egoism’ to a preoccupation with ‘narrow interests’ and to the ‘fear that their own village will suffer too much’.\(^{95}\) Additional reports on this tax complained about private considerations taking precedence over the benefits for the whole.\(^{96}\) Arguably, the launching of the unified progressive tax, whose major objective was to greatly broaden the shouldering of taxes while making these strongly progressive, served to reinforce tendencies towards ‘village egoism’.

To combat ‘village egoism’, party sources called for educating the people. Yet such efforts were, by themselves, unlikely to achieve much. A theoretically more persuasive recommendation was that ‘powerful guarantees’ against losses be given when carrying out the unified progressive tax.\(^{97}\) However, in conditions where everybody was asked to, indeed had to, make big sacrifices for the resistance, such guarantees were hardly a realistic prospect.

Without adequate data it is impossible to establish where ‘village egoism’ was particularly prone to occur. It might be that the better off villages, which shouldered a relatively higher tax burden, were in the forefront. At least a partial example is provided by one village whose high living standards derived from high land fertility and an average landholding of six mu among the 166 households (population of 690). Here property concealment and other tax-lowering measures were taken by members on the appraisal committee and by cadres, with the elected village head turning a blind eye to the matter. The former categories also failed to carry out investigations and work out criteria for calculating the reasonable tax burden.\(^{98}\)

In conclusion, the recognition in party sources of the real danger of ‘village egoism’ to tax implementation was well grounded,\(^{99}\) and this anti-tax alliance certainly had a potentiality far beyond its actuality. The CCP’s reason for concern was all the more justified as this phenomenon brought into sharp relief the conspicuous theme of a tug-of-war between particularistic tendencies and the party’s overall strivings. In other words, the local exclusivist and defensive character of this ‘reverse’ rural united front clashed with the generalized and strategically offensive rural united front of the party.
Shifting Levies

Along the wide continuum of inter-class politics from outright coercive class struggles from above at one extreme to spontaneous class collaboration from below at the opposite end, ‘village egoism’ tended relatively more towards the latter. In an overall taxation perspective, elite response to the equalization pursued by the CCP contained a rather more balanced mix of counter-measures that nonetheless gravitated in the former direction. Yet this diversity, which precludes a simple classification and emanated from complex area differences, centred on a clearly definable commonality of purpose: to resist the progressivity of taxation as far as possible.

The initially successful attempt by the rich in Zanhuang county, Hebei, to block implementation of the reasonable burden assumed a combination of using hoodlums and women, hurling insults at village cadres and lending them grain and money. In Anyang county, the means employed by the rich to reduce or escape the unified progressive tax had a still greater repertoire: dividing up family property and living apart; concluding false mortgages and land sales; collectively concealing property; forging tax deeds; under-assessing crop yield; changing tenancy rules; buying children to report a population increase; neglecting to report at all.

Landlords in Ten Mile Inn were no less imaginative. One way in which they tried to avoid the tax was to let another person cultivate a plot of land in exchange for a money loan. The borrower had possession of the land for a period agreed upon; when it had expired the original owner reclaimed the land by paying up the debt. Widespread and legal, this action ‘was not undertaken by poor men who were in desperate need of ready cash for some family emergency. Instead it was practised by the wealthiest members of the community, whose sole aim was to reduce their land-holdings below the point at which they became liable to progressive taxation.’

This tactic was also resorted to in renting out land. Another way of dispersing landholding was to divide it among sons. The landlords used unquestionably illegal means as well to avoid heavy taxes. They forged land documents ‘purporting to show that certain plots of land had been mortgaged out, rented, sold or even given away’. Sometimes, under the threat of being ousted from the land, the tenants acquiesced in signing such contracts. There was a rich peasant, Li Feng, who in face of a progressive taxation pressured all his tenants to enter into mortgage contracts. He saved himself from all taxation, while continuing to collect rents as usual, since this kind of mortgage implied that he had lost any claim to the land during the agreement period. The tenants also bowed to landlord pressure
for similar arrangements out of fear of the GMD returning at some time in future, an apprehension actively encouraged by the rich. As yet another evasive technique, the wealthy let their sons join the Eighth Route Army because of the special favours accorded to the soldiers’ families in taxation and other matters.102

The above examples, and similar ones given earlier, especially in the first section, illustrate the elite strata’s acute awareness of threats to their power resources; and the sensitivity to the security that these offered was powerfully reinforced by the turbulent war conditions. The strength of this class consciousness manifested itself with even greater clarity, albeit on a lesser scale, in regard to another issue: the CCP’s attempt to reduce rents.

NOTES

10. ‘Yijiusiyi nian heli fudan gongzuo zongjie baogao’, 1942, pp. 35–38, NU.
11. Xu Daben, ‘JinChali bianqu tongyi leijin shui de shishi’, HX, p. 124. The figures are probably from 1941.
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15. The article is cited in Mantetsu Hokushi keizai chōsajo, Shinsatsuki henku ni okeru Chiugoku kyōsantō no nōgyō seisaku, (1941), pp. 77–78.


23. Yang Xiufeng, ‘Yinian lai bianqu xingshi de fazhan he Taihang Taiyue xingzheng zhongxin gongzuo’, p. 18, NU.


30. Li Xuefeng, ‘Zhengshou heli fudan leijin shui de jige wenti’, September 1940, TD, vol. 3, p. 603. There were earlier tax policies with the same name, but different in content, which owed their origins to Yan Xishan and the Sacrifice League. This designation was mainly used in JinChaji, whereas in southern Hebei and Shandong it was often referred to as the ‘fair burden’ to distinguish it from the tianfu system.
41. ‘Taihangqu caizheng gongzuo zhong jige wenti de chubu zongjie’, p. 461.
43. Wei Hongyun (ed.), (1990), pp. 41–42.
47. Böeichô, vol. 1, p. 525.
50. For example, Huang Jing, ‘Tongyi zhanxian he shuangshi gangling zhixing wenti’, 15.4.1941, KC, vol. 1, p. 370.
51. ‘Liu Shaoqi lecture, 1938’, p. 44.
53. ‘Huoyue yu dihou zhanchang de minbing’, JR, 8.7.1944.

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63. There were many statements to this effect, for example: 'Taihangqu jingji gongzuo lishi chubu yanjiu', p. 8; Wang Wanru, 'Jizhong', pp. 207–208; Huang Jing, 'Difang dang wu ge yue gongzuo zongjie yu jinhou gongzuo fangzhen', April 1938, JK, vol. 1, pp. 127–128; Jia Zheng, 'Jinninan qun huang', p. 688.
64. 'Yang Shangkun zai Zhonggong', pp. 681–682.
69. 'Taihangqu jingji gongzuo lishi chubu yanjiu', pp. 7–8, 18.
70. Qiu Xiying, p. 46.
71. 'Yang Shangkun zai Zhonggong', pp. 681–682. See also 'JiLuYu bianqu bannian lai caizheng gongzuo de baogao yu zongjie', p. 343.
78. ‘Taiyue xingshu guanyu yijian fangzhen yu jingji jianshe de baogao’, 1940, p. 93.
84. ‘Heli fudan diaocha pingyi zhong de jishi ge wenti yu pianxiang’, 26.1.1942, pp. 1–4, NU.
88. ‘JinJiLuYu bianqu xingzheng fangzhen yu jingji jianshe de baogao’, 12.9.1943, pp. 16, 19–22, NU.
89. ‘Guanyu zhengli JiLuYuqu liangshi gongzuo de yi jian’, p. 52.
96. For example, Liu Lantao, ‘Lun JinChaji bianqu’, p. 304.
98. ‘Yijiusiyi nian heli fudan gongzuo zongjie baogao’, pp. 7–8.
100. ‘Zanhuang xian Huangbeipingcun shehui jingji diaocha zongjie’, p. 13.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Conditional Exploitation

INDETERMINATE STANDARDS

If the governmental three-thirds system was the chief political expression of the CCP's rural united front concept, the lowering of rents and interests to curtail but not completely eliminate ‘feudal exploitation’ was its economic counterpart. Ownership and tenancy rights were thereby recognized and the landlord class could not be expropriated. The general principle of this land law stipulated that rents be reduced by 25 per cent and after implementation were not to exceed 37.5 per cent of the total harvest, whereas a maximum of 10–15 per cent was fixed for interests.¹ (Without belittling the importance of interest levels, this chapter will only discuss the rent reduction issue.)

A 1942 Taihang document cogently summed up the intentions and dilemma which this policy encapsulated. Its basic tenet was to ‘really enable the peasants to rise up’, while at the same time to guarantee the landlords ‘certain rights’ for the sake of a joint resistance to Japan.² The problem of mobilizing and harmonizing these action patterns was of course acute in other policy fields, but it was most sharply expressed in the rent reduction endeavour since this was primarily targeted at the more harshly exploitative kind of tenancy arrangements. And these were precisely the relationships that tended to generate a momentum towards the two extremes of either peasant submission or peasant radicalism.

The formidable task confronting party organizers, then, was how to effect the level of popular activism required to overcome a determined landlord resistance to reductions, while preventing the former from jeopardizing cross-class cooperation. This ideal was rarely approached. Usually the peasants were either overly or, more commonly, insufficiently aroused for party purposes. This dualism was often noted in party sources. Speaking at
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a cadre conference in April 1939, Peng Tao described 17 months’ mass work in JinJiYu in terms of both ‘excessively leftist’ rent reductions and patent failure to make headway. When representatives of peasant associations in southeastern Shanxi met in September 1941, less than half of the tenants in ‘backward areas’ were reported to have had a rent reduction, compared to localized occurrences of ‘excessively leftist implementation’. In a December 1942 report on mass work in the Taiyue area, Bo Yibo noted:

In the rent reduction movement one cannot completely eliminate abject poverty. A certain comrade in a certain village raises the slogan ‘eliminate abject poverty’... We do not believe this erroneous thinking is limited to one person; we fear this muddled concept is still widespread among our cadres... They do not understand that rent reduction means reducing feudal exploitation, not expropriating the landlords.

The conflicting ways in which landlords’ policy resistance interacted with peasant mobilization crucially set the pattern for the implementation process (see section two) as well as for the relationship of rent reduction to the resistance movement generally (see section three).

In contrast to taxation, however, the rent issue had restrictive geographical relevance since tenancy in North China was by no means as pervasive as in the south. Another, politically determined, quantitative limitation that impinged on the rent reduction campaign was its overall slow spread. The important party resolution on the land policy issued in January 1942 thus described general developments so far:

[T]his [policy] has not yet been earnestly and thoroughly carried out in many bases. In some bases, the rent and interest reduction has still only been implemented in a few areas... Or, where the government has issued laws, rents and interests have formally but not actually been reduced, giving rise to the phenomenon of landlords publicly returning a portion of the rent but the tenants secretly giving it back [ming jian an bu jian]. It must be realized that there is often a big gap between issuing slogans and laws and their implementation.

This critical assessment was corroborated in many sources. A Jiefang Ribao article in the same month said that rent reductions had by October 1940 been realized in only 601 out of 1,982 villages in Hebei. The article also pointed to an area of Shandong where, in May 1941, a mere 626 out of 8,000 villages had felt the effect of the campaign. In southeastern
Shanxi, ‘we have been loudly calling for a rent reduction for two years by now’, a 1940 article declared, ‘but there are many people who still have not heard about it’. In a village in Zanhuang county, Hebei, repeated attempts to enforce the policy had until the autumn of 1942 always foundered on tenants submitting to landlord pressures to secretly give back the lowered amount of rent. (Hereafter these phenomena will be referred to as faked reductions.)

The marked reinvigoration of the campaign during 1942 hardly entailed a generalized breakthrough. A JinChaJi sub-bureau directive in October 1943 conceded that ‘it has still not been possible to carry out this policy widely’, its transformative impact being confined to parts of Beiyue and central Hebei. In the border region as a whole, high rents were said to be widespread, as were faked reductions. Popular mobilization in many areas of JinJiLuYu remained on the pre-reduction stage of trying to oust corrupt and despotic officials, Lai Ruoyu concluded from the statistics on 19 counties. Other sources from 1943–45 similarly drew attention to the continued inadequacies of the campaign.

Table 8.1 Number of land problems solved in Taihang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of problems solved</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wuxiang*</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>Land, debt, taxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 counties</td>
<td>5,733</td>
<td>Tenancy contracts for a fixed number of years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 counties</td>
<td>1,842</td>
<td>Clearing debts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuxi**</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>Land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>303</td>
<td>Rent reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>181</td>
<td>Debts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 counties</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>Permanent tenancy, mortgage, purchase priority rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 counties</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>Mortgage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 counties</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Ownership rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*duration of one month; **duration of two months

Source: Yang Xiufeng, ‘Yinian lai bianqu xingshi de fazhan he Taihang Taiyue xingzheng zhongxin gongzuo’, pp. 9–10, NU.

The import of these broad quantitative data was, however, qualified by significant policy progress in smaller, widely scattered areas. A 1943 report by Yang Xiufeng to the JinJiLuYu border region government concretely illustrates this pattern of unevenness. Having examplified sharp area differences in
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regard to the policy's impact, he listed a number of land problems that were claimed to have been solved in the Taihang and Taiyue areas. Of course, the word ‘solve’ raises the issue of content. Judging from the context of the discussion, it appears that solve basically stands for substantial advance. The figures, in Table 8.1, which Yang says are incomplete, include a variety of land problems, all of which, it will be apparent later, connect with the tenancy issue.

An investigation of the rent reduction campaign in Lin county, northern Henan, during the winter of 1944–45, arrived at a fairly similar conclusion. With the level of mass mobilization as criterion, the county’s 218 administrative villages were divided into three categories. Regarding the frontline 38 villages, rather sweeping achievements were claimed in the mobilizational, class restructuring, leadership and organizational fields. A look at the sub-division of these villages, however, reveals that this assessment was exaggerated. About one-third of these villages (5.5 per cent of the total number of villages) did notably better than the other villages (13.3 per cent of the total) where cadres tended to ‘bestow reductions as a favour’ instead of activating the people. In the second category, which made up 49 per cent of all villages, rent reduction was part of a broad endeavour, as often was the case, to clear up debts and combat ‘local tyrants’. The overall result was a sporadic activity that failed to gather momentum, stopping at a step forward here and there. The remaining 70 villages, 32 per cent of the total, experienced very little in the way of rent reduction efforts. In short, progress was made, but only to a small extent was this of a strong or fairly strong kind; areas where a great deal of fluidity had been generated, which itself signified a relative advance, were far more representative, while in a significant minority of cases the policy impact was most superficial. This three-area characterization of the relative degree of CCP influence also crops up in other policy surveys cited in this study and provides a useful indication of the strengths and, above all, the weaknesses of the resistance movement.13

This unevenness was obviously influenced by the relative strength of the CCP forces and the landlords and other powerholders in the area, primarily measured by the ability to organize or disorganize the tenants. In party eyes, fluctuating rent levels were evidence of mass mobilizational inadequacies which had to be rectified, but there were other, rather more objective factors which the party saw as justifying a large measure of flexibility in fixing rents.
Thus allowance was made for damage to the yield caused by war and natural disasters. With ‘harvest conditions’ below 50 per cent of normal (if above 60 per cent the contract applied) an appropriately lower rate was sanctioned; where all crops had been destroyed, rent was exempted. Soil fertility was also taken into account. The calculation of rent depended further on whether the landlord provided draught animals, tools, fertilizers, seeds or grain to the tenant.¹⁴

Yet adjusting reductions to concrete circumstances was itself a repeated process of adjustment. A report by the JinJiLuYu border region government in September 1943 stated: ‘A year ago there were still many areas that did not differentiate good and bad land and where the maximum standard for the rent rate was mechanically implemented at 37.5 per cent, irrespective of whether or not the land yield had undergone any change since the outbreak of the war.’ This was extensively practised in Xingtai county, Taihang. As not even the worst land was given consideration, peasants took a poor opinion of the policy, and when the 25 per cent reduction was calculated on a previously higher land yield ‘the peasants came to feel that lowering or not lowering rents was the same thing’.¹⁵ In February 1945 a JiLuYu source described how especially village cadres simply reduced rents by 25 per cent without regard to land quality and fluctuations in crop yield.¹⁶

To make sense, flexibility had to be related to some general guideline. As with taxation, an initially rough idea took some years to elaborate upon. While detailed stipulations were important as criteria which cadres were to approach as far as possible, implementation hinged in the final analysis on what the specific conditions in the area allowed for. The promulgation of such laws did therefore not inaugurate the radically new stage that party sources often attributed to them. Evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates a striking element of continuity in the pattern of problems encountered. What changed over time was the relative enhancement of the scope and effects of the policy.

Against this background, only the barest outline of the law revisions (in JinChaji documents) will be attempted, mainly to indicate the rural united front imperatives that these were subjected to. Following the declaration in August 1937 that rent and interest reduction was to be the CCP’s land policy for the duration of the resistance war, the first ‘specific regulations’ were announced in February 1938. These briefly laid down the principles of reducing rents and interests by 25 and 10 per cent respectively and of guaranteeing tenancy rights. Yet the inadequacy of these regulations soon
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became apparent. Even after a 25 per cent reduction, rents often exceeded 37.5 per cent of the main crop, the limit set by the pre-war GMD law adopted by the CCP, and some tenants regarded permanent tenancy rights as an absolute that denied the landlords any say over their rented out land. Faked reductions and tenant refusal to pay rents and interest further alerted the party to the need for complementary laws.

The amended regulations of February 1940 were intended to deal with these problems. The tenants’ living standards were to be protected by fixing a maximum rent of 37.5 per cent and by recognizing by-products on cultivated land as the possession of the tenant. On the other hand, landlords were accorded an elementary degree of security by allowing them to take back their land subject to certain conditions. However, the regulations still proved quite inadequate. They were not sufficiently specific to guarantee land ownership rights and the free selling and buying of land, and to sort out issues related to old debts and mortgaged land. Nor was the mutuality of reducing and paying rent and interest expressly stated. Continued occurrences of peasants refusing to pay the landlords were thus not necessarily rendered illegal, which in some places resulted in landlords having to shoulder so heavy a financial (tax) burden that they were forced to mortgage out their land cheaply. Some peasants also took advantage of tax exemptions on by-products to expand their area of cultivation.

It required three more documents, issued in 1940–41, to conclude the more basic revisions. Thereby a number of controversial issues finally gained a measure of legal clarity. Above all, property ownership rights of ‘all anti-Japanese people’ and the freedom to conclude and dissolve contracts were guaranteed, and the obligations to reduce and pay rents and interest were enunciated. Another important stipulation was that by-products could not exceed one-tenth of the cultivated land.\(^\text{17}\)

How did these laws relate to actual rent reductions? A look at areas where the CCP’s influence was more strongly exerted could be expected to yield relevant insights. The conclusion to be drawn (see below) is a great variability of policy outcomes also in areas described by the party as ‘consolidated’, tendencies that of course reflected their diverse socio-economic and political conditions. The Taihang area is a case in point. Consider, first, eight selected localities (Table 8.2 overleaf).

These discrepancies in rent rate were influenced by social structure – not many landlords lived in the seventh district of Liao county – and the
land quality, which were different in all the six villages. In the campaigns after May 1942, rents were reduced by 50 per cent or somewhat less in some places.

Table 8.2 Rent rates in Taihang, pre-war and 1942 (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Pre-war rent rate</th>
<th>1942 rent rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liao county, first district</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liao county, seventh district</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xingtai county, Baian village</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She county, Wen village</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuxiang county, Hanju village</td>
<td>40–43</td>
<td>30–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taigu county, x village</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taigu county, x village</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zanhuang county, x village</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8.3 Rent reduction in Taihang after 1942 (dan of grain)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Original* amount of rent</th>
<th>Amount of rent after reduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She county, two villages</td>
<td>433.08</td>
<td>218.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piancheng county, one village</td>
<td>247.00</td>
<td>177.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedong county, one village</td>
<td>309.51</td>
<td>153.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pingshun county, 33 villages</td>
<td>2,049.44</td>
<td>997.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*unfortunately the word ‘original’ is not specified.

Source: Li Youjiu (ed.), *Taihangqu shehui jingji diaocha*, p. 63.

The major reason for the rent decreases (Table 8.3) was a bad harvest. In other surveyed localities the meaning of the 25 per cent rule was understood in ways that implied far greater reduction than officially sanctioned: a lowering of rents by one-fourth every year; a 75 per cent reduction; first a 37.5- and then a 25-per-cent reduction, etc.18 Additional Taihang data said that average rents in 30 villages of Licheng county were brought down from 37.5 to 16.52 per cent, and in 40 villages of Pingshun county from 57.69 to 24.25 per cent.19

Surveys of Pingbei county, JinChaji, showed rent reductions of 20–25 per cent for 601 households in 62 villages and of 15–20 per cent for 184
households in 99 villages. Investigated areas in northwestern Shanxi, it was reported in April 1942, had rates below 30 per cent, compared to an original average of 40–50 per cent.

In summary, spots of far-reaching rent reductions intermingled with those covering a more or less significant range.

Taking a broader view that includes the vast regions where the CCP’s presence was highly precarious, reductions were generally of a definitely lesser dimension. Here the campaign had a strongly provisional character. In these conditions the ability to adapt the amount of rent to the concrete, as was relentlessly inculcated, was most severely tested.

There were first of all politico-military reasons: the weaker the CCP influence in the area, the larger loomed the danger of elite collaboration. This dictated balancing a more cautious approach to badly needed reduction measures. In the words of one JinChaJi border region directive,

> [i]n the guerrilla areas one must stress unity even more against the enemy. The main policy is to combat the enemy’s grain seizures and exploitation of the people, while rent reduction is of secondary importance. But it is mistaken not to carry it out because of the emphasis on fighting the enemy.

Definite stipulations were therefore hardly feasible, further underscoring the irregular course of the campaign. The unsettled conditions only allowed very rough standards of lowering rents by about 10–20 per cent, with the possibility of their exceeding 37.5 per cent.

Another compounding predicament was the even richer variation of socio-economic structures that sprang from the very extensiveness of these regions compared to the more advanced CCP areas – and these structures were further diversified by their greater exposure to Japanese army operations. A party investigation of ‘guerrilla areas’ in Taihang described three dissimilar circumstances with regard to how these operations affected tenancy relationships. Where convulsion and destruction were rather minor, the degree of ‘feudal exploitation’ remained unchanged. Yet a declining yield (reason not given; bad harvest?) did increase the rate, but not the amount, of rent. Thus, the average rent rate of 111 households in two villages rose from 58 per cent in 1941 to 63 per cent in 1942.

Second, landlords rented out more land where heavy Japanese extractions caused sharp production decreases that lowered the amount and rate of rents. From being confined to areas along the Beiping–Hankou railway, this
phenomenon spread wider. In the third case, Japanese repression had dealt a fatal blow to the old tenancy arrangements. When, in the course of one year, the resistance authorities had restored order in these areas, tenancy re-emerged in a largely altered form. Of the 102 tenancy contracts in one village of Xixi county, the new type made up 78 per cent. Unfortunately their content is not explained. From other material, however, it is reasonable to surmise that these contacts gave the tenant greater security to till the land on a long-term basis. Another novel tendency concerned the class categories of those renting out and in land. Presumably referring to another village, the former came to include a high proportion of middle and poor peasant households, 15 and 10 respectively, compared to only three rich peasant households. As for the latter, as many as eight were rich peasant households, with 15 of middle peasant and 14 of poor peasant background.24

A proper understanding of the impact of the campaign also calls for examining a still wider issue complex, one that in significant respects transcended area differences: landlord and peasant attitudes to the policy and the difficulties that these raised.

**DUAL BARRIERS**

Reporting on JinChaJi, Peng Zhen sketched the evolution of rent reduction up to 1941 in terms of a three-stage class encounter. The kind of problems identified in this context critically influenced the campaign, and justifies focusing upon them in the present section.

Summarizing Peng’s account, the government and mass organizations initially relied heavily on top-down methods. Most landlords refused to comply with the regulations – the few who obeyed did so under duress. The threat of landlord retaliation inhibited the tenants from pursuing their newly won rights. The second stage saw the harnessing of the peasants’ collective strength. Their emergent activism challenged landlord obstruction and tenants ceased to secretly return the reduced amount of rent. An outright rejection of the policy being pointless, landlords sought to pacify them by offering help and using hired killers. The third stage of consolidation began with landlords stripped of their dominant influence. As the class struggle now became more controlled – the landlords were in a subordinate position and laws that defined the rights and duties of landlords/creditors and tenant/debtors were promulgated – tensions abated somewhat and the party’s emphasis shifted to utilizing the landlords. “The struggles between
landlords and peasants have changed from illegal to legal, from secret to open, and struggles of a harmful character have come to an end.\textsuperscript{25}

Peng indicates that the campaign met with landlord oppositional tactics and peasant doubts and hesitations. But he vastly understates their constraining effects on the campaign; only very exceptionally did reality conform to such a clear-cut scheme, suggesting an almost complete breakthrough. On this score, Peng described what the CCP strove to achieve: to mould class relationships into institutionalized struggles for subordinating and utilizing the elite.

\textit{Landlords: Oppositional variety}

To many landlords, the rent reduction policy did not signify moderation and conciliation. This reaction probably derived less from the actual reduction range than from the policy’s broader implication of ending landlords’ almost unrestricted freedom to dispose of their tenants. In fact, this policy extended to the total tenancy relationship, especially the tenants’ right to continuously till their rented plot of land – an issue that will be heavily stressed. Also, a variety of additional duties were prohibited. Their main forms included: supplying meat, wine and other products (\textit{zazu}); paying the landlord’s supervisor (\textit{xiaozu}); the amount of rice the tenant borrowed when concluding a contract was increased by 50–100 per cent when it was repaid (\textit{daliang}); working a certain number of days a year for the landlord without pay, usually carrying manure to the fields in the spring and threshing grain in the autumn (in Pingshun tenants also had to carry water the whole year) and helping at marriage and funeral services without compensation (\textit{songgong} or \textit{linggong}).\textsuperscript{26}

Landlord resistance to the campaign was truly diverse in content. According to a summary by the Beiyue area party committee in July 1943, landlords seized upon laws and clauses favourable to themselves to gain advantages, launched widespread attacks on the peasants, sowed dissension among them, repossessed or threatened the peasants’ access to the rented out land, increased rents, etc.\textsuperscript{27} A 1943 source on Pingbei declared that landlords ‘oppose [the campaign] in numerous ways and have an extremely strong mentality of taking revenge on the peasants’.\textsuperscript{28}

Sources from different localities highlighted one or another landlord tactics. Tenants were warned against contacts with cadres. Landlords increased the rent before reducing it so that the final rent was higher than the original one. They switched to another tenant to obtain better terms,
thus making tenants compete among themselves. Landlords kept them ignorant of the campaign. They pretended to be ill or not to be at home. To maintain the status quo, landlords sought to gain control over the village administration: by hiring the deputy village head and the police to keep watch on the village head; by threatening or buying off activists and cadres; by discrediting the village head by revealing that he had taken bribes, etc. Landlords petitioned the government, arguing back and forth over details, such as the wording of laws and their interpretation and using procedural pretexts, etc. To make tenants rescind rent reduction demands, landlords imposed still heavier, additional duties on them; these applied to carrying water, cleaning the courtyard, daubing the houses with mud, feeding draught animals, manuring the fields and hoeing up weeds.

Among the great variety of landlord devices to erode the campaign, the most effective one was to threaten to repossess the land – the tenant’s main or sole life-sustaining means. This could take a pre-emptive form of altering the content of the contractual relationship. Concretely, permanent tenancy rights, which entitled the tenant to continue cultivating the land as long as he paid the rent agreed upon, or a fixed contract, were changed into a provisional arrangement enabling the landlord to take back the land at any time.

The more frequent landlord practice in this context was to confront the tenant with an ultimatum: an insistence on rent reduction or the land would be repossessed. The disastrous consequences of being ousted from the land discouraged many tenants from demanding lower rents, sentiments that were strongly reinforced by the actuality of tenants then falling into utter destitution. This psychology could also affect cadres in the village administration, thereby paralysing reduction efforts.

Such apprehensions were well founded. Numerous party documents tell of landlords taking back their rented out land, especially that of a better quality. A few examples will suffice as illustration. Of 4,807 illegally defined land cases discovered in a Taihang investigation of 108 villages during the winter of 1944–45, 1,562 concerned land repossession; this offence was somewhat less common in 72 other villages, amounting to 26 per cent. In another Taihang survey of 152 villages during 1944, this category made up 30 per cent of the cases.

This menace to the peasants’ livelihood was the principal reason for the extensive spread of faked reductions. As already explained, these entailed the landlords agreeing to abide by the regulations but pressuring the tenant
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into secretly returning the reduced amount. Among the illegal landlord practices related to the land problem (including the failure to take any action at all) given in the above 1944–45 Taihang investigation, faked reductions accounted for 1,080 of the 4,807 cases. The second Taihang survey of 152 villages revealed that 7,630 of the 12,525 ‘tenancy problems’ belonged to the faked reduction category. Additional figures in the same document are even more telling. In a part of Pingshun county, rents below 37.5 per cent were only 13.2 per cent of all tenant cultivated land. On 80 per cent of this land, rents ranged from 40 to 80 per cent, and on 6.8 per cent of it the rent even surpassed 80 per cent.

Faked reductions and resultant high rents were also conspicuous in JinChaji. In one area, eight of the 13 villages had rents above 37.5 per cent, and in some it amounted to 50–60 per cent. Still in 1943, many peasants had not benefited at all from the campaign or paid a rent exceeding 37.5 per cent. This applied to 113 tenants out of 308 in nine villages; 78 tenants out of 103 in three villages; 64 tenants in five villages; 32 tenants out of 47 in one village; 20 tenants out of 21 in one village.

Large numbers of landlords thus defied the campaign. However, the landlords were certainly not a uniform category. The fact that they resisted reductions in highly diverse ways is partly an indication of their socio-economic and cultural differentiation.

Arguably, these conditions also produced a certain cooperative kind of landlord response that party sources were keen to propagate, with the hope of stimulating emulation. These ‘enlightened landlords’, as they were called, were reportedly swayed by a combination of patriotic appeals and guarantees of property ownership. Other, more complex circumstances were cited in a Taihang investigation. According to it, outside landlords were more inclined to go along with the campaign than those native to the village; large and medium-designated landlords reduced rents to a much greater extent than small landlords, who were not targeted; landlords who were regarded by the people as vicious and who treated their tenants harshly lowered rents, while ‘enlightened landlords’ having ‘a rather good social relationship’ did not reduce ‘thoroughly’.

These behavioural patterns are open to various interpretations. Patriotism is one factor to be taken into account. Another, of decidedly greater weight, is the pressure emanating from the locally dissimilar character of party strength and popular activism. Yet the findings of this investigation also strongly suggest a facet that raised nagging complications for the campaign.
efforts: a more or less close personalized tenancy relationship of a long-standing customary character which perhaps made it easier for native and ‘enlightened’ landlords to work out a more limited reduction deal with their tenants.

For rural united front purposes, it was vital for cadres to accurately perceive the differences not only between frankly defiant and ‘enlightened’ landlords, but also, and even more importantly, within the former, far more numerous current. Indeed, absorbing the landlords required dealing with each case on a concrete basis that fully reckoned with the variety of individual circumstances. Any generalized, stereotype image of the landlords – whether of the incurably reactionary/collaborative or enthusiastically reformist/patriotic type – was bound to be patently counterproductive to the pursuance of the party’s essential objectives. It was in between these two extremes that work methods of basic level cadres shifted, now on orders from above, then in response to the evolving dynamics of the local situation – tendencies that pervaded the more directly class-confrontational rent reduction issue to a greater extent than other policy fields.

Peasants: Doubts and waverings

If landlord postures constituted one big hurdle to the campaign, passivity of its targeted beneficiaries, the tenants, was another. An outside force might be able to institute a rent reduction, but its long-term effect hinged on a mobilized peasantry.39 In other words, their spontaneous involvement in the campaign was not to be expected. Lucien Bianco has noted how their activism was blunted by traditionally ingrained habits: ‘Before the war, personal relationships between landlords and tenants partly accounted for the overall restraint of the latter and for the fact that anti–rent disturbances were much less frequent than, say, anti-tax riots.’40 The wartime experience would similarly point to a weaker peasant resolve to reduce rents than to achieve a tax evasion, the ‘village egoism’ described in the previous chapter. In fact, the road a rent reduction was lined with cultural inhibitions as well as dangers to the tenants’ livelihood and immediate physical security.

The traditional/cultural aspect contained a disbelief in the ability to challenge status quo. References to related manifestations are numerous. Lacking confidence in their own powers, tenants were inclined to depend on cadres to effect the reductions. Their novelty confounded tenants; to be punished and suffer starvation seemed decreed by fate. In this context landlord authority imparted embarrassed and uncomfortable feelings.41
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This traditional peasant deference to landlords was apparent in Ten Mile Inn:

Even at this late date [1944] some peasants were still somewhat ill-at-ease in the presence of the landlords. At the first meeting some tenants squatting on a large stone in the front of the crowd humbly offered their makeshift seat to the landlord whose affairs were discussed. At the outset, too, the landlords’ glibness and air of learning often carried the day, the peasants sometimes complaining after a sit-and-talk meeting that they had got nothing worthwhile out of it.42

Summing up the experiences of the 1942 campaign in Taihang, the area party committee concluded that many peasants regarded landlords’ exploitation as ‘reasonable’ and dependence on them as the only way to make a living.43 Referring to the early war years, Peng Zhen depicted the poor and middle peasants as ‘timid’ and ‘afraid’, and went on:

Sometimes they still seem to be rather unwilling to part with the shackles they have already got rid of. Apparently they also have a boundless nostalgia for the already reduced exploitation. This is expressed in uneasiness and in an extremely uncomfortable posture. Putting it this way might seem unreasonable, but the existence of this phenomenon is an absolutely true matter of fact. There are not a few peasants who after the legal and open rent reduction secretly return the reduced amount of rent and interest.44

The peasants’ habitually induced submission was reinforced by the other, security-related factor: fear of landlord revenge should they demand a rent reduction. A Taihang report stated some of the ominous consequences. Two have already been mentioned: landlords’ repossessing the land and increasing rents. Other impinged even more critically on the tenants’ lives, as when protective Eighth Route Army units had moved on to a different locality, which raised the spectre of landlords assaulting their tenants with the assistance of GMD or puppet/Japanese troops.45 These apprehensions, an article on Pingxi explained, were so strong that sometimes tenants would rather endure starvation and sell whatever they had to pay up the rent than claim a reduction.46 The very persistence of this problem is also suggested in a 1944 campaign document from Lin county, northern Henan. The campaign largely failed to embolden the peasants to mount a determined challenge to the economic inequalities as the thought of future landlord counter-attacks proved too high a psychological hurdle. Hence land first repossessed by the
landowners and then taken back by the tenants in the course of the campaign was again returned to the landowners. As was pertinently summed up, ‘achievements scored in struggles are not easy to consolidate ... afterwards it is hard to discover the problem [of tenants giving up their rented land].’

Deng Fa provided a further illustration:

At the start [of promoting reduced rents and higher wages] they [i.e. the people] were often scared to do what we suggested. Long experience told them that armies came and went, slogans were posted and the rain washed them off, but the landlords were always there. Quite often the peasants would pass rent reduction resolutions at a meeting and then go to the big house and give private assurances that they would pay the old rent just the same. Sometimes, after signing new-type contracts with the landlords, they did not press for their observance. The heritage of feudal fear could not be wiped out in one day.

To transform the peasants’ ‘slave mentality’ into the ambition ‘we are the masters’, they were mobilized to speak out on the exploitation, hardship and humiliation that they had suffered at the hands of the landlords. Usually organizers first sought out the most disadvantaged tenants to gain a foothold from where to expand the activities. Specific methods varied. In Ten Mile Inn the poor peasants and farmhands’ ‘tracing down the root of bitterness’ was conducted at the winter school; deaths and suffering among peasants were due to three landlords charging high rents and interests, cadres demonstrated in a Taihang locality; it was the landlords who lived off the poor people, not the other way round, peasants in Yingnan county, Shandong were taught during a social investigation and educational campaign; landlords were hauled in front of mass meetings where, facing the villagers with lowered heads, they were subjected to intense pressures.

As has been observed in Chapter 3 and earlier in the present chapter, consciousness-raising efforts as well as largely autonomous peasant initiatives did open up cracks in the thick wall of tenants’ mental inhibitions, at times even developing into a radicalism that broke it down. In a word, peasant consciousness was definitely not fixed, particularly as the war caused acute social instability and tensions. For all the difficulty of arousing the tenants, the campaign harbourd a major element of uncertainty. Such was the complexity that cadres’ top-down methods of reducing rents, which generally were singularly inimical to generating the essential peasant activism, could have exactly the opposite effect of giving rise to radicalism. A Taihang document explained:
Leftist deviations and excesses that the mass movement causes are often inseparable from the cadres’ concept of bestowing favours and monopolizing everything. They think of giving the masses more things, which stimulates a boundless appetite among some peasants to get rich.

Waging political struggles against the landlords was imperative, but, the document emphasized, economically one had to make ‘appropriate concessions and leave landlords with a means of subsistence’. But again, a reminder was served of how volatile the rural united front processes were: peasants had beaten and hanged landlords, occurrences said to be tantamount to compelling them to side with the Japanese.51

Problems of peasant passivity and radicalism were both recurrent themes in party reports. So was characterizing cadre behaviour in terms of either genuinely mobilizing the villagers or ‘running the whole show’, each presented as a quintessential success or failure.52 However, as suggested above, endeavours to arouse the tenants were immeasurably richer in content than such a two-way formula. To illustrate how a host of factors intermingled and conflicted, we shall turn to a document on the campaign in the village of Yehuquan, Hebei.53

The value of this material lies precisely in its focus on a multifaceted reality. The achievements were referred to very briefly, almost in passing, and were in any case hardly remarkable. Nor could they have been in view of the campaign’s short time-span of three months. In fact, cadres’ neglect to activate the tenants had enabled the landlords to undo the gains by repossessing the land. The tenants had not been made aware of their collective potential; nor did they comprehend the laws. In this situation, hoodlums seized control of the village government and landlords bought over the previous chairman of the peasant association who lent them a helping hand. But this did not nullify the import of cadre trials to reduce rents. Valuable lessons were drawn from the setbacks, which were an almost inevitable beginning given the complexity of the rent reduction. The experiences gradually taught the cadres the kind of problems involved and how they were to be tackled. In particular, cadres were made aware of the tenants’ misgivings towards the campaign, despite its intended benefits to them. No uniform policy approach would do: cadres confronted not the abstract masses, but flesh-and-blood individuals with their own doubts and worries. Through mistakes cadres learned that quick results were not in the offing; hard work lay ahead which implied a reform process both
for themselves and for the tenants. To the latter, the campaign efforts represented much that was novel and therefore difficult to grasp. Thus their response could not be instantaneous. They needed a period of preparation, which the landlords adroitly exploited. But the first step was taken. Paralysis was giving way to wavering. Some even acted boldly. A breach in the edifice of landlord rule was visible and tended to widen. The village of Yehuquan was just entering a transitional period with advances and retreats on three fronts: cadres, tenants and landlords. Within the three months, little of substance had changed, but the potential for altering the village structure had grown to the point of posing it as a realistic prospect. Below the document is outlined essentially as it stands, including ambiguities and possible simplifications and inaccuracies.

The campaign unfolded in two phases, the first lasting about 70 days. With cadres initiating the work in the spirit of reducing rents on behalf of the tenants, little was done to raise their understanding of the rent issue. Thus cadres’ 40 days of hard work was largely ineffectual. While they managed to identify the problems connected with tenancy, the tenants paid only scant attention to them. Gradually cadres realized that their inability to perceive of, let alone concretely deal with, the peasants’ ‘complex thoughts’ was responsible for this state of affairs.

Subsequent cadre investigations revealed that the peasants held a variety of beliefs inhibiting their activism. They viewed poverty as a matter of fate. Landlords’ oratorical skills, or cultural resource, impressed the peasants as a sign of capability and many regarded themselves as lacking in respectability. Some were ignorant of the laws and to others these appeared harmful. Given this frame of mind, they could only conceive of relying on cadres for effecting reductions. Fear of a return to the ‘old order’, with landlord acts of revenge, also loomed large in the peasants’ thinking.

Cadres then called upon the tenants to engage in self-reflection and discuss their problems during the winter study. In addition, activists visited the tenants individually, organized them in small groups and summoned mass meetings. The issues brought up centred squarely on the reasons for the tenants’ predicament. Had not the landlords been deceitful and oppressive in the past? Did they not violate the laws by, for example, increasing the rent and evicting tenants from the land? Was it not true that the tenants were humiliated by having to give the landlords presents and to help them without compensation at marriage and funeral services? Could it really be said that land rights and human rights were observed?
However, the tenants were not easily swayed. Most of them hesitated. Only a few were in favour of calling on the landlords immediately. While guaranteeing their land rights was widely taken for granted, the tenants gave, in contrast, little thought to the issue of obtaining permanent tenancy rights, regarding this beyond their reach. Yet little by little, they began considering the justification for these rights. Further investigations, meetings and discussions reinforced this trend. Among the tenants, voices were even raised for them to unite and achieve liberation. In ensuing self-reflection classes, landlord attempts to divide the tenants were exposed. The tide was changing, but not to the extent of engulfing all tenant households. Whereas 20 of them demanded reasoning with the landlords, six wavered and three had no confidence in challenging them.

With the tenants’ psychological constraints loosening up, an increasing number of rent problems, in all 30, came to light. These were divided into four categories and then further investigated. The principles for dealing with them were summed up in the following slogans:

1. Thorough rent reduction, mutual aid production.
2. Safeguard tenancy rights, oppose illegal eviction of tenants.
3. Reclaim wasteland and repair land, permanent tenancy in accordance with the law.
4. Oppose land ownership of tyrants, demand compensation!

Entering the second stage, the stress was on strengthening the ties between cadres/activists and peasants by jointly conducting meetings, investigations and mediations, presumably with landlords. First, concrete problems were examined, providing material for policy elaboration. Thereafter methods of implementation – kinds of struggles, organizational forms, etc. – were worked out. These proceeded from an analysis of the relative strengths of the tenants, the landlords and the ‘broad public’. Implementation began with the rent reduction committee, which was based on the tenants’ meeting, fixing the principles for mediation. Then tenants reasoned with landlords to arrive at an agreement. Finally a mass struggle meeting settled the issue. Yet the peasants’ deeply felt doubts and apprehensions necessitated repeated meetings, each followed by further investigations. In fact, in the initial encounter with the landlords, the tenants were reluctant to speak; they still lacked confidence in themselves and were even suspicious of each other. Cadres’ high-handedness towards the people further undermined their
sense of solidarity. Later remedial measures were said to have improved the situation.

Campaign experiences in the village were summed up in three points. The first concerned the peasants’ consciousness. Left to themselves the tenants were only capable of sporadic struggles. Landlords’ retaliatory acts in the past weighed heavily on the peasants’ mind, as did their innate resignation to landlord rule and a miserable life. Stimulating their consciousness required prolonged, patient and diverse efforts, and detailed investigations to ‘locate their inner feelings’. This stark reality explained cadres’ failure to reduce rents on the tenants’ behalf.

The second point addressed the cadre-tenant relationship. Concretely, how was one to avoid this cadre failure and the other cadre practice of ‘simply letting the tenants call on the landlords to solve the problem’? The answer was for cadres and tenants to jointly investigate each case and determine how the policy was to be implemented. At the same time, tenants needed cadres’ help in analysing actualities and in deciding how to conduct negotiations with the landlords. The last point centred on reforming cadre behaviour, for them to ‘listen modestly’ to the masses and overcome internal disunity.

Despite the fact that insecure tenancy rights had a strongly dampening impact on the peasants’ zeal to pursue rent reduction, legal guarantees against their losing the right to the rented land received elaboration only in the mid-years of the war. The promulgated laws proceeded from the principle that repossession of land before the expiration of a contract was illegal as long as the tenant paid rent. Although the landlord had the right to re-rent or sell the land (or dispose of it otherwise according to regulations) after the contract ended, these rights were severely circumscribed. For the duration of the war, the tenants’ living conditions had to be taken into account. If taking back the land endangered their livelihood, only a part of the land was recoverable or the contract had to be renewed. On the other hand, if the landlord needed the land to make a living and he actually cultivated it himself, he could recover it. Thus, the landlords’ ability to legally reclaim the land depended on the consequences to both parties’ living standards. Significantly, when both asserted their right to the land, the peasant association was authorized to make the decision. Safeguarding tenancy rights was most urgent where the rent period was not specified. This implied constant uncertainty and a consequent disincentive to improve land fertility. Here rent periods for at least three to five years were
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stipulated. Some land was rented on a permanent basis and this practice was further promoted.55

The urgency to legislate tenancy rights derived not only from land repossession and faked reductions. Another factor was landlord initiatives to revise tenancy arrangements in their favour when contracts expired, as in parts of JinChali during 1943.56 A 15-county Taihang survey showed tenancy revision, together with making the tenant pay taxes on behalf of the landlord, made up 20.42 per cent of the illegal tenancy cases. Turning permanent tenancy rights into labour rent, whereby the tenant cultivated a certain number of mu or did such work as carrying water and cutting firewood for the landlord in lieu of rent, amounted to 24 per cent.57

But the complexity of the tenancy issue went beyond landlord stratagems. While the tenants’ demand for safe access to a plot of land to till was no doubt constant, in parts of JinJiLuYu they did not always prefer a permanent (yongdianquan) or fixed (sizu or dingzu) rent contract, according to which they could use the land on a long-term basis while paying a pre-determined, unchanging amount in rent. In fact, where agricultural production had suffered a serious decline due to the war, natural calamities, etc., many tenants came to favour another major form of tenancy, the share rent (houzu), which was concluded yearly and obligated the tenant to pay a certain percentage of the crop in rent. Although this type of rent was thus short term, it offered the tenants distinct advantages in cases of a sharply reduced yield: flexibility in the amount of rent to be paid and, consequently, guarantees against losing the entire crop to the landlord which a fixed rent might entail in a bad year. That landlords and others renting out land turned to share rent was essentially an outcome of the rent reduction campaign focusing on fixed rents as these had risen to extremely high proportional levels with the lowered output. The partial shift from fixed to share rent therefore took place against the background of changing economic circumstances, which could thus help both parties to find common ground.58

To shed more concrete light on the multiple processes complicating the realization of tenancy rights and place them in a broad perspective that concludes the discussion in this section, a document from Licheng county, Taihang, is presented below.59 As will be apparent, it bears close affinities with parts of the earlier presented Yehuquan document, especially those highlighting the tortuous and contingent nature of policy progress. Other discernible themes, which likewise bore heavily on the CCP movement in
general, include a considerable disjointedness of grassroots activism from higher organs in terms of essential policy concerns, and the dilemmas pervading the issue of how to adapt policies to dissimilar circumstances while keeping with the spirit of the stipulations.

The relevant part of the document focused on how county and village level cadres and tenants reacted to landlords repossessing land, said to be widespread, and the train of events leading up to a provisional settlement. As often happened, the initiative was taken from above, by the county party committee. Aware of the land repossession, it launched study sessions on tenancy rights among village cadres and tenants. The subsequent efforts to reduce rents took an ‘excessive’ turn that ‘completely bankrupted many landlords’ due to these cadres’ inadequate attention to varying conditions (‘mechanical implementation’) and probably also to straight radicalism. The landlords then sought to retrieve the situation by appealing to the county committee. Torn between conflicting considerations, however, it was unable to come up with a concrete measure – violations of the land policy had to be dealt with, but, the committee reasoned, would not the appearance of landlord dependence on it repel the peasants?

Meanwhile, ominous clouds gathered. Many landlords grew fearful of the tenants’ insistent demands for the return of their rented land and went hiding in relatives’ houses. The county committee felt that it could no longer procrastinate and decided to set up an arbitration committee, in addition to telling village cadres and tenants that tenancy rights must be harmonized with landlord abilities to make a living. The result was village cadres and tenants’ disappointment and bitterness with the county cadres’ ‘unnatural behaviour’. Yet apprehensive of their criticism and generally feeling ill at ease with them, the village cadres refrained from speaking out. The county committee’s subsequent better grasp of local realities convinced it a top-down arbitration would only aggravate divisions, in relation to village cadres and tenants as well as between them and the landlords. The committee then beat a drastic retreat and basically left matters to the grassroots, while continuing to impress upon tenants and landlords the necessity to ‘suitably consider’ each others’ concrete living conditions when settling the tenancy issue.

What thereafter follows is partly an unconvincingly uncomplicated united front account: tenants’ and landlords’ sentiments were said to have changed in the course of discussions so that a mutually amicable understanding was
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reached. The other part of the picture heavily qualified this optimistic tone. The tenants were emphatic their past actions were righteous; landlords had to be forced into concessions. Most importantly, tenant attitudes to landlords varied with their differing circumstances. For example, tenants’ polite and conciliatory bearing towards an old woman with a son in the Eighth Route Army contrasted with their hostility to a traitor-labelled landlord. Display of ‘honesty’ could also serve landlord interests. Diversity in conditions and outcomes likewise applied to tenants. Those who were relatively better off were returned a lesser amount of land.

Achievements were described mainly in terms of anti-landlord struggles raising the tenants’ class consciousness and confidence. The fact that only 67 mu of the repossessed total of 290 mu was given back to the tenants might indeed suggest that tenancy gains were of minor relevance. However, this resulted from an intense activity involving repeated meetings where 76 tenants and 13 landlords argued their cases and discussed who was to be returned how much land. The outcome testifies both to the tenacity of the barriers considered in this section and to the significantly partial, or transitional, challenge they were subjected to.

DIVERGENT ROUTES

It has been observed that rent levels and peasant behaviour could vary sharply; attitudes of primarily targeted landlords ranged less widely. Conspicuous contrasts were also to be found in the campaign’s relationship to other policies. It could either stimulate and combine with these, thereby having major expansive effects, or it became isolated from other endeavours, even conflicting with them. Moreover, rent reductions might initially be subordinate to more immediately relevant policy measures, or, in conditions of low tenancy, the campaign never really got off to a start but lost a sense of purpose and developed into disorderly channels.

Broadening impetus

The external mobilizational thrust of the campaign is suggested by the multitude of struggles that sometimes were integrated with the rent reduction activities, whether these concerned actual policy enforcement or mass drives to investigate its result. Tables 8.4 and 8.5 demonstrate that the campaign thus went far beyond even as broad an issue as the tenancy relationship.
Table 8.4 Issues and number of struggles in Taihang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Struggles in 4 villages, 1942</th>
<th>Struggles in 3 villages, 1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent reduction</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debts</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-local tyrant</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-corruption</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax burden</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-traitor</td>
<td></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 8.5 Issues and number of struggles in Shandong

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Number of struggles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Village tyrants</td>
<td>5,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent and interest reduction</td>
<td>4,672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage increases for hired farmworkers</td>
<td>3,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corruption</td>
<td>3,186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unregistered land (or ‘black’ land)</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spies</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplying the enemy</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The campaign could have an even broader, more indirect relevance to other policies where tenancy arrangements gave rise to substantial class cleavages. An investigation of rent reduction’s effects in Pingshun county, Taihang, concluded the campaign, was ‘the key to arousing the masses’ and therefore ‘central to all work’.60

By the same token, party documents pointed out, where the campaign lagged, so did other policies. Thus, the North China bureau’s assessment of the campaign in Pingxi county during 1940–43 said that mass mobilization was in a poor state, as was the work on running the elections, building up the party organization, expanding the people’s armed bands and carrying out the unified progressive tax.61 A similar statement was made for three Taihang counties. Failing to properly institute rent reductions, work in general was described as ‘bad’, ‘slow’, ‘stagnant’ and ‘spiritless’ – ‘this is the
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saddest lesson we have learnt during the past few years’. According to the Shandong party sub-bureau in May 1942, cadres’ neglect to pursue policies improving the people’s livelihood, particularly rent and interest reduction, had ‘brought about a situation ... whereby the mass work has no foundation and the basic masses have not been adequately mobilized. It has influenced the progress of the work in all fields and has enfeebled the base area. This is the essential reason for the stagnation of all kinds of work.’ On the other hand, ‘success in this rent and interest reduction work mobilizes the villagers and makes them enthusiastically take part in elections and politics and support the village government.’

These assertions certainly overstate and simplify the campaign’s impact; other, interacting factors also played a part. But where rents were substantially curtailed, and these gains were consolidated, there is reason to believe that the policy significantly raised the peasants’ activism. Although their response to reductions was definitely not immediately and easily forthcoming, these arguably generated a great sense of élan given the unparalleled degree and range of subordination and arbitrariness which this social relationship implied. (This discussion, of course, presupposes the harsher kind of the enormous diversity of tenancy arrangements.) Put differently, the prolonged trials required to obtain a lasting rent reduction were precisely the kind of experience that served to stimulate consciousness. That probably only a small number of tenants completed the journey of anti-landlord struggles and became firmly committed to altered tenancy terms should not belittle the campaign’s import. They belonged to the locality’s hard-core leadership and had a key function in bringing along the many hesitant, even reluctant, peasants and in sustaining a continued, minimal degree of activism in adverse circumstances.

The campaign thus gave rise to a layer of leader-activists who were the fulcrum around which several kinds of tasks were performed. Rather than painting an altogether false picture, party sources therefore greatly exaggerated the direct impact of the policy by according it an overall dynamic character. The outward push of rent reductions was particularly stressed in the two closely inter-related fields of production and resistance.

A March 1945 Taihang report provided a successful example. ‘Based on experience from the past three years one can draw the conclusion’, it said in reference to areas where the policy had been ‘accurately’ implemented, that ‘the people’s resistance and production morale has been greatly raised and, generally speaking, the work tasks connected with expanding the army and
the militia and with production have been carried out well and speedily.66 According to Japanese researchers early in the war, when cadres told poor peasants in Heshun county, Shanxi, of the economic advantages of rent reduction and its relevance for the resistance, their response was such that the rich peasants ‘could not utter a word and were completely intimidated by the strength of the masses’.67 On the other hand, a JinChaji government directive in October 1943 observed that the policy’s lacking progress ‘caused the peasants to suspect us’ and concluded: ‘In order to carry on the struggle against the enemy, develop the production campaign, consolidate unity and tide over the difficulties, we must implement a thorough rent reduction by organizing and mobilizing the peasants better. This is an extremely important task.’68 Additional separate references to production and resistance will underscore their relationship to the campaign.

An early claim to the impact of the campaign on production was made in the 1941 programme for spring ploughing in JinChaji. While agricultural production developed highly unevenly, ‘[i]n certain areas where rent and interest reduction has been thoroughly enforced, the people’s production zeal has risen remarkably, the peasant masses have extensively participated in production, the labour force has been quite adequate’.69 Other assertions to this effect mostly date from later years. In August 1943, Lai Ruoyu thus reported to a local party conference in JiLuYu: ‘In places where rent reductions have been rather thorough in the past, this year’s production campaign develops better; in particular, it easily becomes a mass movement, as in counties like Wuxiang, Yushe, etc.’ Here Lai cited several village surveys.70 A document from Lin county in May 1945 concluded: ‘In the 1944 production campaign, facts told us that rents had to be reduced and feudal exploitation had to be given a blow before launching the production [campaign].’71 Rent reductions significantly spurred production efforts, additional sources on Taihang, JinSui, eastern Shandong, etc., pointed out in 1943–45.72

Again, one should be wary of attributing a decisive weight, or a straight effect, to the policy. Other circumstances clearly mattered. Thus, for instance, raised production activity was occasionally ascribed to a combination of lowering rent and clearing up old debts.73 Arguably, the message conveyed in the above cited examples was that rent reduction was a basic preparatory factor. This is in fact suggested in a 1944 report on the production drive in Taihang, which declared that reductions provided an incentive to the peasants’ production by rewarding efforts to increase the yield (improving
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land quality, etc.) and (partly) removed constraints to production, i.e. landlord interests.74

Reduced rents galvanized the resistance activity, many reports pointed out.75 Some were more specific: peasants volunteered as sentries, brought rifles and ammunition and made new clothes for the militia, while recruitment drives into the armed forces received a strong impetus.76

Incongruous currents

The expansive mobilizational momentum of the campaign was not a constant. Conditions in a given locality could produce differing results. Two stood out. First, rather than spearheading social changes, the campaign might have to be preceded by other policy measures to deal with more urgent problems in the area. When these measures lacked a reasonably concrete and cohesive framework for action, the danger of degeneration loomed large. Second, there was the possibility of the campaign becoming so self-absorbed or insulated as to pose an obstacle to the launching of especially an activity like production drives.

The first point contradicts the general applicability of Lai Ruoyu's assertion that 'only by completing this [rent reduction] revolution, the first revolution, can one enter upon the second [production] revolution'.77 A detailed survey in JiLuYu concluded that struggles against 'local tyrants' had top priority, followed by production and rent reduction drives in that order. Without a prior 'political liberation', people would not engage in the latter activities. The explanation was that these local power holders had gained domination by expropriating peasant land and 'manipulating' public land. The former process was accelerated by famine conditions forcing peasants to sell their land at low prices. Only after subsequent redistributinal struggles had 'partially' solved the peasants' land problem was the time considered ripe for a rent reduction campaign.78 The necessity to conduct such political 'anti-bully struggles' to prepare the ground for it was also observed in other documents.79

The intricacies contained in effecting an appropriate sequence of policies easily spelled a loss of direction. Events in Lin county form a case in point. Here local cadres, half-heartedly, started off with rent reduction work, presumably on orders from above. However, given the low tenancy in the area, these cadres considered the campaign an unlikely mobilizational issue, hence their lack of enthusiasm for it. The cadres then switched to anti-bully struggles which held out far greater prospects for material rewards, and, as
a consequence, the cadres reasoned, for popular activism. Rent reduction therefore got off the rail almost at the outset. Cadre predictions apparently came true as anti-bully struggles unfolded rapidly. But from the party’s viewpoint, they assumed a dangerously undisciplined character, with random imposition of fines and frequent beating and scolding. The party’s worries were reinforced by the spread of these tendencies to other areas where the rent reduction campaign was in progress. While the upper strata were the major target of the struggles, it is unclear whether it was the cadres or lower strata who played the more militant part. Nevertheless, the assertion that the ‘masses’ thoughts were confused’ suggests considerable popular involvement.

In the name of ‘emancipation’ (fanshen), the struggles became so disorderly as to include virtually anything, ‘whether a big or a small issue’, afflicting winter study sessions as well as causing incidents of robbery. Unsurprisingly, the struggles proved ephemeral and singularly ineffective. Combined with war weariness, these soon generated anxiety among the people. The upper strata, themselves hard pressed, skilfully utilized these sentiments to pacify, even win the sympathy of, the people, chiefly by spreading rumours faultfinding mass actions, cadres and government authorities and by appealing to superstition. The struggles thus backfired and rather provided the occasion for the upper strata to strengthen their position. A kind of radicalism that degenerated into chaos and thereby caused widespread uncertainty and fears turned into its opposite, a popular revulsion playing into the hands of the elite.80

The consequence of the second, introvert campaign tendency was pinpointed in a JiLuYu source of February 1945: with rent reduction taking on a self-contained existence vis-à-vis other policies and resultant loss of mutually supportive activities, the people’s collective energies could not be harnessed. Consequently, ‘in many villages one can see the tenant households who are active, whereas the non-tenant households look on with folded arms and are indifferent...’ It was inferred that the campaign must not be confined to the ‘narrow scope of economic exploitation’, like guaranteeing tenancy rights and rent refunds, but should be linked to other kinds of work.81

Given the wartime damage to agriculture and the resistance movement’s pressing demands for supplies (to be discussed in Chapters 10, 11 and 12), the negative impact on production efforts of a secluded campaign raised deeply disturbing prospects. Hence a JiLuYu document’s (July 1945) sharp
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criticism of the latter phenomenon and insistence that ‘it will not do to emphasize one at the expense of the other’. Combining the two fields was thus vital. But this involved major difficulties. Some Taihang sources said that these stemmed in large part from cadre misconceptions, implying a belief that a substantial rent reduction was a prerequisite for launching production drives, etc. The outcome was a failure to undertake preparations for them.

However, Taihang documents were not oblivious to the more basic reason for cadres’ rent bias. In brief, this activity (and sometimes also army recruitment) entailed too heavy commitments to leave the necessary latitude to engage in as exacting a task as to organize concerted production drives. As reported from some localities in the spring and summer of 1945, rent reduction took precedence over production in the competition for scarce time and resources. And even ‘where rents have been reduced one has not actively explored the methods of integrating [this policy] with production’. Only after serious losses and the passage of several months were the consequent drawbacks said to have been realized.

The sheer range of efforts required certainly precluded a swift transition. According to a Taihang document, ‘experience from 1945 prove that we must pay attention to the below issues in shifting from rent reduction to production’: train cadres and masses in organizing production; arouse mass discussions on mutual aid teams, demonstrate their advantages, explain how the teams are organized and undertake necessary reorganizations; as far as possible win the landlords over for joint production efforts with the masses; investigate difficulties in production and devise solutions to them. In other words, generating production drives involved raising responsible personnel, stimulating peasant interest in cooperative production, developing rural united front practices and attending to organizational problems.

No wonder Lai Ruoyu had to qualify his earlier cited formula of prior rent reductions paving the way for production drives by admitting that not all places which had made good progress in the former activity were successful in the latter respect.

Multifarious tendencies thus informed the campaign. But these centred most directly, and uneasily, on the crucial issue of how much social levelling the rural united front could tolerate for the sake of a resistance effort that was broad in terms of both participants’ class origin and their overall numbers. How, then, did CCP policies, and war developments, affect the structures of wealth?
NOTES

2. ‘Qu dangwei guanyu ruhe zhixing tudi zhengce de zhishi’, 15.4.1942, TW, p. 205.
6. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kangRi genjudi tudi zhengce de jueding’.
9. ‘Zanhuang xian Huangbeipingcun shehui jingji diaocha zongjie’, p. 14, NU.
20. ‘Pingbei de jianzu douzheng’, pp. 69–70.
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22. JinChaji bianqu xingzheng weiyuanhui (ed.), p. 188.

23. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu kangRi genjudi tudi zhengce de jueding’; JinJiLuYu bianqu zhengfu, p. 21.


28. ‘Pingbei de jianzu douzheng’, p. 76.


32. ‘Taihangqu jianzu jianxi de fazhan’.


34. ‘Taihangqu jianzu jinxian de fazhan’.


38. Li Youjiu (ed.), p. 64.


42. Crook, Revolution in a Chinese Village, (1959), p. 97. The peasants’ hesitant attitude was also noticeable in the realization of an exchange rate legislation favourable to the poorer peasantry:

   The majority of the peasants, especially the older ones, were still inclined to be cautious about incurring the landlords’ anger and opposition. According to their lifelong experience and that of their fathers before them, new governments might come and go, but the landlords went on for ever. They feared to follow the two young men’s experience. (p. 62)


45. ‘Wu zhuanqu quanmian guanche jianzu yundong zongjie’, p. 113. See also: ‘Pingbei de jianzu douzheng’, p. 72; Xie Feng, p. 656.

46. Ding Yuan, p. 91. Refers to the situation before spring 1943.

47. Yao Guang, p. 415.


53. Xu Linhan, ‘Yehuquancun quanzhong jianzu yundong chubu yanju’, pp. 1–10, NU.
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54. Tenants even withdrew from the peasant association as a consequence. Fang Cao, QZ, p. 342.
65. ‘Taihang laoqu wuge dianxing cun shinian lai tudi gaige chubu yanjiu’, p. 447.
66. ‘Taihangqu sannian lai de jianshe he fazhan’, p. 303. See also Li Xuefeng, ‘Zhengfu guoqu de chengji jichu he jinhou ying zuode shi’, March 1945, ZH, p. 329.
68. ‘JinChaji jianzu zhengce’, p. 79.
69. The document is translated in Mantetsu Hokushi keizai chōsajō, (1941), p. 111.
71. Yao Guang, p. 416.
75. ‘Lun jianzu jianxi de yi yi yu zhixing wenti’, p. 25; ‘Guan xian kangzhan chuqi de nongmin yundong’; JL, p. 453.
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79. For example, BoYibo, 'Taiyuequ quanzhong', p. 6.


81. Xie Feng, p. 655.


84. 'Yijiusiwu nian de da shengchan yundong', p. 743; 'Di wu zhuangqu bannian lai shengchan gongzuo gaikuang', p. 169.

85. 'Di wu zhuangqu bannian lai shengchan gongzuo gaikuang', pp. 169–170.

86. 'Yijiusiwu nian de da shengchan yundong', pp. 752–753.

87. Lai Ruoyu, 'Shengchan yundong de chubu zongjie', p. 375.
Redistributive measures, and the war’s convulsive impact, had important consequences for the configuration of landholding. Although a marked structural inequality generally survived the resistance period, in many areas land belonging to the upper strata gravitated to the poorer peasants who became de jure or de facto owners of it.

This shift in landholding would appear to contradict the party’s commitment in the united front agreement with the GMD in September 1937 to discontinue the pre-war policy of confiscating landlord holdings. Other party statements reinforce this impression. Liu Lantao, reporting in early 1941 to the Beiyue area party committee on the land policy, declared that there was to be ‘no alteration of the old land relationships’. Teaching material for cadres in the JiLuYu military district was even more emphatic:

The land ownership rights are to be guaranteed, and the present land relationships cannot be changed. Apart from the land of incurable big traitors, no matter the reason there must be no land confiscation whatsoever… The land problem will certainly be solved, but this is not the task at present. It should be solved in future within a countrywide scope.

If these pronouncements are understood as freezing the pre-war pattern of landholding with hardly any modifications, the discrepancy to actualities is obvious. A more likely meaning, however, is the rejection of a generalized land revolution, which the party had earlier striven for and many basic-level cadres still clung to tenaciously. The latter interpretation is supported by Liu Lantao’s elaboration which indeed gets to the heart of the matter: ‘This is not the time for completely solving the land problem, at present transitional and revolutionary reformist [geming gailiang] methods should be adopted.’
The quotation contains two key words, ‘completely’ and ‘transitional’. The former denoted limitations upon, but not wholesale abandonment of, the previous land policy, a standpoint which in the party’s view did not imply less zeal in improving the peasants’ living conditions. The latter term signified that the alternative policies were a strategy to promote the revolutionary process under the specific historical circumstances, not an attempt to bring it to a temporary halt. Hence the ‘revolutionary reformist’ character of these policies. Or, as was proclaimed already in May 1937, the party had to ‘pass over from the method of forcible confiscation to appropriate new methods’.

In the field of land policy, the quintessential new method was rent reduction. This policy switch was justified by reference to the new situation inaugurated by the full-scale Japanese invasion. National survival was at stake and giving up warfare against the landlords was unavoidable, Kai Feng explained:

Why has this policy [to stop confiscating landlord holdings] been adopted? This is because China is confronted with a grave national crisis, and because all the people face the danger of Japan annihilating China. The question of whether China’s land belongs to Japan or China is more important than whether the land belongs to the landlords or the peasants. Thus in order to unite the whole people to resist the Japanese invasion and save the country, the policy of discontinuing confiscation of the landlords’ land was announced. This was absolutely necessary.

The peasants were no longer to ‘limit themselves to their own immediate narrow interests’ but merge these with the ‘national interest’.

The party viewed this policy adaptation as a precondition to lessen the danger of landlord collaboration. Without revising past policy, cadres learned from studying the above quoted teaching material, ‘the landlords will be forced to run away, thereby weakening our capacity to resist and, besides, violating the united front’. Mao Zedong told journalist Guenther Stein in mid-1944 that ‘a policy of confiscating may drive them [the landlords] into the other camp. The peasants see the simple truth that rent reduction makes it possible for the landlords to remain, and helps to isolate the Japanese’.

What was the concrete import of this concession? The declaration to cease confiscating landlord holdings was significantly qualified: it did not apply to ‘the most criminal and evil big traitors’, the practical implications of
which are treated below. On the other hand, ‘anti-communists, diehards and puppet officers and soldiers’ in principle retained their land rights. The land of the third group was to be administered by the government and returned to them should they come back to the village. Here the party argued for leniency on the grounds that many had been forced to serve the Japanese. All those labelled ‘anti-Japanese’ were of course guaranteed property rights.10

There were other land cases that had to be dealt with. One was the so-called black land, the tax evasive device of the landed elite, occasionally in concert with the lower strata (discussed in Chapter 7). This land was not subject to confiscation if the owner paid up all taxes in arrears. Such was the wartime increase of this age-old phenomenon that only its partial discovery was declared sufficient to bring the government a substantial income. Additional categories included temple land, clan land, society land, grave land and school land. While administered by the government or a committee of the local people, these were to benefit the village community, especially the needy peasants.

It was one thing to agree upon the broad principles for handling the government or popularly administered land, the various types of which were usually brought together under the heading ‘public land’, its actual redistribution raised potentially contentious questions about how to measure individual needs and different degrees of land fertility. Apparently when apportioning the land according to numerical averages, the middle peasants, some of whom were classified as belonging to the well-off variety of this stratum, benefited at the impoverished peasants’ expense in terms of the lands’ quantity and quality as well as proximity. Similar problems occurred with confiscated landlord holdings, as when cadres took over the more fertile plots and rented out their own inferior land.11

Both direct and indirect measures served to disperse landlord and rich peasant holdings. The former was an outright confiscation that was mainly confined to the initial war years. Interviewed by G. Stein in 1944, Mao spoke of ‘a few experiences of land confiscation in some areas early in the war’.12 According to a Japanese intelligence report of November 1938, the CCP rapidly confiscated and redistributed land from June 1938 in an area stretching from the plain of northern Hebei to the eastern part of the province.13

Party documents did acknowledge confiscatory actions. For example ‘leftist deviations’ in the Pingshan and Pingding counties of JinChaji
reportedly led to a ‘very large amount’ of land confiscations, not all of which belonged to landlords and rich peasants. At times their livelihood was not taken into account; nor was the principle of landlords ‘voluntarily’ transferring a part of their land to impoverished peasants always respected. While condemning these occurrences, the source declared that the redistributed land would not be given back to the landlords unless their living conditions suffered ‘tremendously’. On the other hand, the redistributed rich- and middle-peasant land was to be returned to the original owner ‘without exception’.\(^14\)

As with the high tax exemption rate in the early years, confiscations had the advantage of bringing immediate and, in places, fairly substantial gains when a more institutionalized approach to redistribution was still not feasible. But the long-term politico-economic costs of those confiscations that went beyond the stipulated ‘biggest traitor’ limitation by far outweighed the short-term benefits: the wrecking of the rural united front. Hence the strongly worded disapproval by upper-level party organs of such unauthorized actions. These were associated with ‘extremist thought’, which, for example, emerged in parts of Taihang during the post-1942 rectification campaign to raise party members/cadres’ class consciousness. In line with the transitional essence of the resistance period, those responsible for the radicalism were told to take a longer view; confiscating the land ‘all at once’ (yi\(\text{xia}\)) would only drive the landlords into the arms of Jiang Jieshi, thereby weakening the CCP forces.\(^15\) In a 12-village survey of Xiangyuan county, Taihang, investigators discovered that 36 landlord and rich peasant households had been forced to give up 700 \(mu\) of land due to ‘excessive left’ struggles that arose in the course of a mass movement launched in the spring of 1942.\(^16\)

A particularly sensitive and knotty issue was how to deal with the land of runaway landlords. In principle, this land was not liable to confiscation, but would be administered by the government until the owner returned to claim it. However, problems arose on the question of collaboration. Only where there was ‘conclusive evidence’ of collaboration should the land be confiscated and given to peasants possessing little or no land. Peng Dehuai explained how the non-confiscatory land of runaway landlords was to be treated. First, the government would assume responsibility for leasing it at a below-average rent, with due account taken of concrete circumstances. Second, should the owner come back, the government was obliged to return to him not only the plot of land but also the amount of rent that had accumulated during his period of absence. Finally, the government had no
right to interfere in cases where the runaway landlords had entrusted the
cultivation of the land to relatives and friends. The caution informing these
criteria is symptomatic of the pains to which the party went in trying to
reassure the landlords of an elementary degree of security in the base areas.
Peng’s expressed hope on behalf of the party that the runaway landlords
‘will return home’ was no doubt genuine.17

There were, however, several difficulties with Peng’s simple traitor-or-not
formula. What kind of activity was to qualify as traitorous? To what extent
was it to be regarded as enforced or as voluntarily performed? Could the
verdict always be clearly established? Above all, how was a fair judgement
to be passed under strongly emotion-laden war conditions or against the
background of tenants harbouring pent-up animosities and grudges for
landlord-committed injustices and cruelties in the past? Examples given
elsewhere show that attaching a traitorous label could be a convenient and
effective way of settling old scores, including those of a personal nature,
even when no such guilt existed. If landlords were especially vulnerable
in this respect, they were not the only ones to suffer from ill-founded
accusations of collaboration. Abuses of traitor-labelling was a cross-class
phenomenon, as was actual collaboration.

The second, indirect way of reducing landlord, and rich peasant, land-
holding was to subject them to heavy economic pressures in effect forcing
them to give up a part of it. These varied in kind and degree, at times amount-
ing to radicalism. A few examples will suffice.

Japanese intelligence described how landlords and rich peasants in
the county of Dingxian in early 1940 turned over a part of their land to
peasants without payment to escape ruinous taxes – said to have been a
frequent occurrence elsewhere in central Hebei.18 A party study noted that
landlords in Yushe county, Taihang, lost much land to tenants in 1942 as
the former used it to make up for the insufficiency of grain in refunding
rents calculated from 1938. The large quantities of grain that the refunding
amounted to were due to the earlier lack of progress in reducing rents.
Called a ‘big mistake’, this redistributive method was apparently applied
too drastically by party standards.19

The issue of land sales calls for a comment. These could apply to higher
as well as lower strata, and derived from diverse circumstances. A village
in JiLuYu provides illustration. While heavy taxes had compelled three
landlord households to sell land, among the eight rich peasant households
who did so, four had been penalized for land concealment, two had been
harassed by bandits, one had lost labour power and one had fallen into economic difficulties because of heavy smoking. The causes for sale of middle peasant land were even more varied: harassment of bandits (four households), business failures (three), marriage and funeral expenses (two), redemption from original owner (two), penalties for land concealment and corruption (two), debt repayments (one), insufficient labour power (one). As for the poor peasants, almost half of their land sales were due to business failures (six households), while the other cases included harassment of bandits (two), insufficiency of labour power (two), funeral arrangements (two), redemption from original owner (one).

This wide range of factors producing land sales strikingly indicates a society in rapid change. In a sense, the village was a miniature of the bewildering stresses and strains overwhelmingly wartime China.

Banditry and land concealment were certainly not novel phenomena, but their scale mounted with the increasing social dislocation. Business failures testified to the difficulties of finding alternative ways of making a living. The continued traditional practice of spending heavily on occasions of marriages and funerals only worsened matters. Shortage of labour power reflected the coming of the war, with flights, migrations and recruitment into the armed forces. Taxes placed primarily on the upper strata implied a conscious socio-economic restructuring in progress, as demonstrated in the field of landholding.

LOOSENED LANDHOLDING

The war years saw a partial, but conspicuous equalization of landholding – the theme of the present section. As background factors (redistributive policies and war destruction/dislocation) are dealt with in other chapters, these are noted only when stated in the sources.

Beginning with JinJiLuYu, many detailed investigations were conducted by the party in Taihang. One 1942–43 survey covering 148 villages in 16 counties showed that compared to before the war landlord holdings of the total had decreased from 26.3 to 12.9 per cent and the number of households from 2.8 to 2.1 per cent. According to another study, a host of struggles during 1940–42 (to combat corruption and collaboration and to enforce refunds and fines) resulted in the following curtailment of landlord land (per cent):
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- ‘Four big dukes and princes under the emperor’ in Hexi county: 78.7
- Nine landlords in four villages of Pingding county: 59.
- Five landlords in Lixi county: 56.
- Landlords in four districts of Xidong county: 54.
- Landlords in three villages of Xiangyuan county: 53.7.
- Landlords in four villages of Ci county: 53.
- Landlords in the whole of Yushe county: 50.7.
- Landlords in four villages: 50.5.
- Landlords in the whole of Wuxiang county: 35.1.

Three elaborations were furnished. First, the scale of the bigger landlords in the surveyed areas was mostly cut down to the small-size category. In Xingtai county there were originally 37 landlord households each possessing more than 50 mu of land; after the struggles nobody had that much. The number of landlords possessing 120 mu of land or more in Wuan county shrank from 126 to 15. Second, some landlords went bankrupt, like 16 households in Xiangyuan county. They were unable to pay the public grain tax and even had to rely on relief assistance. Third, the consequence of the above was a notable decline in the number of tenants and in the extent of rented out land. The rented out land in a village of Hedong county was almost halved, while in a village of Ci county it decreased by nine-tenths. The number of tenants in a village of Lincheng county dropped from 90 to 20 per cent of the households.

The same 1940–42 struggles also brought about a shrinking of rich peasant land ownership (per cent):
- Seven rich peasants in Hexi county: 54.5.
- Five households in Liaoxi county: 41.
- One village in Pingshun county: 40.4.
- Four villages: 31.12.
- 26 villages in Piancheng county: 28.2.
- One village in Pingshun county: 20.58.
- Three villages in Xiangyuan county: 19.7.
- The whole of Wuxiang county: 8.
Anti-corruption struggles figured prominently. There was a social structural aspect: being the main rentiers in these areas, the rich peasants usually became the struggle targets. Those having a strongly ‘feudal character’, i.e. depending largely on rents rather than their own labour, were particularly exposed to the attacks. Comparing the years 1938 and 1943, the number of ‘feudalistic’ rich peasant households in two villages decreased from 18 to 13, whereas no change was recorded for the ten rich peasant households who mainly engaged in labour. The effect on land ownership was drastic. Redistributive radicalism could extend to the upper middle peasants, whose living standards resembled the rich peasants’.

The same Taihang source also gave figures on land sales and purchases in the Wuan, She, Ci, Hedong and Hexi counties (Table 9.1).

### Table 9.1 Land sales and purchases in 12 villages in Taihang (mu)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1938–40</th>
<th>1940–42</th>
<th>After May 1942</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>-60.80</td>
<td>-115.10</td>
<td>-1,498.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial landlords</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-195.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>-131.00</td>
<td>-58.32</td>
<td>-583.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>+37.41</td>
<td>-3.20</td>
<td>+402.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>+104.11</td>
<td>+117.19</td>
<td>+1,004.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmhands</td>
<td>+5.30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+99.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Increases of purchases and sales over the years is evident, a tendency that was ascribed to socio-economic reforms. The consequent shift in landholding to the poorer peasants thereby reversed the typical pre-war pattern of the upper strata buying land.22

Other Taihang data on six villages in Yushe county demonstrated that while landlords and rich peasants were indeed mostly sellers of land – 34 and 25 per cent respectively of their households – one-fifth each of the middle and poor peasants also belonged to this category. However, the reasons for sales varied. Heavy taxes and rent reductions influenced landlords. A complex combination of improved and worsening conditions applied to the poor peasants: their sales of inferior land related to war damage and marriage expenses as well as to clearing up old debts and recovering mortgaged out land. A somewhat higher proportion of the middle and poor peasants purchased land. Three years of rent reductions and rent refunds enabled 34 per cent of the tenants to do so.23
A party survey of 15 villages in 12 Taihang counties conducted in May 1945 also illustrates the downward transfer of land ownership; here the impact of the rent reduction campaign was stressed (Table 9.2).

Table 9.2 Landholding in 15 villages in Taihang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Households (%)</th>
<th>Land owned (%)</th>
<th>Average land per household (mu)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landlords</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>23.04</td>
<td>98.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942 campaign</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>8.79</td>
<td>42.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944 campaign</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Managerial landlords</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>37.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>21.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rich peasants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>18.68</td>
<td>30.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>14.53</td>
<td>20.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>17.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle peasants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>30.80</td>
<td>37.02</td>
<td>11.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942</td>
<td>46.79</td>
<td>54.87</td>
<td>11.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944</td>
<td>55.20</td>
<td>60.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor peasants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>48.95</td>
<td>18.98</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942</td>
<td>42.12</td>
<td>20.05</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>17.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farmhands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before May 1942</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After May 1942</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1944</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The land-to-the-poorer tendency is obvious: landlord holdings were greatly reduced; rich peasant land basically remained intact; the striking middle peasant gains were largely a result of the poor peasants’ upward movement. A number of mass actions from April 1944 through February 1945 – lowering rents, raising wages, attacking corruption, uncovering ‘black land’, etc. – reduced the five landlord holdings in one southern Hebei village from 20.2 to 12 per cent of the total. The land possessed by the 14 rich peasant
households contracted slightly from 18 to 17 per cent, whereas that of the middle and poor peasants expanded from 45 to 49.5 and from 15.3 to 18.3 per cent respectively.  

Statistics on JinChaJi mostly refer to the Beiyue area. According to a 39-village survey, the land ownership losses of the upper strata and the gains of the lower strata were largely set in motion by the rent reduction campaign (Table 9.3).

### Table 9.3 Rent reduction and landholding in 39 villages in Beiyue (per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Land owned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>8.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>35.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>40.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmhands, etc.</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As in Taihang, a 1943 survey showed it was the poorer peasants who purchased land from the better off (Table 9.4).

### Table 9.4 Sale and purchase of land in 24 villages in Beiyue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sale</th>
<th>Purchase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mu</td>
<td>per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>1,320.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>1,061.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>765.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>492.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmhands</td>
<td>7.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchants, etc.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Adapted from Fang Cao, ‘JinChaJi jiefangqu de tudi zhengce’, QZ, 1.6.1945, p. 343; ‘Kangzhan liunian Beiyuequ’, p.226 (see also pp. 232–234).

Data on a village in central Hebei covering most of the war period corroborates the dispersal of land ownership in favour of the lower strata, with important time-fluctuations depending on the military situation, the level
Structural Fluidity

of mass mobilization and cadre policy. Landlords sold 149.32 mu, while the 240.95 mu they purchased in 1943 was returned during the 1944–45 rent reduction drive. The rich peasants bought an insignificant amount of land and sold 219.612 mu. Following an initial contraction of middle peasant land, the trend was reversed in later years as the rent reduction campaign intensified. This development also enabled the poor peasants to purchase 280 mu, after a heavy economic burden had impelled them to sell 100 mu in 1942–43. In another central Hebei village studied by Friedman et al., the 103 poorest landowning households had a 300-per-cent increase of their holdings during the decade from 1936 due to economic reforms forcing the well-off to sell or mortgage out a part of their land. As a result, the range of strata-based per capita holdings contracted substantially.

A JinSui investigation of five villages illustrates how many poor peasants obtained increases in land ownership to elevate them to middle peasants, while their number was also augmented by the land losses of higher strata. Nevertheless, great inequalities remained in 1945 (Table 9.5).

Table 9.5 Rent reduction and landholding in five villages in JinSui

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>Land owned (%)</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1945</th>
<th>Average land per household (mu)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmands</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Li Chengrui, *Jingji Yanjiu*, p. 103

Land sales and purchases in two areas of northwestern Shanxi, JinSui, comprising 14 administrative and 17 natural villages, basically conformed to the same pattern. Land put up for sale until 1942 was owned as follows (per cent): 77.9 and 51 had belonged to landlords and rich peasants (figures for these strata were combined in the two investigations), 28.3 and 14.3 to the middle peasants, and 16.6 and 7.5 to the poor peasants. Of the land purchased, one of the investigations said 10 per cent went to landlords and rich peasants and 86.3 per cent to middle and poor peasants. The other investigation gave a similar picture of purchases (per cent): landlords – 0.7; rich peasants – 13.9; middle peasants – 52.8; poor peasants – 32.5. The
landlords and rich peasants mostly sold inferior hilly land and kept the more fertile plots for themselves.27

The trend for the lower peasant strata’s total share of land to rise and the landlords and rich peasants’ to decline is also observable in the Shandong base area. Here the impact of war and taxation was stressed (Table 9.6).

Table 9.6 Land ownership in 21 villages of the Shandong base area, 1937–42

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>Land owned (mu)</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>Land owned (mu)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3,914</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>15,381</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>10,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>6,496</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>9,914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>15,258</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>17,815</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Another survey of the same base area recorded changes in land ownership throughout the war (Table 9.7).

Table 9.7 Land ownership in 11 villages of the Shandong base area, 1938–45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households</th>
<th>Land gained (mu)</th>
<th>Land lost (mu)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>22,401</td>
<td>-22,073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>-1,023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>+1,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>+3,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hired farmworkers</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+658</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to a late 1943 source, landlords’ pre-war land ownership in six southern Shandong villages decreased from 26.95 to 15.66 per cent.28

Party documents on land changes also contain abundant statistics on mortgages. Depending on local customs there were several kinds, a common one being the diandi practice. Usually this implied that the landlord exchanged his land for a certain sum of money to a poor or middle peasant, who was entitled to cultivate this land for an agreed period. While the landlords’ motive varied, generally, it reflected worsening living conditions or it was a pre-emptive measure to avoid economic impositions. As assessed by a comprehensive Taihang investigation, mortgaging land was a temporary retreat by landlords and rich peasants with a view to recovering the land at an appropriate time.29 Since mortgaging did not
Structural Fluidity

directly and immediately touch upon the essential issue of the present discussion – changes in land ownership – this arrangement will not be considered in depth. To be sure, mortgaging and related practices could be an important indirect means of effecting a land redistribution. Yet their high degree of uncertainty and fluidity often makes it extremely difficult to establish their clear-cut impact in this regard. By thus focusing only on the straight cases of changes in landholding, its overall scale has probably been somewhat underestimated.

Two fundamental points emerge. First, landholding did undergo far-reaching changes, a tendency noticeable already in the initial war years, although within a fairly limited part of the vast resistance areas of North China. This substantiates the earlier identified pattern of enclaves of redistributive policy progress. Second, considering the diversity of social structures and processes, causes and outcomes, etc., these changes exhibited a striking commonality in essential content: landholding was dispersed from upper to lower strata.

In viewing this shift, attention must not be exclusively fixed on the more conspicuous cases. Those of a minor kind could also be critical to a poor peasant eking out a living close to destitution. A small plot of land, even if insufficient to meet family needs, or none at all made a big difference, as did an increment to the original holding. So urgent was the peasants’ demand for land that many were desperate to ‘seize upon the favourable opportunities [to buy land] presented by landlords casting aside land’. Poor peasants would even sell badly needed grain and some used relief grain and money to obtain land ‘while going hungry’ – ‘a rather widespread phenomenon’.30 As two detailed land surveys on JiLuYu in late 1941 pertinently concluded (with wider application), ‘[f]rom these [surveys] can be observed the general situation relating to the distribution of land: the degree of land concentration varies greatly from one county to another. On the whole, the degree of concentration is far from serious, but the broad impoverished labouring masses are in acute lack of land’.31

Redistribution’s partial impact meant the upper strata continued to own a disproportionate amount of land over large areas. A few examples will serve as illustration. Citing statistics on 25 villages in consolidated areas of Beiyue in mid-1941, Peng Zhen concluded the relative economic strength of the classes had ‘not yet fundamentally changed’ (Table 9.8). This enabled landlords and rich peasants, who had a surplus of grain and money, to manipulate the grain market and the flow of goods in the rural economy.
Table 9.8 Land ownership in 25 villages in Beiyue, 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (%)</th>
<th>Land owned (%)</th>
<th>Average land per person (mu)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landlords</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich peasants</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>17.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle peasants</td>
<td>50.12</td>
<td>50.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor peasants</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>20.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmhands</td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Inequality in landholding was also qualitative. Fertile land, flat land and irrigated land were mostly held by landlords and rich peasants, with middle and poor peasants cultivating the inferior hilly and dry land. Making up 7.59 per cent of the population in 100 administrative villages in northwestern Shanxi, the landlords and rich peasants possessed 56.6 per cent of the irrigated land. Only 16.8 per cent of it was held by the poor peasants who were 41.2 per cent of the population. Another, single-village investigation of the same region revealed an even more inequitable distribution of fertile land: the landlords and rich peasants’ population share of about one-fourth compared to their holding 94 per cent of the irrigated land and 78.5 per cent of the flat land.32 Since there is no mentioning of how long the Shanxi villages had been under party control, the data can only very roughly indicate the problem.

Sharp contrasts in landholding thus persisted even in areas with a relatively strong CCP presence. The case of a village in southern Hebei indicates just how protracted and thorny the equalization process could be. Following the CCP takeover of the village in 1944 and the establishment of a resistance government, a number of measures were instituted to undercut the landlords’ and rich peasants’ economic power, including rent and interest reduction, debt settlements, anti-corruption struggles, land redemption and wage increases. Still, in September 1945, of the village’s 210 households, the 18 landlord and 21 rich peasant households owned no less than 35.52 and 16.98 per cent respectively of the land.33

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Difficulties of equalization in regard to landholding meant that the same was true for the distribution of economic resources generally. Party statements to
this effect are found throughout the war. In a 1941 comprehensive report on JinChaji, Peng Zhen noted that ‘economically we have only been able to weaken [the feudal system]’, adding that economic class cleavages had generally seen no definite change compared to the pre-war pattern. Speaking on economic work to a Taihang senior cadre conference in February 1943, Rong Zihe concluded that ‘the feudal forces’, despite having been ‘greatly weakened’ politically, continued to dominate the lower strata economically.

The war years did, however, see a large-scale, albeit geographically rather restricted, social mobility. Its hallmark was the so-called middle-peasant-ization (zhongnonghua) tendency whereby, roughly speaking, landlords descended markedly and rich peasants somewhat, most middle peasants maintained their location and some became rich peasants, while large numbers of poor peasants and those below climbed upward. Let us first look at relevant figures and thereafter consider circumstances explaining and qualifying them.

Data on JinChaji chiefly refers to the Beiyue area in the first half of the war. One survey covered 45 villages, classified as consolidated, during 1937–41. Of the landlords, 11.02 per cent declined to rich peasants, 4.72 per cent to middle peasants and 6.88 per cent to poor peasants and others, while 15.15 per cent of the rich peasants sank to middle peasants and 1.29 per cent to poor peasants. Regarding the middle peasants, 88.37 per cent maintained their position, while others rose to rich peasants (1.67 per cent) or dropped to poor peasants (8.18). On the other hand, 18.66 per cent of the poor peasants became middle peasants and many approached their living standard. Farmhands and workers also rose significantly (per cent): 44.04 climbed to poor peasants and 16.25 to middle peasants, and 1.02 even up to rich peasants.

In another Beiyue investigation of 12 villages in the years 1939–41, the landlord and rich peasant descent was 12.44 and 8.33 per cent to middle and poor peasants respectively. The ranks of the middle peasants saw both an increase, by 10 per cent of the poor peasants, and a slight attrition as 5.41 per cent fell to poor peasant and farmhand status. Thirty per cent of the farmhands rose to poor peasants and 2.71 per cent to middle peasants. A four-village investigation in Beiyue’s Pingshan county showed that seven out of the pre-war 28 landlord households had sunk to rich peasants by 1941. Among the 71 rich peasant households, 16 had declined to middle peasants. Eleven of the 261 middle peasant households became rich peasants and ten poor peasants. As many as one-third of the 317 poor peasant households
ascended to higher status: 99 households to middle peasants and six to rich peasants. About half of the farmhand households rose to poor and middle peasants.  

As for the central Hebei area, a 1945 document said that the number of landlord households in one village had decreased since 1937 from eight to zero and rich peasant households from 21 to 11. The number of middle peasant households had jumped from 180 to 243 due to attritions from above and especially from below. A considerable downward mobility by higher strata meant that poor peasant households still totalled 62 as compared with 74 before the war.

Turning to JinJiLuYu, there were several Taihang investigations. One recorded a large increase of middle peasants in 15 villages of seven counties as this stratum was replenished by one-fourth of the poor peasants in the years up to May 1942. Three-fifths of the farmhands also moved upward. About one-sixth of the landlords declined, mostly to rich peasants. A small portion of the latter became managerial landlords, while one-fourth fell to middle peasants and some to poor peasants. Campaigns centring on rent reduction in 20 villages of seven counties after May 1942 caused no less than one-third of the landlords and rich peasants to sink to lower categories. The same proportion of poor peasants ascended to middle peasants, while two-thirds of the hired labourers became poor peasants.  

A seven-village survey in five counties late in the war registered a striking rise of the lower strata: 35 per cent of the farmhands and craftsmen to poor and middle peasants, 47 per cent of the poor peasants to middle peasants, and 14 per cent of them to rich peasants. A rent reduction campaign in a locality of Lin county lasting from November 1944 through January 1945 brought about an ascendancy of 20 among 57 ‘utterly destitute’ (chipin) households to poor peasants and of 42 among 255 poor peasants to middle peasants.  

The rise of the more impoverished to so-called new middle peasants was also prominent in the village of Ten Mile Inn. They included:

The labour hero Wang Chen-chi, the buck-toothed ex-farm-hand Chang Chi-chen, who had redeemed his father’s land, the outspoken first chairman of the peasant union, Wang K’e-pin, the cultivator of the gravesites, Wang Shao-wen ... those who had dared to pay off old debts at the new exchange rate; those who had joined the mutual aid groups and been enabled to take part in trade-and-transport expeditions; those who had exerted great effort in reclaiming wasteland, as well as those women who had set the county record in spinning and weaving.
Structural Fluidity

Comparing the years 1940 and 1944, a swelling middle peasant component was also observed in JinSui. Of the 1,961 middle peasant households, 1,870 maintained their position, while 4.6 per cent rose to rich peasants. No less than 1,951 out of 3,378 poor peasant households ascended to middle peasants and another 45 households to rich peasants. Besides, 227 farmhand households made their way up to middle peasants.44

The documented social mobility was largely the work of the CCP’s socio-economic policy strivings. What about those parts of the border regions which were less affected by them and suffered more from the Japanese army operations, that is, the particularly unstable so-called guerrilla areas?

Party sources on these areas typically convey a dual message: while often the interests of all were harmed by the Japanese forces, the extent varied by class. A nuanced presentation was contained in a frequently cited wartime Taihang study. As observed in Chapter 8, Japanese army practices in the guerrilla zones created three kinds of area differences in regard to rent reduction conditions. The same typology was applied to the issue of social mobility. In the first case, comprising three villages in Hexi county, the professed allegiance of the government administration to the Japanese was essentially a cover for CCP-led resistance activity. Here the rich peasants had a slight movement in both directions. Almost one-third of the middle peasants sank to poor peasants, who basically remained in their position. The second area felt the impact of the Japanese ‘colonial policy’ more strongly. In the relevant village in Liaoxi county, the general decline in living standards hit the middle and, especially, poor peasants much harder than the landlords and rich peasants, who did not move out of their locations. Only the upper middle peasants recorded a substantial rise due to their governmental control. In the third context of Japanese repression and destruction, the downward tendency of all strata in the examined village in Xixi county was very pronounced.

The investigators then proceeded to considering how the specific conditions in the guerrilla zones affected the various classes. While landlords were often able to use their sway over the village governments to protect themselves against high taxes, war destruction of their means of livelihood generally caused a sharp income decline. A survey of the 21 main landlords in nine counties showed that only two of them managed to avoid an economic downturn. The others either had their income halved or became dependent upon serving the Japanese. Most of the rich peasants
also sustained losses from war damage, but their economic fortunes did not fluctuate as widely as those of the landlords. Some rich peasants manipulated the government administration to their advantage. Poor and middle peasants suffered equally from the harrying of the Japanese forces, but the poor peasants’ lesser economic ability to cope with the hardship was evidenced in their making up most of the people leaving their villages. Precipitous decreases in job opportunities and in real wages (by as much as three-fourths, one investigation said) turned many landlords into a fleeting stratum of casual labourers. Their income did not even allow them to return home.45

Economic as well as political circumstances thus significantly counter-vailed the partly socially levelling impact of the Japanese military. Most fundamentally, unequally distributed economic resources entailed unequal vulnerability to material adversity. A 50-per-cent drop in the landlords’ income was still likely to leave them well above the poor peasants. After all, figures cited on landlords descending to lower class categories show that few sank below the middle peasant status. Politically, the CCP’s very tenuous hold on these areas afforded the upper strata greater possibilities to influence government financial policies to offset losses. Besides, collaboration might offer these strata an escape route to protect at least a sizeable part of their wealth. Enrolling in the puppet army/administration could likewise be a way out for the poor, but only as a means to obtain a pathetically low wage when no other prospect appeared to be in sight. Again, inequality of opportunity ensured a basic inequality of outcome.

If the causes of social mobility were in the main clearly discernible, these nevertheless exhibited considerable complexity; in a sense, individual village experiences contained a uniquely interacting set of influences. Data on two Taihang villages shed some light on the issue.

The most detailed material is from the Huangbei village in Zanhuang county. First, an outline of the class structural changes during 1939–42. Four landlord households sank to rich peasant and one to middle peasant status. The increase of rich peasant households from six to 13 was chiefly a function of their splitting up households and of landlord descent. The swelling of the middle peasant stratum was obvious here, too: these households grew from 39 to 53, largely due to the upward movement of 16 poor peasant households from a total of 60. Most vagabonds improved their position.
This mobility was attributed to six issues. Taxation was the main one by causing a dispersal of landlord holdings to poor peasants through sales or mortgages. Second, the policy to lower rents contributed to the ascendency of seven or eight poor peasant households and to the decline of one managerial landlord and one rich peasant household, due to land redemption or rent refunds. A third factor was the war’s direct and indirect effects on the supply of labour power. Its insufficiency compelled four landlord households to engage in production. Being favoured in this respect helped two middle peasant and some poor peasant households to move upward. This condition also benefited the vagrants. Fourth, profitable commercial outlets gave one middle peasant and three poor peasant households the opportunity to rise to higher strata by taking up sideline businesses like peddling and running bean curd and oil shops. Fifth, five impoverished peasant households who before the war had engaged in banditry, and related pursuits like gambling, stealing and trafficking narcotic drugs, were mobilized in production activities that raised their position from bandits to farmhands (one household), poor peasants (two) and middle peasants (one). The bandits’ involvement in ‘honest work’ was given a stick and carrot explanation, that is, the government outlawing their previous undertakings and offering an economic treatment promising future rewards. The sixth point included several situations: a managerial landlord split his household thereby descending to lower, middle-peasant status; an upper-middle-peasant household switched to commerce on full-time basis; one farmhand household climbed one rank by reclaiming two mu of land, another by making charcoal; an upper-middle-peasant household dropped to a poor peasant position because of business failure.46

Social mobility in Huangbei thus derived primarily from the party’s main redistributive economic policies, taxation and rent reduction. The other major objective of the CCP’s economic endeavours is also conspicuous for its (mostly) upward effect: to restore, increase and broaden production to attain a measure of self-sufficiency. Not all statistical changes were genuine. Splitting up the household was an often employed landlord and rich peasant tactic to lessen the economic burden shifted on to them.

The other village investigation, of Daochang in Wuxiang county, first considered the causes of upward social mobility. Half of the ascending 30 households had taken back collateral land and redeemed mortgaged land. Six households were buyers and mortgagees of land. Redistribution of public property had benefited four households. Earnings had been augmented by
carrying services (three households) and by outside employment (two). Although no class indicators were given, it is obvious from the context that the rising households belonged to the lower strata. On the other hand, no class was immune from descent, although its relative spread was not stated.

Landlord and rich peasant decline was mainly due to a heavy economic burden, the sale and mortgaging of land, the use of casual labourers instead of long-term hired hands and to debt settlements. Insufficient labour power and a tenuous relationship to production had a downward effect on some poor and middle peasants. The restructuring mechanism at work in this village bears a close affinity to the one in Huangbei village. Impositions placed on the rich forced them to relinquish a part of their land, permanently or temporarily, to the poorer strata, whose increased access to this resource mainly enabled their ascendancy.47

Social mobility thus basically resulted from conscious CCP efforts, although other factors could also be important. Statistics indicate that its most common pattern was a short-range movement (defined as change by one class category), with a fairly significant medium-range element (a change by two classes). Only in exceptional cases did classes travel the long-range distance of rising or falling by more than two class positions.

In conclusion, class structures in most of the investigated areas were in the process of being broken up, not broken down – society had acquired a fluidity that tentatively raised possibilities of a novel dimension.

Another fundamental point about the wartime social mobility is that upward movement was in the final analysis a relative matter. Whether or to what extent the poorer peasants’ living standards actually rose is debatable. Obviously their lot was better in areas where the CCP’s policy programmes had made a more lasting impact. Jack Belden, upon returning to North China in 1947 to cover vast stretches of the region, made an interesting observation:

For conditions in areas that had been under Communist control for only two years and those that had been under them for five or six were entirely different. It never failed to impress me that in many small villages in the basically poorer mountain areas, conditions were far better than in larger villages on the richer plain. In the first case, the villages had been under Communist control for seven years; in the latter, only since the Japanese surrender.48
Structural Fluidity

Although one may doubt the accuracy of the percentage figure, Bo Yibo’s assessment of the economic achievements during the eight war years in JinJiLuYu seems reasonable:

The standard of 80 per cent of the people has not been lowered despite all the hardships of the Japanese war. This has been due to the redistribution of wealth and to the production campaigns carried out with intensive vigour, especially during the last two years.49

Having examined the redistribution of organizational and economic resources in Parts II and III, it remains to be seen what these hardships amounted to concretely and how the CCP fought the manifold battles on the production front.

NOTES

5. SW I p. 272; Mō Takutō Shū, vol. 5, p. 199.
7. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu KangRi genjudi tudi zhengce de jueding’, JR, 6.2.1942.
16. Li Youjiu (ed.), p. 73.
17. Peng Dehuai, 'Guanyu genjudi zhengquan ji nongcun tongyi zhanxian wenti', 25.9.1940, ZH, p. 102.
19. Li Youjiu (ed.), p. 64.
24. 'Hua xian de gu dian pin yundong', JL, p. 490.
28. TW, pp. 142–143.
30. Ibid., p. 73.
34. Peng Zhen baogao, (1941/1981), pp. 61, 71.
38. Peng Zhen baogao, p. 67. For another Pingshan investigation see 'Wu zhuanqu quanxian guananche jianzu yundong zongjie', p. 124.
44. Mu Xin, JinSui jiefangqu niaokan, (1946/1984), p. 68. It is added that a survey of 33 villages in two counties yielded a similar result.
46. ‘Zanhuang xian Huangbeicun shehui jingji diaocha zongjie’, 1942 or 1943, pp. 21–23, NU.
47. Li Youjiu (ed.), p. 61.
49. Ibid., p. 70. Conversation with the author.
PART IV

PRODUCTION TRIALS
Chapter Ten

Calamitous Years

SUCCESSIVE BLOWS

Wholesale destruction

The advancing Japanese armies laid tremendous waste to many areas. Indiscriminately demolishing whatever lay in their path was an important part of the ‘pacification’ strategy particularly against the resistance bases. Wartime Japanese army sources reveal the thoroughness with which the razing of the villages was carried out. During the military campaigns in Shanxi from September to October 1940, the army was ordered to ‘burn down and level to the ground ... the enemy base area and to make future living there impossible’. This was to be achieved ‘especially thoroughly in villages with enemy military facilities’. The instructions to the army defined ‘the targets and methods’ of the operations as follows:

- To be massacred: the enemy, and the potential enemy among the natives; those males aged 15–60 having an enemy character.

- To be seized, carried away and when unavoidable burnt up: provisions and fodder gathered by the enemy; documents used by the enemy; weapons, ammunition, implements, explosives concealed by the enemy.

- To be burnt down, destroyed: villages having an enemy character.

In October these operations were conducted daily in villages along a 6-kilometre area.

Another army document on mopping-up campaigns in southern Shandong provided details of items destroyed in 163 engagements from 2 November to 23 December 1941: two munitions factories, one hand grenade factory, one ammunition storehouse, one clothing factory, four clothing storehouses, 48
provision and fodder storehouses, two hospitals, one primary school, two cooperatives, two cotton factories, one newspaper office.¹

In areas designated no man’s land by the Japanese army, little or nothing was spared. Post-war research in the PRC into the consequences of this policy objective in Xinglong county of eastern Hebei during 1942–44 tells a truly horrendous story: 15,400 people slaughtered; 15,000 people brought to Manchuria for forced labour; 70,000 houses burnt down; 30,000 livestock seized and taken away. By the time of the Japanese surrender in 1945 the population was down to 100,000 from 160,000 in 1941. The indiscriminate wreckage, the same source records, caused the spread of infectious diseases – the resultant deaths in eastern Hebei climbed to staggering levels:

- Pingquan county: 10,000 out of 70,000; in one area 2,100 out of 5,300.
- Jianchang county: 7,700.
- Xinglong county: 6,000 (summer of 1943).
- Longhua county: half of the population in some villages.
- Chicheng county: 63 out of 280 households in one village.²

A Japanese regimental commander frankly told Prince Mikasa Takahito that ‘[o]ur policy has been to burn every enemy house along the way we advance. You can tell at a glance where our forward units are’.³

Utter devastation was not limited to areas where the resistance forces were active. To quote from an account by two Western journalists:

The Japanese had just left, but they had blazed a black, scarred trail of devastation across the countryside. You might ride for a day through a series of burned villages that were simply huddles of ruins. In some places the roads were so torn that not even Chinese mountain ponies could carry you down the ditches cut across them. You had to pick your way down on foot and lead your horse after you or ride for hours on the crest of a barren ridge looking out into the hills beyond. Then there would be a single hut standing by itself in the vastness of the hills; with roof fallen in and timbers burned black, it would stand as a symbol of the desolation that ran from end to end of no-man’s land.⁴

By taking a comprehensive look at the cataclysm brought directly and indirectly by the Japanese army, including its reinforcing the impact of natural disasters, it will be demonstrated that the CCP, in addition to the exacting resistance task, faced even more formidable ordeals: the breakdown of people's living conditions, producing virtually ubiquitous crisis phenomena. In this light, assertions by many historians that wartime
developments strongly favoured the growth of the CCP movement is a gross simplification; it only addresses novel opportunities opened up to the CCP, chiefly the weakening of the GMD, while ignoring the enormous difficulties, hazards and dangers that the war conditions imposed on the CCP movement. Besides, harnessing advantageous circumstances required commensurate qualities.

Forced labour
Many villagers were compelled by the Japanese to fulfil labour duties. These included repairing roads, digging trenches, constructing fortifications, building houses, working in the village administration, etc. The extent of these duties differed greatly by area. In an unspecified part of Taihang these could amount to 25 days a month for able-bodied men, though 10–15 days was more common. One-eighth of the population in four Taihang villages performed labour duties every day, while all males aged 18 to 50 worked half a month without pay. In some localities of southern Hebei they had to spend an average of one-fifth of their time on these duties.

Large numbers of men were abducted in Japanese raids. In mainly nightly surprise attacks, 20,000 men were press-ganged in various places of JiLuYu within half a month in May 1942. These raids instilled widespread fears. Thus, the seizure of 500 people during a mopping-up operation in one district of Taixi, western Shandong, caused a virtual exodus. In one district of Feicheng county, 80 per cent of the able-bodied left. Of the roughly 41,000 Chinese who were shipped to Japan for labour service, one historian writes, ‘[a]bout 1,000 died aboard ship or shortly after arrival, and about 6,000 died at work sites in Japan. The major causes of death were malnutrition and illness due to overwork and exhaustion.’

Recurrent massacres
Army instructions referred to above demonstrate that Japanese massacres were neither isolated nor accidental occurrences. The intention behind the ‘extermination strategy’ and its indiscriminate character was unambiguously stated in an army report from May 1943:

The primary aim of the suppression and clean-up operations is not to establish control over a locality, but to capture and kill the enemy. The simple increase in the number of abandoned corpses does not necessarily indicate how much damage has been inflicted on the enemy since this figure often includes many [non-CCP] people.
The accuracy of overall statistics on killings is highly uncertain. The CCP calculated in 1946 that the Japanese were directly responsible for 732,000 deaths in the JinJiLuYu border region and for 726,488 deaths in the JinChaJi border region. Wartime and post-war party sources contain numerous examples of slaughters committed by Japanese troops. A few references will suffice. In JiLuYu, collective killings involving more than 1,000 people took place in five areas between September 1937 and March 1938. During the winter of 1940, about 5,000 villagers in one county of the Taiyue area died in indiscriminate killings. Japanese military campaigns in the spring of 1940 caused the loss of 10,688 lives in the one Taihang county of Wuxiang. In one eastern Hebei village, all the 1,230 men, women and children were forcibly amassed inside a courtyard and shot dead. To be sure, these figures are mostly approximate and not verifiable; that the occupiers did perpetrate numerous massacres is, as Japanese sources amply testify to, beyond doubt.

Natural disasters

The people’s plight was made worse by the natural disasters that swept China during the war years. In 1939 JinJiLuYu was struck by a big flood that submerged 20 counties and inundated vast stretches of cropland and countless houses, rendering three million people homeless. A drought spread widely in JinJiLuYu and JinChaJi during 1942–43, seriously affecting one-fifth of the Taihang base area, 39 counties in western Hebei and four-fifths of the province’s central part. Plagues of locusts hit large areas of Taihang from 1943; by 1945 their scope had expanded to 43 counties.

The ravaging impact of the natural disasters on village life centred on JinJiLuYu. Examples are plentiful. In the spring of 1940, people displaced by famine in four Taihang counties added up to 48,449. A March 1943 report by the JinJiLuYu border region government said the ‘disaster conditions’ in two sub-districts ‘have now become so grave that almost half of the people have no grain to eat’. In the same month it described the situation in the core CCP areas of JiLuYu: calamity victims from other areas were roaming about, their number increasing daily; they could be seen ‘everywhere begging for food’; ‘people starving to death and cases of stealing are recurrent phenomena’, the latter antagonizing the local population. By late 1943 the JiLuYu party committee estimated that 1.2 million people lived in famine conditions. With army provisions drying up, calls were raised for collecting grain in the Japanese-occupied zone. Nanle county in southern Hebei was
Calamitous Years

another particularly hard hit part of this area: a 1942 famine, aggravated by the plunder of Japanese and puppet troops, caused a 9-per-cent death rate, about 17,000 lives. Regarding JinChaji, crop failures in three sub-districts of Beiyue in 1943 claimed large numbers of deaths, with survivors generally living on wheat husk and tree roots. Those who could have millet husk were considered fortunate.18

In the wake of the disasters diseases spread. A survey of Zuo Quan county, Taihang, showed that droughts, plagues of insects and other calamities caused febrile diseases, malaria and scabies among a rising percentage of the population: from 2.1 in 1939 to 22.3 to 1941.19 Other localities in this region also recorded alarming numbers of people who contracted various illnesses, such as 20 per cent (6,319) in the northern part of Licheng county and 30–70 per cent for individual villages. Those contracting malaria in two Taihang villages were 514 out of 604 and 308 out of 411 respectively.20 In places the diseases caused a high death toll. Some villages recorded infant mortality rates above 50 per cent.21 The diseases weighed heavily on the production campaigns as well as on the resistance effort. For example, 83,676 soldiers in the Taihang area contracted illnesses22 – a forceful reminder that building up armed strength involved a constant, severe war of attrition.

In face of such adversity, pessimism and demoralization spread. A leading party figure in JinJiLuYu later recalled that ‘the social order was in chaos’.23 The outcome was an overall organizational weakening. A western Hebei document of March 1943 evidenced a profound crisis: ‘In the famine some party branches collapsed and party members fled in disorder ... the work came to a complete standstill. Some party members and village cadres came to resent higher party organs and lost confidence in the revolution.’24 In the worst affected areas desperation gripped the people. Whole families committed suicide. Infanticide spread. Women and children were sold as servants or exchanged for rice. Divorces increased sharply. Belongings such as furniture, clothes, agricultural tools, miscellaneous household things, etc., were sold off cheaply and in great quantities. Oxen and sheep were offered for sale, and livestock was slaughtered.25

SHATTERED LIVES

War and natural disasters dramatically raised the death rate and decreased the population in many localities. In the occupied zones the death ratio could even be as high as 40 per cent, while in some other Japanese-held
or more fiercely contested areas, 5–15 per cent of the population did not survive. 26

Data from southern Hebei in late 1943 indicate that generally five per cent of the population perished in the seriously calamity-hit areas, with 30–40 per cent for individual localities. 27 Another report speaks of 200,000 deaths for the area as a whole during 1942–44. Here it was admitted that the party’s concentration on financial issues to the neglect of mobilizing available organizations for production had contributed to the scale of human losses. 28 Crop failures in northeastern Shandong claimed a staggering number of deaths, with the famine-stricken areas of Liaocheng county being reduced to utter misery:

In the winter of 1942 and spring of 1943 countless old people and children died. At first there were still enough people to bury them, but later, as the whole locality became littered with dead bodies, not even the burying could be attended to.

In despair people began to eat the flesh of the corpses. 29 The core of the base areas generally suffered less from war destruction and was economically more resistant to the consequences of natural disasters. Yet these areas could also be severely hit. Surveys from the Wutai mountains in Shanxi ‘showed that’, in Nie Rongzhen’s words, ‘from 1937 to 1941 the population of an average community decreased by 11 per cent’ due to Japanese attempts to stamp out the resistance. 30 This is close to a general party estimate from 1942 according to which yearly deaths amounted to 115 people out of 1,000. 31

Massive numbers of people fled areas rendered practically uninhabitable by the Japanese army and/or natural disasters. This could involve anything from 10 to 90 per cent of the population, depending on the gravity of the food shortage in the area. Successive years of crop failure and Japanese army attacks caused large-scale flight from the 300 villages in the Sha area of Henan. When people fled famine-stricken areas in western Hebei in early 1943, starving to death was a ‘continuous occurrence’ in some places. Countless localities were indeed depopulated as villagers, among them many party members, fled famines. 32

Japanese sources reported in mid-1938 on large-scale flights. In Handan county, Hebei, 6–7,000 people out of 16,000 fled due to flood and crop failure. 33 A natural disaster did of course hit all in the affected area. However, it was the poorer people who suffered most since they had fewer resources
Calamitous Years

at their disposal. In Liang county, Hebei, those starving to death included 1,700 poor peasants, 1,185 utterly destitute, 769 middle peasants and 153 rich peasants. Of the people who fled the area, there were 2,400 poor peasants, 1,900 utterly destitute, 1,600 middle peasants and 280 rich peasants. Very few landlords reportedly faced either of these two situations.34

These are only a few examples of the numerous population movements. Given the wartime dislocation, data on overall numbers are fraught with uncertainty. Not surprisingly, widely divergent assessments have been put forward. The most comprehensive statistics, a 1946 GMD government archival report, calculates that as many as 26.17 per cent of the country-wide population was uprooted in the course of the war.35 It is impossible to know exactly how the migratory shifts affected the border regions. Many people seem to have made their way to the base areas, putting even greater strain on their economy.36

The wartime convulsion thus had a profound effect on village society. The varying fate of the people in two villages in northeastern Shandong well summarizes the above discussion on the diverse forms which the havoc took. Of the originally about 400 people in the village of Dahuayuantou, 80 fled; 12 able-bodied men were press-ganged; six persons starved to death while performing forced labour; 32 young women remarried and left for a distant place; six girls below the age of 14 were sold by their parents; 14 infants were left abandoned; 64 persons starved to death; 12 whole households were wiped out. In the other village of Moliying, 212 of the 943 inhabitants starved to death; 284 were abducted and 11 were beaten to death by the Japanese; 460 fled the village; in 14 households none survived; the remaining 12 people ‘ate bark and tree leaves at home’.37 (As the total of these categories of people exceeds 943 there is obviously a statistical inaccuracy here.)

Without belittling the tragedy that befell so many people, it can also be argued that in the longer perspective the war destruction also had a ‘constructive’ aspect: it shook up age-old customs and beliefs, particularism and parochialism.38 But natural disasters sometimes had the reverse effect. Especially in the worst afflicted areas, there was a revival of traditional superstitious practices and organizations in a desperate search for a way to lessen the suffering. Some party members, overcome by hopelessness and resenting the failure of higher party organs to ‘solve the difficulties for us’, turned to Buddhism.39

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Impaired resources

Productive capacity, appallingly low before 1937, sustained enormous damage during the war years. Although the reasons for the various losses cited below could be complex, war destruction and natural disasters were basic.

The agricultural labour force contracted, resulting in an acute labour shortage. A decline by roughly one-third during 1937–40 was reported from northwestern Shanxi. More precisely on the same area, the years 1938–41 saw a drop by 63 per cent in 62 administrative villages; and by 1942 only one-fourth of the people in eight counties still engaged in agriculture. Here recruitment into the regular army and guerrilla forces had also drained off the agricultural labour force considerably.

The farm stock saw a drastic lowering. A 1945 document said that Japanese campaigns had caused a reduction in draught animals in 25 Hebei and Shanxi villages by 63 per cent (old liberated areas) and 54 per cent (new liberated areas) during the war period. In Beiyue, surveys of 35 villages in consolidated areas and of 42 villages in guerrilla areas recorded losses of draught animals in the years 1937–41 at 29 and 19.3 per cent respectively.

The situation was no less disastrous in JinJiLuYu. According to an investigation of 32 villages in JiLuYu, of the original 1,012 draught animals, only 354 remained at the end of 1942, and in the spring of 1943 almost all had been eaten up or sold off. Livestock in six Hebei counties was only 61 per cent of the pre-war number by late 1940. The corresponding percentage for 11 JinSui villages was 42, with rates for mules at 23.2, donkeys 32.2 and oxen at 61.8.

The Japanese army’s objective to deprive the base areas of livestock did not always lead to killings. Sometimes it was taken as booty. During the seven-week operations in southern Shandong in 1941, for example, the Japanese seized 745 horses, 4,615 oxen, 13,885 sheep and goats and 97 pigs. The loot of a campaign in Hebei included 126 mules, 414 oxen, 197 donkeys and 1,170 pigs.

With fewer people to work in the fields, fewer draught animals available and direct war damage to the soil, the area under cultivation shrank. Japanese occupation policies in some areas of Taihang had dire consequences. In three villages half of the land went out of cultivation; in four other villages one-fourth did; in yet another village 120 mu of irrigated land became dry.
land and 57 mu of land was used by the Japanese for blockades, trenches and walls. In some localities of the JinSui border region as much as one-third or half of the cultivated land fell into disuse.

**Lowered production**

The wartime conditions were bound to deliver a heavy blow to agricultural output. By 1940 only 22 per cent of the cotton area in North China was still under cultivation. Some areas were of course more severely hit than others. A 1937 Japanese investigation of the harvest in eastern Hebei and along the Tianjin-Pukou railway recorded dramatic decreases compared to pre-war averages. In these two areas, *gaoliang* went down by 50 per cent and paddy rice by 80 per cent. During 1937–40, fighting in JinSui reduced the grain yield by more than one-third, while cotton output dropped by 60–97 per cent. There were average declines of one-fourth to one-third in grain and other crops in western Hebei.

While these decreases were mainly ascribed to war developments, natural disasters also had devastating consequences for agricultural production. A mass of statistics compiled by Japanese researchers in 1937 show that only about 20–50 per cent of the crop could be harvested in the flooded areas; in some places there was no harvest at all. In southern Chahar in 1940, a Japanese intelligence source noted, the combination of heavy rainfall and Japanese attacks reduced the harvest to 40 per cent below an average year. To cope with the situation, taking grain from the village was prohibited and efforts were made to bring it in from the occupied zones. A 1943 emergency directive issued by the southern Hebei party authorities said that a draught and locust plague caused a roughly 50 per cent drop in the autumn harvest. And to make things worse, large numbers of people fled into the area from western Hebei and the counties north of the Yellow River bank where the grain situation was even bleaker. CCP sources say that the 1942 and 1943 autumn harvests in the disaster affected areas of Taihang were generally only 20–30 per cent of the average.

Party investigators found that in parts of Taihang the yield per mu on irrigated land in 1942 was down by 80 per cent compared to before the war and by 50–60 per cent relative to 1940. On dry land the corresponding declines were 60 and 30 per cent. With less to eat, people’s and draught animals’ work performance deteriorated. In a famine-hit locality of She county, a draught animal’s ability to plough was lowered from five to two mu of land, while hoeing one mu required the input of five work units instead of
the previous three. Even in the better off areas of Wuxiang county, donkeys’ capacity for carrying grain saw a decline from 100 jin to 70–80 jin, and still people had to help them in upward slopes. As the yield went down, so did income. This was particularly apparent in the more war-ravaged areas once occupied by the Japanese. In one village the peasants’ income in 1941 was only 44.7 per cent of the pre-war level and in 1942 it dropped to 30.6 per cent. In another village the decrease was roughly one-third in 1941–42.

Crisis sentiments

This deterioration found expression in party statements on the food situation in the base areas, especially in the mid-years of the war. At a JinChaji cadre conference in April 1943 Cheng Zihua painted a gloomy picture:

Due to the war depletion over the past six years and to the enemy’s destruction, plunder and encirclement, the production has declined year by year. Besides, last year saw a shortfall in the harvest in some areas, creating the present serious economic difficulties. This is manifested in people lacking food in many areas ... in some areas they do not have any food at all; compared to a few years ago, the people’s feelings are very different.

Reports from JinJiLuYu were no less perturbing. ‘The gravity of the food problem is increasing daily’, it was stated at a JiLuYu financial conference in January 1943. In fact, there was an estimated two months’ discrepancy between the required and the available amount of grain for the period up to June: grain supplies for the people and the armed forces would only last until late March or early April. While constraints on army supplies grew tighter, imposing a still heavier economic burden on the people was declared unacceptable. The participants were urged to accurately assess and deal with the spread of famines caused by crop failures and Japanese crop-seizing raids. There were ample grounds for the admonition: the Taihang sub-bureau conference in June of that year harshly criticized inattention to the economic predicament. ‘The material and financial resources’, the conference report said, ‘have been severely drained during the past six years of resistance.’ Thus, when providing relief aid during the spring 1943 famine, ‘10 per cent of the population had no grain at all and many more were short of it.’ Not only the mass of peasants suffered from lean harvests. By July 1941, i.e. before the major Japanese onslaughts on the resistance bases, a JiLuYu government report conceded that work personnel ‘from the highest to the lowest levels’ had to endure ‘extremely harsh’ conditions.
Notwithstanding an overall severe grain shortage, spots of early progress were noticeable in agricultural production. A lengthy JinChaJi report in August 1940 concluded that production was rather developed in some areas, yet ‘extremely backward’ elsewhere. The former were claimed capable of supporting a large army unit without ‘feeling any major material difficulties’. ‘However, in northeastern Shanxi, which is quite a large area with a small army, it often happens that the armed forces and the government work personnel cannot find food.’

(Efforts to promote agricultural production are treated in the next chapter.)

Multiple circumstances

This chapter has examined the direct and indirect impact of war and natural disasters on village society in general and on agriculture in particular. It has also been noted that party practices could aggravate the situation. A Taihang investigation illustrates the variety of issues relating to a fall in agricultural production. Five background factors were identified. These were of a military, social and political character, and corresponded to the general three-component formula of direct, indirect and party-generated causes. The military aspect, i.e. the destructive activities of the Japanese army, has already been dealt with at some length. So fearful were the people of the Japanese occupation policies that, following a ‘clean-up’ campaign in the winter of 1940, they did not dare to live in an area of Yuci county.

The social dimension of production decrease had two aspects. First, exposed to ravages of war, hunger, freezing and malnutrition, people’s health deteriorated sharply, resulting in the spread of diseases. The most common of the serious diseases in Liao county were those caused by harmful cold factors, followed by malaria and scabies. About 20 per cent of the population contracted the diseases. The poor peasants made up the absolute majority as they were too short of money to hire casual labour or take medicine. They were often ill during the busy season. The second feature was a marked decline in the availability of hired labourers since the beginning of the war, which negatively influenced the production zeal of those primarily employing their services, the landlords and rich peasants. The increase in casual and seasonal labour proved an inadequate substitute. The shortage of long-term hired labourers was particularly noteworthy.

The political impact proceeded at the two levels of policy implementation and organizational practice. The former referred to the tax policy which, in combination with war-related losses and expenditure, had brought
about a sharp reduction of draught animals during the period 1936–41. Unfortunately, no indication is given as to how and to what extent taxation contributed to this outcome. Possibly the tax burden was too heavy. Subsequent policy-revision, again, no elaboration, was said to have brought an increase of draught animals, but not up to the pre-war level.

Organizational practice, specifically the frequent holding of meetings, infringed heavily on working time. In one village of Liao county, the one month’s loss of working time in December 1941 amounted to 50 per cent for cadres and 13 per cent for the people. Meetings to enlist new recruits in one village of Yushe county consumed altogether 12.5 days of a month in 1941. During the plantation and harvesting seasons in Wuxiang county in 1941, considerable time was spent on village elections, combat preparations and tax arrangements. As a consequence, cadres let much land lie waste. Time allocation for a peasant in Xingtai county during 1941 showed the following pattern (per cent): working in the fields – 22; resistance duties – 39; cutting firewood – 16; rest – 8; miscellaneous work tasks – 5. Not surprisingly, the peasants complained of too many meetings.66

Other sources give a similar range of causes. Apart from war destruction and natural disasters, the roughly 40-per-cent reduction of the yield in the Taihang counties of Xiangtan and Piancheng was attributed to ‘our inadequate work methods’, activities of enemy agents (including their distorting the party’s tax policy), landlords’ slackening efforts to cultivate the land, the drain of labour power due to military recruitment and flights.67

This multiple and geographically expansive onslaught on agriculture – forcefully demonstrating the extent to which North China was turned into a single and closely interwoven, yet extremely fluid and variegated battlefield – compelled the CCP to take energetic counter-measures. It was acutely aware that a sustained resistance effort required definite material support.

NOTES
2. Himeta and Chen, Mō hitotsu no sankō sakusen, (1989), pp. 70, 161–162. The authors’ summary of investigations by local party authorities. For further details on Xinglong see pp. 68–70.

5. On the other hand, there are four very informative essays on the Sino–Japanese war period that broadly address the concerns of the present chapter in Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (eds), *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001). All focus on Central China, despite the fact that the Japanese army’s ravages, slaughters and repression generally were pursued far more extensively and systematically in North China.


Village China at War


22. Qian Xinzhong, 'Kaizhan qunzhong de zaihuang he women de douzheng', April 1945, WS, p. 663.
29. 'Lu xibeiji jiuzai zhenxianshang qu', p. 703; 'Beiyuequ dangqian de zaihuang he women de douzheng', pp. 723–724.
33. 'Hokushi suigai, senka chōsa hōkoku' (3), Mantetsu Chōsa Geppō, July 1938, pp. 92, 113. The first part of the report was published in May and the second in June. Below cited as 'Hokushi suigai'.
34. Song Renqiong, 'Jinan youji', p. 160.
Calamitous Years

37. ‘Lu xibei’, p. 573. For a description of the daily struggle to stay alive in the destitute conditions produced by war and natural disasters in 1941–43 and of how these gave rise to flights, see ‘Shaqu da zaihuang ji shengchan zijiu douzheng’, JL, pp. 550–558.


43. ‘JiLuYu bianqu kangRi genjudi fazhan shilüe’, pp. 422–423. Detailed figures on Taihang are given in: TW, pp. 113, 134; LiYoujiu (ed.), p. 94.


46. Eguchi, pp. 64–65.


55. Chūō mekkyō iinkai chōsabu, Satsunan henchi k ōnichi akka kōsaku jittai chōsa hōkokusho, (1940), p. 100.


58. Li Youjiu (ed.), p. 93.

59. TW, p. 134.

60. Li Housen, ‘Dikou tongzhi’.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Compounded Toil

STABILIZING CONCERNS

Redistributive measures could only partly alleviate the peasants’ material hardship. These had to be combined with persistent efforts to expand production where possible or, in less favourable circumstances, prevent or slow its decline. A report at a cadre conference in late 1943 pinpointed the limited effect of redistribution with reference to rent and interest reduction. This policy ‘does not increase goods and materials, but only distributes them rationally’. Maintaining a certain production level was declared essential not only in tackling acute poverty: sustaining the growing army, government and party organizations required large food supplies. Failure to attend vigorously to these realities was liable to undermine the army’s combativity and endanger the very survival of the bases, the report warned. Its conclusion was a recurrent theme in party sources: ‘If the economy and manpower of the base areas are weakened two problems will arise: first, the war effort cannot be supported; second, the people will have no means to make a living.’

Agricultural production was indeed vital to the sustenance of the base areas: it was the principal source of raw materials for the handicraft and light industries and, above all, grain, as the staple product, was the main factor in stabilizing prices and obtaining government income from taxes. Hence the frequent stress on developing agricultural production. In Deng Xiaoping’s words at a Taihang production conference, ‘if you were called upon to found a base area, you must remember that the first thing to do is to resolutely deal with the problem of the masses’ and the army’s agricultural production.

The disasters wrecking agriculture and the crushing demands placed upon it created an urgent need to develop production campaigns – this was the stern message contained in many party documents by the third year of the war. A Taihang report in mid-1940 described how destruction
by the Japanese army, in addition to unspecified policy mistakes by the CCP, had exhausted and demoralized the poor people to the point of their losing confidence in resistance and production and feeling that ‘too heavy a burden’ was imposed on them. Nor did rich peasants and landlords take an interest in production. And there was no end in sight to the deaths and flights.

The urgency to launch production drives was compounded by an apparently low popular awareness of the rising material support that the resistance effort required. In northwestern Shanxi the call for a spring ploughing campaign, ‘to solve the grain problem for a prolonged resistance war’, met with a cold popular response: ‘People think [that] the resistance war is only a matter for the government and the army and that it has nothing to do with themselves.’ With the Japanese occupying the more fertile regions and the CCP retreating into the remote, mountainous areas, the document continued, production had to be increased and not just maintained, since ‘only then can the resistance war be supported’.

**Hesitant beginnings**

Spring ploughing campaigns conducted in many areas of JinChaji and JinJiLuYu during 1940–41 marked an initial attempt to actively develop agricultural production. Let us first consider a detailed document on these campaigns in JinJiYu that cogently elucidates their pressing necessity as well as outstanding problems.

The necessity turned on stabilizing the base area, i.e. to satisfy popular and army demands for grain, in conditions where ‘the people live in destitution, prices soar, countless people cry from hunger and cold...; this has already brought about a most serious and tragic situation in the base area and driven a big wedge between the broad masses and the party, government and the army’. With the peasants lacking in production zeal and the villages being ‘riddled with gaping wounds’ these organizations were called upon to exert maximum efforts.

Of the four problems declared to bear upon the execution of the campaigns, three deserve emphasis for their very intricate and sensitive nature. First, the grain supply was to be regulated to aid famine-hit areas, ‘otherwise people will starve to death’. Yet given the grain’s hugely unbalanced supply and demand, the issues From where? and How much? were potentially highly contentious. Second, the holdings of the landlords who had fled high taxes, or who had simply let the land go out of cultivation for...
the same reason, were to be redistributed. These rates had also discouraged the middle peasant stratum from producing more. Their effects threw into strong relief the difficulty of harmonizing the two imperatives of social equalization and increased production. Third, the depletion of labour power due to army recruitment thrust upon the CCP the tasks of taking care of the soldiers’ families and of mobilizing all villagers for defence and other policy programmes in the locality. This brought to the fore the issue of how to share out the overall resistance burden fairly.7

These were widely and continuously felt dilemmas which we shall return to in this and the following chapter. Nonetheless, it was an important feature of the spring ploughing activities that their comprehensive scope foreshadowed the focus of later, large-scale production campaigns: increasing agricultural production by repairing sandbanks, restoring to production formerly cultivated land and preventing flood; initiating cooperative forms of labour and helping to overcome the lack of seeds and tools (the shortage of tools due to Japanese destruction and flooding was so serious that their replenishment was the ‘main preparatory work’ of the campaign in some areas); undertaking relief work by organizing the refugees to reclaim wasteland, while the government and the spring ploughing committees tackled problems of tools, seeds, houses and grain; providing ‘substitute ploughing’ for the impoverished and those lacking labour power, especially soldiers’ families, and armed protection for the spring ploughing. Committees were set up at various administrative echelons in 1940 that assumed responsibility for planning, investigating and supervising the campaign.8

In parts of JinChaji, significant immediate gains were scored in extending the area under cultivation as peasants were absolved from rent obligations on reclaimed and abandoned land.9 Generally, however, the spring ploughing activity remained unco-ordinated and defensive. Certainly the general objective to raise agricultural production to pre-war levels was too optimistic.

A massive attempt
As intensified Japanese army offensives, natural disasters and rapidly rising military and administrative expenditure threw the base area economies into a severe crisis, the spring ploughing campaigns proved quite inadequate to cope with the situation. The growing predicament was reflected in party declarations. While a production campaign had been described as one of the most ‘urgent present objectives’ in 1939,10 Peng Zhen warned two years
later that the resistance was in danger of disintegrating unless one shifted 'the focus of improving the people’s livelihood to the aspect of developing production'. In short, a far more systematic approach to the politics of production had become imperative. The result was the CCP’s launching of the intensely propagated Great Production Campaign in 1943.

This campaign grew out of emergency circumstances. To be sure, the need for production campaigns and combined labour schemes had been expressed in party writings much earlier, and practical steps in this direction were evident in the spring ploughing campaigns. But the very heavy preoccupation with developing production was a novel departure. It was indeed at variance with the party’s frequently stated view that priority should at first be given to redistributive measures and only when these had made substantial headway would the time be ripe for concentrated efforts on production. Both policies were to be pursued simultaneously, but with emphasis shifting from one phase to another. By such standards, the kind of all-out production offensive proclaimed in 1943 was clearly premature.

Another, most fundamental problem with this formula were the enormous difficulties of putting it into practice. To place these problems in a broader, essentially rural united front context, we shall turn to a May 1945 JiluYu document entitled ‘Peasant mobilization must swiftly and resolutely be shifted into a production campaign’.

The repeated use of the expression ‘swiftly and resolutely’ betrays a strongly felt apprehension: it was an admonition directed at localities where the socially transformative policies had made an impact and the peasant movement was ‘brisk’, precisely the conditions from which peasant radicalism usually emanated. To convert redistributional mass struggles into a production campaign was declared essential to a ‘normal [zhengchang] rural united front’. The necessity to develop the material foundation of the base areas was also mentioned in this context.

Local organizers were charged with the truly Herculean task of first mobilizing the peasants for transformative anti-elite struggles and then, at the ‘crucial moment’, switch popular energies mainly into joint production efforts that blunted sharp class conflicts. These were not to be allowed to ‘drag on’ as the anticipated consequences for the party’s wartime strategy were deemed disastrous. First, with radical thoughts, like dividing up property equally, gaining ground among poor peasants, their vital middle peasant allies would be alienated. Second, ‘enlightened’ gentry and landlords could
not, in these circumstances, be expected to take a cooperative attitude since protective laws and promises of certain gains were hardly to be trusted by these strata. In a word, mechanisms of absorbing and utilizing them were rendered inoperative. A third danger associated with peasant radicalism was a continuous social disruption that in the end generated widespread demoralization and lowered production zeal. The predicted outcome was waste and squandering of base area resources. As the summary stated, these scenarios ran counter to the three interrelated wartime objectives of the CCP: social transformation, a rural united front and resistance activity.

It was of course recognized that the villagers’ action patterns were not easily swayed by higher level directives. In fact, experiences from some counties confirmed that shifting the policy emphasis to production ran into the usual kind of local obstacles – perceptions of cadres and people in general. The credibility of the cadre-targeted criticism is difficult to assess as it, following common practice, only gives some surface manifestations without explaining background factors. Cadres were found to be insensitive to the perils of radicalism. On the other hand, peasants’ declared ‘unwillingness to engage in production campaigns’ was traced to a more substantive reason: radical redistributive struggles offered the ‘easiest and most effortless’ method of obtaining livelihood provisions. The peasants’ reluctance to discontinue such struggles was attributed to their belief that these ‘can solve everything’.

Put differently, why devote one’s energies to a hard and unexciting production campaign that held out very uncertain prospects of a quick return on labour inputs when livelihood provisions were already available at close hand and at the fair price of social justice? Again, the short-term perspective at grassroots clashed with the party’s longer policy view; radical redistributional urgency at the village level was too strong to enable the penetration of an overall assessment of what in official party eyes a sustainable resistance movement required. The concluding message was as clear as it was stern: feudal exploitation will be reduced, but the real key to improved living conditions lies in unremitting work efforts. Another factor, applied to cadres and peasants alike, arguably had the greatest inhibiting effect on the campaign in a general perspective: the peasants’ inexperience of organizing production on scales and in ways that contained many novelties.
Nevertheless, there are indications that campaigns to develop the rural economy could be conducive to cross-class cooperation. A 1943 Taihang report on the production campaign drew attention to its ‘gradually stabilizing’ influence on class relationships which had been severely rocked by earlier rent reduction and anti-traitor campaigns. Another Taihang document of late 1944 noted that production campaigns had ‘adjusted’ earlier ‘disorderly’ and ‘conflicting’ class relationships.

As will be observed, however, the production campaign did not relate uniformly to class issues. Rather, it had a dualistic import of both enhancing the economic power resources of the poorer peasantry and permitting a large scope for the elite’s economic pursuits. In rural united front terms, the subordination aspect was generally rather indirect and diffuse, whereas the utilization part was conspicuous and actively encouraged by the base area authorities. The production campaign did therefore not simply have the economic objective of tackling the villagers’ abject poverty and supplying especially military bodies with increased supplies; the intention was also to serve vital political purposes.

The hallmark of the production campaign was the extension, remoulding and more systematic application of previous practices, above all those relating to cooperative schemes and to the use of labour heroes for arousing mass activism. In calling upon the bases to prepare for a production campaign during 1944, Mao Zedong declared that it was to cover ‘both public and private farming, industry, handicrafts, transport, animal husbandry and commerce, with the main emphasis on farming – a campaign for overcoming difficulties by our own efforts’. Everybody but small children were to take part:

The gist of this policy is to organize the masses, to mobilize and organize into a great army of labour all available forces without exception – the people, the army, the government and other organizations and the schools – all men and women, young and old, who can contribute their labour power on a part-time or full-time basis. We have an army for fighting as well as an army for labour. For fighting we have the Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies; but even they do a dual job, warfare and production.16

These campaign features suggest, and party statements confirm, that the earlier warnings against slightening production had not been heeded. ‘In the past, we did not adequately devote ourselves to agricultural production’, Deng Xiaoping acknowledged in October 1943. A report to a cadre conference two months later said that the party ‘has for a long time
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failed to pay attention to the base areas’ economic hardship and neglected production.\textsuperscript{18}

But to actively engage in organizing a production campaign was for many cadres a hard learning process; they felt that substantive reasons spoke against as exacting an undertaking. One has been already been touched upon: social levelling as the preferable method to betterment. A great many cadres, a December 1944 Taihang document spelled out, instituted ‘leftist’ rent reductions to ‘eliminate abject poverty’, an objective declared achievable only by developing production.\textsuperscript{19} In another example from the same region, cadre arguments that redistribution should take precedence over a production campaign (‘they discussed the issue every day’) was manifested in intimidating landlords into fleeing and then giving their land to the needy, apparently in substantial amounts.\textsuperscript{20}

A second ground for cadre resistance to the production campaign concerned military commitments, notably in the more contested areas.\textsuperscript{21} Here the party had a hard time convincing cadres of its feasibility, prompting a warning that disregard of the people’s hardship in the heavily war-damaged regions would block the build-up of resistance forces:

If one does not grasp this basic and urgent demand of the masses [to develop the production campaign] one cannot unite with them, and then proceed to organize them in fighting the enemy. Armed struggle will become a purely military operation without the support of the masses and it will be difficult to fight a protracted war.\textsuperscript{22}

There were certainly practical difficulties imposing particularly sharp variations on the progress of the production campaign in conditions marked by instability. Thus a 1945 survey of guerrilla areas in Shanxi and Hebei showed that campaigns were launched in somewhat less than half of the 2,247 targeted villages (432 of which were in Japanese occupied areas) in 19 counties, with participation percentages ranging from 100 for Fuping county’s 126 villages to 2.7 for the 148 villages in Yangqu county.\textsuperscript{23} It should furthermore be stressed that recorded work performance was qualitatively extremely uneven.

Labour heroes were a zealously publicized part of the campaign. The qualities ascribed to them were set out by Mao Zedong at a 1945 labour hero conference in Yan’an: their efforts and innovations to improve the people’s living conditions inspired emulation by others; they made it ‘easier to push
our work forward’ since they constituted the ‘hard core of the masses’; and they bridged the party leadership and the people by transmitting opinions in both directions. To what extend were these idealized claims valid?

Numerous examples were raised to illustrate how the presence of labour heroes crucially enhanced the campaign’s prospects. Characteristically, however, these accounts were couched in very abstract terms and clearly exaggerated achievements. Heroic individual deeds were not a universal feature of the campaign and were in any case unlikely to bring drastic production increases under the wartime circumstances. Rather, it seems that examples of bold challenges to acute poverty had the educational intention to inspire others to follow suit. This function was not unimportant: as in other fields, results did not have to be dramatic to be immediately useful and even contain a large future potential.

In the long term, the labour hero activities complemented and combined with other policies to raise local leaders. The import of the production exhibitions and labour hero conferences should therefore be viewed in this overall light, as part of the broad transformative endeavours. The objective of the exhibitions and conferences was to change the conception of manual labour and elevate the position of peasants and workers. Traditionally, manual labour and those who engaged in it were despised in China. They were to be completely subordinated to those who did the mental work. Although the peasants, according to Confucianism, ranked next to the gentry and above the artisans and merchants, they laboured ‘with their strength’ and were not held in high esteem. When Mao in his childhood read ‘the old romances and tales of Chinese literature’ he was puzzled not to come across peasants cultivating their land; ‘all the characters were warriors, officials, or scholars; there was never a peasant hero’.26

Speaking at the opening of a conference/exhibition in Yan’an for labour heroes of the ShaanGanNing border region, Gao Gang, a leading party figure there, proudly declared, ‘this is unprecedented in China and the East’. Gao contrasted the status of the ‘working people’ before the party had established itself in ShaanGanNing and thereafter. As an example of how it used to be Gao mentioned a play he had seen 10 years earlier in Xi’an that showed the peasants in a contemptuous light. He continued, ‘but now here among us, the working people receive a respect as never before. You are labour heroes, “The Number One Scholar” of the new society.’ The title [zhuangyuan] refers to a person who topped the highest imperial examination. They had owed this honour to their contribution to society, he
explained. Having asked who had made possible an adequate supply of food and clothing, Gao answered: ‘This has been created from the hoe, hatchet, whip and scissors which the labour heroes hold in their hands’, adding that ‘everybody should learn from you’.

The conferences were occasions for according the heroes profuse praise, not for an unbiased scrutiny of their merits and demerits; to stimulate emulation of the heroes’ potential rather than their actual social transformative impact was in reality the underlying conference theme. Occasionally documents questioned the ‘excessive’ acclaims given the labour heroes: surely they also had failings and should not these also be subject to close inquiry?

As has been amply demonstrated, local leaders from the masses were not necessarily obedient and effective tools for linking the party organization with the people: these leaders could be swayed by or immersed in village concerns that were not in keeping with the policy of the party centre. But there was also contention at the local level between cadres officially in charge of policy implementation and labour heroes whose mission in realizing party objectives was of an unofficial and generalized character. The extravagant praise showered upon the labour heroes caused misgivings among cadres. In their opinion, it was unfair that glory and encouragement was only extended to labour heroes, who, after all, had often gained their status through cadres’ mobilizational efforts. Many cadres were said to have reacted strongly: ‘We have engaged in revolutionary work for several years but nobody rewards us. The labour heroes have their skills, but surely the work is not only due to them.’

Arguably, cadres’ antipathy was exacerbated by the overbearing airs that some, especially newly elected, labour heroes put on. They reportedly looked down on county and district cadres. Examples were given of heroes who highhandedly took a wide range of matters into their own hands. The labour heroes thus related to cadres in complex ways. The party’s task was to develop cooperation between the two categories that did not infringe upon the labour heroes’ ideal qualities as largely independent mass leaders. The sharp criticism in party sources of practices whereby labour heroes were assigned to a variety of cadre positions – such as serving in the public security bureau, directing the militia, participating in cadre conferences, launching army recruitment campaigns – reflected an acute awareness that the heroes thereby lost their natural ties to the villagers and consequently their important complementary function as spontaneous community leaders. Nevertheless, promotion of labour heroes to cadres
was declared ‘too frequent’ and ‘too quick’.

At least part of the explanation for this practice appears to have been the desperate shortage of cadres. In conclusion, boundaries between the differentiated roles of cadres and labour heroes were often blurred which easily gave rise to antagonism between them.

Reference has already been made to another, constantly lurking, danger of the labour heroes cutting themselves off from the other villagers, namely, their adopting an elitist and arrogant attitude. ‘If you become conceited, if you are not modest and cease to exert yourselves ... then you will cease to be heroes and models’, Mao Zedong warned.

Labour heroes’ usefulness to the party might also be thwarted by their low qualities. Some ‘provisionally appointed’ heroes in Pingshun county were described as ‘loafers’. Of ten elected labour heroes in She county, five were not heard of any more after they returned home from a conference. Nor was it always a matter of rejoicing to be given the labour hero title. One hero ‘closed the door and wept, feeling he was very unlucky’.

Possibly the reaction was due to the heavy duties that sometimes accompanied the labour hero title, which could infringe on the private production and cause considerable worry.

A critical issue bearing on the process of raising labour heroes was the criterion for their elevation. The essential yardstick was the contribution to developing the village economy; on this basis a labour hero ‘should be commended, his position raised, his production experiences introduced and his model deeds propagated’, a Shandong sub-bureau directive laid down.

Other conditions were added. One referred to group-based ‘collective encouragement’, sometimes combined with competitions. Both aspects had a large divisive potential and tended to foment ‘local egoism’, that is, mutual jealousy and unwillingness to learn from each other. Political qualifications could be heavily stressed, whereby labour heroes might be adept at speaking but have a poor production record.

Another problem concerned the procedure for assessing the potential labour hero. For a time, at least in JinChaJi, selection was invested in the upper party organs. However, the drawbacks of this top-down method soon became obvious: people took little interest in an issue over which they had no say, and without popular scrutiny labour heroes easily acquired haughtiness and complacency. To ensure that they ‘represented the masses’ interests’ and enjoyed their prestige, a bottom-up approach was then tried. This delegated to the villagers the examination and choice of labour heroes.
In addition to the class-assertive content, the labour hero activities contained a largely overlapping gender-specific element of perhaps even greater historic novelty: the significant presence of women among those awarded this title. In Zuo Quan county, Taihang, for example, 56 of the 212 labour heroes were women.\(^3\) This acknowledgement and utilization of their capacities contrasted starkly with the women’s customary lot of, in the words of one sociologist, ‘[f]orced seclusion and imposed ignorance, lack of occupational opportunities, general discrimination against working women’.\(^4\) The women’s functions, another student of Chinese society writes, being limited mainly to ‘child-care, the preparation of food and clothing for the family and general household tasks’, they rarely undertook any outside activity, which was of a subordinate nature anyway.\(^5\) Only in a situation where the peasant women’s ‘family was both short of manpower and too poor to hire help, would a northern woman work in the fields, and then it was felt to be a cause for shame’. In pre-war North China, a mere five per cent of all agricultural work was done by women.\(^6\)

Mobilization of women for production activities essentially stemmed from the labour shortage – rendered all the more severe by the large-scale recruitment of men into the full-time armed forces – and from the scarcity of goods.\(^7\) Party sources furnished an additional reason for involving the women in production: it was conceived as the basic solution to their emancipation. As stated in the important central committee resolution of February 1943 on woman-work (funü gongzuo) in the border regions,

> progress towards women’s liberation through an amelioration in their educational level, their political position, and their living standards will arise from their economic independence and prosperity. If they produce plenty and are very thrifty, women and their families will be able to live better. Not only will this play a big part in building up the economy of the base areas, it will give women the material conditions which will enable them gradually to escape from feudal oppression.\(^8\)

This orthodox Marxist position implied a de-emphasis on emancipating women’s role in the family. Cai Chang, a leading figure in the party’s women’s movement, went as far as to assert that ‘[o]ur slogans are no longer “free choice marriage” and “equality of the sexes” but rather “save the children”, “a flourishing family” and “nurture health and prosperity”’.\(^9\) In fact, the 1943 resolution is remarkable for its almost complete silence on liberating
women from the shackles of tradition and patriarchy and its insistence on production ‘as the most relevant [work] for women’ and as a means ‘vital to safeguard their own interests’. Participating in production was ‘as glorious a struggle as that of the soldiers at the front’.

The concrete example of the work of the women’s association in Ten Mile Inn shows the consequences of this production-centred view. Although the poor peasant women made up the vast majority in the village, it was the old middle peasant women who assumed the leadership of the movement, due to their skill in spinning and weaving, which were the main production activities. They were ‘the only ones amongst the labouring masses who in the past had had enough capital for wheels, looms and other equipment and the raw materials’. Since women of landlord and rich peasant origin were also members of the women’s association, woman-work ‘tended to limit itself to production alone’, so much that:

The whole range of social objectives – such as equal status with men, freedom from oppression by parents-in-law, in brief, complete social emancipation – which had been aimed at in the earliest phase of the women’s movement, were now largely disregarded.

The extent to which the association’s work became production-oriented might have been specific to Ten Mile Inn. While the old middle peasant women took a positive attitude to income earning activities, they ‘had no vision of what their social emancipation could mean to them’, or, not being as harshly treated as the poorer women, they did not feel it as such a pressing problem. The failure to mobilize the poorer women resulted in an almost exclusive preoccupation with production. Hence, while the association did ‘succeed in building up a mass movement for production among women’, it ‘failed to do so in the field of social problems’.

Apart from the basic fact that the party had an extremely deficient understanding of what patriarchy meant, a key factor blocking emancipation efforts was fear of social disruption, at least in the precarious conditions of the war-affected areas. The issue was potentially explosive, threatening the marital relationships of many men in the army, government and party. It was no coincidence that left-wing women intellectuals who gathered to Yan’an in the beginning of the war, where they advocated maximum efforts to get rid of the old marriage system and criticized the party’s policy on women, were assailed in 1942 when the CCP was pressed hardest. The stress of the legal authorities’ work in Taihang on preventing the peasants’
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marriages from breaking up was indeed most notable at this time; instability was believed to play into the hands of the enemy forces. A Shandong document on woman-work declared that in dealing with marriage disputes in general ‘one should seek to patch up the quarrel and reconcile the parties concerned and to promote family unity’.

The women’s principal tasks in production were spinning and weaving. The work was either done independently or the raw materials were supplied by the government which then purchased the finished goods and paid wages. Various cooperative production activities were also undertaken. Increasing textile production was essential as blockades and soaring prices had caused an acute shortage of cloth and the rapidly swelling armies created a heavier demand for uniforms. In JinSui, where the Japanese had destroyed 60 per cent of the pre-war textile industry, about 125,000 women produced 75 per cent of what was needed in the region. Other initiatives supporting the production effort included operating sewing shops for the army, raising pigs and chickens, as well as contributing to the output of items like vegetable oil, cured leather and paper. Working in the fields was rather rare except in areas where the scarcity of manpower so dictated, or when harvesting had to be completed as soon as possible.

Women’s participation in production, party sources often claimed, raised their position in the home and society at large, since it created additional income for themselves and their families. The women’s increased social involvement certainly implied a significant advance. But the reverse side of the women’s production undertakings was their place in party ideology as the panacea for women’s oppression, a conception that was to outlast the war years.

Any quantitative assessment of the production campaign obviously has to take into account the wartime bleeding of agriculture – a stark fact precluding generalized production gains. More significant in the long term was the campaign’s qualitative aspect, namely the rich variety of labour combinations that it gave rise to and was crucially sustained by. Obviously, exhortations and mass mobilizational techniques were by themselves inadequate means to deal with the agricultural disaster; to yield appreciable results these had to rest on an organizational framework that demonstrated the concrete benefits to be gained from collective endeavours. These warrant a closer examination.
LABORIOUS EXCHANGES

The damage to agriculture, the shortage of labour power and the variety of military pressures – these made it imperative to raise efficiency through reorganizing production. The party’s main response was to promote labour exchanges or mutual aid (laodong huzhu). Its proclaimed inherent advantages included better and expanded use of labour power, draught animals and agricultural implements, and the opportunity to increase fertilizers and seeds, to launch water conservation projects and to enlarge the area under cultivation. These potential gains in turn held out promises of mutual aid backing up redistributive measures. Where, for example, rent reduction had effected a shift in landholding in favour of the poorer peasants, they were often unable to produce due to the lack of draught animals. As a consequence, some of the peasants obtaining land let it go out of cultivation. Again redistribution did not constitute a panacea.51

The concept of mutual aid can be traced to traditional forms of village cooperation. Indeed, initial organizational efforts depended heavily upon them: only after 1942–43, when production decline tended to erode them, did CCP-remoulded mutual aid make substantial progress. Customary cooperation had definite limitations for CCP purposes. It was confined to relatives and friends and operated extremely irregularly in terms of work schedules and calculation of work contributed. These traits proved hard to reform even after mutual aid had gained organization from about 1943. Their drawbacks were particularly evident in seasonal undertakings like sawing and hoeing young plants which required a rather strict discipline to finish on schedule.

Successful mutual aid organization gradually evolved from seasonal and provisional groups of a few persons or households into increasingly complex bodies, reaching the highest form of cooperation in the (almost) permanently functioning mutual aid cooperatives comprising most villagers. This process entailed an expanding range of responsibilities, culminating in the involvement of these cooperatives in – apart from agriculture – auxiliary and handicraft industry, transport, trade, supply and marketing, education, etc.52

A concrete idea of how mutual aid might operate is given in the study of Ten Mile Inn:

At harvest-time each group would split itself into labour-exchange squads of several families each, to work first on one family’s fields, then one another’s.
Animals were loaned to help carry home the crops from outlying land, to carry fertilizer to it, to do the ploughing and so on. Tools, too, were widely and systematically loaned and borrowed by group members. Households with few or no able-bodied men did spinning, weaving and sewing for those without any women. Accounts were kept in terms of man-and-animal-labour-days given or received, and payment for excess services rendered was made in cash or kind.53

As mutual aid arrangements were extremely diverse, suffice it to elucidate the characteristics of the two better-known types, called *biangong* and *bogong*.

There were three basic forms of exchange. First, there were exchanges of manpower to finish harvesting and other agricultural production in time. Second, there were exchanges of manpower for oxen and vice versa, to make up for shortages of either. Normally an ox was equal to three men. Finally, there was mutual assistance with tools.54

Two forms of *biangong* were prominent. In the first, encompassing three to eight households, cultivation was done on a rotation basis. The unit of calculation was either the number of days (‘I do a day’s work for you, and you do a day’s work for me’) or amount of land (each cultivated a specified amount of land for the other). With the work tasks exchanged in easily calculated ways, there was no need to keep accounts. Being fairly close to the peasants’ habits, the organizational problems were not overwhelming. It was a common kind of *biangong* during the spring ploughing. This *biangong* enabled a much larger proportion of the villagers to get access to oxen and tools. With the enlargement of these teams, fewer persons could accomplish the same amount of work. Four persons joining together were able to do the work of five, seven did the work of nine and ten the work of thirteen. The raised efficiency notwithstanding, this *biangong* had drawbacks: if leadership was not exerted with skill, the rotation of work tasks became inflexible and those at the end of the schedule might suffer losses as a result; and since membership was rather narrowly restricted so was the scope for efficiency gains.

In contrast, the second *biangong* form could absorb far more people into one team but, given its size, rotation was out of the question. Built up gradually into a ‘large team’, the constraints of a household-based rotation system were broken. Rather than the team members recording the work tasks, the relationship now changed into one between the member and the team as a whole, with a standardized calculation of the work contributed and received.55
There were many forms of *bogong* depending on local customs, a main distinction being small and large ones. The former was the simplest kind of *bogong* and often became the basis for other labour exchange combinations. Its activities extended from agriculture to handicrafts and auxiliary industry, with exchanges of manpower, draught animals and such property as carts. Only in some places did *bogong* develop into the large variety, in which case it included most of the labour force and had the household as unit.\(^{56}\)

This kind resembled the highest level of joint group work, the mutual aid cooperatives, which likewise were few compared to the teams. The better run cooperatives managed to blunt the division into busy and slack seasons significantly and to institute a certain division of labour. This framework could further assist the peasants by integrating mutual aid with supplies and credit provision. Yet it also contained real hazards. Apart from impaired flexibility resulting from the enlarged scope, the villagers’ manpower and other resources might be subject to ‘control’ (*tongzhi*) from above. Peasants’ rights to own draught animals and direct hired labourers were interfered with, to the detriment of the peasants’ production zeal. Pressures to raise efficiency (and ideological motives?) even led some village cadres to try ‘collective farms’, bringing forth party criticism that ‘a socialist mode of production’ was not on the agenda at present.\(^{57}\)

Like novel institution-building in general, mutual aid did not unfold spontaneously. Hard evidence of its benefits was usually required to persuade the peasants. Two developments were crucial to the formation of teams in Ten Mile Inn:

One was Wang Chen-chi’s leadership of the cave-digging movement, which first demonstrated the possibilities of organized collective labour. The other was his arranging the use of the sick family’s donkey, which demonstrated the benefits to be derived from cooperative labour exchange.\(^{58}\)

This condition, coupled with the considerable popular involvement which the more elaborate exchanges implied, called for a good deal of experimentation and adjustment before the mutual aid had acquired a measure of viability. Haste proved singularly counter-productive (as can be seen below).\(^{59}\)

Data on the productivity gains of mutual aid highlights substantial organizational headway in some localities as well as contrasts among them. Most sources say 15 to 30 per cent of the labour power was saved, with some claiming efficiency increases from 30 to 60 per cent.\(^{60}\) Broken down by work
tasks, a model team in Fuping county recorded the following productivity rises (per cent): cutting wheat – 25; digging hillside fields – 30; hoeing young plants – 30; carrying manure to the fields – 66.61 In some villages of JinSui the autumn harvest was completed in 13–20 days, compared to the previous 30–40 days.62

Leaving aside possibly exaggerated claims, it may reasonably be inferred that working together in teams according to a rudimentary plan, instead of dispersed and individually, notably enhanced productivity under given conditions. Yet to better grasp its fluctuations it is necessary to consider the quantity and quality of participation in mutual aid.

Not surprisingly, the relevant rates of the labour force ranged widely. Figures on six JinChaJi counties said that 28 per cent had been organized into small groups by 1944. Beiyue was in the forefront: 40 per cent had joined the teams where the campaign proceeded well and 20 per cent elsewhere in 27 investigated counties; some localities even registered 60 per cent. Regarding JinJiLuYu, 24 counties in Taiyue and 31 counties in Taihang claimed a participation of 20 per cent. A central Shandong document states that the average participation was 9.2 per cent, with a rise to 17 per cent in some localities.63

The degree of military stability in an area certainly bore heavily on participatory rates. Hence the differentiated targets set for enrolling the labour force in JinChaJi during 1945: 30–35 per cent in ‘consolidated areas’, 15–20 per cent in the ‘guerrilla bases’ and 5 per cent in the ‘guerrilla zones’.64 But a host of additional factors influenced the formation of mutual aid, to the extent of imposing a virtual mosaic of local contrasts in regard to the teams’ relative level of development, thus defying simple area categorizations. An illustrative example is provided in a 1945 document survey of the production campaign in Taihang. Having noted its weaknesses ‘in the broad newly liberated areas’, it was conceded that ‘even in the core areas the development has been very uneven’. Thus, in the ‘advanced areas’ of Zuo Quan county, ‘model’ mutual aid small groups made up no more than a distinct minority, 273 out of 1,519. Those described as ‘ordinary’ (yiban de) were 949, and 296 existed only formally. The other supposedly ‘core’ case of Xingxi county fared still worse. Here ‘model villages’ of a ‘rather consolidated’ kind numbered nine; 22 villages ‘still had many problems’, despite the experience of the 1944 campaign investigating the results of rent reductions; 103 villages defined as ‘not consolidated’ were only able to carry out a ‘rush job’; and 73 villages were labelled ‘backward’.

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While figures given earlier on participation indicated the rough scales on which mutual aid teams were initiated, the above Taihang survey raised the qualitative aspect of the actual social impact; if the former data vaguely suggested the long-term implications, the broadly based first step, the latter furnished in addition a concrete immediate perspective.

Other Taihang sources confirm that teams operating fairly well were a small minority. Among 57,492 teams, the ‘good’ ones were estimated at about one-fifth in the summer of 1943. According to another appraisal (of May 1944), a mere three to four teams of 300–400 in an area were working. Data on Beiyue in 1945 gives a similar picture. Of 25 teams in one village, only six were characterized as ‘rather good’. A somewhat lower ratio of functioning teams was given for two other villages, three of 18 and two of 16 respectively.

The swift progress of mutual aid was therefore limited to scattered enclaves. But as the 1945 Taihang survey strongly hints at, shortcomings were highly variable – a diversity that connected with the teams’ future potential. It is important to note that a large number of them were relative rather than absolute failures. To repeat, the launching of mutual aid was itself often a noteworthy beginning, however minor the achievements were in the short run.

Overall, then, qualitatively developed spots contrasted with extensive regions, sometimes also including portions of the ‘advanced’ areas, where mutual aid activity was of a far less sustained nature, yet characterized by a complex hierarchy of deficiency. Still other parts of the base areas were almost untouched by the cooperative endeavours. Such were indeed the broad configurations of the CCP’s concrete policy impact in general.

The intense pressures to develop some form of mutual aid and the general lack of a ready-made mass response for it easily generated cadre highhandedness in setting up teams. As party sources acknowledged, cadres’ impetuosity to achieve quick results clashed with peasants’ economic concerns and hesitation with partly or largely unfamiliar practices. Examples were given of cadres ordering the peasants about, believing that the teams’ advantages were obvious enough to the peasants or, conversely, regarding them as too backward to comprehend the idea of labour exchanges. The consequences for the teams’ quality, and hence longer-term quantity, were distinctly negative.

Yet straight cadre compulsion as such is obviously not a general explanation for the mutual aid activity. Apart from the fact that its scale
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vastly exceeded the effective management powers of the thinly spread cadre resources, duress was a pliable concept allowing for a wide range of relatively softer and harder methods. A document on the results of the 1944 production campaign in Taihang throws some light on the issue. Using the criterion of the degree of force applied in enrolling the peasants, three kinds of mutual aid were distinguished. In the first instance a high degree of volunteering was achieved, primarily by linking the organizing to old customs. These teams developed into the more stable, complex and regularly functioning categories of mutual aid; they signified the strong spots of progress. The second, most numerous type was identified as ‘semi-voluntary’. This had markedly provisional features, with some teams representing a response to famine conditions and others being set up by ‘reformed idlers’ under the ‘cadres’ personal leadership.’ The ‘entirely compulsory’ character of the last variety flowed from a narrow and immediate focus that was unrelated to basic social concerns: the motives were mostly of a personal nature, such as cadre propensities to finish their tasks as soon as possible or, more generally, ‘to benefit from the association with somebody or something’. These teams were numerous, but also transient in the same proportion, which was ‘one factor causing the campaign to enter a depressed stage’.69

An organizational factor that heavily influenced the peasants’ willingness to form mutual aid teams was the extent to which these conformed to the operational principle of ‘exchange at equal value’. Devising comprehensive criteria for ‘exchange at equal value’ was fraught with practical difficulties as it implied accurate recording and converting of greatly varying work tasks. Differences in conditions of exchange raised further complications, such as the land’s proximity and quality. Implementing this principle also demanded much flexibility in adjusting to the peasants’ habits in the specific area. A conference on production in the Hebei–Shanxi area proclaimed some general standards: the amount of time and work expended, the number of persons involved (with a ratio for dissimilar categories of the labour force) and the money value of the production result.70 The enormous diversity of the organizational forms of mutual aid testify both to the team’s large quantitative dimension and to the big challenge of complexity that restricted their qualitative progress.

The principle contained another complication, one that touched on the rural united front strategy. The main beneficiaries were to be those in want: ‘the better the exchange is carried out the more the poor will gain’.71 Several reports pointed out the problems that ensued. The interests of the poor
peasants were ‘excessively’ stressed, to the point where the level of wages and price for animal power depended on class status. As a result, ‘nobody is willing to engage in labour exchanges with impoverished peasants, who become isolated’.72

Nonetheless, a number of circumstances significantly attenuated the impact of class contradictions on these teams. To begin with, these were only very loosely organized and did not serve as essential instruments for subordinating or even utilizing the elite. Mutual aid was mainly mass-based activity; in the absence of technological inputs the only possibility open to the peasants was some kind of labour cooperation. Another factor that tended to take the edge off straight class conflicts was the rich diversity of organizational forms that local conditions produced, in regard to both the pattern of inter-class exchanges and their specific work content. A few examples from different areas provide illustration.

An article on the Binhai area in southern Shandong emphasized the advantages of exchanges among poor peasants, which was facilitated by their similarly sized landholdings. To make up for the lack of an ox they used manpower to plough collectively. They might also pool resources and get a loan from the government to borrow or buy an ox. Besides, the exchanges gave a strong impetus to the poor peasants to reclaim wasteland. An optimistic tone was struck for poor- and middle-peasant exchanges, which were said to be effective in tackling problems connected with oxen, tools and manpower. With no great disparities in landholding, exchanges between middle peasants were described as raising few complications. Longer-range class cooperation, involving poor and rich peasants, was a different matter since ‘the rich peasants always fear their draught animals will be injured’.73

Experiences in JinChali varied. In some localities, the middle peasants characteristically worked together and were loath to join with either the poor peasants, who were thought to wear out the former’s draught animals, or the rich peasants. On the other hand, rich and poor peasants occasionally combined to remedy their respective inadequacy of draught animals and manpower. In parts of Beiyue, however, the rich peasants at first refused to join mutual aid; not until many poor and middle peasants had been organized did the rich peasants change their minds as they otherwise would have been unable to hire temporary labourers.74 Strongly stratum-based exchanges, with teams being made up of either the poor or middle peasants, was reportedly a feature in JiLuYu.75
ERRATIC COOPERATION

Another form of combining resources that impinged far more directly on the rural united front were the cooperatives, as most concretely manifested in their relationship to the merchants. The broad politico-economic orientation assigned to the cooperatives was also evident in their occasionally absorbing many landlords and, especially, rich peasants. A 1942–43 Taihang survey of 148 villages said the great majority of landlords and rich peasants joined the cooperatives, while other sources indicate the typically varied pattern.

The character of membership qualifications and operational functions facilitated the expansion of the cooperatives. Initially they relied mainly on government supplies of money and grain, which were repayable within a stipulated period, and on cash shares. Yet the experience was unsatisfactory. The government assistance tended to backfire as people failed to relate it to their own interest, ‘with the result that the greater the amount of government credit the less people cared about the cooperatives’. Besides, cash shares excluded in effect many of the poorest from membership. To get out of the predicament the rules for buying shares were altered so that, a JinChaji border region directive stated, these could be obtained ‘with cash, savings bonds, or commodities such as grain, farm produce and livestock’. Thus, disparate articles like chestnuts, cloth, sheepskin, etc., were convertible into a money share. Income from work in the cooperatives was another means enabling practically anybody to get access to shares. In this way, the poor and middle peasants came to possess 82.3 per cent of the total amount of share capital in four Taihang counties, with the former’s ownership amounting to 43.8 per cent.

Of the numerous kinds of cooperatives, five stood out. A 30-county investigation of Beiyue in mid-1940 showed that 1,111 (31 per cent of all cooperatives) were production cooperatives, 962 were consumers’ cooperatives, 844 were combined cooperatives, 586 were supply and marketing cooperatives, and 32 were credit cooperatives. As could be expected, area contrasts were striking. More than one-third (464) of the production cooperatives were concentrated to Yi county, next came Fuping county with 96. The transport cooperatives had a similar lopsided distribution: 376 of the 586 were active in Pingshan county, followed by 70 in Tang county and 33 in Wutai county. The other cooperatives had less extreme geographical differences, yet many counties exhibited a highly varied picture as regards the pattern of the cooperatives’ diffusion.
Taihang sources show that the combined type was active in a wide range of fields. In Ciwu county, the 71 cooperatives all sold consumer goods and engaged in spinning and weaving, while simultaneously extracting oil (22 of the 71 cooperatives), gathering crude drugs (12), organizing transport (5), opening up a coal pit (5), and running coal supply centres (7), a leather factory (1) and a herbal medicine shop (1). The variability of the cooperatives also included their size. The average membership of a cooperative in six separately given Taihang counties in 1944 was 267 (in 1943 there were 212 members), 253 (150), 209 (84), 200 (216), 197 (90) and 190 (232). 82

The provision and planning of basic necessities were undertaken by the consumers’ cooperatives. The principal function of the supply and marketing cooperatives was to effect a more even distribution of essential commodities, which also necessitated regulating prices to protect the peasants from merchant manipulation. When collecting the unified progressive tax in 1941, for example, grain prices dropped due to a shortage of banknotes. Some merchants sought to utilize this opportunity but were forestalled by the cooperatives which bought up large amounts of grain and issued banknotes. By supplying cotton (used for spinning and weaving) to their shareholders and selling a wide range of daily necessities at relatively low prices, the more successful cooperatives lessened middleman exploitation. Another major task of these cooperatives was to help people to tide over natural disasters by transporting grain to the afflicted areas and putting it on sale at low prices. 83 Rather more difficult to develop were the credit cooperatives which mobilized capital in the villages and made loans available to the poorer peasants for expenditures on, for example, fertilizers, that increased production. Within the cooperative framework these loans could be used in a concentrated form; previously the peasants had used them for daily needs and relief. Given the rural poverty, amassing large amounts of capital was out of the question, but the cooperatives could still, to some extent, alleviate the problem. 84

The cooperatives’ broad involvement, thus extending to trade, necessitated their finding a modus vivendi with the merchants (in this category peddlers will be included as party sources usually lumped them together). The party proclaimed that they were to be subject to the rural united front principles, that is, subordinated to a restructured village order but given enough scope to enable the utilization aspect. Specifically: ‘Unite with their having a ready
market of goods, which is convenient for the people's livelihood ... strike at their manipulating the market and causing financial disorder.\textsuperscript{85}

The merchants' function in the commodity circulation process was indeed the party's primary motivation for winning them over. A 1942 conference report on cooperatives thus explained the acute need for the merchants' services:

\begin{quote}
We have trade bureau cooperatives, but they do not have much of an impact. Technically they are very poor and their routes are very few. To wage an economic struggle against an enemy, a great many problems will not be solved [if we] only rely on the trade bureau cooperatives. [We] must rely on the private merchants. They have far greater strength as regards number of persons, funds, technical matters and routes.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

The merchants' 'special experience' was essential in breaking through the Japanese blockades of the base areas, a Taihang investigation pointed out.\textsuperscript{87}

But even as concrete and substantive a united front priority as the merchant connection had to contend with radical policy departures. Thus, until about 1941 many merchants found themselves in a frankly hostile environment as numerous restrictions were instituted on free trade in the base areas. Beginning with the milder measures, merchants were checked and investigated over short distances. To take maybe an extreme example, they would be examined no less than 26 times from Jiaohe to Anping within central Hebei. There were cases of their being arbitrarily arrested and fined. The bureaus were charged with stabilizing prices, regulating commodity circulation and preventing market speculation. In fact, those merchants who tried to increase profits by manipulating the market or through other illegal means were banned from business activity and classified as traitors.\textsuperscript{88}

Predictably, a severe profit squeeze caused merchants to go out of business, particularly during the height of radicalism in 1939–40 when the free market was prohibited and a low price system was introduced in places. Prices might then be fixed through consultation between cadres of the village administration and responsible personnel of the mass organizations and the cooperatives, with the object of protecting the poor from price increases. Merchants responded to the strangling of profitable outlets by not marketing surplus food, further aggravating the plight of the peasants who urgently needed grain after the floods.\textsuperscript{89}
Yet this hardline policy towards the merchants was not, or rather could not be, a general feature. The insufficiency of trained cadres meant that the trade bureaus could become dependent on the merchants, some of whom actually served in bureaus headed by party cadres. A particularly vexatious consequence for the party was the corrupting influence the merchants’ ‘money-making obsession’ then had on cadres’ work.90

Nonetheless, circumstances demanded that the merchants be given a freer rein. Hence a party investigation report called for a speedy correction of the tendency that ‘everything is to be done through the cooperatives’ as this ‘cannot be achieved at present’.91 The subsequent policy shift entailed substantially enlarging the scope for free trade inside the base areas and, on this basis, working out a viable united front arrangement with the merchants. In this spirit the second economic conference of the JinChaJi border region in August 1941 criticized the monopolistic practices and declared that ‘all fair merchants must be accorded operational freedom and freedom of movement’.92 This was followed by the decision at a conference in May 1942 to abolish commerce registration, which, through its numerous procedures and strict controls, had characterized the party’s policy approach to the merchants.

To establish a new cooperative framework, merchant associations were set up. Their principles restate the party’s overall concerns and basic conditions for the rural united front. The merchants had to commit themselves to the resistance effort. This ruled out any action that could benefit the enemy forces, such as supplying them or selling their products. The merchants were also obliged to accept ‘adjustments’ for the sake of the people’s livelihood. As a consequence, the merchants were prohibited from taking advantage of circumstances to enhance their private profit, i.e. by violating government laws and engaging in smuggling, tax evasion, hoarding and speculation.93

The broadened material incentives accorded the merchants after 1941 were combined with counter-vailing political campaign pressures. Their tone of conditional acceptance – the subordination and utilization mechanisms – was suggested at a trade conference in 1945: ‘An understanding attitude must be adopted towards the merchants who should also be reformed; ‘educate them to earn less money in order that money is earned fairly and reasonably.’94 The insistence on merchants serving the CCP’s base area building also found expression in a Taihang investigation of 1945. Having severely criticized the party’s distrustful and restrictive treatment of the
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merchants, it called for continued vigilance against them given their ‘double-faced’ nature.95

The policy revision was summed up in the decision of the JinChaJi border region government in November 1942: ‘[O]pen up the road for merchants’, but only ‘within the scope of government regulations’, which meant ‘controlling the merchants and regulating the market’.96 But as often happened, correctives were hard to enforce. A JinJiLuYu government report in September 1943 for example, still complained of the cooperatives’ tendencies to monopolize and exert strict control.97 The gap between the official policy line and the localized dynamics also manifested itself in this field of activity.

Internally the cooperatives, like other organizations, wrestled with three sets of problems that constrained qualitative progress: lack of trained cadres, members’ unfamiliarity with operational matters and malignant influences of ‘bad elements’. To come to grips with the more serious manifestations, such as a fragile mass base, disorderly management and shady objectives, investigations and conferences were held and, as already touched upon, laws were revised in 1940–42. The upshot was a general retrenchment to raise the quality of the cooperatives, affecting at least half of those in Beiyue during 1942. In the same year, a ‘broad reorganization movement’ was launched in central Hebei.

Yet two problems in particular continued to hamper the performance of many cooperatives. Beginning with inadequate cadre qualities, their dysfunctional effects were usually described in terms of arbitrary decision-making, violation of the principle of voluntary enrolment in and withdrawal from the cooperatives and a profit-oriented bias. It happened that only a very small share or even none of the surplus was allotted to the members, while a sizeable amount of it was either used for unrealistically enlarging the scale of the cooperatives or became the personal possession of the cadres. As a consequence, members lost interest in the cooperatives and left them. A connected problem was economic rivalry between many cooperatives, rather than their mutual support.98

A directive on promoting cooperatives in JinChaji highlighted the perennial cadre problem: ‘In whatever respect we lack cadres, a difficulty manifested especially in the cooperatives.’ But it was a specific cadre that the cooperatives desperately cried out for, a cadre possessing skills in commerce and industry, and reliability in political judgement. The trouble
was, however, that both qualities were very rarely present in a single person. The politically committed cadres ‘do not like to engage in business and accountancy’, and in addition, were ‘not easy to find’. On the other hand, those active in these fields had serious political liabilities. The proposed solution to this dilemma was to ‘seek out politically strong cadres to serve as leaders’ and ‘absorb skilled persons’ to do the ‘technical work’ – in short, the rural united front formula.

This strategy highlighted the second problem of landlords’ and merchants’ occasionally destabilizing influence on the cooperatives. A Taihang document said that these categories got either themselves or their agents into leading positions and ‘used all kinds of methods to manipulate, control and exclude the impoverished masses’. The objective was to enrich themselves and prevent the cooperatives from catering to the needs of the peasants. In She county, the board of the cooperatives concentrated on trading mountain products and other goods, to the neglect of transport and textile undertakings. Given the consequent peasant losses, the cooperative movement there reached a dead end. While landlords, rich peasants and merchants were welcome to invest in the cooperatives, ‘this is conditional upon the broad masses enjoying democracy and their being free from manipulation and domination’. Apparently checks on landlord and merchant ambitions were at the time not effective since ‘our cadres have not yet grasped this principle’.

Overall, qualitative weaknesses gave the cooperatives a conspicuously more irregular growth pattern than that of mutual aid. At least part of the explanation can arguably be traced to the latter’s closer human relationships that resulted from the generally smaller membership units and from (however varied and tenuous) links to familiar, deeply rooted village habits.

Figures on cooperatives mostly refer to their rapid expansion during the first half of the war in JinChaJi. In the period 1938–40, the number of cooperatives in 52 counties rose from 14 to 6,078, a membership of 842,015. The setbacks in the mid-years of the war were particularly visible in parts of Beiyue where cadre practices alienating the people had disastrous consequences by 1942. Organizational changes (see above) and training courses reportedly brought improvements thereafter. In the other border regions the diffusion of cooperatives was generally a later phenomenon, with notable progress only in 1943–44.

If the extent of the statistical fluctuations was specific to the cooperatives, their broad developmental configurations were nevertheless similar to
other organizational endeavours. These exhibited a highly uneven, spotty progress, both between different areas and within smaller ones. Besides, like the war years generally, organizations were of a transitional character; far-reaching changes were under way, but the cooperatives were far from consolidated, interacting as they did with a wartime environment that imposed heavy demands of several kinds. What this meant in military terms will be examined in the following chapter.

NOTES

4. Li Yiqing, ‘Cong Taibei caizheng jingji jianshe zhong gonggu Taibei kangRi genjudi’, 1.7.1940, JJ, p. 87.


17. ‘Taihangqu shengchan huiyi suxie’.


22. ‘Kaizhan da shengchan yundong de jige wenti’, JR, 1.3.1945.


24. SW III, p. 189.


34. Lai Ruoyu, ‘Shengchan yundong de chubu zongjie’, p. 387.

35. ‘Di wu zhuquan bannian lai shengchan tongzhi gaikuang’, p. 192.

36. ‘Zhonggong zhongyang Shandong fenju guanyu kaizhan chungeng yundong de zhishi’, JR, 17.4.1944.


Compounded Toil


44. A translation of the resolution is given in Davin, (1979), pp. 198–200.


48. *Taihang geming genjudi shigao*, p. 239.


56. ‘JinChaji bianqu laodong huzhu de fazhan’, p. 315; ‘JinChaji san fenqu chuangli laodong huzhu hezhushe’, JR, 10.5.1944. One article lists five types of *biangong* organizations depending on how their scope of activities, calculation of work tasks and discipline varied with size. ‘Bogong huzhu bianjia youjiqu’, JR, 20.5.1940.

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58. Crook, p. 66.


64. Liu Dianji, ‘JinChaji bianqu jinian lai’, p. 345.


71. ‘Jigong zhegong he huangong banfa de chubu yanjiu’, 5.8.1944, NH, p. 524.


73. ‘Binhaiqu Junan biangong huzhu de fenxi’, JR, 2.6.1944.


Compounded Toil


83. Nie Zhanglin, ‘JinChaji de hezuo shiye’, JR, 5.1.1943; document issued by the JinChaji border region government in May 1940 translated in Mantetsu Hokushi keizai chōsajo, p. 214; Crook, p. 50; Du Xiao, p. 293.


87. ‘Taihangqu jingji gongzuo lishi chubu yanjiu’, April 1945, p. 19, NU.


97. ‘Yinian lai Taihangqu shengchan jianshe’, p. 103.


100. Dong Dongfu, pp. 953–954.

Endeavours to develop agriculture had to reckon with military realities. Production and warfare were in fact two closely connected battle fronts. Lin Feng thus explained their mutuality to a Western journalist:

The whole form of organization in the rear of the enemy can be encompassed in the words of ‘labour exchange’, taken in their widest sense – labour exchange not only among the people but between the people and the army, the people and their own militia. The link between production and war is indissoluble and reciprocal. It is true that the people would not and could not fight unless they had improved their livelihood and produced enough to support the struggle. But the converse is also true. They could not improve their livelihood without fighting... Patriotism alone may excite but productive achievements raise self-confidence and enthusiasm... So we organize the people beginning with production. The militia grows with the rationalization of production. Relations between the army and people improve as production improves... At the beginning our army fought, and the people produced to feed themselves. Now, they recognize the necessity of producing in order to fight. The Labour Exchange group and militia unit here have become two faces of the same coin.¹

Lin Feng’s outline has the merit of identifying some core issues in relating production and military tasks, but his optimism about achieving a state whereby the two interacted on an equal basis and in the process steadily reinforced each other is untenable.

Their interrelationship was definitely beyond dispute. However, no optimal solution existed to the demands raised by the war effort on the one hand, and the people’s material conditions on the other. The issue was complicated by the relative extent to which the military burden depended
on the Japanese army; what could be adjusted and regulated were the specific duties to be shouldered by the people. Chapters 5 and 7 in particular have demonstrated how these increased greatly as the war progressed, thus straining popular resources and ties to the army and guerrillas. The intense and virtually omnipresent pressure exerted by the war upon CCP activities is forcefully expressed in the ‘Central Committee Resolution on the Unification of Leadership in the Anti-Japanese War Bases’ passed in September 1942. The resolution is worth quoting at length:

[T]he leading organs of the Party and the government in some localities and districts have not had a real understanding of the fact that everything is subordinate to the demands of the war, have not been capable of fulfilling the necessary responsibilities in questions of reinforcements for the Main Armed Forces, the guarantee of supplies and materials, the privileged treatment of the families of resistance fighters, and in counteracting desertion, and have thus brought about discordant relations between the army and the local Party and government... 'Everything bows to the demands of the war', is the highest principle of unified leadership. The entire Party must understand that if the army is weak and if the war is lost, it will be impossible for the War Bases to exist, and the Party, government, army, and people will collapse. It is thus the duty of Party committees, the government, mass organizations, and all the people to strengthen the army and increase its fighting power. Party committees, the government, and mass organizations all have a constant responsibility to solve the problems of army recruitment, provisioning, and clothing, supplying and transporting of ammunition, providing quarters, transporting the wounded and disabled, their nursing and care, preferential treatment of families of anti-Japanese soldiers, etc., etc... Within the army it should be thoroughly understood that without the integration of the Party, government, and mass organizations, the army by itself would not be able to fight on in the War of Resistance for a single day; we must therefore intensify education in the army, so that the army will protect the War Bases, conserve human and material resources, respect the Party and government, strengthen discipline, and give the Party, government, and people the necessary assistance.²

The fact that the resolution was issued at a time when the Japanese armies were inflicting disastrous defeats on the base areas might have lent it a stronger emphasis on military necessities than party policy otherwise allowed for. Besides, party sources had usually a penchant for exaggerating when making an important point. Yet, having eliminated the more absolutist claims, the message is nevertheless abundantly clear: military strength had to be boosted on an overall basis that called for a wide range of directly and
indirectly related measures, and hard concentration on this objective was vital.

How the CCP concretely strove to join the military and production (including the more broadly material) spheres and the problems this entailed is the theme of this chapter. First we shall consider the organizational attempts to integrate the activities in the two fields, then turn to the CCP’s mobilizational efforts to protect the harvest and finally examine how war requirements and material realities created a harsh environment for the army/guerrillas and the villagers and strained the relationship between the two sides.

A prominent feature of the organizational initiatives was the so-called work-armed struggle (laowu) combination based on the militia. In the three-tier military structure (see Chapter 5) emerging in 1940–42 the militia was charged with both defending the village and engaging in production to become self-sufficient. The development of the militia’s twin commitments into the specific laowu combination occurred by force of circumstances. At first, substitute ploughing was resorted to in coping with Japanese attacks; the villagers were organised into a team to cultivate in the militia’s place when it performed military functions. Yet this method proved ineffectual. For example, in the spring of 1941, 13,000 Japanese and puppet troops launched a mopping-up operation of 84 days in northwestern Shanxi; it was claimed to have killed 3,400 people in a few counties alone. The lesson was obvious: production and fighting had to be more closely linked.3

The laowu invention was credited to a militia hero named Zhang Chuyuan in 1943. He was from a northwestern Shanxi area that suffered heavily from Japanese military campaigns. Commander of a militia detachment and secretary of a peasant association, Zhang became a model for emulation in the base areas of North China. Of the numerous laowu combinations that spread, the most propagated one was the integration of biangong and munition demolition units. In the beginning, the biangong team and the militia were combined so that the latter protected and the former, together with the people and the militia, engaged in production. Although going some way towards linking war and production, the mere joining of the two and relying exclusively on the militia for fighting was found unsatisfactory; more people had to engage in both. In Zhang Chuyuan’s words:

The enemy comes and the militia fights him, giving the masses an opportunity to move away. This can only be called cover, and cannot be regarded as...
combining laowu. It won’t do for the militia alone to defend; male, female, old and young must all learn how to fight the enemy.

In making everybody contribute to defence, members of the biangong team as well as women and children were taught how to bury mines. Women laid them inside the village and children put them in the doorway. The militia carried out reconnaissance, fought on the front and planted mines along roads and in important places. A Western journalist travelling in JinSui observed:

That village was one of the most belligerent I have ever seen. Every approach, every trail, was heavily mined; and mines were set not only on the trails but also out in the fields... Warning notices, easy to remove should the enemy approach, were stuck into the ground on every mine. It gave you a goose-pimplly sensation to zigzag your horse carefully in and out between those marked mines.4

With the people's self-defence capacity strengthened, the militia was freed to devote more energy to striking at the enemy and co-ordinating with the army.

The first attempts to coordinate combat and production were not an unqualified success: the commands for leading anti-mopping-up warfare, quickly gathering the harvest, etc., emphasized one or the other and lacked unified leadership. Consequently, when enemy forces were not in the vicinity the production command was very busy, while the one responsible for fighting had little to do. During combat operations the reverse was true. To overcome this separation, a unified command for production and combat was set up. In this advanced form of laowu, the village head was the chairman, and he and the government, mass organization and military personnel were the committee members in charge of the militia’s fighting, intelligence gathering, biangong production, shifting people and resources, securing supplies, etc.5

Another laowu variation was ‘joint defence’ (lianfang), which tied together the militias of several villages. It was found that one village could not muster sufficient strength to effectively fight the Japanese and protect production. There were four types of joint defence. First, the militias were placed under a unified command with each assigned a sector and attacking the enemy from all sides except the front, thus wearing him out (lianfang zhandou). Second, duties like sentry, reconnaissance and intelligence were
closely co-ordinated to reduce the possibility of surprise enemy assaults resulting in serious losses (lianfang jingxie). Third, by laying siege to the Japanese fortified points and thereby limiting the enemy’s movements, the warning system was supplemented and manpower saved (lianfang weikun). Fourth, the militia struck successively according to a co-ordinated plan (lianfang poji). These were only the main laowu innovations. A great variety were worked out to manufacture mines and agricultural tools.6

Instances of frequent fighting necessarily modified the militia’s self-supportive principle, making it at least partially dependent on food supplies from the other villagers. Their cooperation was in turn conditional upon the militia’s effectively protecting the locality. This mutuality could engender problems in a fiercely contested area like the plain of central Hebei, where the militia enjoyed several privileges. Thus, these became the object of popular resentment in Anguo county as the militia, taking advantage of a lull in the fighting, failed to actively engage the Japanese army and assumed an overbearing attitude. The subsequent discontinuance of food provisions to the militia, however, backfired elsewhere in the area: unable to hold out in face of the cuts, militia members in one village hid their firearms and fled. On the other hand, people in another locality voluntarily provisioned the militia which kept up its operations.7

Arguably, the laowu combinations were weakest where they were most needed: near Japanese fortified points on the fringe of the base areas. Here military vulnerability entailed highly provisional organization; care was taken in daytime not to provoke Japanese attacks that interfered with work in the fields, and only under the cover of darkness and when the work for the day was over were Japanese blockhouses harassed.8

A second attempt to join war and production was the regular army’s involvement in the latter. Although army production was initiated in 1939–40, it was not until three years later that it developed on a larger scale – then in response to deepening economic crisis. Thus, a JiLuYu document of November 1943 bluntly declared that the soldiers had no choice but to engage in production and dig edible wild herbs as the planned reductions of the soldiers’ daily grain rations in Taihang from 600 to 500 grams in February of the following year would not leave them with enough to eat.9

The army was mainly active in production during the busy agricultural season, when a soldier was generally credited with cultivating one or two mu of land. Handicrafts also benefited from army involvement. In northwestern
Shanxi it included oil pressing, cloth-weaving, paper manufacturing and flour grinding, in addition to 70 items of herbal medicine and special kinds of drugs.\textsuperscript{10}

However, although an objective necessity, agreement on army production was far from unanimous. A February 1945 article on JinChaJi drew attention to the disturbing fact that army cadres and ‘a fair number’ of soldiers were strongly sceptical. Participation in production campaigns, they argued, was incompatible with constant combat preparedness. Indeed, ‘being a soldier means eating grain and fighting, not working in the fields’. Mao Zedong’s essay ‘Get Organized!’ (November, 1943), frequent sub-bureau directives and the promotion of model guidance were declared to have brought some change of attitude, but only ‘slowly’.\textsuperscript{11}

Nevertheless, reluctance to engage in production persisted where military duties were particularly heavy, in the guerrilla areas. Acknowledging this tendency, Mao Zedong, in a Jiefang Ribao editorial of January 1945, sought to refute its basis by quoting extensively from a report published in the same organ a few days earlier by a certain comrade Zhang Pingkai on the production performance of guerrilla units in Hebei and Shanxi. Zhang thus characterized the guerrilla environment:

The place bristles with enemy and puppet strongpoints and blockhouses and is criss-crossed with ditches, walls and roads, and taking advantage of his military superiority and communication facilities, the enemy often launches surprise attacks and encirclement and ‘mopping-up’ campaigns against us. Under such conditions the guerrilla units often have to shift their positions several times a day.

Despite this adversity the guerrillas had managed to produce between combat engagements, yielding substantial results:

Everybody is now better fed – each person has 0.5 liang of cooking oil and salt and 1 [jin] of vegetables per day, and 1.5 [jin] of meat per month. Furthermore, tooth-brushes, tooth-powder and reading primers, which for years were unavailable, are now all available.

And although these were densely populated areas, the guerrilla units had, Zhang asserted, even solved ‘the land problem’ by increasing the land under cultivation, improving production methods, etc. The guerrillas had also developed handicrafts:
The fourth district contingent has set up a felt-cap workshop, an oil press and a flour mill, and in seven months has netted a profit of 500,000 yuan in local currency. Not only has it settled its own difficulties but it is satisfying the needs of the people in its guerrilla zone. The soldiers can now provide all their own woollen sweaters and socks.

The guerrillas direct contribution to production and their armed protection of the peasants in the fields had, Zhang continued, spurred the people's production zeal and solidified popular support for the Eighth Route Army. Hence Mao's conviction that the people favoured a production campaign in the guerrilla zones 'where', he added, 'rents have perhaps not yet been reduced or the rent reduction has not yet been thorough'. This was indeed the case.12

Zhang Pingkai and Mao Zedong's concern was not to analyse the overall actualities of production in the guerrilla zones. The import of their arguments was rather that production was possible also in guerrilla areas, despite the heavy odds against them. The point was not irrelevant. As with the labour hero campaign, 'models', for all the unrealistically inflated feats ascribed to many of them, indicated a simple, though hard way to a certain betterment when alternative methods were unavailable or difficult to devise.

Military commitments were not the only major obstacle to army production. There were also problems integral to agricultural work, such as those concerning selection of land for cultivation, preparation of seeds and provision of tools. The last issue was even declared to present greater difficulties than organizing the labour force. The reason was of course the scarcity of tools, rendered all the more acute by the destructive Japanese attacks and by the very scale of demands raised by the swelling army and guerrilla forces. A number of problems came to the fore as a result of the army borrowing tools from the people. Both were in need of tools at the same time, during the spring ploughing. Some army units were criticized for failing to properly co-ordinate the usage of tools with the people and 'even damaging many tools'. Suggestions as to how the army could get access to tools did not hold out prospects for achieving a breakthrough. To borrow tools only before dawn or at dusk, when the people were not using them, set very severe limits to the army's production activities. And collective tool purchases by army units were not an effective remedy in conditions of a desperate tool shortage.13
Allocating land to the army ran into troubles where land was scarce and troops were heavily concentrated. In a part of Beiyue, for example, competition between the people and the army resulted in taking over uncultivated land, and villagers were even forced to give up sizeable plots of land. In brief, if the constraints on the people provisioning the army were tight, so too were possibilities for making up for inadequacies in this respect by the army’s own efforts. In this harsh environment, the army’s material interests easily tended toward segmentation, with each unit focused on its own needs.\textsuperscript{14}

EMBATTLED HARVEST

A critical link in the production–warfare chain was the protection of the wheat harvest. Material on northwestern Shanxi indicates that leading resistance organs were well aware of this issue’s dimension already prior to the Japanese crop-seizing raids. Hence a comprehensive plan was then devised by local authorities for gathering in, transporting and storing the harvest, operations deemed critical to keeping up the resistance.

All organs from the county down to the village were called upon to hold joint conferences and to set up autumn harvest committees. The latter were to have sections for propaganda, supervision, adjustment and storage/transport. Their activities had to accord with a general work plan and with measures specifically adapted to the needs of the locality. Investigations showed that some progress was made in establishing such committees. The second point focused on area differences. Where the danger of enemy attacks was immediate, the situation dictated making maximum use of joint action and arranging relevant tasks in order of priority. This placed heavy demands on the leadership role of the autumn harvest committees in planning and executing the operations. In the more stable localities, by contrast, the committees were to have a looser, coordinating function. The remaining points contained guidance on how to deal with the harvest of runaway landlords, on where to store the harvest, and on when to punish or reward participants in competitions related to the degree of swiftness with which the harvest was gathered.\textsuperscript{15}

Practically all villagers, including school children, took part in the operations, as did party cadres, soldiers and government personnel. Investigations were conducted to register landownership and expected yield as well as to determine priorities and the arrangement of the labour force.
Following the completion of the harvesting in mid-October, villagers were mobilized to recapture grain seized by the Japanese by attacking, and sometimes burning down, their storehouses.16

What were the relative achievements of, in party terminology, ‘the grain struggles’, and how did they bear on the wider resistance movement? These questions are fruitfully approached by taking a look at the attempts to safely store the harvest.

The principles for grain storage were fairly clear. The location had to be as secure as possible from enemy attacks – that is, areas having a strong CCP presence and a terrain favourable to hiding and militia operations – and it had to be dry and cool to prevent the grain from rotting. Particular care was urged in areas crossed by a major road as it enabled the quick deployment of the motorized Japanese army. Here, a storage site had to be at least half a kilometre from the village, or 250 metres in mountainous terrain. To place grain not intended for immediate consumption in rooms or courtyards or in nearby ditches was declared unacceptable.

The issue of how to store the grain required a more elaborate treatment. The basic rule was dispersed storage, either collectively by small groups or by individual households depending on circumstances. In the former case, the dispersal was to be greater in the more unstable areas. Thus in the newly opened-up areas the appropriate size of the group was thought to be 3–5 households, who were instructed to store 300–500 jin, or at most 1,000 jin in one site. This compared to 5–8 households storing a maximum of 2,000 jin in the longer CCP-controlled areas. In ‘especially good’ cases, 3,000 jin was an admissible standard.

Yet grain dispersal carried great risks. To forestall losses several precautionary measures were prescribed. The storage operation had to be carried out in secret. This implied the following: first clear the village of traitors and spies and do not let suspect persons know about the matter; mobilize the militia for surveillance; keep out of sight people who are not a part of the operation. Next, store the grain deep underground. Third, organize special investigation squads to keep watch on each village. These were empowered to order restorage if necessary and to extract a promise from members of the small groups to observe the storage rules. Last, the militia was vested with responsibility for protecting the stored grain, including announcing methods for punishing thieves and warning ‘bad people’.17
The problem was that these principles presupposed a level of organization and mass mobilization that was atypical for the base areas. In fact, the call for a thorough dispersal was significantly modified both on a regional and on a smaller area-based scale, a circumstance no doubt determined by the CCP’s shifting influence. One prominent form of congregating resources was the grain depot system, or grain storehouses, which spread particularly in northern Taihang during the latter half of the war. The advanced type of system merging the transport, storage and supply functions embodied a definite sense of necessity: the depots emerged in the critical years of 1941–42 and functioned primarily in areas where military and civilian organizations were concentrated.18

Without a rigorous mass mobilization on an extensive scale, sizeable grain losses were unavoidable. A 1942 JinChajJi report on ‘The experiences and lessons of the grain work in recent years’ characterized the losses as ‘very major’. Japanese attacks were not the sole reason. In some places the damage was entirely self-inflicted as the grain had been left rotting.19 Instructions to the county authorities in JiLuYu in February 1943 further explained why ‘big, unnecessary losses’ had been incurred. Instead of dividing up the grain in small quantities, big, easily recognizable holes had been dug, some containing as much as 10,000 jin. Since the grain storage had not been conducted in secrecy, the site of the buried grain was widely known. Moreover, in drawing up detailed lists of the sites, there had been a failure to use code names for villages and households, thereby enabling cadres unconcerned with the operation to locate the buried grain – a neglect which had serious consequences. Grain storage was rarely followed up by investigations; everything was assumed to be in order. The fact that grain was rotting or had been stolen did therefore not come to light.20 In short, the principles for storing the grain had not really taken effect in a number of areas.

Other sources drew attention to the same kind of problems. Investigators found that households in many villages had not divided up and buried the grain; instead, it was gathered in one big heap at home, or buried without making precautionary arrangements to ensure secrecy.21 The report summing up the grain work noted: ‘Recently incidents of stealing public grain have continuously occurred in many places.’ Those found guilty included personnel in charge of the grain storage. In fact, the report said, stealing was generally the work of village cadres, who were mostly party members. Excusing themselves with ‘[we] have nothing to eat at present’ and
Military Weight

‘the public wants grain’, the village cadres ‘played a shrewd business trick’ by distributing grain to the people while keeping a part for themselves.\textsuperscript{22}

It has been observed that while the principle was a highly dispersed grain storage, a relative concentration proved an unavoidable weakness and, in some regions, a real necessity. The CCP’s dilemma was that under the circumstances an effective alternative to such grain concentrations was unlikely to be forthcoming, a fact indirectly acknowledged in many reports. A 1944 JiLuYu document, for example, complained that the lessons from 1943, when large amounts of grain buried in a few places were lost in Japanese attacks, still had not been learned: grain was stored in the same way.\textsuperscript{23}

The Japanese army’s grain seizures were primarily aimed at the plains, especially those in central and southern Hebei. The reasons are obvious: these areas produced most of the grain and the terrain made them easily accessible to the occupation forces. Here the Japanese chiefly relied on quick military assaults. In one such operation during the 1941 harvest season, lasting two weeks, the Japanese forcibly brought along 3,000 people from the occupied areas and captured two million jin of millet, gaoliang, etc. in Wanping county, Hebei. The 3.5 million jin of grain that could not be transported was burnt up. The Japanese army source said the ensuing food shortage in the area caused ‘a big obstacle’ to the manoevrability of the main resistance forces.\textsuperscript{24}

In the CCP-entrenched mountainous areas the Japanese employed alternative tactics. For example, in a Taihang locality collaborators were hired to infiltrate the villages and persuade the people not to let the militia attack the Japanese. The sound of shooting, the people were told, was certain to bring the Japanese over and cause destruction. The people chose not to join the militia and buried their rifles. The Japanese then entered the villages unresisted and seized the grain. Not only that, about a hundred people who had refused the party branch’s evacuation order were slain.\textsuperscript{25}

The Japanese army therefore made several localities pay dearly for concentrated grain storage. The result was to aggravate an already acute grain shortage, sometimes dramatically. Thus, in a month-long Japanese army campaign in a JiLuYu area, inflicting losses corresponding to its total grain needs for two to three months, the hardest hit villages were thrown into famine.\textsuperscript{26} There were other, less extreme yet distinctly ominous, consequences. Large-scale grain seizures by the Japanese army and resultant
material scarcity could give rise to food conflicts between the army and the people as well as between lower and upper strata, then developing into the radical grain borrowing actions described in Chapter 7.27

Another aspect was the villagers submitting false reports on grain losses to higher organs after a Japanese mopping-up operation, said to be ‘extremely serious and widespread’. For example, a village in Fan county claimed that 50,000 jin of grain had been lost, whereas a subsequent investigation revealed that the actual figure was 1,000 jin. The deception had several sources, including individual households, the village head and a broader body of people acting in unison. The last instance in particular worried party authorities.28 Consequently, depending on circumstances, Japanese grain-seizures could lead straight to, or substantially contribute to, both class warfare actions by the impoverished and moves to form a tactical, reverse rural united front against higher party influence. Both occurrences powerfully defied the CCP’s policy ambitions. In other words, destruction and plunder by the Japanese army did not necessarily play into the hands of the party’s wartime propaganda, irrespective of its content.

The magnitude of the grain losses was in part also due to the assistance lent the Japanese army by the active Chinese collaborators and their hierarchy of underlings, including local informers. They disclosed sites of the stored grain which were not easily discovered by the Japanese. The conclusion that ‘traitor elimination work’ had to be integrated with the grain storage operation was readily drawn but hard to enforce effectively.29 Nonetheless, there were strong spots of popular activism that thwarted Japanese attempts to take possession of resources in an area, as primarily manifested in the policy to ‘clear the walls and empty the fields’. This meant shifting people, grain and other materials from an entire village as the Japanese army approached, generally to the hills in the vicinity.

Weapons, clothes, grain and other articles, a Japanese report on western Hebei in 1943 noted, were ‘skilfully concealed in places very difficult to discover or transported to remote localities’.30 Reminiscences of Japanese army personnel similarly acknowledge the effectiveness of these elusive measures. During military operations in Shanxi in March 1939, Captain Yamazaki Jūzaburō notes, the Japanese army had ‘almost no knowledge’ of the Eighth Route Army’s movements and did not even get a glimpse of it. ‘Hence there was no real fighting and no military achievements were scored. And since the people in the battlefield literally implemented “clear the walls and empty the fields”’, the Japanese never encountered them.
Brigadier General Katayama Shōtarō had a similar experience in the same province in August the following year: “The villages literally “cleared the walls and emptied the fields” so that most of the inhabitants escaped and none could be seen. They actively cooperated with the Eighth Route Army.”  

An army private participating in ‘countless’ suppression campaigns in Shandong during 1942–45 observes that there was only one instance when the evacuation failed.  

Despite these impressive achievements, this policy ran into a thick wall of problems. A work report on armed mobilization in JinJiYu during 1941 related them to the overall limitations of the CCP movement: inadequate preparations for accomplishing the task practically and for keeping up a constant popular readiness to act. Given the pervasive uncertainties, many people were unwilling to evacuate the villages because of well-founded fears that their belongings might be stolen.  

The ‘grain struggles’ exposed the relative weaknesses of both the CCP and the Japanese army. Neither side was able to score a decisive victory. In this sense, the contest over the primary livelihood resource resembled a prominent feature of the war generally. The Japanese grain seizures certainly inflicted hardship on the base areas, but their sustenance was only partly routed. The good knowledge which the Japanese sometimes had of the numerous methods whereby the resistance forces moved and hid things could not be crushingly applied to more extensive regions due to a combination of the resistance forces’ protective measures and the limited Japanese troop strength.  

**TESTED SOLIDARITY**  

An undernourished army could not be expected to display combativity. Army production to augment the soldiers’ poor rations was therefore enforced by circumstances. Its extent, however, depended largely on military factors. Based on these, Mao Zedong divided the self-supporting activities of the army into three standards. The highest applied to ShaanGanNing, the border region little affected by direct fighting, where ‘many’ army units were said to be completely self-sufficient. The second and third criteria referred to areas directly drawn into the war. In these areas, the army was required to provide itself with many items except grain, clothing and bedding, which were supplied by the government.
The material contribution of army production is hard to measure. A 1944 US government study on the CCP was full of praise for the Eighth Route Army:

[T]he food ration of the army is good and the fighting morale is high. There is excellent unity between the army and the democratic government... The consensus of opinion of US observers is that the Chinese Communist Army is a young, well-fed, well-clothed, battle-hardened, volunteer force in excellent physical condition.36

When the party reported self-sufficiency ratios, they mostly represented so-called model cases – achievements that were possible under favourable, or highly exceptional, circumstances.37 The more typical army unit no doubt had to settle for considerably less. But even that made an important difference to the soldiers’ hard life. To appreciate the point just consider some examples from the years prior to the army’s involvement in production. In 1940–43, following Japanese and GMD attacks, ‘things got steadily worse until we were in great difficulty, running short of grain, short of cooking oil and salt, short of bedding and clothing, short of funds’.38 Li Da, a commander of the 129th division, recalled after the war that the daily ration of grain for some army units even fell below one jin per person in July–August 1943.39 During a Japanese offensive in northwestern Shanxi in 1940, soldiers could only have soya beans for several months.40 In parts of JinJiLuYu in 1939, it was common for soldiers to eat chaff and herbs and be without salt.41 A Japanese intelligence report said that communist army units only had grain for three days; ‘thereafter they have to struggle with hunger’.42

Army production also had the merit of somewhat lessening the enormous difficulties of supplying it. Agnes Smedley, while travelling with the Eighth Route Army in Shanxi, highlighted the issue:

I wonder what the people will live on during the winter. We buy everything we take, but much of our rice is transported on donkeys and mules with us. It is many days’ march over terrible roads to Taiyuan and the problem of feeding and clothing an army during the winter months, in this region, is almost unbelievably difficult. There are no motor roads – and no motor trucks. It is almost impossible to find any man in these villages who has enough money to change one Chinese dollar. We could not change a dollar to buy one chicken, but had to buy another chicken this afternoon, a squash, and some corn for my horse and mule.43
In order not to alienate the peasants and to manage the economy, the CCP had to keep the rising costs of running the war within reasonable limits. While many figures were cited in party sources to show how the army’s production activities, together with organizational retrenchment, eased the people’s burden, the real significance of this involvement lies rather in this restraining effect. Nevertheless, military consumption was crushing, even exceeding its stated principle of 70 per cent of the government’s total financial expenditure. Rong Zihe, who was in charge of financial matters in JìnJīLùYu, later calculated that 90 per cent of the expenditure in the border region was used up in the military field. Detailed figures for various areas say that military-related outlays made up 75–95 per cent of the total. These percentages indicate the continuously broad scope of the military activities; if expenditures initially were almost entirely of a military character, their later decrease was hardly dramatic.

The consequent hard squeeze was both on activities in other fields, primarily government administration, and on popular consumption. A 1942 party estimate suggests that it took a hundred persons to feed four Eighth Route Army soldiers in the core areas (where ‘the people’s livelihood is rather good’), whereas the same number of persons in the much larger guerrilla areas could only support two soldiers. Near or in the occupied zones the people’s capacity to shoulder the burden was described as ‘poor’. In these conditions, popular cooperation in provisioning the regulars and guerrillas hinged largely on their observing discipline and frugality. There are eyewitness accounts testifying to their very careful handling of villagers. Wang Yu-chuan described the Fourth Brigade in southern Shandong early in the war which behaved extraordinary well. It laid down three principles concerning the collection from the people of supplies for the army. First, it does not care what food it gets. Second, it does not take from poor peasants. As a rule, before soldiers were sent to the villages for supplies, political workers would precede them to make a thorough investigation of the situation, and the burden of taxation would be imposed according to the ability to give. Third, the Fourth Brigade never collected more than enough for its immediate needs. If anything was left over when the guerrillas moved on, it was distributed among the poor.

This conduct was in sharp contrast to the provincial forces in the area:
[They] demanded everything they wanted from the people, not only steamed bread, but such things as oil, salt, vegetables, meat, utensils, dishes, anything they could lay their hands on. The number of soldiers that the people were supposed to support was never given correctly. As a result, supplies raised among the people often greatly exceeded the needs of the army, and the soldiers would then either waste them, send them to their homes, sell them, or just give them away. The village heads were frequently forced to make complaints to headquarters about the bad behaviour of the soldiers and to request that they leave the villages.48

A missionary from Baoding (under Japanese rule) told journalist A.L. Strong about the Eighth Route Army’s fairness in obtaining grain:

This past year there was a good grain harvest in our district, as we began buying grain for our hospital. But within three days our supply stopped entirely; all wheat in the district three miles or more from the railway was travelling away from the cities toward the Eighth Route headquarters in the hills. The big [Baoding] flour mill had to import its grain from outside the province. The Eighth Route was not seizing this grain; they were paying for it, at prices which seem slightly higher than [Baoding] offered.49

After seven weeks and travelling a thousand miles in CCP areas behind Japanese lines in late 1944, Major M.A. Carsberg, an American army doctor, recorded:

One of the most impressive facts gleaned from this trip was the complete solidarity of the soldiers and the civilians... On every occasion that I witnessed contacts between soldiers and peasants, whether individually or in larger groups, there was evidenced a genuine friendship... The villagers are very generous in supplying the needs of the soldiers, all food being paid for in full... On numerous occasions I witnessed peasants from surrounding villages bring in gifts to the soldiers. These gifts were frequently quite substantial consisting of sheep, goats, chickens, eggs, baskets of grain, fruit, shoes... On returning to the village where we camped I again saw these same peasants. They had brought gifts for the Eighth Route Army soldiers, coming out practically from under the shadow of the Japanese blockhouse... I have seen villagers walk up to the soldiers passing through and give them gifts of food such as ears of corn, fruit and bread.50

Leaving aside the more obvious simplifications, these observations are a valuable verification of the kind of qualities to be found in a number of army and guerrilla units. These were the real hard core of the resistance, its crucial
sustaining element. On the other hand, as Chapter 5 has demonstrated, a broader view of these forces brings to light a highly complex composition dominated by decidedly lower qualities. Given the very limited political training that was possible in conditions of rapid and widely dispersed recruitment into the armed forces and the sheer urgency of supplying them with grain, it is no wonder that violations of conduct did occur on a worrisome scale. For example, a serious conflict arose in central Hebei in the winter of 1939–40, a time of the year when the crop had been largely consumed and there was a shortage of grain. As fighting intensified, army personnel ‘behaved unscrupulously’ in extracting grain, even to the point of beating, scolding and detaining village cadres. The army also acted on its own in storing and hiding grain, with disastrous consequences; much of it was burnt and destroyed in Japanese attacks.51

Here again the actuality and significance of the relative distinction between the CCP army/guerrillas and the GMD/provincial/warlord armies must be emphasized. These two forces did not represent an antithesis of heroes and villains, as CCP sources often would have it. Rather, these camps operated and acted in ways that on the whole was sufficiently dissimilar to lend them a contrasting reputation among villagers. The Eighth Route Army contained a wide range of behavioural patterns, some tending towards the model type, others having a fairly dishonourable record, and with a main current fluctuating in between these varieties. This variability, which, it deserves reiterating, included an outstanding quality, was different from the massively negative character, often assuming extreme proportions, of the GMD, etc., armies’ relationship to the people. This basic fact was an enormous asset for the CCP.

To deal with the practical difficulties of supplying the army, a grain ticket system was set up. With these tickets the army on the move could draw its rations from the widely scattered army service stations. This arrangement offered advantages in coping with problems of transportation and inflation. However, as with grain storage generally, dispersal spelt weak control and a consequent host of troubles. In fact, several party sources from 1942–44 drew attention to the loose and disorderly functioning of the system. Tickets were used as currency which gave rise to corruption, or secret circulation, among government cadres and their dependents. Such abuses aggravated the shortage of grain in general and supplies to the army in particular, in response to which the party outlawed buying and selling of grain tickets and altered their usage by issuing separate categories of tickets.52
Party sources often proclaimed that army production also reinforced the resistance effort in immaterial terms, chiefly by forging closer ties between soldiers and civilians, prompting village youth to volunteer for the army and fostering disciplined behaviour among soldiers. At times Japanese intelligence concurred, as in a 1938 document from Shanxi which conceded that the CCP’s assisting the peasants in harvesting ‘achieved enormous results in winning popular support’.

There were, however, three major difficulties in the way the army related to agricultural production. Two have already been considered: army scepticism to production activities and practical obstacles due to the scarcity of land and tools. The third one, which posed a major threat to resistance unity, was the large-scale recruitment of peasants into the regular army and guerrillas, forces that were basically separated from production and therefore drained the villages of badly needed labour power. To be sure, recruitment percentages of the labour force ranged widely: 12–50 (some counties of JinjiLuYu); 59 (a locality in Shandong); 35 (part of She county in northern Henan); 10 (Kelan county in northwestern Shanxi). Obviously, a heavy burden weighed upon many localities, even at the lowest figure. The JinjiLuYu source drew attention to the severe consequences that might ensue, such as depleting the mutual aid teams’ membership or depriving villages of leading cadres.

Geo-military factors further complicated the third difficulty. In contrast to mountainous areas, plains were densely populated and hence offered large numbers of potential recruits. Yet military security was generally far more tenuous on the plains, rendering armed build-up extremely hazardous in these areas. A recruitment pattern then easily ensued whereby mountain villages were discriminated against. A report by the North China bureau on the Pingxi area exemplified the problem. The 10-per-cent average enrolment in the mountains (one village even recorded 23 per cent) compared to only about 3 per cent on the plain. The call for recruitment to be halted in the mountain villages and concentrated to the plain became imperative. There was another reason why recruitment often disadvantaged the former. Generally these were very poor and were all the more in need of the scarce labour power available to undertake production. A 10-per-cent recruitment was a decidedly heavier burden in a mountain village than in a locality on the comparatively fertile plains.

The CCP could hardly ignore the painful economic loss suffered by a family when a son or husband joined the army, a circumstance occasioning
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fears of impoverishment by family members and recruits. To mitigate the consequences families were accorded material guarantees, or preferential treatment as the policy was called. Its implementation assumed two forms. One was a programme of substitute ploughing which ‘included besides ploughing, sowing and harvesting as well as carrying water from the well and fuel from the hills’. In this way the soldiers’ families received certain assurances against their plot turning into wasteland or, if they rented it, being taken back by the landlord. The second method was to provide direct aid in the form of seeds, grain, agricultural equipment, money and cloth. In parts of JiLuYu, 5–8 per cent of a year’s harvest was set aside for soldiers’ families. There were also cases of destitute families obtaining land.

Concrete examples from different areas demonstrate the bearing of the policy on building up an army with staying power, an endeavour which thus involved far more than simply enlisting an increasing number of soldiers. ‘Three years’ experience of the resistance war’, a JinChajji government resolution spelled out in 1940, ‘has taught us that only if the preferential treatment is well done can the army be constantly expanded and consolidated.’ There are many references to how poor implementation affected recruitment efforts adversely and also caused desertions as soldiers worried about their families’ well-being.

The problem of compensation for the loss of labour power extended, albeit in relatively lesser dimensions, beyond the military sphere as full-time cadres were raised to take up posts in the government and other organizations. ‘Since the beginning of the war’, a 1944 investigation report on Taihang stated, ‘not a few cadres have laid down the hoe to participate in the work’. This forced some of their families to rent out their land or use hired labour, which influenced negatively their livelihood and attitude to work.

Since preferential treatment was based on the specific needs of the recipient family, arbitrariness easily resulted. The problem was how to keep it within manageable confines. Grain assistance was an especially sensitive issue. In parts of the eastern Hebei/Jehol/Liaoning region no less than 70 per cent of the families (‘too many’) benefited from it, compared to 30 per cent in some localities of Beiyue. The debilitating impact of the former ratio on base area running was unmistakeable:

In particular, there are a great many soldiers’ families who depend completely on government provision (more than 2,000). Thereby financial expenditure has risen tremendously, imposing an even heavier burden on the people. At
the same time, it further obstructs expanding the army and local personnel separated from production. At present some soldiers’ families tend to become a parasitic class on society.62

Random assessments producing drastic variations were apparent elsewhere. As reported by the JiLuYu government in April 1944, the grain assistance to one village amounted to 2,266 jin, compared to 535 jin to four other villages put together. The explanation for the discrepancy reveals the characteristically contrasting degrees of CCP penetration: in the first case the criticized ‘waste’ of grain stemmed from the village's autonomy vis-à-vis higher organs, whereas in the latter control from above was effected by the participation of the district cadres on the appraisal committee. Inflated grain assistance to other villages likewise resulted from the failure of district and county authorities to effectively supervise the registration, appraisal and calculation processes. Decisions of these bodies, the document lamented, were based on inaccurate reports by village cadres, not on independently conducted investigations.63

In reaction to these particularistic tendencies, reports stressed that grain provisions could be no more than a temporary measure. Echoing these sentiments, a JiLuYu source argued that the objective of preferential treatment was self-reliance of soldiers’ families and assistance only when they were unable to make a living. As the reproving conclusion went, ‘to resist Japan is a glory, it is not done for the purpose of receiving preferential treatment’.64 An example from the Binhai area in Shandong of a family being assisted to the extent that it rose to a middle-peasant standard of living was clearly out of keeping with these criteria.65 But if it was to be a real safety net in the service of the resistance, a help in the last resort when other means failed, preferential treatment still had to be cast wide and be tightly tied. Given the material scarcity and the urgency of supplies to the military forces, sharp conflicts between the latter and popularly self-protective tactics had a certain inevitability; the strong preference for as favourable a treatment as possible had an objective basis.

This motive could also generate actions to make the ‘haves’ foot the bill, even quite generously. In places, the peasant associations ‘mobilized’ landlords and gentry to provide soldiers’ families with a fixed amount of grain each month or to perform substitute ploughing.66 Already in February 1938, Peng Zhen found it necessary to warn unspecified authorities in Xiyang and other counties in JinJiYu that to keep their obliging landlords...
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and rich peasants paying a large monthly allowance to soldiers’ families was not only ‘impossible in practice (at present the Xiyang area is feeling the difficulty of implementation)’; such methods also ran counter to the rural united front and thereby played into the hands of Japanese attempts to entice these strata.67

This chapter has examined several ways in which the villagers were called upon to support the resistance effort: protecting their locality in general and the grain in particular; assisting army production by providing tools and occasionally land; supplying the army with recruits and grain; extending various supportive services to soldiers’ families. As members of the militia and the self-defence corps the villagers assumed an even broader range of duties that also related less directly to the war. Over large areas, all these involved immense sacrifices interfering with the villagers’ ordinary daily undertakings.

Indispensable for the villagers’ physical and material security as the resistance commitments were, they also constituted an enormous encumbrance – hence the dual meaning of the military weight. From this mass involvement, whatever its qualitative variability, emerged another, closely intertwined duality defining the anti-Japanese resistance movement generally, that is, the struggle against both imperialism and domestic forces of status quo.

NOTES

5. Unless otherwise indicated the above refers to ‘JinSui bianqu laowu jiehe yinian lai de xin fazhan’, JR, 1.2.1945.


28. Chao Zhebu, Xu Daben and Jia Xinzhai, p. 265.

29. Ibid., p. 264; ‘Di wu fenqu fan qiangliang douzheng cailiao’, p. 111.


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45; Chūō mekkō yōinkai chōsabu, Satsunan henchikanichi akka kōsaku jittai chōsa hōkokusho, (1940), pp. 2–6.


34. Several illustrations are included in Bōeichō, vol. 2, pp. 415–418.

35. SW III, p. 193.


38. SW III, p. 278.


44. ‘Dīhòu jīefàngqu de nòngyè shèngchān’, ‘Kǎizhān dā shèngchān yùndòng de jīge wěntì’.


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64. ‘JiLuYu bianqu jun zheng weiyuanhui guanyu tongzhan’, p. 445.

65. ‘Shandong renmin canjun yundong’.


67. ‘Peng Zhen zai Zhonggong JiYulin shengwei huodong fenzi huiyishang de jielun’, February 1938, TD, vol. 1, p. 120.
Chapter Thirteen

Conclusion

CONTENDING PROCESSES

The war situation was dominated by sharply competing demands for scarce resources, issuing in a variety of conflicts. Overall, these centred on the relationship of the resistance efforts to the restructuring and construction pursuits. Although these two sets of fields certainly complemented each other in vital ways, by providing security and material/personnel resources respectively, intense pressures to boost military strength produced pervasive strains. This factor explains the tendency of mass mobilization towards a military bias, while – depending on circumstances – swings in the other direction were also noticeable.

The military effort was heavily dependent upon supportive restructuring and construction, and hence upon a liberating and developmental logic, but this progressive aspect was countered by inhibiting effects on the emancipation of women. That is, preoccupation with satisfying the urgent material demands of the resistance crucially influenced the production-centred view that slighted freeing women from domestic oppressions.

The war demands also greatly complicated the restructuring–production relationship. Whereas restructuring was by itself quite unable to meet resistance consumption – concerted production efforts were indispensable – rising taxes tended to discourage the upper strata’s active contribution to developing the economy; and even the poorer peasants could react similarly to avoid higher taxation.

The war, in addition, easily gave rise to opposition between the immediate concerns of a locality and the overall and long-term considerations of the central/higher party organs. Given the hardship, the contention focused on the material burdens to be borne by the villagers. Their negative reactions to broad resistance obligations found contrasting expressions: redistributive
radicalism violating the rural united front, or joining the rich in tax evasive concealment (‘village egoism’). Similarly, some localities manipulated the preferential treatment’s grain assistance to their advantage. The strategic view might also, due to the economic implications, clash with the locality on the issue of army recruitment.

Another, somewhat less generalized, conflict was between classes or strata. Mobilizing and controlling this conflict was indeed central to the CCP’s policy pursuits, as evidenced in the rural united front formula. The dualism integral to it has been a recurrent theme: both subordinate and utilize the local elite, both arouse and restrain the poorer peasants. Thus, for example, taxation was to be fair and widely shouldered.

The offensive, class-struggle aspect of the dualism precluded stability. This was most clearly manifested when vital class interests were challenged head on, such as rent reduction drives against harshly exploitative and oppressive tenancy relationships. Here the landlord–peasant confrontation emerged in a ‘pure’ form, i.e. when the latter’s habitual deference to landlords had given way to a propensity towards struggle. Such drives pre-eminently tested the adversaries’ class consciousness and the viability of the front.

Admittedly, this is an atypical case. Yet it serves as a Weberian ideal type for showing that the elite did oppose measures damaging to their vested interests, as party policies generally did. What varied was the extent of elite intransigence, which depended on just how threatening they perceived a specific policy. The very sternness embodied in this particular relationship, the tightness with which it bound the peasant to the landlord, also, in a sense, made it an ideal mass-mobilizational type. It sharply posed to the party the crucial question of what, under the circumstances, was an appropriate degree of mass mobilization; while essential to policy implementation, arousing popular activism also carried the danger of uncontrolled radicalism.

Resentment of the front was liable to develop from a combination of the offensive and defensive aspects of the dualism – the elite reacted against subordination and the peasants against restraints, albeit less conspicuously given their generally lower class awareness. Peasant opposition had a twofold implication for the CCP. On the one hand, the mass spontaneity which informed this tendency was an essential impetus to restructuring power resources; on the other, this radicalism threatened the party’s strategic priorities. The challenge was how to steer the unleashed energies into the intended channels.
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Elite defiance of the front was arguably stronger from within than from without. Paradoxically, this was notable in the very agency charged with their subordination, the party. Its decision-making authority and power probably exerted the decisive pull, with marked subversive overtones. The elite posture to governmental and economic organizations was more varied and included positive responses. The reason is obvious: these actively sought to gain elite cooperation in exchange for granting them a certain space for autonomous activities.

Inharmonious policy relationships emanated from war and class/strata factors. At the same time, the many-sided effects of policy implementation added to the complexity.

While the CCP’s reform programmes brought about a considerable social mobility in favour of the poorer strata, this achievement also engendered problems. Among some of those who climbed to a higher status, especially the so-called new middle peasants, attitudes inimical to mass solidarity came to the fore. Their clearest expression was in inheriting the practices of the old rulers; one cleavage was replaced by another. Furthermore, egalitarian reforms did not always lead to a commensurate betterment for the poor. Thus, although tax changes certainly eliminated many onerous levies, the war effort imposed heavy exactions on most people.

A redistributive measure tended to stimulate popular activism and hence facilitate progress in other endeavours. Yet there was also the actuality of these being blocked by a policy requiring so heavy inputs of labour as to leave little time for additional pursuits. A complex rent reduction or taxation case obviously comes to mind. To launch another major undertaking, such as a production campaign, then proved extremely difficult.

Such campaigns also related in various ways to a number of broader issues. One was the balance of class forces. Many of the joint production schemes enhanced the poorer peasants’ socio-economic resources. On the other hand, the measure of leeway accorded the elite in the field of production also strengthened their position. Since the peasants’ economic build-up was a characteristically gradual, cumulative process and did not directly attack elite interests, these opposing tendencies worked themselves out in a rather non-confrontational fashion and over a longer historical period. During the war years, production efforts had also a broad cooperative quality that blunted outright class strife.

Army involvement in production had a mixed record both internally and externally. Regarding the former, although this activity somewhat
alleviated the soldiers’ hard material life, there were also misgivings in the army regarding the interference of the production with military matters. Externally, army contribution to production was certainly beneficial to the peasants. The usage of scarce tools and land did, however, create complications and concomitant frictions.

Other campaigns likewise had diverse effects. Ideological ones that taught party policy and laws arguably went some way towards imparting a common purpose to the movement. The same activity also exerted a contrary influence: the divisions created by higher party echelons’ high-handed ‘rectification’ of lower ones. Another kind of drive to pull a locality into the CCP’s political fold was the mobilization of native leaders. If they were essential to the party’s penetrating a village community, they sometimes became so immersed in local interests that they posed an active hindrance to the party’s broader ambitions. How to link these leaders’ perceptions to overall policy endeavours was, as initially suggested, a question that indeed haunted CCP leaders.

HERCULEAN TASKS

The CCP’s wartime ambitions were extraordinary demanding considering actual circumstances. The rural united front formula is an obvious case in point, based as it was on stability vs. volatility, harmony vs. conflict, cooperation vs. confrontation – with the aim of effecting a comprehensive restructuring and construction over vast areas in turbulent war conditions.

All this implied massive policy responsibilities that by far exceeded available means. Organizational developments in the military field demonstrate how the consequent impatience to achieve quick results against heavy odds caused severe strains. The early breakneck speed to regularize a rich assortment of armed bodies quite unprepared for it much aggravated problems of disunity. In the mid-years, the failure to plan and discuss adequately the structural overhaul of the crack troops policy beforehand brought insensitive top-down handling of superfluous personnel, leaving deep scars.

A second example reveals how realities brought about CCP policy modification as well as sizeable losses. Concretely, principles were laid down that grain storage was to be widely dispersed in order to forestall Japanese seizures. However, a relative concentration proved unavoidable due to the
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CCP’s spotty influence and the stationing of army units in certain areas. The resultant damage inflicted by the Japanese army derived from the CCP’s inability to strictly execute precautionary measures related to the storage in many localities. Constraints added to constraints.

The difficulties of policy systemization are a third case: these necessitated or brought about a large measure of non-systematic practices. Thus barriers to instituting an effectively operating tax system largely account for the existence of extra taxation. Yet if its methods significantly complemented formal taxation, their very arbitrariness contained serious politico-economic hazards.

The consequence of work tasks towering above available resources was not only that basic problems lingered on: as already indicated, hard priority choices were inevitable in allocating resources among the main fields of activity. Not all of them could be vigorously pursued in a given area; some were left behind or de-emphasized, with accumulating imbalances and tensions. These heavily influenced the politics of volatility and discouraged cadres from taking a long-term, developmental view.

Against this background, the criticism of the policy directives of local cadres was often misplaced. Only on occasion was it acknowledged that tasks assigned to them were unreasonably burdensome. These applied particularly to complex policies requiring considerable skills, experience and labour. While policy co-ordination was vital, a single major undertaking was likely to consume most of the cadres’ (and other villagers’) time and energy. The cadres were further placed in a quandary by higher party organs’ constant reminders to adapt policies to concrete conditions, the variability of which was truly daunting.

The gap between available resources and policy ambitions importantly accounted for local cadres’ often noted resort to highhandedness, compulsion and haste – practices against which the party persistently admonished. These were liable to appear where, lacking a prior popular spontaneity, tasks were heavy and urgent (including strong military pressures) and gains were not immediately visible. Then, to repeat, cadres sought to force the pace, as frequently happened in building organizations. In fact, only a few were judged to function satisfactorily.
HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Despite the conflicts and obstacles, and despite the typically less than dramatic changes effected in village society, the CCP’s policy endeavours had momentous implications. That the CCP, for all its failings, addressed itself to the crucial issues in crucial times with a commitment distinctly surpassing rival domestic forces had extended effects in obtaining degrees of active or passive, willing or reluctant peasant cooperation. And while the war years exacted enormous sacrifices from the peasants – deaths, injuries and diseases, destroyed homes and tools, slaughtered livestock, pervasive military duties, etc. – this period also left a rich legacy for the future by equipping vast numbers with a broad range of noticeably enhanced power and social resources to challenge the village elite and regional and national politico-military formations as well as oppressive traditions and acute poverty. In short, emancipatory prospects and aspirations received a powerful impetus; history accelerated.

By the end of the war, therefore, the social changes had ushered in a transitional situation. What this portended for China’s future was shrouded in many and multilayered uncertainties. True, the party organization had come to rest on a vastly expanded popular foundation. Yet as the trials of mass mobilization demonstrated, the vital basic-level organs were burdened with too heavy tasks and problems to really exercise the decreed vanguard functions. The transitional possibilities in 1945 were far broader in scope than an easily disadvantageous hindsight would suggest – in regard to both the political mastery of China and the nature of the CCP movement.
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